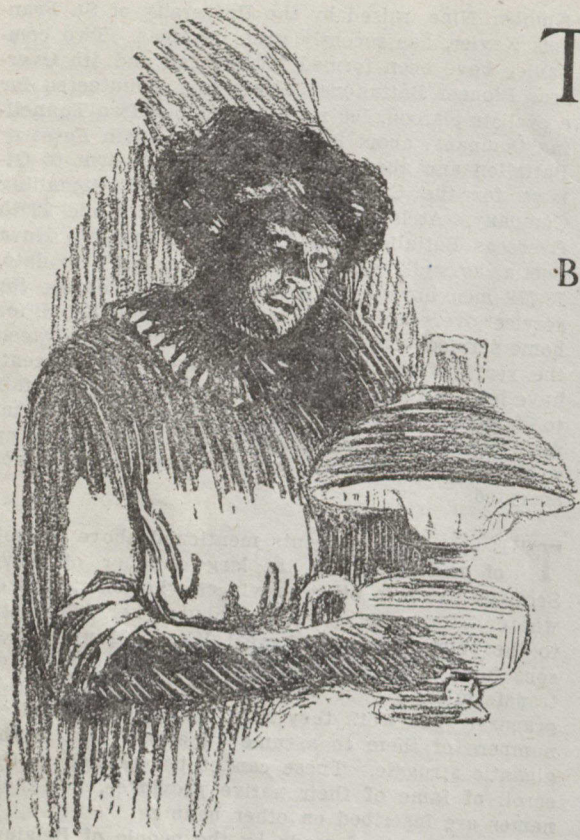


The Daughter of a Dream

By WILLIAM McHARG and EDWARD BALMER



YOUNG BLYTHE, startled wide awake but not knowing yet what had aroused him, lay still for a moment blinking at the matchboard walls and ceiling of the bungalow bedroom, bright with the first level rays of the summer sunrise. Before it sounded again—that rapid, frightened knock upon his bedroom door—he had swiftly decided that what had aroused him at this unusual hour was only the twittering of the birds outside his open window, which came to him mingled with the soft dry rustle and scent of the pine trees. But now, at the repetition of the knock, he leaped out of bed. He pushed his feet into slippers, pulled on a bathrobe over his pajamas, and hurriedly unlocked and opened the door.

His mother and Edith Coburn, his fiancée, waiting anxiously in the hall outside, gasped with relief at sight of him.

"Oh—you are safe—you are safe yet!" The girl caught him to her, palpitating still in her relief and shaken by dry sobs. "I saw you dead! I have had that terrible dream again and saw you dead—saw you lying dead, Randall, as I found Charles dead the time I dreamt it before!" She shuddered.

Blythe's mother clutched the young girl by the shoulders and searched her face with hostile eyes.

"You say it is the same dream you had before when you were engaged to Charles Ritchie and—they found him dead?" she demanded. "So it was not merely that you dreamed that something had happened to Randall; it was the same dream that you had before Charles Ritchie's death? I did not understand that before! Then something must be done about it!" She dropped the girl as suddenly as she had caught her.

Young Blythe had flushed at first with the natural aversion of a healthy man to having a fuss made over him; but now he sprang swiftly forward and put his arm protectingly about the girl.

It was the second morning she had aroused the household in terror for Blythe's safety, waking from a dream of his death.

"Mother, mother!" he rebuked, sharply. "Are we living in the Book of Daniel? And Edith—Edith!" he cried to the girl. "I can't let this go on, worrying yourself sick and wronging yourself so with mother! We are educated people living in the twentieth century. You know there can be nothing in dreams!"

"No, I don't know that, Randall!" the girl defied him desperately, as she watched suspicion of herself darken in the mother's eyes. "Neither would you know it, if you had seen that terrible dream come true as I have. Whatever your mother may think of me, I shall not conceal that I am dreaming it again, until—as she says—something has been done about it. For even yesterday, when you told me that Mr. Trant, the psychologist from Chicago, had come to join the camping party at Black Lake, I determined then, if the dream came again, to ask for his help. That is what you, too, want now, is it not, Mrs. Blythe?"

Blythe bit his lip with vexation. He was visiting with his mother at this summer bungalow of Edith Coburn's, which capped a wooded knoll in

one of the few spots of wilderness left in northern Michigan. While riding through the warm, damp woods the day before, he had learned and mentioned to Edith that Luther Trant had recently joined a fishing party at the neighbouring lake; and he had discussed with Edith the reputation the young psychologist had made for himself in Chicago through his startling successes in tracing the workings of the minds of men through their most secret thoughts and motives to the solution or prevention of crimes.

Two hours later, in response to a letter from Blythe himself, as Edith sat with Blythe and his mother on the wire-inclosed porch, a red-haired man in canvas coat and leggings emerged from the pines which, protected by private ownership, still filled the hollows and topped the low crests of the glacial moraines about the bungalow.

Before the introductions were well over the girl stretched out her hand to him. "Oh, Mr. Trant, if you can only help us!"

"Mr. Blythe's note did not tell me what you want of me," the psychologist answered, with an involuntary glance of admiration at the girl's unusual combination of clear olive skin with auburn hair, "and I must tell you that, after coming here for a rest, I would prefer not to take up any investigation at all, unless the matter is of such overwhelming importance that it cannot be put aside."

"The matter is Miss Coburn's peace of mind and my mother's right understanding of her, Mr. Trant," Blythe replied. "Both you can restore by two words, if you will."

"Two words?" Trant smiled, as he glanced at the stern-faced, elder woman.

"Yes. Sit down, Mr. Trant. I ask you as a psychologist only to assure Miss Coburn that her dreams cannot possibly have any significance, for she is not only worrying herself sick over them, but has aroused with them the most absurd superstitions and suspicions in my mother. Neither of them," Blythe went on, as Trant found a seat on the log steps of the porch, "will listen to me when I tell them how impossible their fears are; but they will to you, Mr. Trant, and I appeal to you professionally, as a modern, scientific psychologist," he repeated, "to tell Miss Coburn that her dreams cannot possibly have any meaning."

"I am afraid you are appealing to the wrong side of me to have me tell you anything like that," Trant answered. "For the serious study of dreams, to learn their interpretation, is one of the most important and absorbing occupations of the modern psychologist."

"Of course, of course!" Blythe protested. "I understand that dreams may be fascinating to the psychologist as an abstract study. But practically—practically—Mr. Trant, as they certainly cannot be connected with any real experience, you can surely tell Edith that it is absolutely absurd for anyone to fancy, just because she happened to have a peculiar set of dreams before a friend died, that now another friend—in perfect health—must be in some indefinite danger because of the return to her of the same set of dreams under similar conditions."

"So that is how the matter lies!" the psychologist looked with more interest into the tense faces of the women. "But I'm afraid I can't say even that. For we have found, Mr. Blythe, that dreams must always be connected with some real experience."

"Good Lord, Trant!" Blythe ejaculated, with still greater impatience. "I don't want you to treat the matter seriously and frighten them still more!"

For the girl had turned chalk white at this apparent confirmation of her fears.

"Then you think that this return of my dream does mean that—that Randall is in danger?" Edith demanded. "For it is he whom I now see dead—as I saw Charles Ritchie dead the night before he died. And in the same room where Randall is now sleeping!"

Trant smiled as he shook his head. "I have little doubt but that you are going to a worse extreme than Mr. Blythe." He glanced over his shoulder at the sun which had suddenly appeared high in the sky from behind a bank of clouds. "I was going after bass this morning, but it is getting too bright

for them to bite now. Besides, I was speaking for myself," he confessed, "when I said that the analysis of dreams is sometimes the most absorbing part of a psychologist's work. You have so interested me that I shall be glad to hear the details of this remarkable dream."

"I want you to understand at the very first, Mr. Trant," the girl began when they had settled themselves again, "that I am not at all a superstitious person. I know people are likely to think so because, as my mother died before I was two years old and my father's death followed two years afterwards, I was brought up mostly by my nurse, who is now my maid and housekeeper. But Linette, so far from making me superstitious, is harsher than anyone else with me—as Mr. Blythe can tell you—for giving way to myself so much as I have. Dear, proud, loyal Linette! In spite of her few drops of coloured blood, she is as fine as any woman I ever knew. In Detroit, where I live in winter with one or the other of my father's sisters, I am considered a sensible sort of person, rather independent and headstrong, and not at all easily frightened. And I can honestly say, that, except for this dream, I cannot recall any sort of fright or superstition in connection with any other dream or with anything else; and though I had dreamed the first half of this dream many times before, it never did more than depress me—I mean it never really alarmed me till it came finally in the form in which it foretold Charles Ritchie's death."

"When," asked Trant, "did you first begin dreaming the part which had the depressing effect?"

THAT began as far back as I can remember anything, Mr. Trant," she said. "It must have been very recurrent during my childhood, for I can so vividly recall the sense of depression which it brought to me and which was so entirely absent from my waking consciousness. Then, for a time, it came much less frequently or, perhaps, not at all for a year or two till I was a junior at Cornell, where I met and became engaged to Charles Ritchie. But after that it began again to come almost constantly; and that July, when Linette and I came up here to open my grandfather's bungalow, to visit with Charles and his mother free from my aunts, the dream came in its final form, but still starting with the original struggle."

"At the start of this dream I am always trying to join or to keep up with other people. In the first dreams these people were my aunts and cousins; then Charles was with them, as Randall is with them now. The scene of the dream is always the same—a round-topped hill up the side of which goes a great flight of steps which we climb. The steps are hard for me and I lag in the rear and get farther and farther behind the others in spite of my struggles; and no one of them ever seems to care or to notice that I cannot keep up with them. Always I am left struggling farther and farther behind till, always at the same place, I am stopped—I do not know why or how, but I cannot lift my foot from the place on which I stand, or call out to them to let them know my trouble."

"Such paralysis is a common dream event, Miss Coburn," the psychologist assented. "Can you remember whether it has always been a part of this dream?"

"I think that while I was a child I was able to go up and down the steps as I wished though I never could keep up with the others. But ever since the dream began again while I was at Cornell, I have been stopped."

Trant nodded to her to proceed.

"My companions, still not noticing my plight, go merrily forward, laughing and shouting," the girl continued, "until finally they disappear over the top of the hill, leaving me entirely alone. A dreadful feeling of loneliness and isolation comes over me. But while I still stand, unable to move, I become aware that, though lonely, I am not alone on the hillside. A great crowd of people is moving about on it, and among them are numbers I recognize—acquaintances, people I have seen on the street, my former schoolmates and teachers. Sometimes they come quite close to me; but either they do not see me at all, or, after looking at me compassionately