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The Hidden Hour

BY J. B. HARRIS-BURLAND

CHAPTER II.

Swifter than the car moved through the darkness moved the thoughts of Ruth Bradley, seated in silence by the side of John Merrington. Far, far ahead they travelled down a long road that seemed to wind round and round the world—a road that it would take years to traverse, a road over which she might move very slowly after the first rush of passion and excitement that had swept her off her feet, whirled her along like a leaf before the storm, and sent her spinning into what might not be a new heaven but was most certainly a new earth.

She shuddered and shrank from the immensity of that which lay before her. Wrapped in her fur coat and sitting close to the man she loved, and protected by the wind-screen, she shivered with physical cold, and with an effort of her will she turned her thoughts backwards to the events of the past few hours.

How skillfully they had planned it all so that her husband could do nothing to interfere with their schemes. It was curious, she thought, that she should have troubled to "cover up her tracks." Not so very long ago she would have laughed if anyone had suggested that she was afraid of her husband. But all that had changed. As a loyal wife she had not been afraid of him. She had held her own against his coldness and his anger, and even against a streak of brutality that seemed to have come into his nature. It was not until she had actually decided to leave him that fear had begun to creep into her life.

And it was fear that had made a cunning woman of her when it came to the taking of the last decisive step. It was fear that had prompted her secretly to purchase a new trunk and a completely new outfit of clothes, and leave the trunk in the cloak-room at Victoria Station. It was fear that had induced her to tell her maid that she was going to the theatre, and that her maid was not to wait up for her.

And then she had taken a ticket to Clapham Junction, and John Merrington had met her there with his small car. Except that she had not dressed for the theatre there had been nothing about her movements to attract suspicion. Her husband would not return to the house until about three o'clock in the morning. He would believe her to be in bed and asleep. He would not know until the morning that she had not slept in the house. A long time would elapse before he learned the truth, and then she would be beyond his reach. Folkestone, Paris, Rome! She had a swift vision of the night. He would not follow them farther than a day's journey. But so long as she was in England she was afraid of him. She pictured him as swift to avenge his honor—a strong, terrible man who would commit murder rather than be robbed of one of his possessions, even if he were tired of it.

And she had forced John Merrington to take the same precautions. John Merrington had a friend who lived in Kent fifty miles out of London, and he had told his wife that he was going to spend a couple of days with this man. That had been very simple indeed. "Like a thief—like two thieves," thought Ruth, "flying from justice."

That ugly idea came into her mind and asserted itself. There was no getting away from it. In the fierce tumult of the last fortnight her mind had perhaps not been able to think quite clearly. Love had obscured everything. But now, rushing through the cold night air, she was more critical of her action.

"How far are we from London, Jack?" she asked. "Oh, about forty miles, dear," Merrington answered with a laugh. "Are we anywhere near Mr. Ardington's house?" "Ardington?" he queried. "Yes, Jack dear—your friend, who lives at Dedbury."

"About ten miles farther on, I should think. Yes, about that."

"Don't you think you had better stop the night there?" said Ruth, after a pause. "I will go on to Folkestone, and you—you could leave your friend's house early in the morning—in time to catch the boat."

Merrington drew in his breath sharply and slowed down the car, until it was travelling at no more than twelve miles an hour.

"Ruth, you—you have not changed your mind?"

"No, no, Jack—I only thought—"

"If you have changed your mind," he continued—"well, it is not too late."

She was silent. She had not changed her mind, but she was most horribly afraid. Her mind had gone forward into the future and back into the past, and it had travelled in storm and darkness.

He had not been angry at her suggestion. "Perhaps," she thought, "he too is afraid." The fact that she loved him did not blind her to his faults. She knew he had little strength of character. He had not even been able to cope with Paula, his pretty, petulant, empty-headed butterfly of a wife, whose selfish extravagance had been the cause of so many quarrels over money and an ever-widening breach in his married life.

She glanced up at Merrington's face, dimly beautiful in the faint light from the lamp on the dashboard. It was the face of one who sooner or later would give something of extraordinary beauty to the world—a poem, a song, a picture, a building, or a statue. It was almost a contrast to the big, strong, athletic body of the man—too small a head for such a vigorous framework of bones and muscles.

The sadness of Merrington's beautiful face had always appealed to Ruth. To her he was rather pitiful. He ought to have married some woman who would look after him. Merrington and her husband stood as far apart as the two poles. Her husband was not the sort of man who required to be looked after. He had always been in perfect health and had never seemed to have a care in the world, except the tremendous burden of his work. John Merrington had wanted a woman to "mother" him. . . . And she was in love with John Merrington.

"You are giving up so much, Ruth," Merrington continued after a pause, "and I—I am giving up so little. If you did change your mind I shouldn't blame you."

His humility hurt her more than any words of reproach could have done. "Jack, dear," she said hurriedly, "I only meant that it would be safer for you to stay at Mr. Ardington's. I could take the train on to Folkestone. Of course I haven't changed my mind. Do as you like, dear."

"We'll keep to our plans," he replied. "Difficulties might arise—unforeseen difficulties. I can't think what put that idea into your head, Ruth."

He quickened the speed of the car, until the needle of the speedometer pointed to nearly forty miles an hour. It seemed to him that if he did not drive furiously something would overtake him and rob him of all that he had in the world. The little car, too light to hold the road at this speed, jumped about and vibrated most unpleasantly.

Ruth closed her eyes for a few minutes, and then suddenly opened them at what seemed to her to be the report of a pistol. She saw the car lurch to the left towards the strip of grass by the side of the road, heard the grinding of the brakes, and Merrington call out "My God!" Then, as his left arm swiftly shot across her face to shield her, she felt herself lifted out of her seat and flung sideways on to something that gave beneath her weight and wrapped her round and held her fast like a network of strong, thick cords.

When Ruth, half dazed and cruelly shaken, managed to free herself from the wide, tall hedge that had broken her fall she could see nothing but the white and red tail lamp of the car. It was an oil lamp, and though the electric headlights had been extinguished, it still burnt steadily. She groped her way to it, called out "Jack! Jack!" and then, receiving no reply, managed to get the lamp out of its socket and flashed the white light from the number plate on to the grass and road.

She saw that which she had feared to see, and running forward, she knelt by Merrington's side. He was lying on his back quite motionless, with arms stretched out and eyes closed. His face was uninjured and so calm that he might almost have been asleep. She caught hold of his left wrist and pressed her fingers against the pulse. It beat faintly but steadily. The great fear passed away from her.

"He has only fainted," she said to herself. He must have fallen very heavily on the hard road and have lost consciousness. She must find some water—get brandy from somewhere, perhaps. No, she could not leave him there in the road. No doubt it would only be a matter of a few minutes before some car came by, and she could ask for help. They were on a main road, and had already passed dozens of cars moving from the south-east to London.

Before a minute had elapsed she saw a white fan of light in the distance. It was travelling in the same direction as she had travelled. She rose from her knees and went forward to meet the car, standing in its path so that it could not pass her by, and waving her arms. It slowed down and stopped within two yards of her, and a man called out, "What's the matter?"

"An accident—I want help," she came to the side of the car. "My husband's hurt," she continued. "He's lying in the middle of the road."

"Far on?"

"About a hundred yards."

"Jump in," said the voice. "I'm a doctor. My name's Trehorn. I only live a couple of miles away from here."

She seated herself beside the driver and said nothing. She had suddenly realized that she would have to be careful what she said. Already she had spoken of Merrington as her husband. There was no reason why she should not have called him "a friend." But the word had slipped out of her mouth unawares.

The big car glided on for a few seconds and came to a standstill. Dr. Trehorn sprang out of it and knelt down by Merrington's side. Ruth, alighting more slowly, for she was aching in every limb, saw Trehorn for the first time in the glare of the headlights. He was a young man with a kindly, clean-shaven face—a rather ordinary young man of medium height and with nothing very remarkable about his appearance. But she liked the look of him. He seemed capable.

"Where do you live?" he asked.

"Far from here?"

"Yes—in London. We were on our way to Folkestone."

"You're off the main road," he said, busy all the time with his eyes and fingers. "Did you know that?"

"No."

"This is a by-road to Dedbury," he continued. "Lucky I came along. Not many people go along this road at night."

"Dedbury," she echoed, and she remembered that Ardington lived at Dedbury.

"Yes—well, you've got pluck, and you'll keep your head. Your husband may be rather badly hurt. I think I'd better take him along to my house. Between us we can get him into my car. I can do nothing for him here."

Ruth faltered out some words of gratitude. She could do nothing less. But it seemed to her as though she was already in the storm and darkness she had seen—so far off on the long road of life.

(To be continued.)

Minard's Liniment for Dandruff.

About the House

AN ATTRACTIVE NEGLIGEE.



4425. Foulard is here portrayed with girdle and bindings of satin in a contrasting color. This model is good also for crepe, printed voile, or crepe de chine.

The Pattern is cut in 4 Sizes: Small, 34-36; Medium, 38-40; Large, 42-44; Extra Large, 46-48 inches bust measure. A medium size requires 4 1/2 yards of 40-inch material. The width at the foot is 2 1/2 yards.

Pattern mailed to any address on receipt of 15c in silver or stamps, by the Wilson Publishing Co., 73 West Adelaide St., Toronto. Allow two weeks for receipt of pattern.

ARE YOU HELPING YOUR CHILD?

Your child's usefulness, happiness and success in life are dependent largely upon the care you give it, the watchfulness you keep over it and the intelligence with which you guide it. "From 10 to 15 per cent. more public school pupils would be promoted if they had a physical over-hauling before they enter school in September," declared an educational expert at this time last year.

"Adenoids, defective eyesight or malnutrition, sometimes all of them, are usually found," he said. "The adenoids and eye trouble can be corrected in a short time, if the parents will give the matter serious attention. Take the children to the family doctor, and when he gives advice in reference to these matters, act at once."

Statistics covering many years show that nine out of every ten persons over twenty-one usually have imperfect sight. At thirty-one the proportion is larger. Above forty it is almost impossible to find a man or woman with perfect sight. For the last 100 years the profession has wrestled in vain with the problem, finding no means compatible with the conditions of modern life for preventing errors of refraction, and no means of relieving them except by eyeglasses.

It was learned some years ago by the examination of several thousand school children in one of our large cities that 66 per cent. of them had defective vision of such a degree as to warrant the wearing of glasses. Quite recently the examination of

more than ten thousand employees in factories and commercial houses showed that 53 per cent. had uncorrected faulty vision, 13 per cent. had defects which were corrected, making 66 per cent. with defective eyes.

These two surveys were made under different auspices several years apart. The figures are startling. They mean that a very large majority of the public have eyes defective to such a degree as to require glasses to conserve vision and make the individual a happier and more efficient member of society.

BARGAINS IN BEAUTY.

So often the little things are the most helpful. Tea leaves, for instance! After the tea is made, do not throw them away? Why not keep them and turn them into beauty spectacles? Then you won't have to worry about the attractiveness of your eyes, for they will be young and sparkling, with smooth lids and uncrinkled corners.

Make an oblong bag of white cheesecloth. Fill it with old tea leaves and tie it in the middle, so that by a stretch of the imagination it looks like a big pair of white spectacles. Now dip it in a basin of warm water and lay it over the tired, old-looking eyes. If possible, lie down and relax when you give yourself this treatment. Try to think only of pleasant thoughts—such as how rested your eyes will look when you get up. If your eyes are very tired, you may renew the hot water two or three times during the treatment. But if you have been taking care of them you will only need to rest for a few minutes, remove the tea spectacles, and wash your eyes in cold water.

The following recipe is a simple way to restore the summer neglected skin: Buy some precipitated chalk at the druggist's. Five cents' worth will last for several treatments. Squeeze the juice of one lemon and mix enough chalk with it to obtain a thin paste. Apply this paste to the face and let it stay until it powders off.

And here's a recipe culled from a very old book that can work wonders for the most neglected hand. Mash a banana into a soft paste, and add a little lemon juice. Rub this over the hands at night, and draw on a pair of

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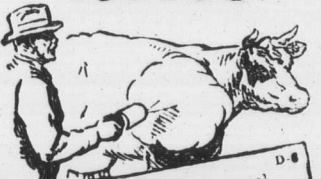
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