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The Bernard Sisters

A Mystery That Hung About Them Was Finally Solved ___

By JEAN WINTER

I lived with my mother and sister in an apartment building and there became acquainted with the Bernard sisters, who occupied a small suit at the other end of the floor on which we were located. They lived very simply and without a maid. Their names were Margaret and Grace, Margaret being the older. Their names expressed their general makeup, Margaret being strong both physically and mentally: Grace gentle and pliable. I supposed at first that they had a small income on which they lived. At any rate, they did not go out regularly each day, as women do who work for their living. But my sister, who was at home all day, said they went out irregularly, usually remaining away from their rooms from two to three hours at a time. She believed they went to keep some business en gagement, but they never mentioned where they had been.

Soon after we met them in the apartment house my sister, thinking that they must be lonely sitting by themselves, asked them to come into our They did so, and we were delighted with them. Both seemed endowed with the same gift, but in different ways. Possessing a keen knowledge of human nature, they could be very entertaining in portraying it in stories taken from their own observations of everyday life. When Margaret told of some woman of high degree. some tragic episode, some thrilling adventure, she threw herself into her part as if she were a professional actress. Grace was equally apt in narrating



OH, HENRY, THERE'S SOME AWFUL TROU-BLE BETWEEN THOSE GIRLS."

events concerning girls of her own kind. Margaret was a Portia, Grace a Juliet. My favorite of the two sisters was

Grace. Margaret was of a pattern to be admired. Grace was lovable. It occurred to me that Margaret was not only a woman of strength, but of violent emotions. I was not surprised one day to hear a storm going on in the sisters' rooms. The doors were all shut, and a window of theirs which faced one of ours was hung with a rugit seemed to me to prevent sound from being heard. Nevertheless I could hear Margaret Bernard hurling vituperations upon her sister that made my blood curdle. I was tempted to go in and protect the poor girl from her unnatural sister's wrath. I restrained myself, and after the sounds ceased I rejoiced at my forbearance, for when in my sound senses I would never think of interfering in family

Naturally the sympathy I felt for

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the younger girl drew me closer to her. I did not see her till the next day, when I met her in the hall connecting our and their apartments. It's seemed to me that her face should wear a sad expression, but she showed no trace of the "roasting" she had endured. Indeed, she greeted me with a smile, and her smiles were beginning to go straight to my heart. I could not refrain from referring to her sister and was conscious of a frown passing over my face at the mere mention of her, but Grace appeared to be unconscious of any wrong done her by Margaret and spoke of her as usual. This I attributed to her forgiving na-

But I was soon after destined to receive a shock. One evening when I came in from business my sister came into my room, closed the door behind her and looked at me in a way that told me she had some bad news for

"I have noticed your growing attachment for Grace Bernard." said, "and, considering the mystery that hangs over these girls, I have been very much worried. Some time rating Grace for something, and I took a violent dislike to her for doing so." "I overheard that, too," I put in.

"Today I overheard another trouble between the two. I could only catch snatches of what was being said, but it was enough to convince me that, after all, Margaret was right. This morning I overheard Grace making the most appalling confession to her sister. Grace seemed so crushed by what she had done, so penitent, so filled with despair, that I found my-self weeping for her. And you should have heard how nobly Margaret talk-ed to her. She was motherly as well as sisterly and was as encouraging as could be expected to one who had sunk so deep in shame."

"For heaven's sake!" I exclaimed, horror stricken. "Did you learn the nature of the crime?" "Only this: I heard Grace say, moan-

ing all the while: 'On my life, when I went to live with Harry I did not know that he was married. I believed myself to be his lawful wife. When he turned me off I was so sunken that all sense of shame had gone out of me, and when Maynard took me up' "-

I heard no more, for, burying my face in the pillows on my bed, I put my hands to my ears to shut out the rest of the horrid revelation. Betty quietly withdrew and left me to recover from the shock alone, knowing from experience that this was the best way to comfort me. And this was the finale of that blessed contentment which for weeks had been stealing over me, realizing as I did that I loved and was loved; this the girl to whom my affections had gone out! How could she have been able to hear those first tender words I had spoken to her knowing what she was? Had she possessed a spark of real purity she would have winced at being ad-dressed as I addressed her, she knowing the while what she was. Bet had said that she was penitent. Had she grieved for her fall it would have been impossible for her to accept what I had said to her with that modest look on her face. Her self control had been marvelous. But I have always heard that those deepest dyed in iniquity maintain consummate assurance.

What should I do? Not for the world would I meet again the girl who had deceived me. I arose from the bed and began throwing some clothes in a suit case. Bet heard me and returned. She asked me where I was going, and I told her anywhere that would prevent my meeting that shameless girl again. Bet tried to quiet me, but it was no use. was frantic. Fortunately I couldn't go away that night, for I had not decided where to go. Bet made me promise that I would not go in the morning without seeing her and left me to myself. She brought up my dinner to me, and I managed to swallow a few mouthfuls. After dinner I went out and walked the streets till late, then went in and to bed.

l awoke shortly before daylight with a realization of some frightful trouble hanging over me, but it was not till I had rubbed my eyes that I remembered what it was. Then the whole thing rushed upon me. I went down to breakfast and drank a cup of coffee. I knew that it wouldn't do for me to appear at the office in my present condi-

tion of mind, so I telephoned that I was indisposed and would not go down before afternoon. Then I sat down in the library and took up the morning paper. Bet came in and, standing behind me, soothingly put her arms on my shoulders. Then she called my attention to the fact that I was holding the paper upside down. I smiled a sickly smile and reversed it.

About 11 o'clock Bet came to me again with a scared look on her face and said:

"Oh, Henry, there's some awful trouble between those girls. I can hear them plainly in my room. Margaret has been treating Grace so badly that the worm has turned. She's desperate. Margaret is goading her, and she will either go mad or kill her sister or both. I do think you ought to go in there and stop it."

Springing up. I followed Bet to her room, and, putting my ear close up against the wall where she indicated, I listened. Grace was speaking, but could only distinguish what she said when she spoke in her highest pitch. Her apparently subdued nature seemed to have been fired by taunting to despair. I listened till I heard Margaret say calmly, "Put down the weapon;" then I bolted for the hall and in another moment was rapping at the Bernard sister's door. Bet followed me, and when the door opened she and I stood on one side of the threshold, while the sisters stood on the other side. "What's the matter?" asked both girls

in a breath. "Matter! What's the matter here?"

"Nothing." "Nothing! Are confessed crimes, tauntings, threats at murder" I paused. A change was coming over the faces of the two girls. They look-

ed at each other, then burst out laugh-

lug. "Did you hear?"

"Of course we heard!"
"We thought we had the sound dead-Come in and we will explain." And they did explain. They sat as models for artists who portray the passions. Just previous to a sitting for any especial part they were accustomed to work themselves up to feel and consequently to look it. They committed to memory scenes in plays and rehearsed them to each other, then went at once to the sitting with the impres sion fresh. It was these rehearsals we had overheard. There was nothing to be ashamed of in their work, but it was unusual, and persons who knew of it asked so many questions that the sis-

ters became tired of answering them. I married Miss Grace Bernard and stopped the rehearsals. Her sister soon after married, and numerous artists were disappointed at losing valuable

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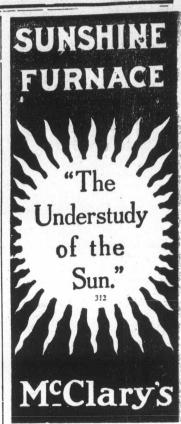
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