

PAYING THE PRICE

BY AGNES C. MITCHELL

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"There was an unflinching determination in the words which were not lost upon Sir Anthony. He smiled, and tried to answer carelessly, but the twitching of his lips did not cease. "That is all right, then! A good many of the engagements we hear of nowadays must be made for fun, or they are trial affairs. It seems to me, and the man or the girl—generally the man—kicks over the traces at the end of a month or two, and sets the tongues of all sundry and wagging. I don't want men to come here proposing unless they are sure of what they mean. "You shall never have cause to regret having believed in me at any rate. I look upon my engagement as being as binding as the marriage ceremony itself, and as for Margot—I am sure of her as I am of a hereafter. "She is safe enough if her word is given. I wish you every happiness, and I am confident you stand a very good chance of getting it." Jack took the words as a dismissal, and left the room in search of Margot. Sir Anthony had not offered his hand, and Jack was conscious of the omission—and thankful. Outside the door he paused, and shook back his shoulders, as if shaking off some unclean thing. "The scoundrel! If I could only kick him he said with low viciousness. "If I could only wipe the floor with him as he deserves! The brute! And I don't believe the possibility has ever crossed either of their minds. Heaven help my little girl if it ever does!" He went upstairs, then, to the drawing room, where Margot was sitting in the firelight waiting for him. She did not rise, but put out her hand to him with an eager little gesture as he came to her side. "Well," she said, smilingly. "It is all right. You are tied up now, little girl, firm and fast, and you

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are not to be allowed to throw me over, though you wish to." "What has he said?" "Not very much. Give me a share of your settee, and I'll try to remember it all. There—that's better. He is quite pleased, sweetheart; he was not hard to satisfy, but he made one condition. Guess what it is." "I couldn't, Jack. Tell me. Nothing very difficult, I hope." "We will manage to fulfill it. He appeared to have some visions of a breach of promise hovering in the background, and he made me promise, in all seriousness, mind, that there was to be no breaking off; neither you nor I must go back on our word. Imagine it, if you can, Margot! He hasn't any conception of what we are to each other."

"No," she agreed softly. "He does not understand." Then she put another question, and her voice faltered slightly. "Did he say anything about—my people, Jack?"

"Your people?" he repeated. Her cheeks flushed, and she looked down. "Yes, but he would not tell me his face. He was glad she could not see his face. "No," he never mentioned them. Why?" "I was hoping he might. I had the idea that my mother was not happy in her married life, but she never told me anything about it, and I could not ask. And before she died she must have destroyed her marriage and our birth certificate, for they could not be found afterward. She did not leave a single paper of any importance."

"You have asked Sir Anthony?" Jack said, tentatively. "Yes, but he would not tell me anything, and I have been hoping he would tell you. I think he knows. It is your right, Jack."

"I know all I want to know," he said, quietly, laying his cheek tenderly against her soft, glossy hair. "But, Jack, I want you to know more. You cannot be expected not to wish to know who I am, and for your sake I want the mystery cleared up." She altered her position, and looked at him entreatingly. "You might ask Sir Anthony—he could not put you off as he put me, if he knew my mother so well, I think he must have known something of her husband."

Jack fixed his eyes on the dancing flames that were leaping up from the small allowance of fire in the grate. "If she took such good care not to speak of your father, or leave any clue to him, she could not have intended you to know," he said. "That is the only conclusion you can draw, Margot, and the matter ought to be left there, dear. Very likely you are right—she may not have been happy, and the inference is that she made up her mind that even his name would never be anything to his children."

"I can't help believing Sir Anthony knows. Don't you think he must?" She was still looking at him. He answered her carelessly. "I shouldn't like to risk an opinion on that. Though he did know your mother, it does not follow that he knew the man she married, and supposing he did at the time, a man forgets a lot in twenty years."

"But he might give you some clue." It is better not to ask for it, sweetheart. You can trust your mother's judgment, and if Sir Anthony is keeping her secrets, we needn't tempt him to divulge them. It is the present we have to deal with, and the future. Tell me how you like this."

He had taken a ring case from his pocket, and she exclaimed in admiration as a magnificent half-hoop of diamonds flashed up at her. He extracted it from its white velvet bed and put it on her finger, telling her that as soon as their arrangements could be made her wedding ring must keep it company.

She smiled shyly as she whispered an assent and stood turning the gleaming circle round and round, studying the changing lights the stones gave forth. "How did you guess the size?" she asked. He touched a pearl ring, one of her mother's, which she wore on her right hand. "I tried how far on my little finger that one would go," he said with a laugh. "You remember taking it off and showing it to me one day when I admired it?"

"She nodded and laughed also. Her next remark sounded irrelevant. "Sir Anthony has been kind to me, but I don't think he will be sorry to let me go. He grudges to spend the money, and though I have tried to cost him as little as possible, still I am an expense."

Jack Renton's strong face darkened. "Does he make you feel that?" he asked, quickly.

"He does not say it, but I know. He has not had much occasion to say anything, because, though I had not finished at school when mamma died, I had plenty of clothes, and I have not required any new ones. My black dresses were new, of course, but I got them before I came here. Tom has been made to feel his position more than I have," she added. "I don't know why, but Sir Anthony has never been quite just to him, and sometimes I think he will not remain long at Abbotsdale. He does not complain, but I know he is not happy."

"He can come to us when we are married," said Jack.

CHAPTER VIII.

Another Man in the Secret. Two hours afterwards Jack met with the first opposition to his plans.

Mr. and Mrs. Renton were together when he reached Conyngham, and he plucked at once into his news. Mrs. Renton sat silent, looking rather white and scared; her husband listened calmly, his face set and hard as flint. "Am I to understand you aright?" he asked in an oddly level voice. "Are you proposing to marry Anthony Garrick's ward?"

"I am to marry Miss Beresford. Are you not pleased, sir? I believed you particularly desired me to marry." "Pleased!" David Renton repeated the word with biting sarcasm. "Pleased to have the prospect of being connected with Anthony Garrick! Thanks!"

no! I am not pleased. My ambition does not carry me to such a height." Jack gave him an uncertain stare; hurt, and a good deal puzzled. "If objection was to be taken to Margot because she happened to be indebted to Sir Anthony for a home, the reason was very paltry, indeed, he decided. "I am sorry if you don't like the idea; the thought that you might not never occurred to me. Sir Anthony has given Margot and her brother a home—he could not do less, since he was evidently their only friend, but that is not a very close connection after all. Whatever aversion you have to him need not extend itself to her, surely. If you knew her there would be no question of dislike. No one could find any ill to say of her, though they tried."

He spoke awkwardly, almost jerkily. David Renton made a gesture of haughty disdain. "Possibly not—she must have had some very specific attraction to induce Anthony Garrick to provide her with bread and butter; she would not have been a good advertisement otherwise," he sneered. "But my dislike of him is such that neither he nor any one connected with him shall be received in my house. I know the man, and knowing him, I will have nothing to do with him or his. You must take your own way, of course; I cannot prevent you making a fool of yourself if you choose, but the day you marry the girl all connection between us ceases, in both business and friendship."

"David, don't say what you may regret," Mrs. Renton spoke for the first time, and her quivering voice was weighted with the sound of tears. "Be reasonable," she pleaded. "Don't let our lives be made empty again. Jack did not know; you ought to have told him before now why you could not countenance any friendship with Anthony Garrick's people."

"You have known of my visits to Abbotsdale," Jack said. "If you had objections, it would have been only just of you to have told me of them." "I have never interfered with your comings and goings since you came into this house. You have been free to make what acquaintances you pleased, and go your own ways."

"Then why lay down such a rigid law now?" "Because I have reason."

"Will you give me that reason?" "The reason of my animosity to Anthony Garrick, and therefore the root of my aversion to his ward, did I tell her? Certainly. He killed my only sister."

He paused as if waiting for questioning, but none came. Jack had scarcely heard his assertion; the significant stress he had laid upon his reference to Margot was filling the younger man's mind, and a new fear, the like of which he had never known, was gripping at his heartstrings with an icy clutch—the fear, or rather the certainty, that to yet another the mystery of Margot's parentage had not been plain.

"Long ago, before he was married, he courted my sister," David Renton, finding no remark forthcoming, broke the silence himself. "He jilted her for Isabel Garrick's mother—it turned out he had been engaged to both at the same time, and Carry only knew of the other woman a fortnight before his marriage. The shock unhinged her brain and she had to be put under restraint for a time, and afterwards, when she was getting better, fired by some idea of showing Garrick that she had got over his defection, she ran off with an Italian singing-master."

He stopped again. The sordid tragedy was fresh to him still, and he could not speak of it quite steadily even yet. The pause was longer than the first, and Jack, feeling called upon to say something, put a curt question. "Did that kill her?"

"It brought her to want. We knew nothing of her till she wrote home begging for help—she had drifted back to Fleet Hill and had hidden herself in one of the slums down by the river. We were all in London at the time and the letter was a week old before we got it. I went to the address then and learned that the day before she had been found on the doorstep, dead, from exposure. An exposure. Garrick owned these slums, and he had sold her sticks and turned her out."

Jack's eyes traveled down the long room, taking in the exquisite panelings, the costly furniture, the cabinets with their priceless china, the tables laden with silver curios and quaint, beautiful trifles. And the woman who had been used to luxury and refinement such as this had fled from it recklessly because of Anthony Garrick, and through him had died in the doorway of a slum.

He did not do it openly, of course; he was too wise for that; his reputation as a philanthropist would have suffered. David Renton went on, with a queer, twisted smile. "His agent did the work, does it still, for Anthony Garrick owns these hovels to this day, and wrings his rack-rents from the poor wretches who find shelter there, and not one in a thousand knows he is at the bottom of all the misery and the selling up. But I know, and, by heaven, I hope not to go off the face of the earth till I see him get his deserts!"

The last sentence broke from him in an uncontrollable burst of fury. Jack squared his shoulders as if he was fighting the ground, inch by inch, to a certain point. "He could not have known about her," he said. "A woman he had made love to. Not that was impossible. The case was bad, and bad enough, but he could not have known who she was."

The twisted smile came back again to David Renton's mouth. "She was the one among the thousands," he answered calmly. "She knew he was her landlord, and she went to him and begged for mercy—for delay. I try to think her brain had never recovered its balance, else she would not have done that. He laughed in her face and refused, and the next day she was put out. And he gave £500 to charity that very week."

A burning coal fell from the grate, striking against the gleaming brasses on the hearth with a noise that seemed very loud. Stopping, Jack took the tongs and replaced it, then straightened himself and made an effort to speak naturally. "I understand now," he said. "You could not do otherwise than hate him. But you have always been just. Why should Margot Beresford be placed under your ban?"

To Be Continued.

OLD SANTA CLAUS AS FIRE FIGHTER

Blaze in the Children's Hospital and Tois Thought the Firemen Santa.

New York, Dec. 26.—There are just a few more than 200 patients in the Hospital, for Ruptured and Crippled Children at Lexington avenue and Forty-second street. They are pathetic little people—these boys and girls, with crumpled backs, crooked legs and other deformities of body.

But Christmas comes to these children just as it comes to others more fortunate. After the manner of their age, next Christmas is in prospect as soon today becomes yesterday. The playroom at the home is on the fifth floor of what is known as the "old building." A matron, Mrs. Gillespie, making her rounds among the sleeping children at 3 o'clock Christmas morning, saw flames bursting from a window of the playroom across the courtyard. Mrs. Gillespie called the night watchman, William Ashley, and he passed the word on to Superintendent Oliver H. Bartine.

Two years ago, under the direction of Capt. James Sherlock, of hook and ladder No. 2, a fire drill was instituted in the hospital. Each nurse and physician has his or her part to do in an emergency. Because of the three Christmas trees and the toys and the excelsior and the tinsel, which were in the playroom ready for the Christmas celebration, Superintendent Bartine had taken extra precautions. The fire hose on the third floor had been unrolled and carried upstairs; hand grenades and extinguishers were grouped at handy points in the old playroom.

At Superintendent Bartine's word, the clockwork began to ring. The heavy iron doors separating the wards were closed, nurses went to their posts at the sides of the sleeping children, and other nurses and physicians joined the superintendent and watchman on the fifth floor. An alarm was also sent in from the box at Lexington avenue and Forty-third street. The watch of truck 2, at Fifth street and Lexington avenue, saw the flames, so the truck did not wait for the alarm. In a few moments there came another truck and four engines.

As the various companies got near enough to see where the fire was, whistles and bells were stopped, and they wheeled into place by the hospital in silence. Quietly the firemen were let into the building; quietly they mounted the stairs to the playroom. The efforts of the hospital people while they kept down the fire, had failed to extinguish it. Shooting an immense box of excelsior, the chief cause of trouble, to a window, the firemen broke it up and threw the parts burning into the street. The woodwork which had caught was ripped off—and the fire was out.

Although the men had worked with the quiet of expert burglars there came a wall from downstairs. "What's that?" a little fellow who can't raise himself from his cot without assistance, asked a nurse.

"That's Santa Claus, dear," the nurse answered. "The boy, his fears quieted, listened with open-eyed wonder at the sounds above him."

"But there's more than one of him"—he persisted, doubtfully. "Of course, he has to have men go around with him to help put up trees and carry boxes."

The answer was sufficient. Others of the youngsters stirred and woke, but the single magic name, "Santa Claus," was passed, and all listened without fear. Then there were steps on the stairs. "They've fixed everything and are going on to take care of the other children," other nurses whispered, and then some could hear many horses starting off in the street below. "His reindeer," said the nurses. "Can't you hear their hoofs?" And a quarter of an hour later all the bent and twisted little human beings were asleep again, dreaming of tomorrow.

It took some time bustling to clean and straighten and trim and air the playroom for the Christmas entertainment in the afternoon. But it was done, and not a child—unless one or two of the older ones—knew that it was firemen and not Santa Claus who had come into the hospital.

\$8,000,000 FOR THE DITCH

Work Has Progressed So Rapidly That Money for Year Is Exhausted.

Washington, Dec. 26.—The first bill to be considered by the house committee on appropriations with a deficiency bill carrying an item of about \$8,000,000 to enable the Isthmian canal commission to continue the work on the Panama Canal without interruption or delay until June 30 next. The general bill for the current year gave the commission about \$28,000,000 all told, on estimates furnished by the then chief engineer, John F. Stevens, but under the present management the work has progressed so rapidly that additional funds must be provided if it is not to be stopped. Commissioners Goethals and Blackburn will appear before the committee after the holidays and present the requirements of the situation. It will not be difficult to make the members understand what is needed, for they spent a week for the month of November last has just been received in Washington from the commission on the Isthmus and contains the following of general interest:

The excavation in the Culebra division during the month was 790,652 cubic yards as against 834,499 cubic yards in the month of October, 1907, and 221,642 cubic yards in the month of November, 1906. The total excavation during last month was approximately three and one-half times that for the corresponding month in 1906 and the average output per steam

shovel was about 74 per cent greater. Of the amount excavated 67 per cent was rock and 23 per cent earth. The average number of steam shovels working during the month was 41.87, against 20.46 for the corresponding month in 1906. There were but 24 working days in the month and the average excavation per shovel per month was 18,822 cubic yards, against 10,833 cubic yards per shovel in 1906.

During the month there was a decrease in the force of commission employees, while the Panama Railroad force remained stationary. Less than 500 contract laborers, Europeans and West Indians, were received during the month. Fewer men were recruited in the United States than at any time since March, 1906, and the decreased demand for skilled labor has permitted the withdrawal of one of the three labor agents in the United States. There are now 905 families of old employees in the commission quarters and nearly 4,000 bachelors.

The decrease in the death and sick rates noted in October continued during November, the deaths for the two months being respectively 277 and 267. The Isthmus has been free from yellow fever for more than eighteen months. The figures indicate that there has been a steady and continued improvement in the health conditions on the Isthmus.

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TENOR AND CONSTABLE

Latter Followed Singer Upon Stage in Order to Serve a Process.

Boston, Mass., Dec. 26.—An element of comedy was mingled with the grand opera at the production of "Il Trovatore" by the San Carlo Grand Opera Company at the Majestic Theatre tonight, caused by the presence of a Boston constable upon the stage to keep personal guard over the tenor, Carlos Albani, in the interests of Mr. Oscar Hammerstein, of New York. Early in the day a sheriff served the papers on the tenor in a civil process on behalf of Hammerstein, who seeks to recover \$1,000 paid the singer as advance salary when he came to America to sing for Mr. Hammerstein. Through the efforts of Manager Henry

Russell, of the San Carlo Company, a prominent Bostonian went bonds for Mr. Albani in the sum of \$25,000 for his appearance when the case should go to trial.

Mr. Hammerstein claims that Albani is under exclusive contract to him. Tonight Albani appeared as Manrico in "Il Trovatore." Just before the second act was to be put on a constable placed Albani under arrest, on a process to secure the amount of his wages for the week, which Hammerstein laid claim to. The constable, after consultation with Manager Russell, consented to allow the singer to complete the programme, but insisted that he be allowed to remain on the stage.

The constable kept on his overcoat and hat, and whenever the singer moved about the stage, the officer followed, the audience usually hissing. After the performance a bondsman was found and Albani was released.