

Desperation – to the Point of Murder! Then –

THE SHOCK

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HERE were eight persons in the hospital room—doctors, nurses, interns, Inspector Shelting who was my superior officer in the Long Beach, California, Detective Division, and the patient, Randolph, who had suffered a serious syncope of the heart. The room was very quiet—doctor's orders. Another shock might kill Randolph. Inspector Shelting waited only for one thing—the confession.

As for me, I was in love with Randolph's niece. I knew that she was innocently implicated in the vast gambling ship organization of which Randolph was the big mogul. His confession, tempered by revenge on Tess merely because she was going to marry me, was going to be a tremendous blow against our happiness. I was resolved to stifle that "confession" if I could. Randolph was old and his heart was weak. If I got my two hands on his throat—

I didn't consider consequences. The vile lies, I vowed, would never leave Randolph's lips.

Perfect crime? Far from it! Yet for me it was going to be perfect, for by it I would prevent the degradation of a girl who was totally innocent of implication with Randolph's crime ring.

Shelting was bending over the patient's bed. The head physician was measuring Randolph's pulse. The old man's eyes were opening.

"He'll be able to talk in a few minutes," I heard the doctor whisper.

I looked toward the window. Light was beginning to fade from the March sky. Catalina

Island, westward, lay like a dormant cetacean under the abalone shell sky, striated with the miraculous colors of the Pacific sunset, blazing and iridescent.

Then I heard Randolph's voice: "I—I'm ready to—talk now—"

I pushed forward. "Inspector," I said between my teeth, "get out of my way, because I'm going to kill—"

That was the last word I uttered for many hours to come. Without warning the floor beneath me cracked open like a coconut rind. A savage, rending sound, magnified into distance, pressed about my eardrums. The walls convorted and split, and shattering glass exploded like doom opening for the cohorts of hell. Screams rose up all around me. A weight dropped loose from the suddenly cobwebbed ceiling, and my head took the full impact. I lost consciousness at once....

Tess was beside me when I awakened hours later. She made me understand what had happened, and there is no need for me to elaborate upon history. Randolph had died. Fate's hand, with the strength of a Samson among the Philistines, had worked havoc with the elements. Disaster was indiscriminate. And it had taken murder out of my hands.

It is not my intention to chortle over my own escape. Both Tess and I felt keenly the horror of those hours. I only record what is actual fact. We were married next day, March 11th, 1933, the morning after the terrible earthquake at Long Beach.