Virtual Thrilling Tales: The Place of Madness by Merlin Moore Taylor

Hello, and welcome to Thrilling Tales, Seattle Public Library's storytime for grownups: I'm your librarian reader, David Wright.

What two hours in a prison "solitary" did to a man. That is the blurb for today's story, as in appeared in the inaugural issue of *Weird Tales,* which appeared on newsstands on February 18, 1923. Many issues of this legendary pulp magazine have been digitized at the Internet Archive and elsewhere, and they make for exciting browsing: I don't doubt we'll be hearing more from Weird Tales and other early pulps in the weeks and months to come.

And now, *The Place of Madness,* by Merlin Moore Taylor

"NONSENSE. A penitentiary is not intended to be a place for coddling and pampering those who have broken the law."

Stevenson, chairman of the Prison Commission, waved a fat hand in the direction of the convict standing at the foot of the table.

"This man," he went on, "has learned in some way that the newspapers are 'gunning' for the warden and he is seizing the opportunity to make a play for sympathy in his own behalf. I'll admit that these tales he tells of brutality toward the prisoners are well told, but I believe that he is stretching the facts. They can't be true. Discipline must be maintained in a place like this even if it requires harsh measure to do it at times."

"There is no call for brutality, however," exclaimed the convict, breaking the rule that prisoners must not speak unless they are spoken to.

Then, ignoring the chairman's upraised hand, he went on: "We were treated like beasts here! If a man so much as opens his mouth to ask a civil and necessary question, the reply is a blow. Dropping a knife or fork or a spoon at the table is punished by going without the next meal. Men too ill to work are driven to the shops with the butts of guns. Petty infractions of the most trivial rules mean the dark cell and a diet of bread and water.

"Do you know what the dark cell is? 'Solitary' they call it here. 'Hell' would be a better name. Steel all around you, steel walls, steel door, steel ceiling, steel floor. Not a cot to lie upon, not even a stool to sit upon. Nothing but the bare floor. And darkness! Not a ray of light ever penetrates the dark cell once the door is closed upon you. No air comes to you except through a small ventilator in the roof. And even that has an elbow to keep the light away from you.

"Is it any wonder that even the most refractory prisoner comes out of there broken—broken in mind, in body, in spirit? And some of them go insane—stark, staring mad—after only a few hours of it. And for what? I spent two days in 'solitary' because I collapsed from weakness at my bench in the shoe factory.

"See this scar?" He pointed to a livid mark over one eye. "A guard did that with the barrel of his rifle because I was unable to get up and go back to work when he told me. He knocked me senseless, and when I came to I was in 'solitary.' Insubordination, they called it. Two days they kept me in there when I ought to have been in a hospital. Two days of hell and torture because I was ill. People prate of reforming men in prison. It's the other way around. It makes confirmed criminals of them—if they don't go mad first."

The chairman wriggled in his seat and cleared his throat impatiently.

"We have listened to you for quite a while, my man," he said pompously, "but I, for one, have enough. A dozen or more prisoners have testified here today, and none of them has made a statement to back up the charges you have made."

"And why?" demanded the prisoner. "Because they are afraid to tell the truth. They know that they would be beaten and starved and deprived of their 'good time' on one excuse or another if they even hinted at what they know. You wouldn't believe them anyhow. You don't believe me, yet I probably shall suffer for what I have said here. But that doesn't matter. They can't take any 'good time' away from me. I'm in for life."

His voice grew bitter.

"And that is one reason I have gone into this thing in detail—for my sake and the sake of others who cannot look forward to ever leaving this place. The law has decreed that we shall live and die here, but the law said nothing about torturing us."

"This board guaranteed its protection to all who were to called upon to testify here," answered the chairman. "It has no desire to whitewash any person in connection with the investigation which is being made, and in order that there might be no reflection upon the manner in which this hearing is conducted neither the warden, his deputies nor guards have been permitted to attend. Unless you have tangible evidence to offer us and can give the names of those who can back up your charges, you may go."

"Just a minute." It was the board member nearest the prisoner who interrupted. Then, to the convict,

"You said, I believe, that only a few hours in the dark cell often will drive a man insane. Yet you spent two days there. You are not insane, are you?"

"No, sir." The convict spoke respectfully. "My conscience was clear and I was able to serve my time there without breaking. But another day or so would have finished me. You testified against me at my trial, didn't you? I hold no grudge against you for that, sir. I give you credit for doing only what you thought was your duty. Your testimony clinched the case against me. Yet I am innocent—"

The chairman rapped sharply upon the table.

"I utterly fail to see what all this has to do with the matter under investigation," he protested irritably. "We are not trying this man's case. The courts have passed upon that. He is just like all the rest. Any one of them is ready to swear on a stack of Bibles that he is innocent. Let's get on with this investigation."

The convict bowed silently and turned toward the door beyond which the guards were waiting to conduct him back to his cell. A hand upon his arm detained him.

"Mr. Chairman," said Blalock, the member who had questioned the prisoner, "I request that this man be permitted to go on with what he was saying. I shall have no more questions to ask. You were saying he prompted the man beside him.

"I was saying that I was innocent," resumed the convict. "I was about to add that not even a man who is guiltless of wrongdoing would be able to withstand the terrors of solitary for any length of time. You, for instance, are a physician, a man of sterling reputation against whom no one ever has breathed a word. Yet I doubt that you could endure several hours in the dark cell. If you would only try it, you would know for yourself that I have spoken the truth. Gentlemen, I beg of you to do all in your power to abolish the dark cell. Men can stand just so much without cracking, and if you will dig into the facts you will find that nine times out of ten it is men broken in 'solitary' who are responsible for the outbreaks in prison. That is all"

He bowed respectfully and was gone.

"CLEVER TALKER, that fellow," commented the secretary of the commission, breaking the silence. "He almost had me believing him. Who is he, Blalock? You had him summoned, I believe."

The physician nodded.

"I confess it was as much from personal interest in the man as from any hope that he might give valuable evidence here," he said. "He surprised me with his outburst. He is a clever talker. Ellis is his name—Martin Ellis—and he comes of a splendid and well-to-do family. University graduate and quite

capable of having carved out a wonderful career. But he was idolized at home and given more money than was good for him. It made him an idler and a young ne'er-do-well. But whatever he did he did openly, and I never heard of anything seriously wrong until he was convicted of the crime which brought him here."

"Murder, I suppose?" Stevenson, the chairman, was interested in spite of himself. "He spoke of being in for life."

"Yes; killing a girl. Agnes Keller was her name. Poor, but well thought of. Church worker, member of the choir and so on. It was brought out at the trial—in fact, Ellis told it himself—that he was infatuated with her and they were together a great deal. Not openly, of course, because old man Ellis, his father, would have pawed up the earth. The affair ended like all these clandestine affairs, specially if the girl is young and pretty and poor. It was the theory of a prosecution that when she discovered her condition she became frantic and demanded that Ellis marry her, the alternative being that she would go to his father with the story. It was charged that he killed her to avoid making a choice. The evidence against him was purely circumstantial, but the jury held it was conclusive.

"Ellis admitted on the stand that they often went riding in his motor-car at night. One damning fact against him was that he was seen driving, alone and rapidly, along the country lane near where her body was found. He had nothing to back up his claim that he felt ill and went for a drive in an effort to relieve a sick headache. Of course he denied absolutely that he was responsible for her condition, or that he even knew of it, but the jury was out less than an hour. The only hitch, I learned later, was whether to affix the death penalty or not."

"He said you were a witness against him. What part did you play?" asked Stevenson.

"An unwilling one," answered Blalock, quickly. "I did not believe that Ellis was guilty then. I am not convinced of it now. But as the girl's physician, and presumably one of those to whom she would go in her trouble, I was questioned as soon as the coroner had held an autopsy. I admitted that she had confided in me and that I had agreed that the man responsible should marry her. She did not tell me his name, but my evidence added weight to the theory that Ellis killed her to avoid marrying her."

The door to the room swung open and the warden stood on the threshold.

"May I come in?" he asked. "Dinner is almost ready and I thought I had better give you warning."

He crossed to an empty chair and sat down.

"We concluded the taking of evidence quite a little while ago," said the chairman. "Since then Dr. Blalock has been entertaining us with the story of the crime of that fellow Martin Ellis, who was one of the witnesses. Quite unusual."

"Yes, the sheriff who brought him here told me all about it," answered the warden. "He's hard to handle. Had trouble with one of the guards a while back and we had to discipline him."

"Two days in the solitary cell on bread and water, wasn't it?" asked Blalock. "He didn't have any good word for it."

The warden flushed.

"Few of those who taste of it do," he admitted. "Too much a matter of being left alone with your thoughts and your conscience. They'll punish you as much as anything can do. Well, supposed you take an adjournment and come on to dinner? Will you want to make the regular inspection tour of the prison?"

"Oh, sure," yawned the chairman. "Undoubtedly, everything is all right, as usual, but if we omitted it the newspapers would have something to howl about."

He rose, and, with the rest of the commission trailing them, followed the warden to the dining-room.

"Well, let's make the inspection and have it over with," Stevenson suggested, when the meal was finished. "Where do we go first, warden?"

"Through the shops and smaller buildings first, then the cells. That way you'll end up closest to the administration building and you can go back into conference with the least delay."

Uniformed guards stood smartly at attention as the warden piloted the commission through. "Trusties" ingratiatingly hovered about the party, eager to be of service. Great steel-barred doors swung open at the approach of the commission and clanged nosily behind it. The afternoon sunlight, slanting through the bars, relieved the somberness of the cell blocks and revealed them in their spick-and-spanness, made ready for the occasion.

"Well, everything seems to be O.K.," said the chairman, as the party again drew near to the offices. "Anyone else got any suggestions?"

"Yes, I'd like to see the dark cell," answered the secretary. "I don't recall ever visiting it, and that fellow Ellis interest me. He said it was a pocket edition of Hades. Where is it, warden?"

The ward assumed a jocular air.

"You'll be disappointed," he warned. "It's down in the basement, where prisoners who want to do so can yell and scream to their hearts' content without disturbing anyone. A trifle dark, of course, but if to some it is hell it is because they choose to make it so. If you really want to see it, come ahead. It's not occupied, however."

He did not mention that he had seen to that. With all this uproar about the management of the prison, it wasn't safe to take chances. The commission, he had foreseen, might decide to make a *real* investigation, and you never could tell in just what condition a man would be after several hours in "solitary."

"THERE you are gentlemen?" he said, with a flourish of the hand when a "trusty" had switched on the lights in the basement. "Not *one* dark cell, but half a dozen."

He stood back as the members of the commission crowded forward and peered into the dark recesses. Over each doorway a single electric bulb shone weakly, far too weakly for the rays to penetrate into the corners. The solid, bolt-studded doors stood open, formidable and forbidding.

"Any of you want try it?" asked the warden from the background.

"Sure, let Blalock take a whirl at one of them," suggested the secretary. "His conscience ought to be clear enough not to trouble him. Go on, doctor; try it and let us know how it feels. I'd do it myself, but I don't dare risk my conscience."

Blalock, standing just inside the doorway of one of the cells, turned and for a moment surveyed them in silence.

"Your suggestion, of course, was made in jest," he said. "But," a sudden ring came into his voice, "I am going to take you up on it! No," as a chorus of exclamations came from the others, "my mind is quite made up. Warden, I want this as realistic as possible. You will please provide me with a suit of the regulation convict clothing."

"Well, of all the blamed fools," ejaculated the chairman. then he gave his shoulders a shrug. "Go on and get a zebra suit, warden. I only hope this doesn't get into the papers."

A "trusty" was dispatched for the striped suit. When it had been brought Blalock already had removed his outer garments, amid the banter of the others. He did not deign to answer them until he had buttoned about him the prison jacket and jammed upon his head the little striped cap.

"I guess I'm ready," he said then. "You gentlemen have seen fit to ridicule the experiment I am about to make. But I say to you that I am doing this in all seriousness. I do not believe that 'solitary' is as bad as Ellis pictured it to us. I am going to find out. Warden, you will please see that conditions here are made exactly like those which surround a prisoner in this place."

He whirled upon his heel and strode into a cell.

"How long do you want to be left in there?" asked the warden. "Fifteen minutes or so?"

"Ellis declared his belief that I could not stand it for an hour or two," came the reply from the depths of the cell. "Suppose that we make it two hours. At the end of that time you may return and release me. But not a minute before."

"Very well, Number 9982," replied the warden. "You now are alone with your conscience."

The heavy door clanged shut, and a faint *click* told Blalock that the light above the door had been snapped off. Then the sound of footsteps, growing fainter and fainter, the *clang* of the door leading to the basement—then silence. Blalock was alone.

Feeling with his hands, he made his way to a corner of the cell and sat down upon the bare, hard floor.

HE SHUT his eyes and set about concentrating his mind upon some subject other than the fact that he was a prisoner, of his own free will to be sure, but a prisoner nevertheless.

He always had prided himself upon the fact that he had the ability to drive from his thoughts at will all topics but the one which he desired. Now, he chose, at random, to begin preparing an outline of a lecture which he was scheduled to deliver within two weeks before the convention of medical men. Back home in his study, Blalock was accustomed to stretching out at length in an easy chair, his feet upon a stool, a pillow beneath his head. Here his legs were stretched out upon the floor at right angles to his body, held bolt upright by the steel wall at his back. He sought to relieve the strain by keeping his knees in the air, but the floor offered no firm foothold and his heels slipped.

Irritated, Blalock slid away from the corner and tried lying upon his back, his eyes staring up into the darkness above him. Immediately that position, too, grew irksome and he turned over upon first one side, then the other, and finally he got upon his feet and leaned against the wall. Thus another fifteen or twenty minutes passed, he judged. He found that it was impossible to concentrate his thoughts, so he resolved to let them wander.

Leaning against the wall speedily proved uncomfortable, and Blalock began to pace around and around the narrow confines of the cell. Four paces one way, two at right angles, then four, then two. It reminded him of a big bear he once had watched in a zoo, striding back and forth behind the bars, but never very far from the door which shut him off from the outside world and freedom.

Suddenly Blalock discovered that he had made the circuit so many times in the darkness that he was turned around, that he did not know at which end lay the door to the cell. He began to hunt for it, feeling with his sensitive surgeon's fingers for the place where the door fitted into the wall of the cell. It annoyed him, after making two trips around, that he had failed to locate the door. He could tell by counting the corners as he came to them. The door fitted into its casing so well that he could not distinguish it from the grooves where the plates of the cell were joined together.

Immediately it became to him the most important thing in the world to know where lay that door. He thought of sounding the walls to see if at some point they would not give back a different sound and thus tell him what he felt he must know.

It was becoming a mania with him now. So gently, he began rapping with his knuckles against the steel, here, there, in one place, then in another. The he tried it all over with his ear, trained to detect, even without the aid of a stethoscope, the variations in the beating of a human heart, pressed close against the walls.

But again he was foiled. Every spot gave forth the same hollow sound.

Angered, Blalock kicked viciously against the insensate steel. Shooting pains in his maltreated toes rewarded him and, with a growl of anguish, he dropped to the floor to nurse the injured members. Then he became aware that his hands were stickily saturated, and he knew, when he discovered that his knuckles were skinned and raw, that it was his own blood. Desperately he fought to regain his self-control in an effort to force himself to be bland and unruffled when the warden should come to release him, as Blalock felt sure would be the case in only a few minutes at most.

He caught himself listening intently for the footsteps of the warden, or some "trusty" or guard sent to release him. He strained his ears to catch the faraway clang which would indicate that someone was coming into the basement.

But only the hissing sound of his own breath broke the tense silence. Funny he thought, how very still things could be. It required no very big stretch of the imagination to picture himself as really a recalcitrant prisoner, slapped in 'solitary' to ponder upon his misdeeds.

Going further, he recalled a story, which had read long ago, of a man who found himself to be the only living human being, the others having been wiped out in the flicker of an eyelash by some mysterious force.

Why didn't the warden come on and let him out of here? Surely the two hours were up, and he was getting tired of it!

It would never do, however, to be caught in this frame of mind when he was released. He must emerge smiling and ready to give the lie to that clever talker, Ellis.

Once more he got up and began his circuit of the walls. He felt that he was master of himself again, and it would do no harm to try to solve the puzzle of the door that would not be found.

Perhaps the warden had been delayed by some unexpected happening. Oh, well, a few minutes longer wouldn't make any difference. Suppose that he were in Ellis' place! In for life! He didn't want to think of Ellis. But somehow the face of the "lifer" kept obtruding itself—his face and his words.

What was it that Ellis had said? "You, for instance, are a physician, a man of sterling reputation, against whom no one ever breathed a word. Yet I doubt if you could endure several hours in the dark cell."

And the warden had added that in the dark cell a man was alone with his conscience. Damn that warden! Where was he, anyhow? Blalock began to dislike him. Perhaps there was something in those stories of brutality which the newspapers had printed, after all.

Dislike for the warden began to give way to hate. Blalock wondered if the warden and that fat, pompous little Stevenson, chairman of the commission, hadn't got their heads together and decided it would be a good joke to let him stay in there a great deal longer than he had ordered. He would show them, once he got out, that he didn't relish that kind of a joke, that he wasn't a man to be trifled with. Thus another hour passed, as he reckoned it, and his anger and passion got the best of him. He kicked the walls and hammered upon them with his clenched fists, insensible to the fact that he was injuring himself.

Then came fear—fear that he had been forgotten!

Suppose that there had been an outbreak in the prison, that the convicts were in control! Would they release him? Might they not wreak their vengeance upon him in the absence of another victim?
HE BEGAN to call, moderately at first and pausing often to listen for some response; then louder and louder, until he was screaming without cessation.

He cursed and swore, pleaded and cajoled, threatened and sought to bribe by turns, demanding only that he be taken from this terrible place. He was dead to the fact that it was impossible for anyone to hear him, that only the reverberation of his own voice, thunderous in that narrow place, answered him. Beating down from the ceiling, thrown up from the floor, cast back into his teeth by the walls, the noise of his own making overwhelmed him, crushed him.

Stark terror held him in its icy grip now. His thoughts pounded through his brain like water in a mill race. The perspiration fell from him in rivulets as he hammered and smashed at the walls. His brain was afire. He began to realize that what Ellis had said very easily could be true. Men *did* go mad in this place! Why, he was going mad himself—mad from the torture his body was undergoing, made from being alone with his own thoughts.

There were more lucid moments when reason desperately sought to assert itself. Blalock's cries became less violent and, moaning and sobbing softly, he began all over again that endless circuit of the cell in search of the door. Failing, he raved again and staggered from wall to wall or leaped madly toward the ceiling as if, by some miracle, escape might lie in that direction.

Exhausted at last, he sank to the floor, poignantly conscious that interminable nights and days were passing over his head and that thirst and hunger, keen and excruciating, held him in their grasp.

At intervals, strength would come back to him, strength, backed by indomitable will power that sent him lunging to his feet to renew his battering at the walls, his frenzied shouts and screeches, in just one more effort to make himself heard.

His knuckles were broken and bleeding, his lips cracked and swollen; his voice came out shrilly from his dry and wracked throat, his body and legs were succumbing to a great weariness that would not be denied.

Came the time at last when his own voice no longer dinned into his ears, when his legs refused to obey the will that commanded them to hoist him upon his feet, when he no longer could lift his hands. His spirit was broken at last, and he gave up the struggle and sank back upon the floor. And all around him the darkness shut down—the darkness and the silence.

Then the door was thrown open, and, framed in silhouette against the light beyond, stood the warden. "Got enough, doctor?" he called out cheerily. "Your two hours are up. . . Why don't you answer me? Dr. Blalock! What's wrong, man?"

He peered into the cell in a vain endeavor to force his eyes to penetrate the darkness. Failing, he fumbled in his clothes for a match and, with hands that shook, scratched it against the door.
Then his face went white as a sheet, he staggered where he stood and the match burned down to the flesh of his hands and scorched it. For in the far corner he had perceived, flat upon its back, a haggard, bloodstained, whitehaired thing that winked and blinked at him with vacant eyes and muttered and gibbered incoherently.

REASON came back to Blalock one day many weeks later.

He opened his eyes with the light of understanding in them, and they told him from his surrounding that he was in a hospital. Outside, the sun was shining brightly, and in a little park, just beyond, birds were singing and the breeze brought him the sound of children at play.

"Awake at last, are you?" asked the white-capped nurse who came into the room just then.

"Yes," said Blalock, in a rasping whisper. He did not know it then, but the calm, soothing voice he once had boasted was his best asset in a sick room, was gone forever. The terrific strain to which he had put his vocal cords in his paroxysms in the dark cell had shattered them.

"You are doing splendidly," the nurse assured him brightly. "You have been seriously ill, but you are recovering rapidly now."

"No," said Blalock positively, as one who knows. "I shall never get well. Give me a mirror, please."

"I don't believe there is one handy," she evaded, loath to let him see the havoc in his face.
But he insisted.

"Please," he begged. "I am prepared and I do not think I will be overcome. I will be brave."

Reluctantly, then, she started to place the silvered glass in his hand. As he reached out to take it, he stopped, his hand half-way. The hand he was accustomed to see, with its tapering fingers and well-kept nails, the hand that so deftly had performed delicate operations, was gone. Instead was a slim, clawlike thing, with distorted knuckles and joints.

Blalock finally extended it, took the mirror and, slowly but steadily, brought it into line with his eyes. He had expected some changes, but not the sight that greeted him. The black, wavy hair had given place to locks of snowy white. His face was drawn and wrinkled, and lack-luster eyes stared back at him from cavernous sockets. Long he gazed at this apparition, then silently he let the mirror fall upon the cover and closed his eyes.

"Don't take it so hard, doctor," begged the nurse. "You have been through a harrowing experience and your face shows it now. But in a short time—" The lie did not come easily, and her tongue faltered.

"Never mind that," whispered Blalock. "It doesn't matter now. Send for Stevenson, please."

The chairman of the Prison Commission came without delay. Compelling himself to conceal the repulsion he felt at sight of the broken man upon the bed, he bustled in with forced pleasantries.

"Stevenson," said Blalock when finally the other had taken a chair and the nurse had withdrawn. "I have something to tell you. That day I went into the dark cell—"

"Now, now, old man," soothed Stevenson, laying a restraining hand upon the other's arm. "Don't let's talk about that. We abolished it that very day. Why bring up that awful experience of yours? No one knows about it but the commission, the warden and your doctor and nurse here. We all are pledged not to talk about it, and the newspapers didn't have a line except that you were taken ill. Let the past take care of itself, Blalock, old man, and let us talk of other things."

A flash of the old will power shone in the sick man's eyes.

"No," he said firmly. "No, Stevenson, the past cannot take care of itself. Bend closer, Stevenson, I must tell you something and it seems I'm not strong enough yet to talk out loud.

"That day I so boastfully demanded that I be locked up in 'solitary.' I thought I knew myself and my will power. I believed that I had such control over my mind and my body that I could defy any torture man might devise, without quailing—despite the knowledge that my conscience was not the lily-white thing I had led others to believe it was. For, Stevenson, my conscience was black—as black as hell! It held the knowledge of a great sin on my part, a huge wrong that had been done another.

"But I had stifled it by my will power until I believed it a thing that was dead, that could never throw off the bondage to which I had doomed it, and arise and accuse me. It was to proved that I was superior to it that I deliberately chose to be locked up with it where, alone with my thoughts, I could prove myself the master, once for all.

"For Martin Ellis had shaken my confidence. Where before I had been certain I was doubtful, I wanted to prove him a liar and at the same time satisfy myself that I was a free man and not the galley slave of that thing which we call a guilty conscience.

"In that cell, that conscience which I believed I had killed rose up to show me it had been but sleeping. Under other conditions it might have slept on indefinitely. In there it overwhelmed me with a sense of its power and made me feel that I was about to meet my God without even so much as a veil behind which to hide my guilty thoughts. No matter which way I turned I saw an accusing finger pointing at me out of the darkness and the solitude was shattered by a voice which cried out that those who sin must pay and pay until the slate is wiped clean. And I had sinned, but I had not paid.

"Conscience is a terrible thing once it is aroused, Stevenson. It is living, vibrant, and it lashes and scourges until it has exacted its toll. That was what it did to me there in the darkness alone and at its mercy, and with no chance to escape. And in my agony and fear I cursed the God who had created me and saddled me with this thing. I learned my lesson, though, before I was through. I who had presumed to piece my own puny will above the Great Eternal Will; I who had dared to believe that the great order of things, the plan by which we all must live and die, must make an exception of me, learned that I was wrong.

"Martin Ellis is innocent, Stevenson, and I trust to you to see that justice is done. He did not kill Agnes Keller and I knew it. And I stood by and let him be convicted. More, I took the stand against him and helped make that conviction certain. I told only the truth in my testimony, but I did not tell all I knew and what I omitted would have saved Ellis. I did not want to testify at all, but the prosecution refused to let me take advantage of the confidential relation which is supposed to exist between physician and patient.

"The state was right in its theory that the man who strangled Agnes Keller did so because he was responsible for her condition and did not wish to marry her. She came to me in my study on the night she met her death and told me she had discovered she was about to become a mother.
She refused to take any steps I suggested and she said that her child, when it was born, must have the legal right to bear the name of its father. And that very night she was lured into an automobile with the promise that the man who was to blame would take her to a nearby town and make her his wife. But on that lonely country road he turned upon her and killed her with his bare hands.
And how do I know these things? Because Stevenson, I was the man responsible for her condition, *and it was I who killed her!"*

The End. Join us next time for another Thrilling Tale.