

The Exploits of Elaine

A Detective Novel and a Motion Picture Drama

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SYNOPSIS.

The New York police are mystified by a series of murders of prominent men. The principal clue to the murderer is the warning letter which is sent the victims, signed with a "clutching hand." The latest victim of the mysterious assassin is Taylor Dodge, the insurance president. His daughter, Elaine, employs Craig Kennedy, the famous scientific detective, to try to unravel the mystery. What Kennedy accomplishes is told by his friend Jameson, a newspaper man. Elaine is kidnapped by the Clutching Hand, but is rescued by Kennedy, who has discovered her whereabouts through using third degree methods on one of the crooks.

EIGHTH EPISODE

The Hidden Voice.

"Jameson, wake up!"
The strain of the Dodge case was beginning to tell on me, for it was keeping us at work at all kinds of hours to circumvent the Clutching Hand, by far the cleverest criminal with whom Kennedy had ever had anything to do.

I leaped out of bed, still in my pajamas, and stood for a moment staring about. Then I ran into the living room. I looked about, rubbing my eyes, startled. No one was there.

"Hey—Jameson—wake up!"
It was spooky.

"Where—the deuce—are you?" I demanded.

Suddenly I heard the voice again—no doubt about it, either.

"Here I am—over on the couch!"

I scratched my head, puzzled. There was certainly no one on that couch.

A laugh greeted me. Plainly, though, it came from the couch. I went over to it and, ridiculous as it seemed, began to throw aside the pillows.

There lay nothing but a little oblong, oaken box, perhaps eight or ten inches square at the ends. In the face were two peculiar square holes, and from the top projected a black disk, about the size of a watch, fastened on a swinging metal arm. In the face of the disk were several perforated holes.

I picked up the strange looking thing in wonder, and from that magic oak box actually came a burst of laughter.

"Come over to the laboratory, right away," pealed forth a merry voice.

"I've something to show you."

"Well," I gasped, "what do you know about that?"

Very early that morning Craig had got up, leaving me snoring. Cases never wearied him. He thrived on excitement.

He had gone over to the laboratory and set to work in a corner over another of those peculiar boxes, exactly like that which he had already left in our rooms.

Half an hour afterward I walked into the laboratory, feeling a little sheepish over the practical joke, but none the less curious to find out all about it.

"What is it?" I asked, indicating the apparatus.

"A vocophone," he replied, still laughing, "the loud speaking telephone, the little box that hears and talks. It talks right out in meeting, too—no transmitter to hold to the mouth, no receiver to hold to the ear. You see, this transmitter is so sensitive that it picks up even a whisper, and the receiver is placed back of those two megaphone-like pyramids."

He was standing at a table, carefully packing up one of the vocophones and a lot of wire.

"I believe the Clutching Hand has been shadowing the Dodge house," he continued thoughtfully. "As long as we watch the place, too, he will do nothing. But if we should seem, ostentatiously, not to be watching, perhaps he may try something, and we may be able to get a clue to his identity over this vocophone. See?"

I nodded. "We've got to run him down somehow," I agreed.

"Yes," he said, taking his coat and hat. "I am going to connect up one of these things in Miss Dodge's library and arrange with the telephone company for a clear wire so that we can listen in here, where that fellow will never suspect."

At about the same time that Craig and I sallied forth on this new mission, Elaine was arranging some flowers on a stand near the corner of the Dodge library where the secret panel was in which her father had hidden the papers for the possession of which the Clutching Hand had murdered him.

She had moved away from the table, but, as she did so, her dress caught in something in the woodwork. She tried to loosen it and in so doing touched the little metallic spring on which her dress had caught.

Instantly, to her utter surprise, the panel moved. It slid open, disclosing a strong box.

Elaine took it, amused, looked at it a moment, then carried it to a table and opened it.

Inside were some papers, sealed in an envelope and marked "Limpy Red Correspondence."

"They must be the Clutching Hand papers!" she exclaimed to herself, hesitating a moment, in doubt what to do.

She seized the telephone and eagerly called Kennedy's number.

"Hello," answered a voice.

"Is that you, Craig?" she asked excitedly.

"No, this is Mr. Jameson."

"Oh, Mr. Jameson, I've discovered the Clutching Hand papers," she began, more and more excited.

"Have you read them?" came back the voice quickly.

"No; shall I?"

"Then don't unseal them," cautioned the voice. "Put them back exactly as you found them and I'll tell Mr. Kennedy the moment I can get hold of him."

"All right," said Elaine. "I'll do that. And please get him as soon as you possibly can."

"I will."

"I'm going out shopping now," she returned, suddenly. "But, tell him I'll be right back—right away."

"Very well."

Hanging up the receiver, Elaine dutifully replaced the papers in the box and returned the box to its secret hiding place, pressing the spring and sliding the panel shut.

A few minutes later she left the house in the Dodge car.

Outside our laboratory, leaning up against a railing, Dan the Dude, an emissary of the Clutching Hand, whose dress now greatly belied his underworld, "monniker," had been shadowing us, watching to see when we left.

The moment we disappeared, he raised his hand carefully above his head and made the sign of the Clutching Hand. Far down the street, in a closed car, the Clutching Hand himself, his face masked, gave an answering sign.

A moment later he left the car, gazing about stealthily. Not a soul was in sight and he managed to make his way to the door of our laboratory without being observed.

Probably he thought that the papers might be at the laboratory, for he had repeatedly failed to locate them at the Dodge house. At any rate he was busily engaged in ransacking drawers and cabinets, in the laboratory, when the telephone suddenly rang.

An instant he hesitated. Then, disguising his voice as much as he could to imitate mine, he took up the receiver.

"Hello!" he answered.

His face was a study in all that was dark as he realized that it was Elaine calling. He clenched his crooked hand even more viciously.

"Have you read them?" he asked, curbing his impatience as she unsuspiciously poured forth her story, supposedly to me.

"Then don't unseal them," he hastened to reply. "Put them back. Then there can be no question about them. You can open them before witnesses."

For a moment he paused, then added: "Put them back, and tell no one of their discovery. I will tell Mr. Kennedy the moment I can get him."

Clutching Hand studied for a moment and then grabbed the telephone again.

"Hello, Dan," he called when he got his number. "Miss Dodge is going shopping. I want you and the other Falsers to follow her—delay her all you can. Use your own judgment."

It was what had come to be known in his organization as the "Brotherhood of Falsers." There, in the back room of a low dive, were Dan the Dude, the emissary who had been loitering about the laboratory, a gunman, Dago Mike, a couple of women, slatterns, one known as Kitty the Hawk, and a boy of eight or ten, whom they called Billy.

"All right, Chief," shouted back Dan, their leader, as he hung up the telephone after noting carefully the hasty instructions. "We'll do it—trust us."

With alacrity the Brotherhood went their separate ways.

Elaine had not been gone long from the house when Craig and I arrived there.

"Too bad," greeted Jennings, "but Miss Elaine has just gone shopping and I don't know when she'll be back."

Aunt Josephine greeted us cordially, and Craig set down the vocophone package he was carrying.

"I'm not going to let anything happen here to Miss Elaine again if I can help it," remarked Craig in a low tone, a moment later, gazing about the library.

"What are you thinking of doing?" asked Aunt Josephine keenly.

"I'm going to put in a vocophone," he returned, unwrapping it.

"What's that?" she asked.

"A loud speaking telephone—connected with my laboratory," he explained, repeating what he had already told me, while she listened almost awe-struck at the latest scientific wonder.

He was looking about, trying to figure out just where it could be placed to best advantage, when he approached the suit of armor.

"I see you have brought it back and

had it repaired," he remarked to Aunt Josephine. Suddenly his face lighted up. "Ah—an idea!" he exclaimed. "No one will ever think to look inside that."

"Now, Mrs. Dodge," he said finally, as he had completed installing the thing and hiding the wire under carpets and rugs until it ran out to the connection which he made with the telephone, "don't breathe a word of it to anyone. We don't know whom to trust or suspect."

Elaine's car had stopped finally at a shop on Fifth avenue. She stepped out and entered, leaving her chauffeur to wait.

As she did so, Dan and Billy sidled along the crowded sidewalk.

Dan the Dude left Billy and Billy surreptitiously drew from under his coat a half loaf of bread. With a glance about, he dropped it into the gutter close to the entrance to Elaine's car. Then he withdrew a little distance.

When Elaine came out and approached her car, Billy, looking as cold and forlorn as could be, shot forward. Pretending to spy the dirty piece of bread in the gutter, he made a dive for it, just as Elaine was about to step into the car.

Elaine, surprised, drew back. Billy picked up the piece of bread and with all the actions of having discovered a treasure began to gnaw at it voraciously.

Shocked at the disgusting sight, she tried to take the bread away from him.

"I know it's dirty, miss," whimpered Billy, "but it's the first food I've seen for four days."

Instantly Elaine was full of sympathy. She had taken the food away. That would not suffice.

"What's your name, little boy?" she asked.

"Billy," he replied, blubbing.

"Where do you live?"

"With me mother and father—they're sick—nothing to eat—"

He was whimpering an address far over on the East side.

"Get into the car," Elaine directed.

"Gee—but this is swell," he cried, with no fake, this time.

On they went, through the tenement canyons, dodging children and pushcarts, stopping first at a grocer's, then at a butcher's and a delicatessen. Finally the car stopped where Billy directed. Billy hobbled out, followed by Elaine and her chauffeur, his arms piled high with provisions. She was indeed a lovely Lady Bountiful as a crowd of kids quickly surrounded the car.

In the meantime Dago Mike and Kitty the Hawk had gone to a wretched flat, before which Billy stopped. Kitty sat on the bed, putting dark circles under her eyes with a blackened cork. She was very thin and emaciated, but it was dissipation that had done it. Dago Mike was correspondingly poorly dressed.

He had paused beside the window to look out. "She's coming," he announced finally.

Kitty hastily jumped into the rickety bed, while Mike took up a crutch that was standing idly in a corner. She coughed resignedly and he limped about, forlorn. They had assumed their parts, which were almost to the burlesque of poverty, when the door was pushed open and Billy burst in, followed by Elaine and the chauffeur.

"Oh, ma—oh, pa," he cried, running forward and kissing his pseudo parents, as Elaine, overcome with sympathy, directed the chauffeur to lay the things on a shaky table.

Just then the door opened again. All were genuinely surprised this time.

By a Sort of Instinct Kennedy Seemed to Recognize the Sounds. "Elaine!" He Exclaimed, Turning Pale.

For a prim, spick and span, middle-aged woman entered.

"I am Miss Statistix, of the organized charities," she announced, looking around sharply. "I saw your car standing outside miss, and the children below told me you were up here. I came up to see whether you were aiding really deserving poor."

She laid a marked emphasis on the word, pursing up her lips. There was no mistaking the apprehension that these fine birds of prey had of her, either.

"Why—wh—what's the matter?" asked Elaine, fidgeting uncomfortably.

"This man is a gunman, that woman is a bad woman, the boy is Billy the Bread Snatcher," she answered precisely, drawing out a card on

which to record something, "and you, miss, are a fool!"

There was no combating Miss Statistix. She overwhelmed all arguments by the very exactness of her personality.

Elaine departed, speechless, properly squelched, followed by her chauffeur.

Meanwhile, a closed car, such as had stood across from the laboratory, had drawn up not far from the Dodge house. Near it was a man in rather shabby clothes and a visored cap on which were the words in dull gold lettering, "Metropolitan Window Cleaning company." He carried a bucket and a small extension ladder.

In the darkened recesses of the car was the Clutching Hand himself, masked as usual. He had his watch in his hand and was giving most minute instructions to the window cleaner about something. As the latter turned to go, a sharp observer would have noted that it was Dan the Dude, still further disguised.

A few moments later, Dan appeared at the servants' entrance of the Dodge house and rang the bell. Jennings, who happened to be down there, came to the door.

"Man to clean the windows," saluted the bogus cleaner, touching his hat in a way quietly to call attention to the words on it and drawing from his pocket a faded written order.

"All right," nodded Jennings, ex-

amining the order and finding it apparently all right.

Dan followed him in, taking the ladder and bucket upstairs, where Aunt Josephine was still reading.

"The man to clean the windows, ma'am," apologized Jennings.

"Oh, very well," she nodded, taking up her book, to go. Then, recalling the frequent injunctions of Kennedy, she paused long enough to speak quietly to Jennings.

"Stay here and watch him," she whispered as she went out.

Jennings nodded, while Dan opened a window and set to work.

Elaine now decided to go home. From his closed car, the Clutching Hand gazed intently at the Dodge house. He could see Dan on the ladder, now washing the library window, his back toward him.

Dan turned slowly and made the sign of the hand. Turning to his chauffeur, the master criminal spoke a few hurried words in a low tone and the driver hurried off.

A few minutes later the driver might have been seen entering a nearby drug store and going into the telephone booth. Without a moment's hesitation he called upon the Dodge house, and Marie, Elaine's maid, answered.

"Is Jennings there?" he asked. "Tell him a friend wants to speak to him."

"Wait a minute," she answered. "I'll get him."

Marie went toward the library, leaving the telephone off the hook. Dan was washing the windows, half inside, half outside the house, while Jennings was trying to be very busy, although it was apparent that he was watching Dan closely.

"A friend of yours wants to speak to you over the telephone, Jennings," said Marie, as she came into the library.

The butler responded slowly, with a covert glance at Dan.

No sooner had they gone, however, than Dan climbed all the way into the room, ran to the door and looked after them. Then he ran to the window. Across and down the street, the Clutching Hand was gazing at the house. He had seen Dan disappear and suspected that the time had come.

Sure enough, there was the sign of the hand. He hastily got out of the car and hurried up the street. All this time the chauffeur was keeping Jennings busy over the telephone with some trumped-up story.

As the master criminal came in by the ladder through the open window, Dan was on guard, listening down the hallway. A signal from Dan, and Clutching Hand slid back of the portieres. Jennings was returning.

"I've finished these windows," announced Dan as the butler reappeared. "Now, I'll clean the hall windows."

Jennings followed like a shadow. No sooner had they gone than Clutching Hand stealthily came from behind the portieres.

One of the maids was sweeping in the hall as Dan went toward the window, about to wash it.

"I wonder whether I locked those windows?" muttered Jennings, pausing in the hallway. "I guess I'd better make sure."

He had taken only a step toward the library again when Dan watchfully caught sight of him. It would never do to have Jennings snooping around there now. Quick action was necessary. Dan knocked over a costly Sevres vase.

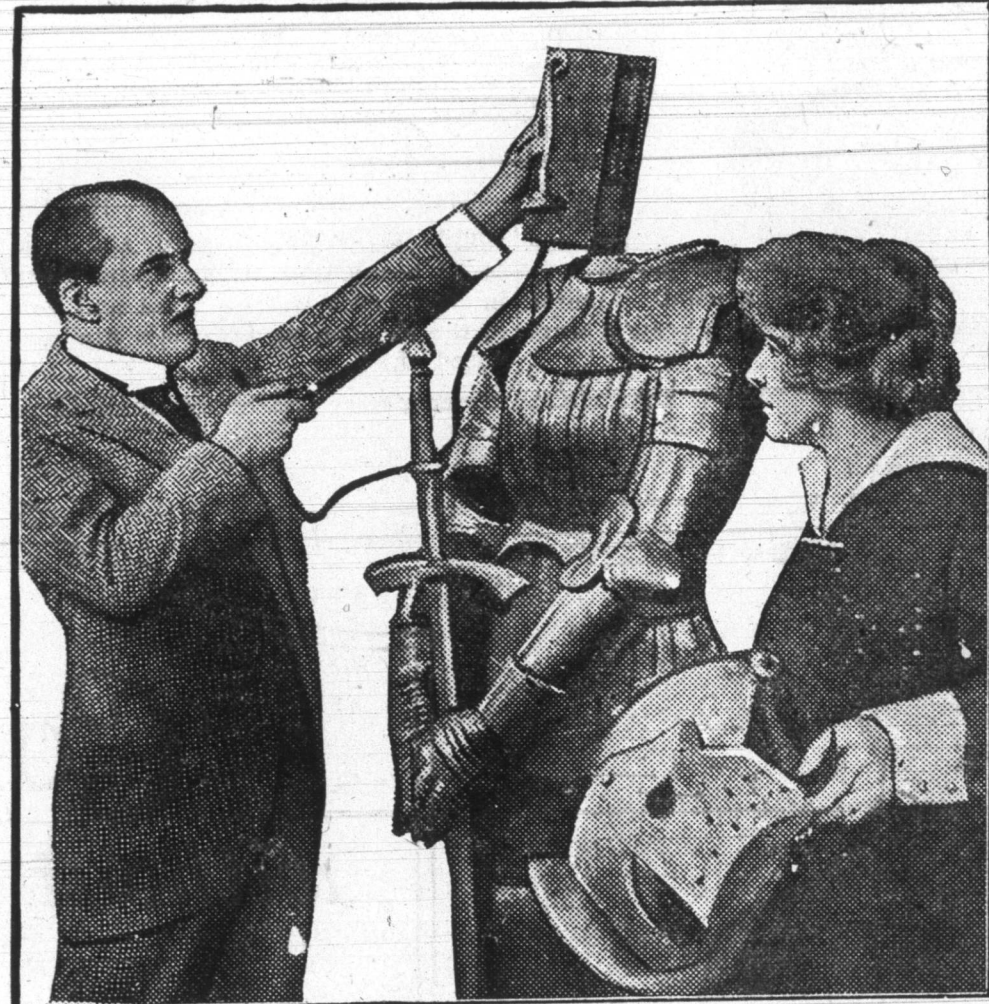
"There—clumsy—see what you've done!" berated Jennings, starting to pick up the pieces.

Dan had acted his part well and promptly. In the library Clutching Hand was busily engaged at that moment beside the secret panel searching for the spring that released it. He ran his finger along the woodwork, pausing here and there without succeeding.

"Confound it!" he muttered, searching feverishly.

Kennedy, having made the arrangements with the telephone company by which he had a clear wire from the Dodge house to his laboratory, had rejoined me there and was putting on the finishing touches on his installation of the vocophone.

Every now and then he would switch it on, and we would listen in it as he demonstrated the wonderful little instrument to me. We had



Kennedy Shows Elaine the Little Instrument That Saved Her Life.

heard the window cleaner and Jennings, but thought nothing of it at the time.

Once, however, Craig paused, and I saw him listening more intently than usual.

"They've gone out," he muttered, "but surely there is some one in the Dodge library."

"I listened, too. The thing was so sensitive that even a whisper could be magnified, and I certainly did hear something."

Kennedy frowned. What was that scratching noise? Could it be Jennings? Perhaps it was Rusty.

Just then we could distinguish a sound as though someone had moved about.

"No—that's not Jennings," cried Craig. "He went out."

He looked at me a moment. The same stealthy noise was repeated. "It's the Clutching Hand!" he exclaimed excitedly.

A moment later Dan hurried into the Dodge library.

"For heaven's sake, Chief, hurry!" he whispered hoarsely. "The Falsers must have fallen down. The girl herself is coming!"

Dan himself had no time to waste. He retreated into the hallway just as Jennings was opening the door for Elaine.

Marie took her wraps and left her, while Elaine handed her numerous packages to Jennings.

Dan watched every motion. "Put them away, Jennings," she said softly.

Jennings had obeyed and gone upstairs. Elaine moved toward the library. Dan took a quiet step or two behind her, in the same direction.

In the library Clutching Hand was now frantically searching for the spring. He heard Elaine coming and dodged behind the curtains again just as she entered.

With a hasty look about, she saw no one. Then she went quickly to the panel, found the spring and pressed it. So many queer things had happened to her since she went out that she had begun to worry over the safety of the papers.

The panel opened. They were there, all right. She opened the box and took them out, hesitating to break the seal before Kennedy arrived. Stealthy and tigerlike, the Clutching Hand crept up behind her. As he did so, Dan gazed in through the portieres from the hall.

With a spring, Clutching Hand leaped at Elaine, snatching at the papers. Elaine clung to them tenaciously, in spite of the surprise, and they struggled for them, Clutching Hand holding one hand over her mouth to prevent her screaming. Instantly Dan was there, aiding his chief.

"Choke her! Strangle her! Don't let her scream!" he ground out.

They fought viciously. Would she succeed? It was two desperate, unscrupulous men against one frail girl. Suddenly, from the man in armor,

in the corner, as if by a miracle, came a deep, loud voice.

"Help! Help! Murder! Police! They are strangling me!"

The effect was terrific.

Clutching Hand and Dan, hardened in crime as they were, fell back, dazed, overcome for the moment at the startling effect.

They looked about. Not a soul.

Then, to their utter consternation, from the helmet again came the deep, vibrant warning.

"Help! Murder! Police!"

Kennedy and I had been listening over the vocophone, for the moment nonplused at the fellow's daring.

Then we heard from the uncanny instrument: "For Heaven's sake, Chief, hurry. The Falsers have fallen down. The girl herself is coming!"

What it meant we did not know. But Craig was almost beside himself, as he ordered me to get the police by telephone, if there was any way to block them. Only instant action would count, however. What to do?

We could hear the master criminal plainly fumbling now.

"Yes, that's the Clutching hand," he repeated.

"Wait," I cautioned, "someone else is coming!"

By a sort of instinct he seemed to recognize the sounds.

"Elaine!" he exclaimed, paling.

Instantly followed, in less than I can tell it, the sounds of a suppressed shuffle.

"He has seized her—gagged her," I cried in an agony of suspense.

We could now hear everything that was going on in the library. Craig was wildly excited. As for me, I was speechless. Here was the vocophone we had installed. It had warned us. But what could we do?

I looked blankly at Kennedy. He was equal to the emergency.

He calmly turned the switch.

Then, at the top of his lungs he shouted: "Help! Help! Police! They are strangling me!"

I looked at him in amazement. What did he think he could do—blocks away?

"It works both ways," he muttered. "Help! Murder! Police!"

We could hear the astonished cursing of the two men. Also, down the hall, now, we could hear footsteps approaching in answer to his call for help—Aunt Josephine, Jennings, Marie and others, all shouting out that there were cries in the library.

"The deuce! What is it?" muttered a gruff voice.

"The man in armor!" hissed Clutching Hand.

"Here they come, too, Chief!"

There was a parting scuffle.

"There—take that!"

A loud metallic ringing came from the vocophone.

Then silence!

What had happened?

In the library, recovering from their creak of surprise, Dan cried out to the Clutching Hand. "The deuce! What is it?"

Then looking about, Clutching Hand quickly took in the situation.

"The man in armor!" he pointed out.

Dan was almost dead with fright at the weird thing.

"Here they come, too, Chief," he gasped, as, down the hall he could hear the family