

The Dream Doctor

By

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The Dream Doctor

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1. The Dream Doctor

"Jameson, I want you to get the real story about that friend of yours, Professor Kennedy," announced the managing editor of the Star, early one afternoon when I had been summoned into the sanctum.

From a batch of letters that had accumulated in the litter on the top of his desk, he selected one and glanced over it hurriedly.

"For instance," he went on reflectively, "here's a letter from a Constant Reader who asks, 'Is this Professor Craig Kennedy really all that you say he is, and, if so, how can I find out about his new scientific detective method?'"

He paused and tipped back his chair.

"Now, I don't want to file these letters in the waste basket. When people write letters to a newspaper, it means something. I might reply, in this case, that he is as real as science, as real as the fight of society against the criminal. But I want to do more than that."

The editor had risen, as if shaking himself momentarily loose from the ordinary routine of the office.

"You get me?" he went on, enthusiastically, "In other words, your assignment, Jameson, for the next month is to do nothing except follow your friend Kennedy. Start in right now, on the first, and cross-section out of his life just one month, an average month. Take things just as they come, set them down just as they happen, and when you get through give me an intimate picture of the man and his work."

He picked up the schedule for the day and I knew that the interview was at an end. I was to "get" Kennedy.

Often I had written snatches of Craig's adventures, but never before anything as ambitious as this assignment, for a whole month. At first it staggered me. But the more I thought about it, the better I liked it.

I hastened uptown to the apartment on the Heights which Kennedy and I had occupied for some time. I say we occupied it. We did so during those hours when he was not at his laboratory at the Chemistry Building on the University campus, or working on one of those cases which fascinated him. Fortunately, he happened to be there as I burst in upon him.

"Well?" he queried absently, looking up from a book, one of the latest untranslated treatises on the new psychology from the pen of the eminent scientist, Dr. Freud of Vienna, "what brings you uptown so early?"

Briefly as I could, I explained to him what it was that I proposed to do. He listened without comment and I rattled on, determined not to allow him to negative it.

"And," I added, warming up to the subject, "I think I owe a debt of gratitude to the managing editor. He has crystallised in my mind an idea that has long been latent. Why, Craig," I went on, "that is exactly what you want--to show people how they can never hope to beat the modern scientific detective, to show that the crime-hunters have gone ahead faster even than--"

The telephone tinkled insistently.

Without a word, Kennedy motioned to me to "listen in" on the extension on my desk, which he had placed there as a precaution so that I could corroborate any conversation that took place over our wire.

His action was quite enough to indicate to me that, at least, he had no objection to the plan.

"This is Dr. Leslie--the coroner. Can you come to the Municipal Hospital--right away?"

"Right away, Doctor," answered Craig, hanging up the receiver. "Walter, you'll come, too?"

A quarter of an hour later we were in the courtyard of the city's largest hospital. In the balmy sunshine the convalescing patients were sitting on benches or slowly trying their strength, walking over the grass, clad in faded hospital bathrobes.

We entered the office and quickly were conducted by an orderly to a little laboratory in a distant wing.

"What's the matter?" asked Craig, as we hurried along.

"I don't know exactly," replied the man, "except that it seems that Price Maitland, the broker, you know, was picked up on the street and brought here dying. He died before the doctors could relieve him."

Dr. Leslie was waiting impatiently for us. "What do you make of that, Professor Kennedy?"

The coroner spread out on the table before us a folded half-sheet of typewriting and searched Craig's face eagerly to see what impression it made on him.

"We found it stuffed in Maitland's outside coat pocket," he explained.

It was dateless and brief:

Dearest Madeline:

May God in his mercy forgive me for what I am about to do. I have just seen Dr. Ross. He has told me the nature of your illness. I cannot bear to think that I am the cause, so I am going simply to drop out of your life. I cannot live with you, and I cannot live without you. Do not blame me. Always think the best you can of me, even if you could not give me all. Good-bye.

Your distracted husband,

PRICE.

At once the idea flashed over me that Maitland had found himself suffering from some incurable disease and had taken the quickest means of settling his dilemma.

Kennedy looked up suddenly from the note.

"Do you think it was a suicide?" asked the coroner.

"Suicide?" Craig repeated. "Suicides don't usually write on typewriters. A hasty note scrawled on a sheet of paper in trembling pen or pencil, that is what they usually leave. No, some one tried to escape the handwriting experts this way."

"Exactly my idea' agreed Dr. Leslie, with evident satisfaction. "Now listen. Maitland was conscious almost up to the last moment, and yet the hospital doctors tell me they could not get a syllable of an ante-mortem statement from him."

"You mean he refused to talk?" I asked.

"No," he replied; "it was more perplexing than that. Even if the police had not made the usual blunder of arresting him for intoxication instead of sending him immediately to the hospital, it would have made no difference. The doctors simply could not have saved him, apparently. For the truth is, Professor Kennedy, we don't even know what was the matter with him."

Dr. Leslie seemed much excited by the case, as well he might be.

"Maitland was found reeling and staggering on Broadway this morning," continued the coroner. "Perhaps the policeman was not really at fault at first for arresting him, but before the wagon came Maitland was speechless and absolutely unable to move a muscle."

Dr. Leslie paused as he recited the strange facts, then resumed: "His eyes reacted, all right. He seemed to want to speak, to write, but couldn't. A frothy saliva dribbled from his mouth, but he could not frame a word. He was paralysed, and his breathing was peculiar. They then hurried him to the hospital as soon as they could. But it was of no use."

Kennedy was regarding the doctor keenly as he proceeded. Dr. Leslie paused again to emphasise what he was about to say.

"Here is another strange thing. It may or may not be of importance, but it is strange, nevertheless. Before Maitland died they sent for his wife. He was still conscious when she reached the hospital, could recognise her, seemed to want to speak, but could neither talk nor move. It was pathetic. She was grief-stricken, of course. But she did not faint. She is not of the fainting kind. It was what she said that impressed everyone. 'I knew it--I knew it,' she cried. She had dropped on her knees by the side of the bed. 'I felt it. Only the other night I had the horrible dream. I saw him in a terrific struggle. I could not see what it was--it seemed to be an invisible thing. I ran to him-- then the scene shifted. I saw a funeral procession, and in the casket I could see through the wood--his face--oh, it was a warning! It has come true. I feared it, even though I knew it was only a dream. Often I have had the dream of that funeral procession and always I saw the same face, his face. Oh, it is horrible--terrible!'"

It was evident that Dr. Leslie at least was impressed by the dream.

"What have you done since?" asked Craig.

"I have turned loose everyone I could find available," replied Dr. Leslie, handing over a sheaf of reports.

Kennedy glanced keenly over them as they lay spread out on the table. "I should like to see the body," he said, at length.

It was lying in the next room, awaiting Dr. Leslie's permission to be removed.

"At first," explained the doctor, leading the way, "we thought it might be a case of knock-out drops, chloral, you know--or perhaps chloral and whiskey, a combination which might unite to make chloroform in the blood. But no. We have tested for everything we can think of. In fact there seems to be no trace of a drug present. It is inexplicable. If Maitland really committed suicide, he must have taken SOMETHING--and as far as we can find out there is no trace of anything. As far as we have gone we have always been forced back to the original idea that it was a natural death--perhaps due to shock of some kind, or organic weakness."

Kennedy had thoughtfully raised one of the lifeless hands and was examining it.

"Not that," he corrected. "Even if the autopsy shows nothing, it doesn't prove that it was a natural death. Look!"

On the back of the hand was a tiny, red, swollen mark. Dr. Leslie regarded it with pursed-up lips as though not knowing whether it was significant or not.

"The tissues seemed to be thickly infiltrated with a reddish serum and the blood-vessels congested," he remarked slowly. "There was a frothy mucus in the bronchial tubes. The blood was liquid, dark, and didn't clot. The fact of the matter is that the autopsical research revealed absolutely nothing but a general disorganisation of the blood-corpuscles, a most peculiar thing, but one the significance of which none of us here can fathom. If it was poison that he took or that had been given to him, it was the most subtle, intangible, elusive, that ever came to my knowledge. Why, there is absolutely no trace or clue--"

"Nor any use in looking for one in that way," broke in Kennedy decisively. "If we are to make any progress in this case, we must look elsewhere than to an autopsy. There is no clue beyond what you have found, if I am right. And I think I am right. It was the venom of the cobra."

"Cobra venom?" repeated the coroner, glancing up at a row of technical works.

"Yes. No, it's no use trying to look it up. There is no way of verifying a case of cobra poisoning except by the symptoms. It is not like any other poisoning in the world."

Dr. Leslie and I looked at each other, aghast at the thought of a poison so subtle that it defied detection.

"You think he was bitten by a snake?" I blurted out, half incredulous.

"Oh, Walter, on Broadway? No, of course not. But cobra venom has a medicinal value. It is sent here in small quantities for various medicinal purposes. Then, too, it would be easy to use it. A scratch on the hand in the passing crowd, a quick shoving of the letter into the pocket of the victim--and the murderer would probably think to go undetected."

We stood dismayed at the horror of such a scientific murder and the meagreness of the materials to work on in tracing it out.

"That dream was indeed peculiar," ruminated Craig, before we had really grasped the import of his quick revelation.

"You don't mean to say that you attach any importance to a dream?" I asked hurriedly, trying to follow him.

Kennedy merely shrugged his shoulders, but I could see plainly enough that he did.

"You haven't given this letter out to the press?" he asked.

"Not yet," answered Dr. Leslie.

"Then don't, until I say to do so. I shall need to keep it."

The cab in which we had come to the hospital was still waiting. "We must see Mrs. Maitland first," said Kennedy, as we left the nonplused coroner and his assistants.

The Maitlands lived, we soon found, in a large old-fashioned brownstone house just off Fifth Avenue.

Kennedy's card with the message that it was very urgent brought us in as far as the library, where we sat for a moment looking around at the quiet refinement of a more than well-to-do home.

On a desk at one end of the long room was a typewriter. Kennedy rose. There was not a sound of any one in either the hallway or the adjoining rooms. A moment later he was bending quietly over the typewriter in the corner, running off a series of characters on a sheet of paper. A sound of a closing door upstairs, and he quickly jammed the paper into his pocket, retraced his steps, and was sitting quietly opposite me again.

Mrs. Maitland was a tall, perfectly formed woman of baffling age, but with the impression of both youth and maturity which was very fascinating. She was calmer now, and although she seemed to be of anything but a hysterical nature, it was quite evident that her nervousness was due to much more than the shock of the recent tragic event, great as that must have been. It may have been that I recalled the words of the note, "Dr. Ross has told me the nature of your illness," but I fancied that she had been suffering from some nervous trouble.

"There is no use prolonging our introduction, Mrs. Maitland," began Kennedy. "We have called because the authorities are not yet fully convinced that Mr. Maitland committed suicide."

It was evident that she had seen the note, at least. "Not a suicide?" she repeated, looking from one to the other of us.

"Mr. Masterson on the wire, ma'am," whispered a maid. "Do you wish to speak to him? He begged to say that he did not wish to intrude, but he felt that if there--"

"Yes, I will talk to him--in my room," she interrupted.

I thought that there was just a trace of well-concealed confusion, as she excused herself.

We rose. Kennedy did not resume his seat immediately. Without a word or look he completed his work at the typewriter by abstracting several blank sheets of paper from the desk.

A few moments later Mrs. Maitland returned, calmer.

"In his note," resumed Kennedy, "he spoke of Dr. Ross and--"

"Oh," she cried, "can't you see Dr. Ross about it? Really I--I oughtn't to be--questioned in this way--not now, so soon after what I've had to go through."

It seemed that her nerves were getting unstrung again. Kennedy rose to go.

"Later, come to see me," she pleaded. "But now--you must realise-- it is too much. I cannot talk--I cannot."

"Mr. Maitland had no enemies that you know of?" asked Kennedy, determined to learn something now, at least.

"No, no. None that would--do that."

"You had had no quarrel?" he added.

"No--we never quarrelled. Oh, Price--why did you? How could you?"

Her feelings were apparently rapidly getting the better of her. Kennedy bowed, and we withdrew silently. He had learned one thing. She believed or wanted others to believe in the note.

At a public telephone, a few minutes later, Kennedy was running over the names in the telephone book. "Let me see--here's an Arnold Masterson," he considered. Then turning the pages he went on, "Now we must find this Dr. Ross. There--Dr. Sheldon Ross--specialist in nerve diseases--that must be the one. He lives only a few blocks further uptown."

Handsome, well built, tall, dignified, in fact distinguished, Dr. Ross proved to be a man whose very face and manner were magnetic, as should be those of one who had chosen his branch of the profession.

"You have heard, I suppose, of the strange death of Price Maitland?" began Kennedy when we were seated in the doctor's office.

"Yes, about an hour ago." It was evident that he was studying us.

"Mrs. Maitland, I believe, is a patient of yours?"

"Yes, Mrs. Maitland is one of my patients," he admitted interrogatively. Then, as if considering that Kennedy's manner was not to be mollified by anything short of a show of confidence, he added: "She came to me several months ago. I have had her under treatment for nervous trouble since then, without a marked improvement."

"And Mr. Maitland," asked Kennedy, "was he a patient, too?"

"Mr. Maitland," admitted the doctor with some reticence, "had called on me this morning, but no, he was not a patient."

"Did you notice anything unusual?"

"He seemed to be much worried," Dr. Ross replied guardedly.

Kennedy took the suicide note from his pocket and handed it to him.

"I suppose you have heard of this?" asked Craig.

The doctor read it hastily, then looked up, as if measuring from Kennedy's manner just how much he knew. "As nearly as I could make out," he said slowly, his reticence to outward appearance gone, "Maitland seemed to have something on his mind. He came inquiring as to the real cause of his wife's nervousness. Before I had talked to him long I gathered that he had a haunting fear that she did not love him any more, if ever. I fancied that he even doubted her fidelity."

I wondered why the doctor was talking so freely, now, in contrast with his former secretiveness.

"Do you think he was right?" shot out Kennedy quickly, eyeing Dr. Ross keenly.

"No, emphatically, no; he was not right," replied the doctor, meeting Craig's scrutiny without flinching. "Mrs. Maitland," he went on more slowly as if carefully weighing every word, "belongs to a large and growing class of women in whom, to speak frankly, sex seems to be suppressed. She is a very handsome and attractive woman--you have seen her? Yes? You must have noticed, though, that she is really frigid, cold, intellectual."

The doctor was so sharp and positive about his first statement and so careful in phrasing the second that I, at least, jumped to the conclusion that Maitland might have been right, after all. I imagined that Kennedy, too, had his suspicions of the doctor.

"Have you ever heard of or used cobra venom in any of your medical work?" he asked casually.

Dr. Ross wheeled in his chair, surprised.

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