MASTERS OF
The Parachute Mail
by PETER BENEDICT

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CHAPTER IV

SILENCE AT NO. 3

At one o'clock Peggy left her stall, not without misgivings, to the tender mercies of Bernard, and set off in search of Church Fold. She had figured that the whole thing, allowing for a good deal of questioning and cross-questioning at the Police Station, would not take much more than half an hour.

But Church Fold proved unexpectedly elusive. She expected it, of course, to be no more than small. No. 3 was probably almost as far as it went; she saw it as one of those very brief junctures between street and street, which are hardly deserving of the name street, or even lane, themselves, and therefore become embroidered with all kinds of more ambitious titles, eager apparently to do them more than justice. This one was all the harder to find, because the part of Abbott's Ferry which surrounded the church was extremely old, and honeycombed with these narrow runways; and the only satisfactory way of finding out which of the many was Church Fold was to go down every one until you found the name inscribed upon it. "Church" occurred in almost every one of them, to make the search still more complicated.

At last, however, she found it. Cavendish Road might be its postal address, but it was nowhere near it. Still, there was the neat, faded little name-board upon the corner of the end house. "Church Fold." Peggy did not know quite what to make of the houses in it. They were of that very discreet type which advertises by its retirement that it belongs to the professional classes. Genteel, horrible word though it is, was the word for them, and there was no other, unless you prefixed "shabby."

They boasted that they had seen better days, as no doubt they had, if that was anything to boast about. But to her they looked mean and dark, and lonely in their shrinking, fastidious retreat from the noisier stretches of the town. Three-storey buildings, all of one face; what she believed was known as the uniform mask; all with three steps up to a broad front door, a shoe-scraper on the lowest for visitors at night to fall over windows. Venetian-blinded and blue-curtained tight against what little sun fell into that narrow place. There were four of them on her left hand, and on her right a high wall. Peggy did not know whether Miss Crosby would like Church Fold, but she knew that she didn't.

She stood in front of No. 3, and looked at it long and strangely. She did not know why, but some instinct in her quarrelled with the natural resolve to knock at the door and deliver the note. It seemed such a little thing to do, and yet for a moment she was—no, not afraid, that was the wrong word—but wary of doing it. It must be the influence of that affair yesterday; she was inclined to suspect every person, whom she did not know. And yet how could the note be anything very terrible?

True, she did not know the first thing about Lorna Crosby, except that she was staying at Mrs. Henshaw's. Lots of people did it in summer; Lancashire mill people usually, but a London school teacher was nothing out of the ordinary. And when Mrs. Henshaw was consulted on the subject of how to get a letter into town without carrying it, she had naturally thought of Peggy. That was automatic. It rang true enough; and if it was not true, how did this girl know even so much as Mrs. Henshaw's name? No, of course there was nothing wrong with the story of the packet.

She mounted the steps of No. 3 and rang the bell. She could hear, behind the heavy door, the burr of it echoing in the hall. It sounded curiously empty She guessed at a big and pretentious space, a wide stairway, and an air of impenetrable gloom.

In the interval, while she waited for the door to be opened, Peggy let her mind dwell idly on the speculation of what period had been responsible for the building of these houses. They were certainly not new. Queen Anne was associated in her thoughts with big, flat-set, wholly delightful windows, so these could not be Queen Anne. Nor did they suggest the Georges, for they had no pretensions to classicism. She assigned the blame to Victoria, and let it go at that.

But the door did not open. Peggy pressed the bell again, with no more result; a third time, and kept her finger on it for a full minute, but no one answered; and she could hear none of those subtle movements within which usually occupy the hush after a ring or a knock. She became impatient. She had still to go on to the police, and if she wasted any more time Bernard would almost certainly have broken the eggs or sold them all below price before she got back to keep an eye on him. She tried the door.

The handle was one of the church type, into which the whole hand slips. It turned, heavily, but easily; she had expected that, because they always do turn, locked or no. What she had not expected was for the gentle push she gave at the end of the turn to swing the door open before her.

EMPTY HOUSE

Peggy looked into a hall quite as large and gloomy as she had expected, but not so pretentious. Plainly this house had seen days very much better than the present ones. The hall was barely furnished, a mere dilapidated hat-stand, one inadequate table, and a monk's bench: that was the sum of it. The carpeting would not have been worth removing had the inhabitants contemplated moving; nor, in its turn, would the stair-carpet. Both were faded almost to the same negative brown, and worn down to the last of the pile. Plainly the casual friend of the mother of Miss Crosby was no millionairess.

In the circumstances, what was the correct thing to do with the note? Leave it on the hall table? She had been told it was important, and there it might easily get overlooked. Enter the house, then, and look for someone to whom to give it? There could hardly be anyone in, or they would certainly have heard that last ring, always supposing, of course, that they were not quite stone deaf. Or just go into the nearest room, and prop it somewhere so obvious that it could not be missed when the people of the house returned. That, Peggy thought, was the best plan; and she proceeded to act upon it.

There was a door upon the left, opposite to the foot of the stairs, which she supposed was likely to give upon what this house would probably still call the drawing-room. She closed the outer door behind her, opened this one, and went in.

The room gave her a distinct start. It was admittedly still furnished, but in no sort of style whatever, and certainly not for permanent use. True, there had been people in it, and not so long ago, for there were the butts of several cigarettes on the table in an ash-tray which was not even dusty. For the rest, the walls were quite bare; so was the floor, apart from one large, thick hearthrug; and the furniture consisted of the table, a magazine-rack, a settee, and three easy chairs. A place to meet, sit and talk; not a place to live. There was something very fishy indeed about No. 3 Church Fold.

Peggy had firmly made up her mind to leave the packet and go, when she heard the hall door, which she had carefully closed behind her, opening. She hurried back to the hall, for this might and must be whatever sort of proprietor this odd house possessed. But in the doorway she stopped dead, for it was nothing more strange than a local policeman, a sergeant. Nothing more strange, she had thought, in the first flush of the law-abiding. But surely here, and at this moment, there could be nothing more strange.

However, there could. The stranger thing was that this obvious friend, this upholder of the law which she was doing her best to serve in peculiar ways, uttered, as soon as he set eyes upon her:

"Ah, I thought you'd be about somewhere. My constable followed you up. If you wouldn't mind, we want a few words with you."

"So do I with you," said Peggy, mystified, but not alarmed. "As a matter of fact, I was coming on to you as soon as I'd left a message here. Tell me does anyone live in this house?"

"No one does—and no one has for six months, as far as I can make out. But if it's all the same to you," said the sergeant of police, calmly, "I'll do the asking, and you can do the answering. I should like a statement from you, but I'm obliged to advise you that you don't have to give it on request. It's your right to hold your tongue if you want to; you know best whether it's wise or not."

"I don't know what you're getting at," said Peggy, a shade uneasily, and more than a shade angrily. "But, at any rate, I've got nothing to cover up so ask me what you want to know. I daresay the thing that's puzzling you is equally puzzling me, if we only knew it. My name's Margaret Calder, and I live at Moor Warren, on the top of the moor. It's a smallholding and market garden. You may know it. I've just come from the market, where I've left my stall in the charge of a congenital idiot, so hurry up. What comes next?

"I was wondering," said the sergeant, mildly, "exactly what brought you to this house." His eyes had by this time wandered from head to foot of her, not forgetting in their passage the basket she carried. Behind him loomed in the hall, from which she had retreated into the room, the shoulders of a very large and silent constable.

TAKEN INTO CUSTODY

"This morning," said Peggy, "as I was getting ready to come down here to market as usual, a girl arrived who said she was staying for a holiday with Mrs. Henshaw, by the river. She wanted a note delivered here, to this address, and said she couldn't come in to leave it herself, and it must get here to-day. She asked me to bring it; and I have. If you were following me up, as you say, you must have seen me ring the bell. There was no answer, and I didn't want to take the note back, so I tried the door; and as it gave, I thought I'd better come in and park the thing somewhere where they'd be sure to see it."

"Have you ever been here before?" asked the sergeant.

"No, and I never intend to be here again. It gives me the creeps."

"And where's the note you talk about?"

She took it out of her pocket. This was all official caution, of course. There was something about this house as suspicious as she had guessed there must be, suspicious enough for the police to be upon the tracks of anyone who even knocked at the door. She had no personal misgivings whatever.

The sergeant slipped a pen-knife out of his pocket, snapped open a blade so thin that it appeared as merely a wafer of steel, and worked it in under the flap of the envelope. In a very few seconds he had it open. He drew out a sheet of notepaper, opened and turned it in his hands, and made plain to her by an eloquent twist of the paper that it was entirely blank. It had been included only to afford protection to a wrapped packet within it, double-wrapped in thick grey paper and thin white, without label or seal of any kind. This he opened at one end, and tipped out into his palm a few grains of a white powder. He looked back over his shoulder, and the constable came to his side, notebook in hand. They looked at it, and meaningly at each other.

"That's the stuff all right," said the constable. "What should you say you've got there? Something over an ounce?"

"Roughly one and a quarter, I imagine, but there's no being sure. The paper's heavy stuff. It may be an ounce weighed and packed."

He looked at Peggy. His look was measuring, in a way she did not like. He said: "I should like to see what else you have in your possession. In the basket, for instance."

Peggy handed it over. "Look for yourself. The parcel was meant for your people. As soon as I had got rid of that note. What is that powder?"

"If you don't know, you'd better stay not knowing," said the sergeant, unfolding the parachute and its dependent parcel in obvious excitement. "And if you do know, the best thing you can do is admit to it. Playing innocent won't pull you out of this."

"I don't know," said Peggy warmly, "but I want to. I have a right to know exactly what sort of criminal you take me to be haven't I?" She stopped, her voice dying in her lips; he had slipped the string laboriously sideways from one end of the parcel, and again loosened the wrapping. She caught a brief glimpse of a brownish, compact mass, like a lump of coloured clay, with large leaves, still green, adhering to it, so that the sergeant had to peel one of them back from it to see what he held. He looked again at his constable, and they exchanged what might have been a glance of triumph it it had not been so completely helpless.

"I'm sorry about this," said the sergeant sincerely, "it's a bad business But I'm afraid I'll have to take you into custody, Margaret Calder; and I caution you that anything you now say may be taken down and used as evidence against you."

"Does that mean I'm under arrest?" demanded Peggy, in the stress of the moment more angry than distressed, and more stupefied even than angry.

"It does. If you know you're innocent, then you've nothing to worry about. I'm only doing my duty."

"But what's the charge?" she cried, almost laughing because it was all so impossible.

"Being in possession of dangerous drugs—to be exact, one ounce of cocaine, and—I should say about a pound, or possibly more—of raw opium. That's the charge."

(To be Continued)

The characters in this story are entirely imaginary. No reference is intended to any living person or to any public or private company.

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MENNONITES PARTLY ADOPTING MODERN WAYS

The age-old struggle between old and valued customs and the inevitable progress of modern ideas, threatens a rift between Ontario Mennonites. In contrast to the three Mennonite women (LEFT), some of the clan have discarded the horse and buggy for the more modern automobile. The girl in the centre is almost gay in her print dress, contrasting with the sombre garb of her elders. Rev. Roy S. Koch is pastor of St. David's Mennonite church at Martin's Corner.

Science Disputes Old Theory About Head Sizes

Anthropologically speaking, the brain may enlarge without affecting the face and head dimensions at all, says Science Service.

Human beings vary more in brain size than in any other dimension, except weight, says Dr. Ales Hrdlicka, Smithsonian Institution anthropologist, writing for the American Journal of Physical Anthropology. In the Institution's famous collection of 12,000 skulls, mostly Indian, he has measured brain capacity, finding normal humans all the way from 910 cubic centimeters of brain capacity up to the world record-breaking size of 2,100. The smallest outdo Peking Man in smallness of brain, and he lived over half a million years ago. Yet, both large and small types presented in the collection are normal, Dr. Hrdlicka is convinced. There are no pathological dwarfs and giants among them, with one exception: a Sioux, probably with some mixed blood, was eight feet tall and suffered from acromegaly.

There is far greater difference in the extremes of normal bain capacity than in extremes of normal outer head size, Dr. Hrdlicka's measurements reveal.

Both large and small-headed geniuses can be cited from history, showing that brain size is not a guide to "brains." Daniel Webster, the Russian writer Turgenieff, and Bismark, had extremely large heads. Anatole France had a very small head.

That Body of Yours

(by James W. Barton, M.D.)

RAPID HEART BEAT NOT ALWAYS DUE TO GOITRE

When we were examining recruits for overseas service many were found with very rapid hearts. Due allowance was made for the fact that many were young and naturally excited, but as a safeguard against goitre being present they were asked to sit down and read for a few minutes whilst the examiner went on with routine work. If the heart were still rapid, tests for other symptons of goitre were made—trembling of the fingers when held outstretched, bulging of the eyes, enlargement of thyroid gland in the neck.

It was naturally felt that these men, no matter how brave, would become excited, tire easily, have heart disturbances, indigestion, and suffer with sleeplessness under the strain of warfare if the thyroid gland were overactive.

To-day, should examination be made of all men available for war duty, it is likely that in these cases of rapid heart beat, the simple but efficient metabolism test would be made. This test shows how fast the body processes (including the heart beat) are working and if more than 15 percent above the normal rate, it is evidence of goitre—an enlarged, overactive thyroid gland.

At a recent meeting of the Royal Medical Surgical Society of Glasgow, reported in the "British Medical Journal," Dr. A. B. Anderson discussed the relation between the normal or basal metabolism and the various signs of goitre or hyperthyroidism, as it is called.

In a series of 140 patients of various ages and both sexes, who had signs of goitre the basal metabolic rate had been compared with these signs; enlarged thyroid gland, rapid heart beat, trembling of hands, sweating, and loss of weight. The findings are certainly of interest to patients and physicians alike.

When there was enlargement of the thyroid gland with all the other signs—tremor, rapid heart, loss of weight except bulging eyes — the metabolic rate was normal. Also, when there was enlargement of the thyroid only, or only one sign, the rate would be normal.

Finally, in cases of rapid heart beat with no enlargement of the thyroid gland the metabolic rate would be normal.

You can thus see how this simple test—which can be made in the physician's office—can take away the alarm caused by a rapid heart beat or other signs of goitre.

SCOURGE

Dr. Barton's latest booklet, "Scourge," with reliable information regarding the two most dreaded social disease, gonorrhea and syphilis, is now available. Know the facts, protect yourself and save endless worry. Address your request to Dr. Barton, in care of this newspaper, 247 West 43rd Street, New York, N.Y., enclosing ten cents. Please request the booklet by name and be sure to give your own name and full address.

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Globe and Mail:—An Ottawa young man plans to steer a 24-foot yacht across the Atlantic Ocean. One can see a lot more projects that would be more profitable and less dangerous.

Couldn't Get a Lawyer But Still Lost Out on Deal

Lawyers have been blamed for people losing out on deals, but here is a case where the clients lost out because they couldn't get a lawyer to act. It is from "Grab Samples" in The Northern Miner:—

There are a thousand and one things that will interfere with a mining deal but one of the strangest reasons that has ever come to the attention of this column was lack of a lawyer to draw up the necessary agreement. It happened in a Northern mining town last spring. A Toronto promoter arrived in town, sought out the men who owned a certain property, they agreed on a price and then went in search of a legal luminary to prepare the papers. It happened to be Wednesday afternoon and that meant a half holiday in this particular locality. The vendors frantically sought a lawyer, there being at least a dozen of the talent in business in the community. Some were out fishing or golfing, some were out of town but there still remained a number who were calmly resting at home. To these the vendors appealed in person, explaining that the promoter had to leave on the night train. But they were told that they would have to wait until morning, when the lawyers would be glad to have the business.

The net result of this development was disastrous. The promoter suggested that he had certain sales agreements with him and, lacking anything better, the vendors agreed to sign up. Later it developed that the document signed tied up the vendors tight but left the buyer free as the air. He fell down flat on his face, so far as carrying out his end of the deal was concerned. The worst of it was that the group of men who owned the claims had two chances to sell and had they accepted one of the offers, which was made in person by a lawyer who had also travelled from Toronto seeking the claims for his principals, they would have had a real agreement which would have been binding on both parties.

Blairmore Enterprise—There isn't much danger of the average man getting a pain in the back from carrying his neighbour's burdens.

Says T. N. O. has Exclusive Rights Here in Air Service

The following is an editorial article from Monday's issue of The North Bay Nugget:—

"Agitation by Timmins and Kirkland Lake for inclusion in the Trans-Canada air transportation system is justified and timely, but it must be directed at the T. & N. O. Railway Commission or the Ontario government to obtain results.

"Soon after Trans-Canada Air Lines decided to make North Bay a station in the Dominion system, the provincial government issued a charter to the T. & N. O. Railway to cover exclusive rights of the operation of an air transportation system in the area served by the government railway.

"It was then contended that the railway commission planned, or intended, to establish a pony service from North Bay to Timmins, Kirkland Lake and other centres of the North, connecting with the Trans-Canada system.

"Hon. C. D. Howe, minister of transport, has already stated that branch or feeder services would not be operated by Trans-Canada Air Lines but encouragement will be given to private concerns to provide "side" services. This is the department's attitude toward an appeal by Sudbury and Sault Ste. Marie for recognition, and the same will apply to the T. & N. O. region."