

# THE BLACK MASK

A MAGAZINE OF MYSTERY, THRILLS AND SURPRISE

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# The Monolith Hotel Mystery

By Lloyd Lonergan

IT was almost eleven o'clock on a Tuesday night, and the stately room clerk of the Monolith Hotel stood yawning behind the desk. The lobby was practically deserted, for the majority of the guests had either retired or were still at the various theatres and restaurants.

"Excuse me, but I want to pay my bill, and I'm rather in a hurry," were the words that brought Pennington Wilson out of his day dreams—or, rather, his night musings. Facing him, and tightly clasping a large handbag, was a little old man, a worried expression on his face. The clerk recognized him, smiled and bowed.

"Certainly, Mr. Henderson, certainly," he replied, in cordial tones, "The cashier will fix things up for you in a jiffy."

He crossed to the adjoining compartment, and gave the necessary orders.

"We are always Johnny-on-the-spot when it comes to taking in money, Mr. Henderson," he continued with his ready laugh, as he returned, "but I didn't know you were leaving us tonight. Thought your liner sailed at noon tomorrow."

"Of course, of course," was the nervous reply, "but, you see, some friends of mine, in—in—Brooklyn, phoned me, and naturally, of course I had to—"

The cashier came forward with the bill at this moment. Wilson glanced at the total, and then passed it over.

"Because you are checking out so late, we had to charge for the night," he explained. "Sorry, but that's the usual custom."

"Perfectly satisfactory," retorted Henderson.

He reached into his pocket and extracted a roll of bills, riffled them over, and extracted several, which he shoved across the desk. "Here you are. Don't bother about the change. Give it to the bellboys," and, with a nod, he hurried out. Wilson looked after him perplexedly, then showed relief as a husky, middle-aged man entered from the street. The clerk beckoned to him, and he approached the desk.

"Spencer, there's something queer about that chap who just went out," he whispered. "Name's Henderson; Daniel Henderson, of Minneapolis. First visit here. Booked to sail for Europe on the *Cardatia* tomorrow. Heavy baggage has all gone to the dock. Just now he ran down, checked out in a tearing hurry, with some silly story about having to go to Brooklyn. Nobody in Brooklyn is awake at this hour of the night. What do you think about it?"

"How much does he owe?" demanded the house detective alertly. "Perhaps I can head him off." He took a step toward the door, but Wilson detained him.

"He paid in full—and in cash," which caused Spencer to snort with disgust and retort, "In that case, why should we worry? What does it matter to us where he has gone, or why, so long as he is straight on the books?"

"Guess I'm more nervous than usual tonight," said the clerk apologetically. "Just the same, I didn't like the way he acted. Seemed as if he was trying to hide something. You can understand

how a man in my position gets hunches at times, but can't explain them."

"Sure thing," yawned the house detective, whose interest in the matter had now entirely subsided. "Guess I'll turn in. Had a hard day, and bed sounds good to me. Nighty-night," and he went toward the elevator, and from it directly to his room. But Spencer soon found that he was out of luck. Sleep was something he was *not* going to get. For before he had even removed his shoes the telephone rang, and an agitated voice directed him to report at room 817 as speedily as possible. He complied, and in the doorway of the designated number found Wilson awaiting him. The clerk beckoned, ushered him into the room, followed, closed the door and stood against it, gasping.

"My hunch was right!" he hysterically cried. "I know now why Henderson acted so queerly. But I never suspected! It is horrible—horrible!"

He half collapsed, and seemed on the verge of fainting. Spencer jumped to his side, put an arm about him, and led the clerk, now babbling incoherently, to a settee, where he made him as comfortable as possible.

"Pull yourself together, man," commanded the detective. "Take it easy, but tell me what's going on."

He patted his frightened companion on the shoulder. Under his ministrations the clerk regained his self-control, sat up and essayed a feeble smile.

"I'm all right now," he said. "The shock of the thing was what got me. You see, as soon as Henderson checked out, the night maid was ordered to put the room in shape. She went to the bathroom and on the floor she found—but you'll have to look for yourself. I—I—can't go on," he concluded, as he sank back again.

Spencer, absolutely devoid of nerves, crossed to the inner door, opened it, and peered into the bathroom, uttering an

exclamation as he did so. On the floor was the body of a well-dressed young woman, and a bullet wound in the side of her head showed clearly the cause of death. Spencer satisfied himself that life was extinct, emerged into the main room again, closed the bathroom door, went back to the settee, and roughly shook Wilson to attract his attention.

"The first thing to do," declared the house detective, "is to start a hue and cry for this man Henderson. The matter of motives and ways and means can wait. You'd better wait here until I can send some reliable person to relieve you. I'll attend to the important part of the work."

And he hurried out, while the clerk, a bundle of nerves in his most placid moments, moaned and sobbed, but did not dare to desert his post.

Fifteen minutes later Spencer was holding a furtive conversation in the lobby with a man who had "city detective" marked on him as plainly as if he carried a sign. Marty O'Donohue was a Headquarters sleuth and possessed the additional distinction of being a cousin and pal of Hotel Detective Spencer.

"It's lucky I located you at the club, Marty," whispered Spencer. "Here's your chance to make good, big, but you've got to cover me, of course. Remember, you just dropped in for a chin-chin on your way home, and found me about to notify the police. So you told me that while you wouldn't interfere, you'd just scout around while waiting for the precinct men. See?"

"Naw, I don't see," was the sulky response. "What's the use of letting the station guys in on this? If they fool around they may get some of the credit."

"It would cost me my job to let Captain Mahoney and his sleuths know I played favorites," Spencer retorted impatiently. "You'll get the gravy, all right, for I'm going to put you wise to a line of stuff that you must seem to find

out for yourself. Get me? Well, I happened to be at the front door when this guy Henderson left, and was lucky enough to see which taxi he picked out. 'Slimy' Foley, who's always hanging around here, was the chauffeur, and he's probably out there now, unless his trip with Henderson was a long one. Dig Foley up and you ought to get on that murderer's trail in no time."

"Thanks. That's good dope," whispered O'Donohue; then, in a louder tone, for the benefit of the loungers in the lobby, "Call up the precinct, Spencer. It's their job. Good-night."

And he walked off.

## II

THE late editions of the morning papers carried brief reports of the "Monolith Mystery." The victim's identity had been established. She was a guest of the hotel, Mrs. Kenneth Johnson, who, with her husband, occupied suite 819. Johnson, it appeared, was down in the writing-room on the mezzanine floor and had known nothing of the tragedy until long after the discovery of the body. The accounts concluded with the statement that Detective Desmond, of the West Forty-seventh Street Station, was trying to locate Henderson and had several clues as to his whereabouts.

But the afternoon journals carried scareheads narrating the unusual sleuthing of Marty O'Donohue, of Headquarters. O'Donohue, it appeared, had dropped into the hotel by accident and, learning of the murder, decided to institute an immediate search for the fugitive while the trail was still hot. Scouting around, he found a taxi driver who had taken a fare from the Monolith at about 11 P.M., and left him at the Grand Central Station. Most luckily the chauffeur—his name was Foley—remembered that the red cap who had taken the passenger's baggage was a

black individual known as "Limpy Sam." "Limpy," it developed, had gone with the man to the ticket office, and recalled that he had purchased a ticket and Pullman accommodations on the 11:20 express for Buffalo. Also, an additional piece of luck, "Limpy" was ready to swear that the berth was lower 7 in car 11. This was not surprising, for "Limpy Sam," being a devotee of craps, would naturally remember the "lucky numbers."

The train had departed long before O'Donohue arrived at the station, but the detective acted with promptness and intelligent decision. He got the Albany police on the long-distance telephone and the suspect was dragged from his berth, handcuffed and led to a cell. O'Donohue hustled up to Albany on the early morning newspaper train, claimed his prisoner and got back to New York with him by noon.

The District Attorney, then in office, saw a chance to make a grandstand play. Too long had the people spoke in praise of "Jersey justice." The Monolith case was clear-cut and conclusive. It afforded a chance to establish a new record. So, while the prisoner was being arraigned in a police court on a short affidavit, the necessary witnesses were taken before the grand jury, then in session, and Daniel Henderson, indicted for murder in the first degree, was in the Tombs awaiting trial, less than eighteen hours after the body of his victim had been discovered.

It was the day of days for Marty O'Donohue and the District Attorney. Everybody forgot about Detective Desmond, and it was not known that he was still busily engaged on the case, a problem that, to all appearances, had been most brilliantly cleared up. The only person who did waste any thought on the energetic precinct detective was "Big Jim" Mahoney, the captain at that time in command at West Forty-seventh

Street. When Mahoney reached the station that Wednesday morning he found a note from Desmond saying he was working on a startling new lead in the case. Mahoney waited impatiently for his subordinate's return, scowled when he read the newspaper eulogies of Marty O'Donohue, and cursed bitterly when the extras came in with the news of Henderson's indictment. The captain went out for supper at six o'clock, and when he came back, Desmond, all one broad grin, was waiting in his office to report to him.

"Desmond, there's some tall explaining coming from you," Mahoney began savagely. "Headquarters has put it all over us on this case, and is giving us the merry laugh. What have *you* done? Nothing! What has this big stiff, Marty O'Donohue, done? Everything! Located the murderer, pinched, arraigned and indicted him, all in jig time. I wonder at your nerve in coming back here at all. A detective who falls down as bad as you have done ought to jump into the river."

"Just a minute, Cap!" interrupted the happy detective. "O'Donohue thinks he put something over on me. That false alarm at the hotel, Spencer, tipped him off, I guess. I'll attend to Spencer later. O'Donohue doesn't know he's alive. Never did know. And the joke of it is that, in this case, he's pinched the wrong man.

"Anybody with common sense would know that this poor boob, Henderson, is telling a straight story. He claims that after dinner Tuesday night he went to his room, snoozed on his bed until late, then got up, went to the bathroom, found the woman's body, got scared and beat it. That was the theory I had all along, Cap, that Henderson was just the innocent goat. And why did I feel that way? *Because, right off the bat, I suspected the victim's husband.* The story he told me when I first hit the hotel

sounded fishy, mighty fishy. He claimed he had been in the writing-room on the mezzanine floor for several hours—his wife was taking a nap and he didn't want to annoy her. That's his story. But, if Mrs. Johnson was taking a nap, why did she have on her hat when the body was found? Did you ever hear of a woman lying down and going to sleep with her hat on—unless, of course, she was drunk?"

The captain's rage had departed. He was giving close attention to the story being told him, and his interest was growing all the time.

"Your dope sounds good," he admitted, "but still," he frowned, "this Henderson bird has been indicted. Don't forget that."

"Just listen a little more, Cap," pleaded Desmond. "I'm giving you this case in order. Nailing Johnson's first lie, I naturally looked for others. On the desk at which he sat were a number of addressed and sealed letters. There were so many that it would look as if the man had been writing for hours and hours. Well, I took a peek at the top letter and read the address. It was J. M. Devereau, 95 West 46th Street. Does that suggest anything to you, Cap?"

The captain shook his head; then, as a thought struck him, he knitted his brows. Looking at Desmond, he grinned.

"I get you," he said. "The last number east of Sixth Avenue is 79 West 46th Street. That address is phony. Good work!"

"Knew it would strike you," the detective went on cheerily. "You can see, as I did, that this fellow Johnson was just *pretending* to write letters, planning in that way to establish his alibi. I didn't let on, of course, but saw to it that Johnson gave those notes to a bellboy to mail. Then I got them away from the kid, steamed them open, and found,

as I suspected, that *the sheets inside were blank.*

"Of course, even then, I hadn't any clear case—just suspicions; but my side partner and I have kept a close shadow on him ever since. This afternoon Johnson came down to the desk with a big valise, told the clerk he was going to visit his lawyer, but to keep his rooms, as he would be back. We trailed our man out to the Bronx and pinched him when he got near the Sound. What do you think we found in his grip? *A floor rug, just sopping with blood stains.* And it came from the Monolith Hotel. Better than that, from Johnson's own room. The murderer is now resting in one of our best little cells, and we have all night to chat with him, for we don't need to take him to court until the morning."

"Did he confess?" asked the captain with interest.

"Not fully," was the reluctant reply. "His story is that he went into the room and found his wife dead upon the rug. Like Henderson, he lost his nerve. Strikes me both of those birds have skeletons in their mental closets. Anyway, Johnson didn't dare to raise the alarm. He remembered that the room back of their suite was one that could be thrown in with his if desired. In fact, the clerk had tried to make him take them both when he registered. The doors between the two bathrooms have locks on both sides, and on Henderson's side the lock had not been thrown on. Johnson discovered this, opened up the connecting door, dragged the body into Henderson's bathroom, locked his own side of the door, and then went downstairs to establish his alibi.

"These hotel people never like to talk, but I got some good stuff out of one of the clerks. It seems Johnson and the woman had a row during the last afternoon she was alive, and jawed so much that other guests complained, and it was

necessary to give them a quiet calldown. Don't know the nature of their spat, but in the evening the woman dined alone and went out in the street by herself, returning shortly after nine. Couldn't get any line on Johnson's movements, but it is safe to assume that he was hiding up in their rooms all the time, waiting for her to come in so he could kill her. Neither of the elevator boys remembers taking him up or down to the writing-room on the mezzanine floor. Yes, his yarn is fishy; no one will ever believe it, but it was probably the best he could think up on short notice. When we've put him over the bumps I think he'll come across all right."

### III

THE above conversation took place early on the Wednesday evening. Before noon the following day Inspector of Detectives James Dineen went to the Criminal Court Building in response to an urgent call from the District Attorney. He found that official in a most unhappy mood.

"Say, Inspector, this Hotel Monolith mystery is getting all balled up," he complained with bitterness. "Captain Mahoney, of the Forty-seventh Street Station, has pinched another man and seems to have built up a fine case against him. What do you think about it?"

The Inspector grinned.

"It's got me winging, too," he admitted. "And what makes things worse is that I have just put a third bird in a cell, and I'd bet a lot of money that he is the guilty man."

"What! Another!" gasped the District Attorney.

"Correct!" replied Dineen. "Ever heard of the Beaumont Detective Agency, a snide concern run by one Buckingham Beaumont, real name Isidore Polinsky? Well, Beaumont blew into Headquarters at daybreak with a yarn that sounded good. The wife of

one J. H. Brotherton, of Toledo, Ohio, ran away some weeks ago, and Izzy was hired to locate her. Found the dame and her paramour at the Monolith, registered as Mr. and Mrs. Johnson. Yep, Johnson's really an alias. Guy in real life is James Willoughby, a rich loafer of Toledo. When Beaumont ran them down he notified Brotherton by wire, and he took the first train east. The surprising thing is that he immediately paid off the detectives, saying he would attend to the rest himself. Wouldn't listen to arguments that he would need corroborative evidence if he meant to sue for a divorce. Beaumont is a wise guy, though, and he had Brotherton shadowed. At ten-ten the night of the murder the wronged husband was seen to slip quietly into the Monolith. Presumption is that he stole up to the room and killed his erring wife.

"We pinched him, of course; found him at the Astor, and he said he'd never have been dragged into the case if he had paid Beaumont the blackmailing sum he demanded. Guess that part of his story is true. Quizzed about the tragedy, he admits going to the hotel, but says that when he found the door unlocked and entered the room the place was empty, so he figured that the couple had gone to some show, and went outside to wait for them.

"There is one very strong point against him, a point that will send him to the electric chair. In his pocket we found a revolver, loaded, but *with one used cartridge, and of the same calibre as the one that killed the woman.* He says he fired the cartridge, and a lot of others, at some shooting gallery over on the East Side, but he couldn't remember the location. I've had Brotherton in my office, grilling him all the morning, and was convinced that it is a dead open-and-shut case against him. In fact, I was just about to send him to court when you called me up."

The District Attorney gasped, and sank back into his chair.

"I don't know what to do," he finally confessed. "To tell the truth, it looks to me as if *all* of these three men are guilty, but it is also equally clear that if one of them is the murderer, the others are innocent. I don't know who to hold or who to set free. Haven't you any suggestions to make?"

"The only thing to do is to let matters drift," was the reply. "We'll keep all of them in jail until things clear a little."

"But we can't," protested the District Attorney. "They'll be suing out writs of *habeas corpus*, with a chance of going free when a hearing was held."

"These birds haven't a Chinaman's chance of getting out of jail," declared the Inspector with emphasis. "Because why? Because we have other charges against them. I understand now why Henderson ran away as he did. Wasn't afraid of the murder charge, but didn't want to attract police attention. You see, we identified him this morning. Henderson is Dwight Harrison, the fugitive cashier of a National Bank in Osoto, Iowa. Left the bank's depositors in mourning and without funds some weeks ago. I'm keeping his identity a secret until we decide we don't want to try him on that murder indictment. Then as for Willoughby, alias Johnson, he can't deny that he ran away with a woman in Ohio and brought her to New York. The Mann White Slave Act covers his case. Brotherton has trouble ahead, too. He carried a revolver without a permit, so is liable under the Sullivan Law. Yes, they'll all stay with us for a while. In the meantime I'll get everybody busy and see what we can dig up."

#### IV

As they say in the movies, the scene

shifts to "One Week Later." Inspector Dineen, in his office, received word that Tom Halloran wanted to see him, and promptly ordered that he be admitted. Halloran was on the retired list of police captains, and Dineen, in his younger days had served under the veteran and always respected and admired him. So he greeted his caller cordially and then looked inquiringly at the young man in civilian clothes who accompanied him.

"My nephew, Neil Mooney," explained Halloran. "A harness bull in the Forty-seventh Street Station. Brightest youngster in town, Jimmy. You need him on your staff. He's a real, honest-to-God detective."

The inspector shook his head.

"Sorry, my staff is full, Cap," he replied. "I'd make an exception to oblige you, if I could, but it isn't possible. I'd be panned by the Commissioner if I let personal friendship sway me."

"But, Jimmy," protested Halloran, "I'm not asking you to do me a favor. I'm doing *you* the favor. Listen, now. Have your bright boys solved that Hotel Monolith murder case?"

"Not yet," admitted the Inspector; "but we are working hard on it."

"Your worries are over on that particular case," declared Halloran, his face one broad smile. "This bright young nephew of mine has cleaned it up."

Then, turning to his companion, he commanded: "Tell him all about it, Neil. I know Jimmy. He'll be glad to listen to you."

"Well, Inspector," diffidently began the young man, "I've always been ambitious to become a detective, and with that end in view I have tried to cultivate a memory for faces. Until I went on vacation a week ago my beat took in the Hotel Monolith. Had the trick from 4 P.M. to midnight. I saw the newspaper pictures of this Mrs. Johnson, and they looked familiar, although I couldn't place her at first. I puzzled

over the matter for a while and then I remembered. From the street one can look into the hotel dining-room, and I had seen this Mrs. Johnson eating there on several occasions, for she nearly always had a window table. And, as I tried to recall more about her, the fact struck me that she always wore a display of jewels. They looked as if they were worth a lot, but after her murder there was no mention of them."

"None of my men ever got onto that fact," interrupted the Inspector.

"It wasn't their fault—just my good luck," was Mooney's generous response. "Had they known as much as I did, undoubtedly the idea would have struck them that some clever crook had seen the jewels while she sat in the dining-room, just as I had seen them. So I decided to test the theory that a criminal had forced his way into the room, been surprised by the unfortunate lady while at work, and had killed her to make a getaway. Of course this was only an idea of mine, based on the assumption that all three of the men under arrest had told absolutely true stories.

"From the brief glances I had secured at this jewelry, I was aware that several of the pieces were odd and unusual designs, and I sketched them out, roughly, from memory." He reached in his pocket and produced a few sheets of scratch paper with rudely drawn designs. "Of course, it was like looking for a needle in a haystack, but I spent my vacation in going around to the various hangouts where crooks congregate—coffee houses and saloons during the day, dances at night. Last evening I dropped into the gathering of the 'Jolly Merrymakers' and spotted a woman who was wearing this piece of jewelry." (Indicating one of the designs.) "Well, I kept her under close observation and found that her steady was that Wop second-story worker, 'Scar-Faced Pietro.' The rest was easy. I trailed him

to his home, down in Hell's Kitchen, forced my way in when he had gone to sleep, knocked him out after a fight, found the jewels hidden in the bed and, when Pietro saw I had the goods, he came across. The Wop had spotted the damc, just as I figured it, slipped into her room when he thought she was at the theatre, and, when she came back unexpectedly, shot her down, pocketed the jewels and walked out. All of which goes to prove that these men now under arrest are innocent and told the exact truth when they were questioned."

"Now, Jimmy, where does Sherlock Holmes get off?" gloated Halloran. "Hasn't the boy here got it all over him?"

"The most marvelous piece of brain work I ever heard of," was the Inspector's reply. "Forget what I said a while ago, Captain. Do we want him at Headquarters? I'll say we do. Young man, there's a great future for you in this department. Shake!"

## V

THAT same evening, after dusk, one of the benches in Central Park was occupied by a couple apparently much interested in each other. The young man was talking, the girl listening.

"And then the Inspector took me in to see the Chief," the speaker went on, "and the Chief said all kinds of nice things. Made me a lieutenant of detectives on the spot. It's wonderful, but—Nora—I hated to do what I did. Never could have done it, only you made me promise. But all the time I wanted to tell them that the credit didn't belong to me, but to Nora Riley."

"Don't be stupid. Neil," retorted the girl. "I didn't do anything bright. Just played in luck. It was luck that I happened to be maid on that floor in the hotel; it was luck that I made a hit with that poor, lonely woman and that she showed me her jewels and talked about

them. Then, more luck, you and I happened to drop into that dance, and when I saw a girl wearing one of Mrs. Johnson's gems, why, I just gave you the tip, and the hard work that followed was all done by my Neil."

"But it wasn't fair for me to take the credit," protested Mooney.

"Why not? You and I are going to be one, and what helps you, helps me. The only way to get ahead in this world is to make people think you are smart. If you'd done as you wanted to, and told the Inspector that accident had been responsible for the solution of this crime, he would have mumbled thanks and left you to yarn away your life as a harness bull. But look what *my* way has accomplished. You're famous overnight, and in a position to do something and be somebody."

"But I'm afraid," confessed Mooney. "They're sending me to Headquarters to associate as an equal with a crowd of big, worthwhile men. How can I ever expect to make good?"

The girl bent over and patted her sweetheart on the shoulder.

"See here, Neil," she said gently, "what did these 'big men' do on the Monolith mystery? I'll tell you: The District Attorney fussed, the Chief fumed, the Inspector barked out orders, and a score of frightened detectives ran around in circles. Perhaps it isn't modest to say it, but the whole bunch were out-classed by one little Irish chambermaid and one big Irish policeman. I'm not afraid you'll fall down, dear. You've got the brains, they'll give you the chance, and you're bound to make good."

"With you to help me, Nora," replied the young man, as he put his arm about her. "with you to advise, I'm sure I'll be a captain some day."

"Captain, nothing," responded the girl laughingly. "The stars tell me I will be Mrs. Inspector Mooney before I am an old, old woman."