

THE MAN WHO COULD NOT DIE

By MABEL BURKHOLDER

Illustrated By HOWARD EDWARDS

ENID MORTON stood alone in the library of her town house, face to face with the disagreeable truth that she had indulged in her first quarrel with her fiancé after a betrothal of but two days. She was so genuinely angry that the passion thrilled and throbbed in her veins like fever; and the slender third finger of her left hand was blood-red, as though it blushed at the wearing of his ring.

"The doctor so soon assumes command!" she stamped, her little French heels clicking on the bricks of the fireplace, "so soon tells me what I shall do and not do with my money! I hate him—Oh, no, no! Heavens, what a speech! I'm ashamed to admit that I'm so angry, I don't know what I am saying!"

Gloomily poking up the fire, the girl confronted herself with the question whether there could really be a spark of that genuine old-fashioned thing called love in Dr. Jackson-Kay's attitude toward her. That he was immensely proud of her accomplishments, and liked to be seen in her company, she knew. That he fondled and petted her in his idle hours, she admitted, with a quickening pulse of anger. But the deep mainsprings of the man's actions she seemed to touch not at all; while that his hand was out for her half-million of money, he sometimes allowed to become painfully apparent. Further heart-searching forced Enid to the realization that her love for him was scarcely more unsophisticated—she was certainly proud of the young cleric whose exceptional ability, lordly appearance, and eloquent tongue made him the cynosure of all eyes, whether on the street or in the pulpit. In winning his attention, she had seized the prize many coveted, and had gained a short, fierce triumph which—she admitted sadly—she had mistaken for happiness; and she wondered how long it would be before she learned to despise this good-looking egotist who angled so unblushingly for the fortune which her grandfather's death had flung into her lap.

Sinking down on a couch in the shadows at the end of the library, Enid gazed absently out of the window, moodily noting how the tall stone chimneys of Bishop's Court stood out against the mellow summer sky. This residence of the Bishop, which was just beyond her hedge, a stone's throw away, was the temporary home of Dr. Jackson-Kay, godson of the pious and venerable churchman. Church property lay all around, famous, hoary buildings; to the left St. Mark's Refuge for Unfortunates, to the right the Sunday School Hall, and, dominating all, the old, gray Cathedral, rusty-dark with ivy not yet clothed in the full green of summer.

"Dr. Jackson-Kay, acting under the guidance of his adviser, the Bishop, drapes all his ambitions in the robes of the church!" mused Enid, bitterly, still restlessly angry. "It is the darling ambition of the Bishop's life to establish a school of a certain order in Burmah, and he now finds that his protégé will make an imposing head for what must become a world-famous missionary institution. Nor need finances any longer trouble the ecclesiastical brain, since one-half of my grandfather's wealth was bequeathed to promote the missionary enterprises of the church, and the other half passes into the Bishop's control on the day I give myself a bride to the man whom he has selected for me."

Then lower sank the girl's head, until her attitude suggested a new phase, humility—shame, perhaps. The peaceful scene beyond the window had cooled her mood, and helped her see a certain pettishness in her outburst. The sunset streak faded from behind the Cathedral, causing the wine-red of its windows to die away into blackness, and above the chimneys of Bishop's Court stood a single, solemn star. Lamps were lighted within the building, and her fancy pictured the venerable old man counselling his son in the faith, and initiating him into the deep rites and mysteries of his holy office.

"My lover is a man of grave responsibilities," Enid reminded herself, with a twinge of remorse; "and I have shown myself a trifle. I have vexed him, when I should have been a source of inspiration. I fear it is the vulgar trait of a newly-rich person to be so supersensitive about money, and to think every one wishes to snatch it away."

Shadows fell, velvet-piled, until the corner in which the girl crouched was shrouded in purple and black. Out on the hearth-rug played a streak of firelight, a ray of which travelled across the room, and reddened the rows of dry-as-dust books, with which her late relative had furnished his library.

Presently the creak of an opening door smote the silence, and Enid knew that some one was entering from the street. The thought flashing over her that this must be her lover returning in contrite mood, she crouched in her place, willing to have him search for her.

The intruder glided into the room almost without noise, and stood in the glow of the grate long enough to disillusion Enid about the return of her lover. Seeing a candle on the mantel, he lighted it and set it back in its place, seeming hesitant of flooding the room with the glare of electricity.

He was dressed in the uniform of a soldier, and many things about him spoke of hard duty on fiercely contested fields. He walked with a bad limp, and the corresponding shoulder hung low, but these seemed minor defects which passed unnoticed because of a more repulsively apparent deformity. His eyes were uneven! The left cheek-bone was sunk an inch out of place, and the sightless left eye protruded from its socket with a most uncanny effect.

"Ah, God's mercy!" came from Enid's lips, but without sound. "What a wound was that!"

She did not cry out—it was never her way when excited—but sat incapable for the moment of speech or action, held spell-bound by the gaze of those uneven eyes, which searched her corner but saw her not. Why should she

TWO days later, and the girl still lay in her bed in a darkened upstairs room. Her indisposition was supposed to have been coincident with the appearance of the intruder in the library, but the exact relation was unprobed, even by the servants.

The mother sat beside her, scarcely less pale and ill. This had been their position for the greater part of the two days, long intervals of silence brooding over the room, broken only by the visits of Dr. Jackson-Kay, who came and went through the house managing everything and everybody.

"Are you sure the man is safely guarded at St. Mark's?" the question came from the girl's bloodless lips, after Dr. Jackson-Kay had quitted the house for the afternoon.

Mrs. Morton's eyes rested haggardly on the walls of the famous Hospital and Refuge for Unfortunates, which was outlined darkly in the fading light.

"Quite safe, child. I tell you he is mad—mad! Did not Dr. Jackson-Kay convince everybody of that fact?"

"Ah, James! Without him I should have died!"

"He was so firm, so controlled in speech and manner," continued the mother, still speaking of her prospective son-in-law. "But for him we might have failed in our attempt to get the man put away safely in St. Mark's. When the house-doctor wavered, James insisted that the—ugh!—the creature was insane; and his knowledge of medicine, as well as his high position in the church, carried weight."

"Will the—the man die?" Enid shuddered as she spoke.

Up to date neither mother nor daughter had spoken the soldier's name, though both knew it. With one he was "the creature," with the other, "the man."

"They say," answered the mother, almost inaudibly, "that he does not improve," and an unconscious sigh of relief broke from her lips. The lines of worry and hard work were just beginning to disappear, under the kinder

treatment she had received from the world since her daughter inherited money. But two days ago they had returned—a criss-cross around eyes and mouth—while in her gaze had slept day and night the glitter of a serpent roused and preparing to strike.

"Enid," she said, "there is no doubt about his being your cousin."

"No, Mother," murmured the girl.

"I have a hundred proofs of it."

"Tell me."

"His speech and mannerisms, his resemblance to his dead mother's picture, his familiarity with this house—"

"Which was formerly his home, and which by every right should be his this day!" shrieked the girl, smothering her face in the pillow.

Mrs. Morton hurriedly closed the window facing Bishop's Court.

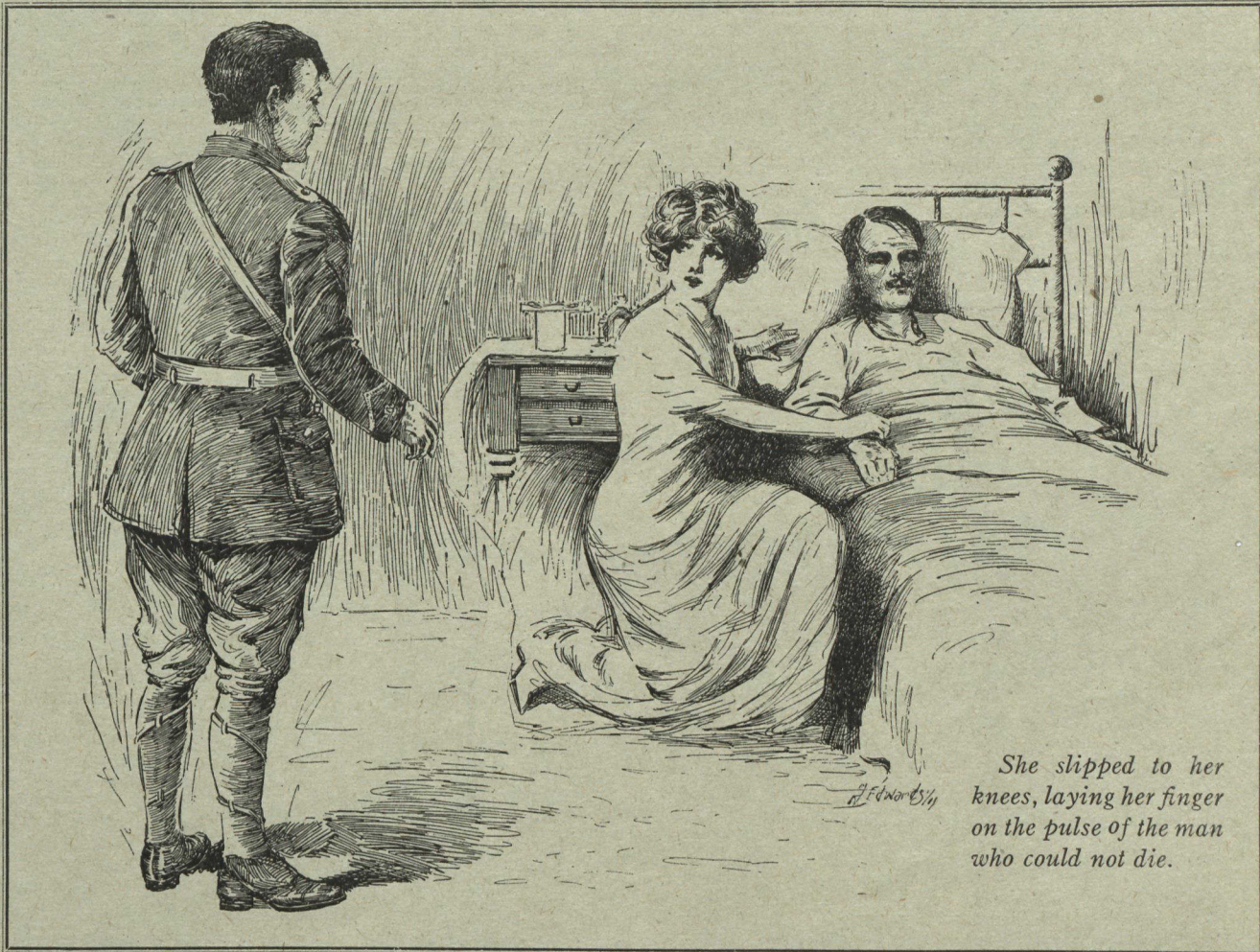
"Hush! Do you hear me, Enid? I command you to control yourself! It is well we have a new staff of servants here—the old ones would have recognized him. But then he is so different. His own dead mother would pass him in the street."

I tell you we are quite safe. Do you note how Dr. Jackson-Kay accepts our theory that the creature is nothing but an intruder? He speaks of him as a derelict of the War. And the Doctor is very keen—if he does not see—well, the rest of the world—laugh!"

"But I cannot keep the fortune of that luckless mortal!" groaned the girl. "I am strong and need it less than he. And his grandfather intended it for him. If he had his reason, he could hunt up the papers and demand his own."

"Of course we must be very good to him," crooned the mother. "We must see that he has the best of everything—the very best. You see how it is, Enid. He could never control money—we must think and spend for him. My daughter, all the doctors agree that he cannot live very long. Why should we raise a commotion about him? Time will settle all."

"Tell me about my grandfather's household at the time they lived here," demanded the (Continued on page 37.)



She slipped to her knees, laying her finger on the pulse of the man who could not die.

fear? This was such a corpse of a man, that he inspired both pity and curiosity before fear. Enid knew that by bending forward she could touch a button which would send a call for help pealing through the house, especially summoning her mother, who was her adviser in all things. Therefore, safely from her corner she continued to gaze with the most unwavering fascination she had ever given to any object in all her life.

It might have been ten minutes thus, during which interval the fellow removed his cap and unbuckled his belt, when suddenly he startled his silent observer by the sickly, sepulchral tones of his voice:

"God! But it's a blessed thing to be at home again!"

Then Enid's fingers found and pressed the button which would summon her mother. The same instant the light of the study lamp flashed its soft aureola in a wide circle. Enid faced the intruder, her finger pointing, lips forming but one word: "Trapped!"