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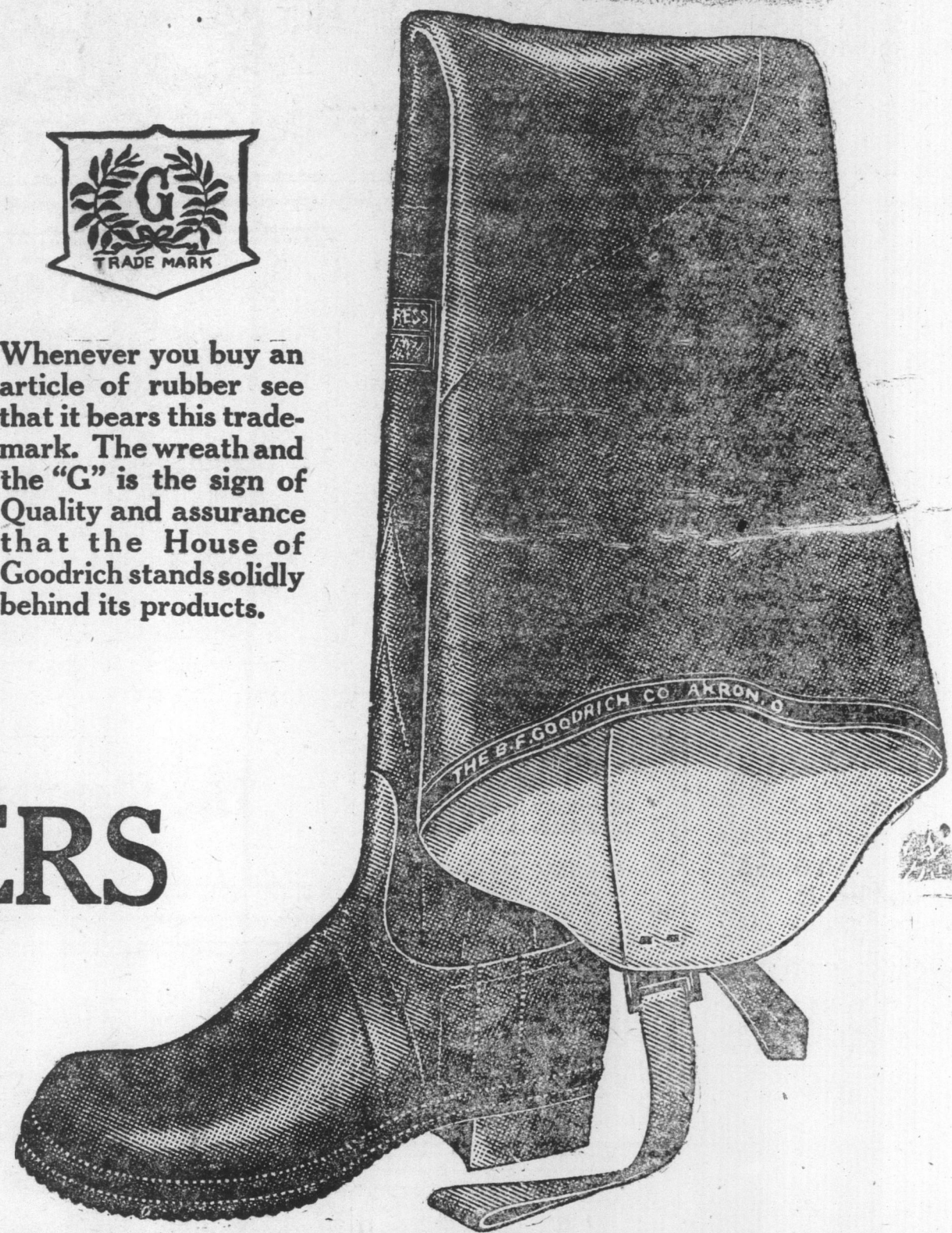
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CHAPTER XV.
A TERRIBLE THREAT.
His heart dropped, and he covered his eyes with his thin, gaunt hands for a moment; then, as if remembering the presence of the other man, turned to him.
"You are here still? Why are you waiting? Go your way, and let me go mine. You know my secret—it is no concern of yours. Forget it, as you forgot the wrong you did me. Go!" and he pointed down the path.
Spenser Churchill smiled blandly.
"My dear, Jeffrey, doesn't it occur to you that perhaps this little secret of yours does concern me?"
The haggard eyes were raised to the smooth, mocking face.
"Doesn't it occur to you that, though you don't appear to have any conscience to speak of, that I may not be so hardened. Oh, fie, Jeffrey! You know, you really must know, what it is my duty to do!"
"Your duty?" repeated Jeffrey, in a low voice. "What do you mean?"
"Why, my dear sir, of course it is my duty to go to the marquis and inform him of the existence of his child. Oh! and how sweet a duty!" he murmured, "to restore a long-lost child to its father's loving arms!"
Jeffrey sprang to his feet and stood,

breathing hard, his hand clenched tightly at his side.
Spenser Churchill looked at him with an air of gentle reproach.
"I cannot think how it is you haven't seen that from the first, dear Jeffrey. You may be so lost to all sense of right as to conceal the fact of Lady Mary's existence; but I—oh, my dear Jeffrey!—I am a man of honour, and must act as my conscience dictates. And how great a reward will be mine! To restore to a father the child he has mourned as dead! The dear marquis, I can picture his delight—the smile grew sardonic for a moment—"his delight at recovering her, and his gratitude to you—"
Jeffrey drew nearer.
"You—you will do this?" he panted, almost inaudibly.
"Yes," said Spenser Churchill; then, with a rapid change of voice, and laying his hand on the quivering shoulders of the man he was torturing, he added, "unless you come to my terms, my dear Jeffrey."
"Your terms?" echoed Jeffrey, his face working, his hands clasp and unclasp each other.
Spenser Churchill nodded blandly.
"—es. I take an interest in this charming young lady. I know her mother, you see—"
"Beware!" broke from Jeffrey's parched lips. "Don't, don't try me too hard!"
"And I should like to have a hand in restoring her to her proper place, or permitting her to remain under your care."
"You mean that her fate is to be in your hands?"

"Yes, exactly; and that it may do so most completely and satisfactorily, I think I will take charge of those interesting papers which you referred to, my dear Jeffrey."
Jeffrey's hand flew to his breast.
"The papers!" he articulated, hoarsely.
Spenser Churchill nodded.
"Yes. Don't say you will not, my dear fellow, because if you do, you will compel me to go straight to the marquis—who is at Barton Towers, by the way—"
"Barton Towers! The marquis—Doris!" muttered Jeffrey, wildly, and with a vacant stare.
"Yes, Doris, who will not be your Doris any longer, but will have to remain with her father, the marquis, whether she likes it or not—"
He had gone too far. With a spring, the tortured man was upon him, the long, thin fingers fastened tightly in the soft, white throat, the gaunt face was close upon the smooth, false one.
Spenser Churchill reeled, and went down on one knee.
"Take your hands off!" he croaked, suffocating, as he struggled to release himself; but Jeffrey, though the older man of the two, seemed possessed of the strength of an athlete, and, after a desperate struggle, Spenser Churchill's knee on his chest, and Jeffrey's fingers still choking him.
"Are—are you going to murder me?" was the grim reply, a wild, fierce light burning in the hollow eyes. "One kills a snake, not murders it. I kill you as I would any other vermin."
"Jeffrey—let me go! Let me go, and I swear to keep your secret. I swear—my honour—"
An awful smile lit up the face above him.
"Trust her to your honour!" the hands tightened, the sky grew black, the trees danced a mad carnival in Spenser Churchill's eyes, and they were closing for the last time, when suddenly the steel-like fingers relaxed their hold; Jeffrey reeled back, and, throwing up his arms, screamed:
"Doris! Doris!" and fell across the man who, only a moment ago, was at his mercy.
Dazed, sick with terror, and half-suffocated, Spenser Churchill struggled to his feet and staggered to a tree. He leant against it for a moment or two, panting and gasping, tugging at

ser Churchill lay on his back, with the collar of his shirt, and regaining his breath, and at last he looked sturdily at the still form upon the ground.
Still shuddering, he went towards and knelt over it.
"Fainted!" he exclaimed, hoarsely. "Another moment!" a shiver ran over his sleek, white face. "Another moment and I should have been lying like that. The madman!"
He spurred the body with his foot. "Lie there and cool yourself!" he snarled, and was turning away, when suddenly he started and put his hand to his brow.
"The beast has driven my senses out of me! The papers! of course! Ha! ha! Master Jeffrey!" and, kneeling down again, he hurriedly turned the still figure over, and, unbuttoning the waistcoat, snatched out the papers.
As he did so, something—was it the nameless terror of death, to which mortal humanity is and ever will be thrall?—something made him wince and shrink back.
He stared for a moment or two at the white face, then, slowly, extended his hand, and trembling, laid it over the heart. The next instant he started back, and, white as the face beneath him, cried:
"Great Heaven! He's dead!"

CHAPTER XVI.
THE PART OF A HYPOCRITE.
"Doris."
The cry rang through the wood and reached the spot where Doris lay full length upon the bank like a crushed flower. For a moment she thought it was an invention of her disordered mind, then she seemed to recognise Jeffrey's voice, and, thrusting the letter in her bosom, she sprang to her feet, and, with hurried steps, made her way, half-blindly, in the direction of the sound.
A few moments brought her to the open glade, and, with a cry of terror, she was on her knees beside the still form.
She had never before been in the presence of death, and for a time she thought that he had only fainted, and she raised his head and called upon him in accents of alarm and affection; then suddenly she heard a step behind her, and, looking round, saw the smooth, bland face of the man who had stood up in the box at the theater, the man against whom Jeffrey had warned her.
She shrank back and clasped the dead man closer to her, as if to protect him.
"Has anything happened?" asked Spenser Churchill, with tender concern. "Dear me, I am afraid there has been an accident. The gentleman is ill?"
"Yes, yes!" panted Doris. "Help me! oh, help me!"
Spenser Churchill knelt down and examined the stern face with an anxious regard.
"Why, I know him!" he said, with an air of surprise. "It is Mr. Flint—Mr. Jeffrey Flint—is it not?"
Doris made a gesture of assent without removing her eyes from the old man's face.
"Yes. Is he—Is he very ill?"
Spenser Churchill shook his head, solemnly.
"I am afraid— How did it happen, Miss Marlowe? It is Miss Marlowe, is it not?"
"I do not know," sobbed Doris, heedless of the latter part of the question. "I—I was not here. I heard him call. Oh, Jeffrey! Jeffrey! dear Jeffrey!

Is he— A doctor! Oh! if I could get a doctor! someone—"
"My dear young lady," murmured Spenser Churchill, pityingly, "I am afraid— Do not give way; bear up! In the midst of life—"
A cry rang through the wood, and a shudder shook here frame, then she looked up with a terrible calmness.
"You say that he is dead—is that it? Dead! Oh, Heaven! Dead!"
Spenser Churchill shook his head.
"I fear—I very much fear—" he murmured, gravely, and he laid his hand upon the thin wrist. "And you do not know how it happened?" he asked again, his eyes scrutinizing her face with a quick keenness.
"No," said Doris, hoarsely, and with a sob. "He was alone. I was coming to meet him. I heard him call my name, and—and I found him like this. Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?"
"Can you bear to be left alone for a little while?" said Spenser Churchill. "There is a cottage near here, on

the outskirts of the wood. I will go and get some assistance. The poor fellow has died from a sudden attack of heart disease!"
"Oh, go! go!" panted Doris.
He went, after another searching glance at her white face; and bent over the motionless form, almost as lifeless herself.
In a few minutes Spenser Churchill returned with a couple of farm labourers carrying a hurdle, and the body was tenderly and reverently carried to the house, Doris walking beside it and still holding the cobble dead hand.
Hasty preparation had been made for the reception of the stricken man and he was carried up to the bedroom. A messenger had been sent to Barton for the doctor, and in a short time he appeared and was received by Mr. Spenser Churchill, who awaited him at the gate.
(to be continued.)

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