

ed her hand within his own; it seemed to him he was justified in doing so; he knew it gave her strength. "After this you may safely go out," he said, "but I would rather you remained here for the present. I only went to Willowbridge for a few hours to see my father and settle some business matters. Directly afterwards I returned to town, ostensibly on business matters. I dread being questioned by those detectives. At present no one has seen me with Jackson, as Jackson appeared at the mill, and they have no grounds for apprehending me."

"But what danger you are in! How can I thank you?"

"By taking care of yourself."

He put her down near her lodgings, and went back by train.

CHAPTER XX.

The Terror That Walketh by Night.

RONALD departed feeling more troubled every day. He abhorred all dissimulation and crooked ways; he had always done so from his earliest boyhood, while here he was launched on a course of deceit which was most repugnant to him. The feeling that he had broken the law was terrible to him; he began to think he was a criminal. And yet he knew that he had acted in the first place from the purest motives, that to save her he would undergo punishment.

Matters at Willowbridge were not going smoothly. Mr. Westlake, who was a man of penetration, was quite at a loss to account for his son's erratic movements, which he did not attribute to the business of the firm, although he accounted for Ronald's absence thus to his wife. She also felt vaguely uneasy, there seemed something wrong in the whole atmosphere, for Louise appeared in a state of suppressed excitement and spoke but little. She spent most of her time in wandering by the river, and as the pretty typist had not reappeared, she came at length to the conclusion that her own action had precipitated matters, and that Ronald had taken the girl away from her previous lover.

"I wish Louise would go," Mrs. Westlake said more than once to her husband; "she makes me feel as if I were living near a volcano which might break out at any moment, and the servants say her temper is unbearable."

But Louise had no intention of going.

Meantime Cornwallis was faring badly. The weather was bitterly cold and stormy. Seas of enormous volume broke right over the lighthouse, communication with land was suspended. He had taken cold in landing from the boat, and he was now very ill. He managed to dress himself, and sat shivering over the small stove, unutterably wretched. The men were very kind, they gave him the best food they had, and, finding he could eat nothing solid, prepared him cocoa and soup, and thought to cheer him with yarns of their previous experiences.

"I tell you what it is, sir," said one of them, "you had better go home as soon as the weather clears. This isn't a fit place for you now."

The wretched man groaned inwardly. Home? Where was it? Was there any place on the face of the earth for a hunted outcast? He ground his teeth and thought that the ways of men were hard. What had he done? He had written another man's name, and he had suffered far more than enough in consequence. He was not penitent, and did not pretend to be even to himself.

Then a strange experience befell him. His past life began to rise before him. At first it was as a faint shadow, and then the recollections grew and grew, and gathered over him as a pall, enveloping him in its thick blackness until he felt he could have shrieked aloud. He could not get away from it, it pursued him, it haunted him, for ever behind it now there was the picture of the grave, and beyond that the judgment to come.

What had his life been? He recalled it as if it belonged to someone else, it was as if some spirit either of good or evil had taken possession of him

and compelled him, for the first time since he had been born, to examine it.

He had lived at a public school, as those boys do live who have no restraining home influence, and then he had entered into the world of fashion. His career had been that of racing, gambling, sport, women. No single good action could he recall—or rather this dominant spirit for him.

"What have you done for others?" said a harsh voice in his ear; "can you remember one act of self-sacrifice, one of evil resisted which might blot out some of your offences?"

Alas! there was not one. He was no atheist in the sense that some of the purest and best people have been atheists, namely, longing to find God but doubting whether He existed, though after long years of trouble they at last have found Him, but he had been an atheist in the sense that he did not like to retain God in his knowledge, and God had given him up to the lust of his heart. And now he saw as he had never seen before that his thoughts had all been grovelling, mean and low, that he had never wished for anything higher. He did not wish for it now, he did not know, or even dimly comprehend, what things high and holy meant, but he trembled because he did believe in the judgment to come.

For in this lonely lighthouse, with the waves roaring around, it was borne in upon him that he must die, and that shortly. The Pale Messenger had beckoned silently, and he knew that he must go. He had never thought of death before except as a remote contingency far, far off, but now every day brought it nearer. What would future life mean to him?

Supposing by some miracle the gates of Heaven were opened to him would he be happy? He would not. What place had another world for his pleasures: was there a single high one among them? The best feeling of his life had been his love for Enid, and he turned to her as a tower of strength. He desired her presence as he had never desired it before: she must come, she must save him from himself.

One night there came a terrible storm, the very foundations of the lighthouse seemed to shake as the water dashed over it, the wind raged and shrieked.

Cornwallis lay in his narrow bunk and shivered with fear, his nerves had departed since his illness, he was a prey to terror both mental and physical.

THE next morning the men found him delirious and in a high fever; he repeated perpetually, "Enid, Enid, Enid; I want her; she must come."

They tended him to the best of their ability, but after an hour or two had elapsed the oldest man, one Bel, said, "That poor chap will drive me frantic soon with his callings for Enid. He can't stay here, mates."

It was decided to write to Ronald, who had left an address that would reach him, and say that as soon as the weather moderated the gentleman must be removed, they could not have him die on their hands without even having seen a doctor.

This letter was despatched as soon as the first craft which passed on her way to Plymouth could take it. By this time Cornwallis was better and could sit up. He also wrote a letter to Enid which he enclosed to Ronald. She must come to him, he said, she must marry him at once, he could no longer be left alone wherever he might be, by day or night. As he sent the letter open, Ronald thought it was intended for him to read.

The appalling selfishness of it overcame him. To call such a feeling love was, he considered, a desecration. This man wished a pure, beautiful girl to link herself to a dying hunted convict. He was a strong man himself, and he did not realize, he could not realize the depth of agony and fear through which Cornwallis had gone—until at length feeling had worn itself out in illness—and he heartily despised him. But none the less it was his duty to send the letter to Enid,



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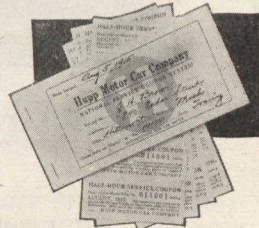
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