

THE STRANGER

By JOHN GOODWIN

CHAPTER XXIX.

"Lost Auld Acquaintance—"
Messrs. Coutts & Co.
Pay Norman Vaille, Esq., or Order
Forty Thousand Pounds.

JOAN TALLOIS.

Joan sat back and looked at the check she had drawn. It seemed a stupendous sum that she, the typist of last month, now made over with a few strokes of the pen. Yet she was now in complete possession of the estate, and there was an actual cash balance in hand of £150,000. The death duties had been covered by insurance. Such figures made Joan's head swim.

It was with an immense sense of relief that she put her signature to the check, in a bold, clear hand. The payment cost her no pain or trial or doubt. She was determined to make it. Philip had absolutely refused to have anything to do with the payment of Vaille or Bell. He simply declared that it ought not to be done, and refused to discuss it. As for Mr. Langley, her solicitor, he advised Joan almost violently to pay nothing, or at least a few hundred, to these "rascals," as he termed them.

Both Philip and Langley, no doubt, had realized that they were helpless in the matter. Lady Tallois was absolute mistress of every shilling and every acre of the Knyath inheritance.

She pressed the bell, and one of Lady Dunleue's men servants appeared.

"The gentleman who called?" said Joan. "Is he still below?"

"I showed him into the morning room, and asked him to wait, as your ladyship ordered," replied the man. "Bring him up here, please."

In a few moments, Mr. Norman Vaille appeared, admirably groomed, and looking quite at his ease, whatever he may have been in the past.

"Good morning, Lady Tallois," he said, gravely.

Joan bowed, coldly, and motioned him to a chair.

"I sent for you in order to settle your claim," she said, "although the cost of the case fell on me—and not on you. I think I should point that out."

"It was by your own choice, Lady Tallois," said Vaille, deprecatingly. "I would have borne the costs. But by the terms under which I forwarded the proofs to your own lawyers—"

"I have no wish to discuss that nor to bargain," interrupted Joan. "This is a check for £40,000, absolving me absolutely from all further liability to you, either legal or moral."

There was just the faintest flicker in Mr. Vaille's eyes as he seated himself at the table. But he opened the despatch case he had brought with him, and took out a sheet of paper, and a fountain pen, with as much nonchalance as a motor salesman about to give a receipt for the price of a car. There can hardly be a higher standard.

He signed and passed into Joan's hands a paper which she read very carefully. She had quite enough business knowledge to be able to judge it. The receipt and the wording were in perfect order; the sense of it was clear enough. There was no loophole. No necessity for the intervention of a lawyer. Indeed,

Joan had had all the lawyer's advice she could want about Mr. Vaille.

"Yes, this will do," said Joan, quietly. "Here is your check."

Vaille folded it with steady fingers and placed it in his pocketbook. It was a small fortune that had been passed across to him.

"May I say, Lady Tallois," he said, with a low bow, "how greatly I appreciate your promptness and the generous manner with which you have—"

"There is no need to say anything of the kind," returned Joan, coldly. "I gave my promise for your services. I have redeemed it. It is finished. Good-bye, Mr. Vaille."

She pressed the bell. Vaille looked at her oddly. The change in Joan Tallois seemed to him remarkable. She had, to the full, the manner of a great lady dismissing an unsatisfactory dependent. Vaille, who had the best opinion of himself and complete knowledge of his own powers, felt an unusual sense of smallness and inferiority. He hesitated.

"There are no questions," he murmured, "insinuatingly, 'that you would like to ask me?'"

"None whatever," answered Joan, jolly. "It is understood that my liability to you and to Mr. Bell is wholly discharged. Lady Tallois," echoed Vaille. A footman opened the door.

"Show this gentleman out," said Joan.

Mr. Vaille was conducted with dignity to the front door. On the way he permitted himself to smile. Once in the street, he pressed affectionately the pocket that held the check.

"What a relief was right," he murmured; "and, by Jove, he's never wrong. The biggest dividend yet. But when he makes the next move, added Vaille, with a grim smile, "I think, my lady, we shall alter that haughty manner of yours a little."

Before Mr. Vaille had turned the corner of the street, Joan had completely dismissed him from her mind. She had long decided that he and the unctuous Theophilus Bell, despite their speciousness, were a particularly shady pair, though how shady she did not in the least realize. Now she had done with them forever. The money was hers; the partnership was really too big for her to grasp its full meaning. It seemed no more to her than a row of figures scribbled on a slip of paper. The future was clear. And in a few minutes Joan was singing jocosely as she went up to her room.

Her thoughts had flitted back to Philip. Indeed, he was seldom absent from them. Philip, her champion, her wonderful lover—him to whom she owed everything. Where, wondered she, would she be now had she remained in the hands of those other two? Even that was nothing compared to the supreme truth—Philip loved her, and in an hour or two she would be with him.

The day was young, and she had several things to do, but at 1 o'clock she had arranged to meet Philip for luncheon at a restaurant near the Law Courts. He was engaged in a case there; he could not neglect his work; and she was determined to spend the hours that he was absent from her.

Joan spent some time making herself look particularly charming. Lady Dunleue's maid did her hair. She chose an idyllic hat, and presently left for the shopping centre in a taxi. At the appointed hour she reached the restaurant in the Strand and found Philip waiting for her.

"Joan!" he exclaimed, "you are like a breath coming from a rose garden after those musty old courts."

Joan laughed, and they had a merry little meal together. They talked of their plans for the golden future, and Joan of her entry, which was arranged for the next day, to Knyath Abbey. She said nothing of her settlement with Vaille. She thought it would worry Philip, and Joan had no mind to let anything cloud their meeting.

"Tell me what you have been doing," she said, just before they left. "You have been leading in another case?"

"Well, yes," he said, smiling. "As it happens, I won it."

"Nothing important," he answered, "but a breach of promise case. I had rather a tough fight."

"Oh," murmured Joan, "and so the girl was permitted to marry a man who had broken his word?"

"No," said Philip, and a smile curved his lips. "It was given against her."

"But you said you won—"

"I appeared for the defendant—the man," Philip replied.

"The girl's eyes looked slightly troubled. 'And you said it was a tough fight. Perhaps if you had appeared for the girl, then, or if the man had had a little fever counsel, she would have won.'"

Philip laughed.

"It is not for me to say that. You may make me mad, but I won't let you go at that. Why these questions? Are you pitying the girl?"

"Certainly. I cannot imagine any woman setting the loss of her love in terms of money," said Joan, slowly. "And yet it is hard not to pity her. 'Not in the least,' he answered. 'You did not hear the case. There are two sides to a bargain. The girl did not, or could not, fulfil her share of the contract. I consider the man was right. But, dear heart, these are dry topics—let us talk of something else. I find it nothing on, after all, when there is a case in chambers. I want to be with you every minute I can, Joan. You said you would like to hear Mottisfont. Is she playing at Queen's? There is time for that; shall we go?"

Joan assented gladly. They left the restaurant, and walked along the street to find a cab. She glanced happily up at Philip's handsome face; it was good to know that she would after all, leave him yet. At that moment she became aware that an oddly-dressed man who passed was staring at her intently. She met his eyes, and he left her without a word.

"Alf," she exclaimed.

It was Alf Blodmore, in chess-board tweeds and a scarlet tie.

Mottisfont controlled his astonishment to this unlooked-for meeting. Mr. Alf Blodmore had stopped too. There was something so pathetic in his eyes that Joan was carried straightway from her new life back to the old days of Lambeth, at the office, and the river. With a quick impulse, she held out her hand frankly to Blodmore.

"It is so long since I have seen you, Alf," she said. "You have heard my news? Have you seen Emmie? You know that she is going to be married?"

"Yes, Miss—m'Lady," stammered Alf, "she's going to marry Ted."

"I hope she will be very happy. I'm going to be married, too," said Joan. And then she suddenly became confused. Hardly realizing what she was doing, she made a motion of her hand towards Philip. "Do you know my friend, Alf Mr. Blodmore—Mr. Mottisfont?"

Philip looked with faint surprise at this curious brouder with the baggy tweeds and blood-red tie. But he raised his hat, courteously. Alf's face, however, became gray and drawn. He turned his strained eyes towards Joan.

"I wish you luck, m'Lady," he said, hoarsely. And shuffling his cap awkwardly on his head, he passed on without another word. Joan and Philip went silently on their way.

Alf Blodmore walked eastwards with a bit of a hesitating step. Twice he bumped into passers-by. He halted at last, in the mouth of a Fleet

street alley-way, and stared before him with his mouth working.

"My Gawd!" he muttered, thickly. "It's more'n I can stand!"

The swing doors of a bar stood invitingly close by. Blodmore thrust them apart, entered, and called dazedly for spirits. He gulped down a stiff glass as though it had been water of the brook.

Alf was usually abstemious. Over-indulgence was not one of his failings. He felt just then as though somebody had struck him on the solar plexus. The drink seemed to pull him together and clear his head.

The girl behind the bar looked doubtfully at the tall, thin youth with the white face and vacant eyes that stared at nothing. There was something wrong with him; she resolved privately that she would not serve him with anything more. She was not required to, however. After a short pause, Alf pulled himself together and left the place. He also left his chair in the street. The barmaid went after him, but he had disappeared.

Blodmore clambered on to a bus, and rapid stages thence northwards to Hackney. He did not, perhaps, look a romantic figure, but it would have been hard for anyone to serve him with anything more. He stumped mechanically along Billiter street, a long, dingy thoroughfare, and arrived at his home, a small shop over which was the name, Samuel Taggart, and the legend, "Naturalistic Emporium."

The place had the appearance of a small and disorderly den. It was noisy with the song of birds; numberless canaries were making shrill melody in the window guinea-pigeons were brooding on green stuff and at the door a cynical-looking magpie without a tail croaked at Alf thoughtfully. Inside were many small dogs, a sleepy cage of birds of every description and a litter of Persian kittens.

There was nobody in charge of the shop, and Alf, with a head-bright eye on an intelligent expression and a very red head, who nodded cheerfully at Alf. The latter walked straight through into the little dark parlour behind the shop. He closed the door silently.

A cock bullfinch in a cage by the window turned a head-bright eye on Alf, chirruped, and began to whistle "When the Boys Come Home," with surprising richness and volume. It was Alf who had taught the bird to sing, and he had a wonderful gift with all small creatures in fur or feathers.

Now, however, the bullfinch's song did not seem to appeal to him. There was still the look of tragedy in his eyes. He sank into a chair beside the little table.

"I don't like to marry him," he whispered. "I know him." His face became suffused with dull red. "It's Mottisfont—the barrister chap."

Alf's chin sank on his breast. "I never was her class. She's rich now. Alf he—"

The bullfinch suddenly became silent.

"I'd like to have him by the throat! I—I wish I hadn't seen 'em together," his voice broke.

"Little Joan—my little Joan!" Alf dropped his forehead on the table and bowed his head upon it. His shoulders heaved and shook. The bullfinch began to whistle "Annie Laurie," but broke off in the middle of a bar, and ruffled its feathers.

(To Be Continued.)
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More S. F. P.

Dear Miss Grey.—Here is another lot of the stocking foot patterns. This makes the fifth. How are you getting on with them now? Is the supply equal to the demand? Have I enclosed a shiplaster for the S. C. H. Won't it be a glorious day when you get the \$1,000 for that dear cat?

I have been wondering if my home-made macaron recipe would take up too much space in the cook-book. If not, I would like to send it. What say you, C. G.?

The idea about the C. G. badge is too great for words. What price for a small Union Jack with C. G. in silver in the center? Please decide soon, Cynthia, dear, so that we can all turn out wearing them when the fine weather comes along. I wonder if any of the Boxites have an old thing called "When There's Love At Home?" There is beauty all around, when there's love in the home, there is joy in every sound.

I would like to get the words and have them wrapped in paper. I am glad to see so many of the old ones coming back. You must surely be a magnet, Miss Grey. With all good wishes to every one.

THE UNION JACK.
Thanks for the stocking foot patterns, Union Jack. I am glad to have them, although just lately the demand has not been quite so heavy. I am sure Calamity Ann will be glad to have your recipe, so send it in the next time you write, which I hope will be soon. Thanks for the shiplaster.

Observe the packet between Dundas and Quebec avenue on Clarence street any morning or afternoon, and you should be able to understand the significance of "angle parking." Your query should properly have been addressed to "The Editor."

More Recipes.
Dear Miss Grey.—I saw in the paper that you forwarded my recipes to Calamity Ann, so I am sending some more, if she cares for them. I am sure she will. I have had a lot of success this winter. I suppose all the Boxites will be pleased if Cynthia gets the badge with an emerald on it, and then if we meet any one of the Boxites we shall know them. I shall want both badge and a cook book. I hope you will be able to let us know how much they will be. Yours ever, M. H.

Thanks very much for the recipes, M. H. I am glad you found a correspondent in Lonesome For Blighty.

Lucy Grey.
A copy of the directions has already been sent to Saskatchewan, Lonesome Lane, but thanks very much for your kindness in letting me have them. I am referring to your request for the words of "Lucy Grey," to readers. Can any of the Boxites provide them?

Pumpkin Face.
Dear Miss Grey.—Will you please forward the enclosed letter to December Bride for some of the seeds she is offering, as we are moving out on a farm shortly, and I think I will have lots of space for a garden there.

I think the suggestion for a C. G. pin for the Boxites is just fine, and I hope to be able to get one if the plan materializes.

I expect to be quite busy for a time now experimenting in farming, as I have never before had a cow and will have to learn so that I can help out during the busy season, but hope to have time to read the letters in the Mail-Box column as usual. My little ones are quite anxious to get on a farm as they are as fond of other animals as they are of cats, and they are going to have a little dog in place of their cats, as my husband will not move cats and has given them all away.

If I am too late for December Bride's seeds, I would be pleased to get any you might have on hand to spare. I enclose a dime for the Hopalong Cassidy, and best wishes to you and the Boxites. I am, Yours sincerely, PUMPKIN FACE.

We shall all be very interested to hear how you succeed with your farming venture, Pumpkin Face, so you must find a few moments to write to the Mail-Box as often as possible. I have forwarded your letter to December Bride and am also sending you a few seeds from the Mail-Box. Good luck with your garden.

An Irish Colleen.
Dear Cynthia.—I am sending you a few of my favorite recipes for Calamity Ann's cook-book, and I am sure they are ready, so be sure and keep my order on file. What lovely weather we are having and how welcome the springtime is, and dear Miss Grey, will you please send me December Bride's address, for which I enclose stamped addressed envelope. I think that's a splendid idea of December Bride's about the Boxites' badge. I see where December Bride says she'll be the first to order one. I hope I'm the second. I think it will be fun and then it will help the fund along, so come along Boxites and help boost this as well as the cook-book. Let's get busy all in favor. Well, I will close, with a mite for the S. C. H. I will sign as B. AN IRISH COLLEEN.

Thanks ever so much for the mail, Irish Colleen, and the recipes. I am sending you "December Bride's address."

Tilde.
Dear Cynthia.—Am appealing again to your column for some perennial roots. I would like a white peony and any other root that would help me have some flowers. Would some one let me have some house plant slips this spring—begonias, geraniums or foliage, anything for a change, as mine are all down to one color? Will send donation to fund and pay postage. I must send Calamity Ann a couple of recipes and will want a book.

I am sorry, Tilde, that I could not forward your letter, as Mrs. H. T. J.'s address was not in the Mail-Box, but perhaps she will notice your letter and let us have it again. I hope some of the Boxites will be able to let you have the plants. Write us again and send in your recipes.

For Jolly Jean.
Dear Miss Grey.—I am coming again with the words of "Barbara Allen" for Jolly Jean, although I never knew of sixteen verses. I think that must have been an error in the printing. What a nice letter from Gollie. The letters are getting interesting now. I enjoyed one from Lavinia very much. It would be most interesting, too, if the Boxites would choose a pen-name instead of all those initials. How ever do you keep track of them all, Cynthia? I am sure

there are heaps of names to choose, and we would all remember them better. I will give you a few: Wildwood, Breezy, Topsy, Snowdrift, Fairy, Water Lily, Blue Bird, Linnet, Oh, I could think of hundreds of funny ones. Froggie, Toadie, Jumping Jack, Hopscootch and Tin Ribbs.

Make the column interesting, dear Boxites, if it is only with your pen-name. I have found a use for my children's old copy books. I am pasting all the Boxites' letters in them. I only started a few weeks ago, and have over 100, so you will see why I am eager for interesting letters. Now, please do not get angry, you "initial" Boxites. If you must call yourselves "J. K." or "M. D." make it very distinct—"Jay Kay" for instance, or "Em Dea."

Then we would miss you when you did not write, and want to know where you were. Now, about that egg supper, Jolly Jean. Did you ever cook eggs this way? Put a small piece of butter in the bottom of cups or individual jelly molds; set them in pan of hot water, and then when butter has melted put an egg into each cup, cover fire until cooked. They slide out so nice and round, taste extra good, and look nice on a round of buttered toast.

Here is another dainty dish. Whip the whites of two or three eggs with a little sugar. Cut some slices of cake, and put on a large platter. Put some egg white on each piece, with half a preserved peach or apricot in the centre, to make it look like a poached egg. Your friends will all think they are going to eat a real poached egg, as our friends did. Now hurry up, Boxites, and let Cynthia know what you think about the initial badge, with blue in it. I am just longing to have one.

DECEMBER BRIDE.
The Boxites will have to think of you, scribbler, now. December Bride, and let that be an incentive to make their letters as interesting as possible. I heartily favor your suggestion of going away with the initials. I was more than pleased to get the splendid package of seeds, as I have several letters waiting for them. I am sure Jolly Jean will be delighted with the suggestions. Am sending her the words of "Barbara Allan." Let us have your next letter soon, December Bride.

Bobby Coon didn't know when Hooty left. You see, big as they are, those wings of Hooty's made a sound. When he flew away it was

in perfect silence. But Bobby Coon was in no hurry to leave. He had made one mistake that morning, but that was enough. He had no intention of making another mistake. He would stay right there until he was sure that the way was clear. Then he would get away from that part of the Green Forest as fast as possible and keep away. Young Owls might be very good eating. He didn't know for he never had tried them. But he was sure that they were not worth what he had already suffered.

So it was long, long after the Black Shadows had crept all through the Green Forest and brought darkness there that Bobby Coon crept out from under that pile of brush and as noiselessly, but as fast as he could, hurried away. He was a sadder, a very much sadder Coon than he had been early that morning, but also he was much wiser. Wisdom, you know, often is attained at the cost of fight and pain. But often it is worth it.

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The next story: "Farmer Brown's Boy Finds the Young Owls."

anything in the world he wanted just then it was to run fast. He wanted to get away from that part of the Green Forest in the very quickest time possible. Of course, Hooty and Mrs. Hooty swooped after him. One of them struck him once and shook him, and he could dodge under cover of a pile of brush.

Once under this he was safe, and he was wise enough to stay there. Those Owls couldn't get at him there, and he knew it. He would stay there until they went away. So Bobby flicked his wings and whimpered softly to himself, "I didn't know," he kept saying over and over, "I didn't know that that nest belonged to Hooty and Mrs. Hooty. If I had I wouldn't have dreamed of going near it. I'll never, never go anywhere again without first being sure it is safe to do so. How was I to know that Hooty had taken Blacky the Crow's old nest?"

Meanwhile Hooty and Mrs. Hooty sat in trees close to that pile of brush and hissed and clacked their stout, hooked bills and threatened things to Bobby Coon. Just to hear them made Bobby shiver and shake. But Mrs. Hooty didn't stay long. Those two babies back in the nest needed attention. So, with a last dreadful threat, she flew away. But Hooty remained. He ached all over for another chance at Bobby Coon. But at last even his patience gave out, or else he felt that he was needed at home.

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