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## SERIAL STORY

### NEW YORK JUNGLE

BY WRAY WADE SEVERN

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YESTERDAY: Barks advances two theories: Marta is an experienced actress, may have killed Adam. Faked a faint; or Togi, Adam's new will, may have shot both, advises the chauffeur to keep quiet. The attorney goes to the jungle, is surprised when Gundrum enters noiselessly. Pat rushes in. Nella has disappeared.

#### CHAPTER XVI

SURELY nothing serious could have happened to Nella. Probably she had gone for a walk in the woods to regain her self-control. So reasoned Braitwood, as he made anxious way along a narrow path that pierced the grove east of the house.

"Nella!" He yelled. "Nella!" When she did not reply his apprehension increased. He thought of the dream she had related to them the previous night, of the faint which had mercifully spared her from more of Murphy's questions, and of her undeniable neurotic inheritance.

Then he recalled that she loved the orchard and directed his steps there. The fruit trees, thickened and colored with promised abundance, held no hint of tragedy. Braitwood heard a crows whirr overhead and the distant murmur of the stream at the end of the estate.

"Nella!" He repeated the call. "Oh, Nella!"

Perhaps she had gone for a swim. Nothing like cold water to restore one to normalcy. He hurried toward the natural swimming pool at the southern boundary of

the property. Screened by a growth of young birches and fed by the stream, the pool was visible from a small stone bridge which spanned a side road that joined the state highway. Suddenly Sidney's feet took startled root. Impossible not to recognize the tall figure staring intently into the water.

Boris Lesencoff stood on the rail, arms extended for a dive. He had flung his coat on the bridge, but he was otherwise fully clothed. Immediately he became a streak in the air.

ONLY a few bubbles marked the spot where Lesencoff had gone under. In an instant a dark head appeared; a shoulder flashed white; a powerful arm struck out; the other arm appeared, holding Nella Langdon's limp form. The pool was not wide. A few strokes and the Russian made bank.

Sidney took the girl from him and laid her face down, on the grass. "We must get the water out of her lungs," he said.

"She had hardly gone under when I caught her," Lesencoff told him. Kneeling beside the unconscious girl, he helped Braitwood administer first aid.

"What did you see?" Sidney asked, his hands moving rhythmically against Nella's sides.

The director shook the water out of his hair. "It is something I cannot understand. She walked deliberately into the water, gazing straight before her. When she got beyond her depth, she sank. It looked deliberate. Then I dived."

"She acted oddly last night. Lesencoff," Sidney explained. "She

had had a terrible shock. Did you know that Adam Langdon had been murdered?"

Lesencoff inclined his head. "Such news travels quickly," he said. "The milkman brought it from the Langdon Knoll kitchen this morning. I'm staying with the Wilkinsons this week." He hesitated before adding, "Can it be possible she knows more about the murder than she has told?"

SIDNEY'S eyes warned him to be less personal. Nella exhibited signs of returning consciousness. A shudder passed through her slender form and a faint breathing had begun to trouble her lungs.

"I came over as soon as I had had breakfast," the director went on. "I hope I may be of service to Marta. She will need all her friends."

"There is little you can do except leave condolences for the family," Sidney replied. "Langdon surprised me when he arrived by announcing his marriage to Patricia Bridges. Did you know of that, too?"

"Married to Patricia Bridges! Impossible!" Lesencoff exclaimed. "I understood there was a wife, but naturally I supposed her to be Marta."

"Well—it was otherwise," Sidney said. "So!" Lesencoff took a moment to digest the news. "All was amiable, no doubt?" he questioned.

For an instant the Russian did not speak. Finally, after a quick glance to see if the girl were suf-

ficiently conscious to hear him, he said, "Had I been present, I might have shot Langdon myself. You didn't do it, did you, Braitwood?"

"No, although I almost wanted to," Sidney replied. "Doubtless you, yourself, have an alibi, Boris?"

"Ironclad, now that I consider." Lesencoff's glance had fastened on Nella's head. "The girl has a bruise behind her ear. It is not fresh. Did you notice it?" he asked.

Sidney examined a small, discolored spot, plainly visible through the damp, streaked hair. "I wonder how she got that?" he muttered.

Lesencoff shrugged sadly. "We have given her another chance at life—for what it may be worth," he said. "At her age happiness should still be possible. You must talk with her, Braitwood. You knew her father."

"I mean to," Sidney promised. "Shall we assume that she slipped and fell into the pool when we give an account of the 'accident'?"

"Certainly she slipped. I saw her do it," Lesencoff agreed. "As for Marta, I shall see her publicity agent at once and give matters as favorable an interpretation as possible. Greatness is in her. This sorrow should broaden her art."

SIDNEY gazed thoughtfully at Lesencoff's broad shoulders and well-poised head. The director had expressed no regret for Adam's death. He had always hated Langdon and now he thought only in terms of Marta's suffering and the possible effect the tragedy might have on her future.

Yet, in spite of Marta's denial Sidney knew that he loved her, and that she had had to make a choice between him and Adam Langdon. He insisted that he had an ironclad alibi. Braitwood hoped he was right.

They carried Nella back to the house and sent for a local doctor. Though she seemed conscious she could not speak, nor could she be induced to do so.

"That blow on her head may be responsible," the doctor told them. "Time will determine if it is. But the trouble may be a psychosis, due to shock."

He suggested a nurse. Pat, however, decided that they had best share the nursing between them.

Though no word was spoken, all agreed that if Nella had anything to say when she became herself again, it might be better for the family to learn of it first.

(To Be Continued)

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