

Detective Tom Kelso uses guts and psychology to discover the secret of . . . .

## Lucifer's Lamp



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**T**OM KELSO stared at the note that had been surreptitiously put in his pocket. His cool blue eyes did not change expression as he read:

*Welcome to Titanic, smart guy. Just to show what a cluck you are, I'm going to kill her on the open stage, right before your eyes. Then you'll get yours.*

Lucifer

Kelso smiled thinly. This was the first break of luck he had had since coming to the Titanic Studios at the request of Montague Howard, the famous cinema magnate. Bernice Richmond,

blondly beautiful and beloved around the world, had been receiving warnings in her fan mail. At first, both the star and her managers laughed at them. But the warnings had persisted and an ominous note was sounded when she began to get messages by telegraph, radio and telephone. The star no longer smiled. Fear had begun to show in her expressive gray eyes, a fear the cameras registered, even when she was going through love scenes with Nelson Cathcart in their new super-feature, "Heart's Desire."

With his huge production menaced, Montague Howard took swift, decisive steps. Through his friendship with some of the leading officials of the detective department, he had

enlisted the aid of Tom Kelso, ace of the Los Angeles plainclothes men. The next day the detective appeared, attired as a stage hand, to watch the beautiful star from the time she reached the studio until she departed.

Kelso read the note again. It was typewritten and had been placed in the pocket of his overall jacket so that he would get it when he first arrived. Not only had the murderer identified him, but had known in which locker his clothes were kept. The killer was about to strike and was taunting him, laughing at his impotence.

The "Heart's Desire" company was assembling on the stage and Kelso slipped the note back into his pocket. Bernice Richmond would soon be where her mysterious enemy had said he would murder her. The detective's stride quickened, his mind ablaze. Through it raced a dozen questions, but the first always returned to haunt him. Who would want to kill this beautiful woman—and why?

The sleuth's tension increased as he watched the principals take chairs bearing their names at one side of the stage. He recognized Bernice Richmond as she bowed and smiled to Nelson Cathcart, her leading man, and then to DuBois Hunter, the director.

THE cameramen set up their hooded machines and directed their assistants to mark the angles at which they would shoot. Then one of them whispered to DuBois Hunter. The director nodded.

"Okay, Miss Nichols," Hunter yelled. "Up Stage there—beside that marble bench. Hey, Miss Nichols— Gracie!"

His voice was raised when no one appeared. "Call Gracie Nichols," he yelled to his assistant.

The girl's name echoed through the vast building. Bernice Richmond arose and started to cross the stage.

"I don't mind," she said, smiling in Hunter's direction.

Tom Kelso followed her with eyes that were

tight lidded by taut expectancy. The girl was beautiful, charming, utterly unspoiled. Although provided with a "stand in" woman by the studio, she was ready to endure the long waits and tedious posings while the camera men focused their instruments and tested the various lighting effects.

"Wait. Gracie is around here. I just saw her—a minute ago." Hunter called the girl's name once more.

"Coming," a voice sounded from the dim recesses on the other side of the set.

"Never mind, Miss Richmond. Miss Nichols is coming. That's just the same."

Another smile and the star returned to her chair.

Tom Kelso saw a girl come running across the stage. His eyes widened a trifle. For a moment, he thought it was a reflection of the star. Then he recognized her as Bernice Richmond's "stand-in woman."

"I'm sorry," the girl said breathlessly. "I was—er—delayed."

Hunter growled: "Over there by the bench, Miss Nichols."

The girl took her place. Her dress, her hair, her make-up were exact replicas of those worn by Bernice Richmond. She could have taken the star's place and none would have been the wiser, for a time at least.

"Okay?" Hunter yelled to the cameramen.

"Waiting."

"All right—hit 'em," the director shouted.

A flood of light poured down upon the stage, flooding it with a brilliance that dazzled. Tom Kelso's eyes blinked as he looked across the court set. The lamps concentrated on Grace Nichols as she stood by the marble bench, assuming a pose characteristic of her principal, Bernice Richmond.

Kelso studied her face. It was pretty, but not beautiful. Away from the famous star, she would have attracted attention, but only the rarest blooms could register in the star's

presence. Grace, however, expected no attention. She was an automaton, a lay figure, used to save Miss Richmond's strength for action when the cameras were working and the microphones drinking in her golden voice.

As the detective's gaze was fixed upon the girl's face, he saw it redden, as though a tide of blood were sweeping into her cheeks. She wavered slightly. Her gray eyes seemed suddenly glazed and her hand reached for her throat.

The detective started forward. The color had ebbed from Grace Nichols' face as swiftly as it had come. Her hand clutched harder at her throat. Then she plunged forward to fall upon her face.

"Good gosh—she's fainted," DuBois Hunter shouted, leaping from his chair.

"Fainted! She's dead," Tom Kelso heard himself say in a harsh, unnatural voice.

He was beside the girl before any of the others. He dropped to his knees and looked down into her eyes.

"Poor thing—what—what—"

**K**ELSO looked across the girl's body to meet Bernice Richmond's misty eyes. The star's beautiful face was lined with worry, her lips twisted into a strange, mirthless grimace.

"Get away," the detective told her, lowering his voice so the others would not hear. "This—this was intended for you."

Bernice Richmond nodded, but did not move. "I know it, but—who are you?"

"Getaway!"

"But—who—"

Tom Kelso sprang to his feet and caught her arm. Her gray eyes looked into his questioningly, but she said nothing as he led her away from the blazing lights. The crowd of extras, principals, stage hands and technicians were too gripped with the sudden tragedy to notice anything. But as he directed her into the

shadow of two huge "prop" trees, Kelso saw a slender man running toward the stage.

"Who's that?" he asked Bernice Richmond.

"His name is Belamy—George Belamy. He's in the scenario department."

Kelso cast a second glance at the man, and then hurried on. He wanted to get Bernice Richmond away from the crowd and talk to her before the shock of Grace Nichols' death had passed.

"Who'd want to kill you?" he demanded, stopping suddenly.

The gray eyes looked up into his and then dropped. "I don't know."

"You'd better tell me," he warned. "Maybe it won't be your stand-in woman—next time."

"But he wouldn't—he couldn't. Why, he wasn't even—"

"Who?" Tom Kelso demanded.

A wave of color crossed the star's beautiful face. It ebbed as swiftly as it had come and she laid her hand beseechingly upon his arm. The gray eyes looked into his and for all his experience and pose as hard-boiled, the detective felt his heart skip a beat.

"You won't let him kill me, will you?" she pleaded.

"Not if I can help it."

"I knew you wouldn't. And—I know you're not a property man. He knows it, too. You must look out for him. He's clever. He's so clever that—I don't even know who he is."

Tom Kelso's jaw dropped. Her words did not make sense. His mind flashed back to the girl who had died before his eyes, untouched by knife or bullet, yet struck down within the sight of almost a hundred persons.

He looked back to see that the studio surgeon and stretcher-bearers had arrived. They were taking the body away. Then he glimpsed Montague Howard, the Titanic's president, hurrying toward the stage. The man veered when he recognized Miss Richmond and Tom Kelso.

"What happened?"

"Grace Nichols—my stand-in woman—" Bernice Richmond began.

"Dead?"

"Y-y-y-yes—I think so."

Howard's eyes shifted to Kelso's. The detective nodded. The muscles on the producer's dark jaws hardened.

"We got to get him before—"

"Yes, but it's not going to be easy. That was clever stuff he pulled—damn clever. The lights—"

Kelso turned as he felt the blond star's grip on his arm tighten. He looked into her face. It was almost livid in spite of the make-up she wore.

"What's the matter?" Montague Howard demanded.

"I just remembered—a telephone call I got last week. I told you about it. He said, 'the spot would be the death of me.'"

THE detective's brows drew together. He looked into Howard's worried eyes and then glanced at the girl. The fear, which had recently appeared in her face, had turned to terror. The shock of her stand-in woman's death had worn off partially and she had begun to realize that but for a trick of fate, she would have been dead and Grace Nichols living.

"Keep her away from the lights," Kelso told Montague Howard, "and have guards around her."

Kelso hurried across the stage and ascended the spiral iron ladder leading to the light loft. The lamps had been switched off, leaving the galleries shrouded in shadows. The detective was looking for something he only suspected vaguely. He was following a hunch.

Stealing through the shadows of the light loft, he sensed the presence of some one else, some one he could not see, yet who was following his movements. The creak of insecurely nailed boards sounded off to the left.

He caught a glimpse of a figure, but it disappeared before he could definitely discern its identifying outlines.

Sliding his hand beneath his jacket, he took out his automatic pistol. Instead of holding it in his hand, he dropped it into his right pocket and stole along the catwalk leading to a group of spot and color floodlamps. Even in the dim light, one of these attracted his attention. He had seen something like it once in a physician's office, although this was much larger and was equipped with focusing lenses.

His steps quickened as he neared the lights. Then he stopped suddenly. A small box attracted his eye. It was an ordinary container for face powder, such as appeared upon every make-up table in Hollywood. A glance identified it as a popular brand used to dust over the layers of grease paints used when using a make-up before the camera.

"And now your turn has come," voice spoke out of the darkness.

KELSO half spun, his automatic flicking out, but he could see nothing.

"Put that away," the voice commanded, "If you don't, you're not going to be living very long."

The detective did not move, but stood holding the box of powder in one hand, his automatic in the other.

"I told you to put that gun away," the unseen man rapped.

Kelso lunged in the direction from which the voice came.

"Stop or—"

"Do your stuff, tough baby!"

The dazzling glare of light struck him full in the face, blinding him for the moment. He stopped, unable to follow the winding catwalk. Then he edged to one side, trying to avoid the overly brilliant beams. He could see nothing behind those sun-bright lamps. He raised his automatic and fired at them in an effort to shoot

them out.

"No use, flat foot," the voice taunted, "in another moment you'll be dead."

A strange odor came to Kelso's nostrils, an odor that brought a terror he had never known before. He glanced at the box of powder he still held in his hand. It was fiery red in the brilliant path of the floodlights. A faint smoke seemed to be coming from him. He hurled it away as his head began to spin. He felt himself choking, as if some powerful fist had grasped him by the throat.

His heart was struggling desperately to keep its beat. The catwalk was swaying. The thought flashed through his mind that Grace Nichols must have had those same sensations before she fell forward upon her face and remained forever still. He strained to hold his mind clear, to work the trigger of his automatic. Another crashing shot, but the bullet went wild. A convulsion went through him. His finger constricted on his weapon. The remainder of the shots in the magazine burst out, zooming undirected among the bridging girders of the stage roof. Then Tom Kelso slithered to the floor of the narrow catwalk. His glazing eyes looked down to see that he was over the two huge prop trees beneath which he and Bernie Bosworth had been talking. Their enemy must have watched them as he laid in wait.

"Well—don't tell the devil I didn't warn you," the rasping words came dimly to his ears.

The detective looked up. His failing vision distorted the figure standing over him. Kelso strained, trying to see and recognize, but his dimming eyes made everything unreal. He struggled weakly, but could not clear his vision.

The wraithlike figure looked down and kicked him in the side, throwing him half off the narrow catwalk. The headquarters man grasped one of the railing supports, but his fingers had no strength.

Another kick and he felt himself sliding over the edge. The concrete floor of the stage was

more than a hundred feet below. To fall such a distance could have but one result, death.

"Get going, wise guy. Your day's work is done."

The voice came more like a whisper than the spoken word. Another kick that sent him over the side and the next moment he was falling, weakly grabbing at the air in an effort to find something that would support him.

Next he was crashing through the branches of the prop trees beneath which he and Bernice Richmond had discussed the death of her stand-in woman. They broke his fall and he ricocheted down through them, cracking off branches as he fell. Finally, he struck a pile of artificial grass that had been taken off a setting representing a garden.

The fall jarred Kelso's dimming senses back to partial consciousness. He saw a number of stage hands bending over him and he whispered a few words.

"Get doctor—" was all they could understand.

Next he was in the studio hospital. Dr. Marsh, the surgeon in charge, looked at the man's livid face and noted the barely moving pulse. His first move was to administer adrenaline. The powerful drug's stimulus gave him power to speak.

"Touch of cyanide, doctor," he managed to murmur. "You might try that—"

"This is better," the surgeon broke in, "I'll give you another shot, then put you to bed."

The detective smiled thinly.

"Gimme two shots, and skip the bed," he answered.

A fresh injection of the drug and then inhalations of oxygen to clear his lungs. Kelso's strength gradually returned, but his call with death had been close. When he was able to sit up, he beckoned the surgeon to him.

"Get Mr. Howard. Then post notice that I'm dead. Have the wicker basket carried out, if you have to load it with brick."

"But—"

"Mr. Howard can make any explanations he sees fit."

Realization that he must work at high speed made him stir his lagging nerves and muscles. The murderer would complete his program with Bernice Richmond's death. Kelso had not the slightest clue to the motives prompting the man's murderous designs, nor had he the least idea what he looked like, but he was sure now he would find him and convict him of Grace Nichols' murder.

FRESH inhalations of oxygen, a stiff shot of brandy and Kelso was ready for action.

Montague Howard arrived, his dark eyes filled with surprise.

"What's the joke?" he demanded, "the bulletin board says you are dead."

"The assistant property man who fell from the light loft is, Mr. Howard," the detective answered.

The frown between the cinema chieftain's brows deepened.

"What's the gag?" he wanted to know.

"To catch the man who killed that poor stand-in girl and save Miss Richmond's life. Here's what to do. First, get me a sample of every typewriter on the lot. Say you're replacing worn machines. But I want samples of every one."

"I'll have them ready for you when you come in tomorrow morning," Howard promised.

"You'll have them in half an hour if you want to save Miss Richmond's life."

"Okay. We'll have them in fifteen minutes." The film producer stepped to an interoffice telephone and snapped an order over the wire. "And what next?"

"The loan of your best barber, a suit of clothes that'll fit, a sun-tan lamp like that on the Maytime set and the use of an office with an automatic lock, whose inside catch has been removed."

Montague Howard made notes of these requests.

"Sounds nuts to me," he said, "but we're used to nutty things on this lot."

Rene DuPuy, the Titanic's barber in chief, had not half finished his task when samples of the work of the Titanic typewriters began to pour in. Kelso threw most of them away. Occasionally he kept one for further study. The floor was littered with rejections, but he held three sheets of paper in his hand when he began putting on the suit of clothes sent over by the wardrobe department.

"Anything more, monsieur?" the master barber asked when he had cut his hair and shaved him.

"A touch of gray at the temples will turn the trick," Kelso told him.

A telephone call informed him his office was ready and the studio locksmith had so fixed the door that no one could get in or out. A final request for a pair of pince-nez whose lenses were plain glass, and Tom Kelso went to his freshly acquired office. Instead of being a grime-covered, perspiration-streaked property man, he had been transformed into a sleek professional type, a successful physician or a scientist who had made science pay.

He still retained three sheets of typewriter paper. He studied them as he walked to his office. Then he summoned three members of the scenario department for interviews. Their names were Charles Munyon, Henry Savage and George Belamy.

Tom Kelso surveyed the three young men who came to him. He then spoke quietly:

"Mr. Howard, your distinguished employer, is planning something out of the ordinary. He wishes to approach it in a rather out-of-the-ordinary manner. I am Professor Artemus Brown of the University, and he has asked me to make certain tests. I hope you agree."

"We get used to the out-of-the-ordinary on this lot," Savage answered.

"Sure. We're squirrels. We live on nuts," said Savage.

"Yeah—only some nuts are nuttier than others," Belamy finished for the three.

**T**OM KELSO beamed through his pince-nez in the manner of a professor who has several aces up his sleeve.

"Splendid, gentlemen. Now the first test is one of those simple and, you might say, nutty things that we psychologists indulge in. It's that old favorite, the mental reaction routine. I shall give you sheets of paper and you will write the words that occur to you in relation to the ones I propose."

The three exchanged smiles and nodded. A moment later, they were scribbling industriously as the detective barked a congeries of words that had no relative meaning. The young men took the test as a joke, but Kelso's tension increased as one word followed another. He snapped them out, his speed increasing as he paced up and down the room. Then he stopped suddenly and took the papers from the trio's hands.

A swift glance over the answers, and he touched a button hidden by the top of his desk, sounding a call in a nearby office. A moment later, the telephone on his desk rang.

"You're wanted in Mr. Howard's office," Kelso told Henry Savage, after answering the call. "You needn't come back until I send for you."

"Okay." And the young man harried away.

Once more the detective pressed the button, and a uniformed messenger appeared to call Charles Munyon to the stage of the Maytime company, whose scenario he had prepared.

As the door closed behind him, Tom Kelso took up the paper upon which George Belamy had his answers to the G-man's words. A short pause, and the pseudo professor took off his glasses; and cold blue eyes looked into Belamy's. The scenario writer met the gaze unflinchingly.

"Why do you want to kill Bernice Richmond?" was the startling question spoken in measured voice.

"Nuts," answered George Belamy, unruffled by this surprise attack.

"Okay, Mr. Lucifer." The suave voice of the professor was gone, and in its place came the clipped tones of the detective. "Then perhaps you'll tell me why you tried to kill me."

"Nuts again. I never saw you in my life," the man shot in reply.

"No? Not even in the light loft when you worked that infra-red lamp on me?"

"Nuttier and nuttier," the scenario man growled. "Say, professor, instead of giving other people the works, you ought to be out with the daffodils, playing with feathers and glue."

Tom Kelso smiled and nodded. George Belamy was no soft boiled egg easily trapped into damaging admissions. He had worked out a plan, but the plan did not work. He took up another.

"You write Richmond—in answer to my 'Grant'," he pointed out.

"Naturally—Grant took Richmond, didn't he?"

"But Munyon and Savage both wrote U. S."

"Yeah? So what?"

"And in answer to Switzerland, you wrote 'Berne'."

"It's the capital, isn't it?"

"Yes, but they wrote 'Alps'—the normal reply. Berne, however, is very close to Bernice and—"

"Go lay an egg," scoffed the scenario man, "you're goofy."

**K**ELSO smiled and bowed, mockingly. Then he took a box of face powder from his desk and placed it in front of the hard-faced young man whose *sang froid* had remained unbroken.

On it was a label which read: "Miss Richmond's dusting powder—Exhibit B 2."

Belamy looked at it and lighted a cigarette. Kelso's blue eyes had turned to ice. He had dealt with sullen racketeers who demanded the services of their lawyers. He had questioned criminals of various types who defied him to make them talk, but George Belamy was ready to talk, and each word was a jeer.

"'Nother little sideshow, professor?" he asked.

"Yeah—a good one."

Kelso pushed aside a screen, revealing the surgical lamp he had ordered brought to the office. Belamy's tired eyes brightened at sight of it. Then he yawned ostentatiously.

"Going to give me a treatment, doc?" he asked.

"Yeah. A little infra-red might help, don't you think?"

"That machine generates ultraviolet," Belamy rejoined.

"It used to, but it's infra-red now."

Kelso's hand threw on the switch.

Belamy's spring caught him off guard. He had no time to snap his automatic into action. In another moment, he was struggling with a desperate man, fighting for his life. Next they were on the floor, each seeking the other's throat. The detective broke his adversary's hold. He looked down into his grimacing face as he pinioned him to the floor.

"Former chemist turns scenario writer and falls in love with film star," he jibed. "Girl scorns romantic lover and he gets rough and threatens. Uses tricks of film-writers to frighten her, but she laughs at him. Then plots dramatic revenge. How do you like my scenario?"

"Nuttier than ever," Belamy rasped.

"Chemist knows that strontium tetracyanide breaks up under infrared rays," Kelso went on, "so he mixes it in film star's face powder. He manages to get stand-in girl away and expects film star to register cameras. Plot fails and stand-in girl returns. She has used some of her principal's powder, and when infra-red light

goes on, she dies of hydrocyanic poisoning."

No answer, but George Belamy's struggles increased.

"Then the detective finds powder in fly loft. Lucifer is up there getting back his infra-red lamp. He turns rays on detective who tumbles to doom. But sleuth hits tree, breaks fall and goes to hospital. After being pronounced dead, he comes out in character of professor of psychology and traps—"

"Like hell he does," the man beneath Tom Kelso yelled.

HE had jerked one hand free, and reached beneath his coat to pull out a snub-nosed automatic pistol. Hardly more than a toy in size, it was deadly at that range.

Kelso grasped the man's wrist and twisted. The weapon fell to the floor. Next they had their hands on each other's throats. Their fingers dug deep, each trying to strangle the other.

Tom looked down into his adversary's face. It was deeply lined, desperate, but showed no trace of fear. He was the type of man who would never surrender. George Belamy was not destined to feel the noose around his neck for the murder of Grace Nichols. He would kill or be killed. Two men were fighting in a room, whose door was locked. Only one would leave it alive. Clever, resourceful and audacious, Belamy would be a menace until he was dead.

Kelso tightened his grip on the other's throat. In turn he felt Belamy's fingers dig deeper. The detective's lungs were already bursting for want of air. The room was swaying. He would have to win soon, or not at all. The scenario writer was powerful, young, and still filled with strength. Kelso gripped with all his power, straining until the veins stood out on his forehead.

He heard yells outside and looked around to see frightened faces peering in the window. Then thunderous knocks sounded on the door. He could not call. Belamy's grip was strangling



him.

Next the knocks turned to hammering, and those outside tried to break in. The detective looked around again. The faces at the window were swelling into balloon-like objects, vague and distorted. He was losing consciousness. In another moment, Belamy would win the struggle. Only Kelso knew the secret of the love-mad writer's crime. If he were killed, Belamy would escape.

"No you don't."

The headquarters man's lips moved, although no sound came forth. Then suddenly he reared back and lunged. His foe's head struck the floor with a crash. His hold loosened slightly, but still he tried to burrow deeper.

"No—this—"

Releasing his grip on Belamy's throat, Kelso twined his fingers in the writer's hair. Again he crashed his head against the floor. A berserk fury seized him. This clever, heartless

murderer must not escape. He would kill again, if he ever got the chance. He was trying to kill now, despite his waning strength. Again and again the man's head was dashed against the hard oaken floor.

A rending of timbers, and the door fell under the blows of axes from outside. Montague Howard dashed into the room to find Kelso still straddling his victim, fighting more viciously than ever. A madman was grappling with what had been an adversary. Montague Howard grasped the detective's arms and dragged him away.

"No use," he murmured. "He's dead, anyway."

"Good thing—it saves the hangman a job. He's your man."

And Lucifer's lamp glowed darkly red as it shed its beams upon a box of powder that had never been in Bernice Richmond's dressing room.