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Published Monthly by THE CONSTRUCTIVE PUBLISHING CORPORATION, Washington and South Aves., Dunellen, N. J.
 Editorial and General Offices, Macfadden Building, 1926 Broadway, N. Y.
 Charles Mendel, President William Thompson, Secretary
 M. L. Wilson, Jr., Advertising Manager, Graybar Building, 420 Lexington Ave., New York, N. Y.
 Entered as second class matter April 30th, 1926, at the Post Office at Dunellen, N. J., under the act of March 3rd, 1879. Additional entry at New York, N. Y.
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 Price 25c a copy in U. S.—30c in Canada. Subscription price \$2.50 a year in the United States and its possessions; also Cuba, Mexico and Panama. All other countries including Canada \$4.00 per year.
 Chicago Office: 168 North Michigan Blvd., C. H. Shattuck, Manager.
 London Agents: Atlas Publishing & Distributing Co., Ltd., 18 Bride Lane, London, E. C.
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 PRINTED BY THE ART COLOR PRINTING CO., DUNELLEN, N. J., U. S. A.

A Crystal Gazer's

By
PAUL
ERNST

*I watched her with savage
pleasure, knowing that my
plan was working out suc-
cessfully*

WE never know, here in the psychopathic ward, how much of a patient's raving is truth and how much is caused by the twist of mind that makes him a patient. But the outpourings from the soul of Genevra Fleming—crystal gazer, hypnotist and alleged medium—have a ring of truth that chills the heart. She still is balanced enough to withhold names and avoid definite incrimination of herself; but I imagine the events she describes, involving the vague He and She of whom she speaks, actually took place. At least she is so convinced of the truth of them that her belief has landed her here for mental examination, and the result is that she will be pronounced insane.

She is still a beautiful woman; unusually brunette, with hair, eyes and eyebrows of a startling blackness. From her—when she is not in one of her violent spells—comes an atmosphere of dark strength and quiet. A beautiful woman—but one with whom a man would hesitate to involve himself!

Her story, ramblingly told and retold, begins with an afternoon when she sat in the dusk of her studio and held a man's framed photograph covetously in her hands.

The setting she describes is one of darkness. The studio, draped with black silk and dim with stained glass which she used to impress her clients, was even darker in the late dusk than the failing daylight should have made it. And in that dark place sat its dark mistress, studying patiently over a scheme that should result in a woman's death.

Again and again she reviewed the scheme to see if there were flaws or weak spots in it.

"And I could find none," she says always at this point. "It was perfect. As perfect as human plans can be made, anyway. I knew it would succeed."

So she sat motionless in the big dark room, exulting at the thought of victory.

"By this time tomorrow," she whispered to the man's photograph, "you will have lost her, and you will begin to turn to me."

"I really believed this," she says. "I was sure of it! They had loved each other since childhood, this man I wanted for mine, and the girl he was going to marry. It was the kind of love that is written and sung about, the kind that seems imperishable. But I know men, and I knew that the



one sure way was to put her out of his mind permanently. Then, when she was gone out of life and memory, he would turn to me. For you can see I am beautiful. . . ."

Her scheme, then, was formed and ready to put in motion. She set the picture back on a table and picked up her telephone.

"Hello," she called guardedly, as her number was given.

"YES?" The answering voice, a man's, was oily and without expression.

"Is this Bennet, the butler?"

"Yes, madam."

"You know my voice, don't you? You remember me? A few days ago I told you I might give you an easy way to earn a hundred dollars. Do you still want it?"

"Oh, yes!" A hard eagerness in the voice.

"Is any one near you?"

"No, madam. I am alone in the room and the other connection is out of order."

"All right, I'll tell you exactly how you are to earn the money: Tomorrow afternoon at about one-thirty she will phone you. She will ask about a certain man—you know him, Bennet. When she does, you are to repeat to her what I am going to tell you now. Get a pencil and paper so you won't forget."

A pause. Then a cautious sentence or two, almost whispered into the phone.

CRIME!



Paralyzed with fright, she stared at the dreadful scene in the crystal

She thought she could win the man she wanted—if only the fair-haired girl were out of the way. And so she dared to plot a psychic murder!

tired mind would be entirely receptive to the thoughts that were to be sown into it!

Genevra Fleming took the black velvet cover from the crystal ball in whose depths the girl was to see, next day, the scene that should destroy her. Then she opened a drawer in the table that supported it. In that drawer was one of the vital working parts of her plan—a small revolver!

Next afternoon at exactly one o'clock the studio door-bell was sounded. It was a revealing ring, timid yet urgent, nervous, appealing. It told of a restless night of worry. It hinted at hysterical tears.

The appearance of the girl who entered the studio confirmed the mes-

sage told by the bell. Her slender shoulders drooped a little as though she carried a burden. Her dark blue eyes

"Did you hear me? Repeat it to me. That's right. Now—call her to the phone." The crystal gazer's face, and the vicious inflection on the monosyllable, reflected the hatred such a woman cherishes for the rival who succeeds where she herself has failed. But, as a girl's voice answered a few moments later, her face changed its lines to match the studied kindness of her tone.

"Hello, darling. This is Genevra Fleming. My dear, I am very worried. This afternoon I saw a dreadful thing in my crystal—it is about someone you care a great deal for! I felt I must call you right away."

A quick reply in a high, clear voice—words that tumbled over each other in their haste to be spoken.

"No, darling. It isn't a matter that we can discuss over the telephone. All I can say is that you must warn your fiancé that he *must* stay indoors tomorrow. On no account can he leave his office, even for lunch! Come and see me tomorrow about one o'clock. Is the time all right? No, I'm afraid I can't see you before that—I am going away now and won't be back till tomorrow noon."

Firm fingers hung up the receiver, snapping off the sound of the clear voice and the fear-edged words that were still coming over the wire. Thin lips smiled quietly as the woman with the dark hair and eyes again picked up the framed photograph.

The girl would be sick of brain and exhausted of nervous energy after the night and morning of apprehension. Her

were ringed with almost equally dark circles of sleeplessness. Wisps of coppery gold hair showed from under the rim of her hat, indicating an emotional disturbance that had not allowed for the usual small vanities of preparation before a mirror.

"Genevra!" she cried, her voice mounting shrilly from key to key. "What were you hinting at last night when you phoned me? 'About someone I care a great deal for!' What threatens him? And why wouldn't you tell me over the phone? The suspense of waiting. . . ."

THE older woman comforted her, putting careful sympathy in her voice. "Never mind, I'll tell you all about it now, my dear—or, rather, I'll show you in the crystal. Tell me, did you warn him to stay indoors today?"

"Yes. But—he just laughed. He asked me why he shouldn't leave his office all day and I told him about your phone call, and he said the whole thing was silly. He hasn't my faith in the power of the crystal ball, Genevra. But at last he did say he would stay in to please me since I seemed so upset about it."

"Then everything will be all right," was the soothing answer. "Perhaps the fates will relent after all and spare him the end that was revealed to me yesterday. Now, we'll see if he keeps his promise. If he doesn't—I'm afraid it will mean some terrible disaster. Look into the crystal and tell me if you see anything there."

So—continues Miss Fleming—I led her to the table on which was the crystal ball, and drew away the velvet cover. Over it I had placed a lamp with a blue-tinged bulb. I lit this and drew the shades, and the room was dimmed into ghostly blue darkness.

"If he is in no danger you will see nothing," I said. "But if he disregards my warning, I fear—"

But I knew very well that she would see something in the ball! And I knew what it would be—she would see whatever pictures my stronger mind should care to impress on her own tired brain!

For minutes she gazed at the ball, white-faced with terror of what she might see there. Now and then she would look up at me, always to find my eyes fastened on hers . . . staring . . . staring . . .

Her body swayed a little as she relaxed under the somnolent influence of the crystal and the mesmeric power of my eyes. A poor, weak thing, this girl, not worthy of the man I wanted. My man, no matter what I must do to get him!

"Do you see anything?" I asked.

"No," she whispered. "Nothing—yet."

But even as she finished speaking, her eyes widened with alarm. "There is a cloud—" she murmured. "It is clearing now. Oh, I see him, I see him!"

In the ball she could see a man seated at a typical office desk; a tall, straight-shouldered, brown-haired man—the man for whom I was committing this psychic crime.

"He seems impatient," the girl's voice went on as she stared at the picture reflected in the crystal. "He is frowning and looking at his watch. . . ."

She pressed her slender hands together, beat them softly against the table top.

"Genevra! He is going out! He's breaking his promise to me! Look!"

But I had no need to look into the ball. I knew just what she was seeing there. I knew, I say, because what she saw was a picture conceived by me and thrust deliberately into her field of vision by hypnotism!

"He's putting on his hat!" There was despair in her voice. "Oh, stop him! Stop—"

She flew toward the telephone, but I called her back.

"Too late, dear. He must have left his office by this time. We can only hope the fates will be kind to him. Look in the ball again. Where is he now?"

"He is standing on the sidewalk," she continued, her voice dull with the monotone of the hypnotized subject. "What is going to happen? Genevra! Tell me! You promised to tell me—" The words broke into a shriek. Then, paralyzed with fright, she stared at the dreadful scene in the crystal. I watched her with savage pleasure, knowing that my plan was working out successfully.

SHE said no more, just stood there. Her breathing sounded loud and strangling in the quiet of the studio. But I knew what she had seen.

The man—her man, who would soon be mine—had stepped carelessly from the sidewalk to the street—directly in the way of a motor truck! The driver's lips moved with a shout of warning. Then the man was knocked down and one of the enormous rear wheels passed squarely over his limp body. After that the crystal clouded and turned blank.

For several minutes she stood motionless, her gaze still fastened on the crystal. Her eyes were heavy in her pale face, and her shoulders sagged as though sixty years had been added in an instant to her age.

Then came reaction. She sprang away from the table. Her hands flew to her throat and pressed there with such force that red finger marks showed in the white of her skin.

"It didn't happen!" she screamed. "It couldn't have happened! Why—I love him. Such things *can't* happen to

people you love! It's all a lie! Tell me it's a lie!"

I said nothing—simply stared at her, pushing suggestions into her mind, telling her what she must do next. I was not quite through with her.

"I'll call up home and see if it's true," she went on, more composedly. "If anything has happened to him they'll phone my house at once. But I know it's a lie. Please, please, let it be a lie."

She reached uncertainly for the telephone and called her home.

"Bennet? Bennet, for God's sake tell me—has anything happened—" Her voice failed her entirely and she had to stop and pull herself together. When she went on, it was in a quieter tone. "Have you had any word of any kind for me, Bennet?"

I was near enough to the phone to hear Bennet's answer. Word for word it came, the phrases I'd given him the night before.

". . . a message from his office. He has had an accident. I'm afraid it is very serious. . . ."

"Is he—dead?"

SILENCE. Then, "The message was very serious indeed. You must try to compose yourself to—"

The phone fell from her hand. She turned to me, although I knew she was as unaware of my presence as though I had not been at her side.

"He's dead," she murmured, a perplexity in her voice as though she were puzzled by the meaning of the word. "He's dead. This morning he was alive—but now he's dead."

A sudden wave of grief broke through her bewilderment.

"Oh, God! He's dead! My sweetheart—" She sank into the chair before the crystal, and her head, with its coppery gold hair, bent lower and lower until her white forehead touched the smooth table top. Her body was still with the rigor of a sorrow too great for sobs and crying.

I said no word. Even if my sympathy had been real instead of pretended, there would have been nothing to say. Instead I put my arm around her and held her to me gently. Also—I pulled the table drawer partly open so that when she raised her head the first thing she should see would be the revolver. Then I moved away.

There's just one thing for you to do—my mind commanded hers urgently. He's dead and you're separated from him in life. But there's a way to rejoin him. . . .

Her head moved slightly and I was sure she had received my suggestion. I left the room then, feeling that my plans would be completed soon.

When I came back some time later, the girl was gone—and so was the revolver!

It must have been nearly two o'clock when she left. I suppose I waited barely an hour to hear the end of all my scheming, but it seemed a hundred years! The feverish suspense *she* must have undergone the night before, was nothing

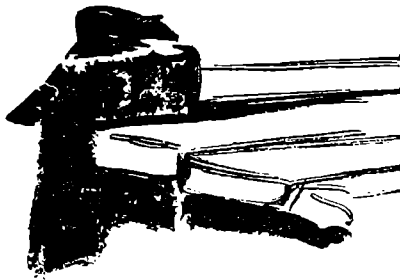
to what I endured as I sat with my hand on the telephone, waiting for the call I hoped soon to receive.

That hour crawled by until every second brought a dozen apprehensions with it. Had my plan failed? Surely I should have heard before now, if it had not. Was the girl too weak and frightened to take the step I'd outlined in her mind? *What* had happened? Why didn't Bennet call me!

When the phone bell rang a few minutes after three, I was forced to delay lifting the receiver for an instant till I could control my voice.

"Yes, this is Genevra Fleming speaking."

"My God, Miss Fleming!" A frantic, hysterical Bennet. "She's just killed herself! Three o'clock! The clock was just striking. Right through the (Continued on page 94)



A Crystal Gazer's Crime

(Continued from page 44)

head. Shot herself. I was just coming into the library . . . saw her . . . her head after the shot . . ."

I heard him faintly through a drumming of excitement in my ears. I had won! Success! I missed Bennet's words completely as he went stumbling on. My mind went ahead through the years, picturing myself at the side of the man I'd won—after he should forget his loss and turn to me. Then a louder word of Bennet's penetrated my abstraction. It was—*Murderer*.

"You murderer!" he was crying at me. "You are the one that killed her! I'll tell all I know about this, so help me! I'll send you to the chair too, if there's any justice!"

THIS recalled me to the present effectively enough. The man must be silenced.

"If you say anything," I promised, "you'll pay for it with a lifetime behind the bars. You're as guilty as I am. More so! It was your phone message that killed her. If you ever breathe a word to anyone I'll tell about that phone call she made and the answer you gave!"

Through the receiver I could hear him catch his breath. Then he hung up without a word. A rabbit of a man! I knew the affair was safe with him. The sight of her shattered head, her powder-burned, white face, might haunt his sleep for the rest of his life, but he'd never dare to tell!

And now it was time to take my reward. My man! I'd done a lot for love of him. I'd killed for him, and what more can a woman do than that?

I knew that the news of his sweetheart's suicide would be phoned him immediately. I wanted to be there shortly after he had heard the shocking and inexplicable news. I wanted to be the first woman his eyes rested on. That first flashing impression at such a time would do more for me than a year of tender companionship. And I would grieve with him—wonder with him why she had done such an appalling thing.

Hurrying from the building, I called a taxi and gave the address of his office.

"And drive quickly, please," I directed the chauffeur.

I sank back in the seat, thinking what I should say to him, planning how best to impress my desirability on him, now that the other woman was gone. So much depended on the way I could turn these first moments to my own advantage. I must be very tactful and subtle.

The car went rapidly, according to my request; but my thought traveled even more quickly. He would be alone in his office. He would just have heard the news. I would tiptoe to his side. . . .

The taxi slowed suddenly, half a block from the office building; then it came to a full stop. All around us were excited people going in the direction we

were headed. I tapped the glass window in front of me. It was imperative that I reach my man at once!

"Can't you get on?" I demanded. "I'm in a frightful hurry."

The chauffeur shrugged his shoulders. "I can't move in this crowd, Miss. Something must have happened up ahead. But your address is only half a block or so up the street. If you're in a hurry, you'll save time by walking the rest of the way."

A look at the hopelessly jammed street convinced me that he was right. I paid him and started edging through the crowd toward the office building.

The mob grew denser as I neared the entrance, forcing me almost to a standstill. Fragments of talk came to my ears.

"Awful accident. . . . Don't see how he could have done it. . . . Right in front of the street-car. . . ."

Then a name, and I stopped—breathless at a similarity of sound. For an instant I had thought it sounded like the name of the man I was on my way to see! But that was impossible, of course.

The name was spoken again. And ". . . no chance for the motorman to put on the brakes. Terrible!"

My heart raced, and then seemed to stop beating. My purse slipped unheeded to the sidewalk and was scuffed under the equally heedless feet of the throng. Then I commenced to tear a passage for myself among the spectators until I came to the scene of the accident. . . .

In what awful fashion had my prophecy come true! What irony had turned my lie on my own head!

A street-car instead of a truck; three o'clock instead of one-thirty—only in these details did the fate of the man differ from the lie with which I'd sent the girl to her death!

I won't forget that picture till I die—and I hope my death won't be too long in coming.

A SCARED crowd of workmen. A long street-car jacked up to permit the removal of a mangled thing from under the front wheels. The almost unrecognizable features of the man I'd thought to win. . . .

The frightened motorman was babbling to whoever might pause to listen.

"It wasn't my fault. I swear it wasn't. He saw me coming—looked right at me. I thought he was going to get out of the way. He had time to. Then he stopped dead-still, like he'd been shot. Seemed like he was listening to something. Right in front of me—dead-still—no chance to stop—"

I would have given anything for the power to raise my hands to my ears and cut off his words. But I was as unable to move as the mangled thing under the car wheels.

On and on he babbled. "Exactly

three o'clock." As though the time meant anything! "Just three o'clock. I'd looked at my watch a second or two before. . . ."

Three o'clock! The man's hysterical words were an echo of another message I had received. Something else had happened just at three o'clock! I tried not to think any further on that line, but my mind refused to be commanded and raced ahead to dwell on the coincidence of time.

At three o'clock this man's sweetheart had shot herself. And exactly at three—

". . . stopped dead still in front of me—stopped like he'd been hit on the head, and looked around like a blind man," the motorman repeated brokenly. "Seemed to be listening to something I don't know what—"

His words trailed off into silence as someone led him away.

And me—I fought my way blindly back through the crowd. I had to get away from the awful, accusing stares that seemed to come to me from the eyes of everyone on that crowded street. I must get away by myself to realize to the full just what had happened—though nothing but bitterness could come from such realization.

But now, as I dragged myself back toward my lonely studio, my head was jerked up as though tilted by an unseen hand. As if a revengeful finger di-

rected my gaze, I found myself staring at an incredible thing!

Two persons, a man and a girl, were walking slowly toward me. The man's head was bent as though he were listening, afraid he would miss some slight note of the voice he loved. And the girl was looking up at him with the light in her eyes that is only lit once in a woman's existence and by only one man.

They laughed soundlessly and drew nearer to where, paralyzed with fright, I stood directly in front of them.

I screamed at them, shrieked at the top of my voice. They paid no attention—seemed not to hear. Closer they came. I turned to run away from them but I couldn't move an inch.

Nearer they walked, never looking at me, acting as though I didn't exist. Again I screamed at them.

They paid no heed, these two who walked so close together. I tried once more to call to them, to deny the crime I'd committed against them. But still they would not hear.

Arm in arm, absorbed in each other as only reunited lovers can be, they drifted toward me.

Just as I fell fainting to the pavement they walked past me—and on to whatever place is reserved for those whose hearts have been made one beyond even the power of death to separate.