

The Whiteest Thing in the World

By MIRIAM MICHELSON (Author of 'The Bishop's Carriage' etc.)

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

Theresa Pettitelli, ambitious and unsophisticated, seeks a position as a writer on a newspaper and is rebuffed by the editor, who, to get rid of her and discourage her, gives her an impossible assignment, which she believes she is regularly on the staff, and in a burst of hopeless frenzy the editor sends her to work on the murder trial of Eustace Maniloy, who is getting rid of his boy friend, Miss Pettitelli, known as "Peach-blossom," sees the accused murderer in a new light and writes an amazing story, which she delivers to the editor. She believes the man innocent, and the publication of the story she has written causes an immense sensation in the town and legal circles. Maniloy is convicted and sent to prison to await his execution, and the girl, who has fallen in love with him, gains admittance to the prison in the guise of a nurse. She reveals her identity to a jailer and tells him she wants to make amends to the convict for the harm she imagines she has done to him during her newspaper work at the trial. The jailer, Kerr, is in love with the girl and seeks to wed her, but she confesses that Maniloy is the one for whom she cares.

(Copyright, 1907, by the New York Herald Company. All rights reserved.)

A sudden desire to make her suffer came to the man, who would have given his life to shield her. "What'll you do when he's hanged?" he demanded brutally.

The intonation seemed not to have reached her. "I'll die, too, then," she said, softly.

"Do you mean—Kerr's voice was hoarse—"you'll kill yourself for—"

"No, I'll kill me," she said, with quiet confidence.

A quick sigh of relief burst from him. "And if it should?" he persisted.

"What then—what then?"

"Oh, do you suppose I care," her voice rose for the first time, "what becomes of me then—after that?"

He took her hand in his and smoothed it with a loving touch.

"I care," he said, "care all I am and all I hope for. I'll learn you to care, too, little girl, and I'll wait forever if I have to—ill you do."

They passed within the gate and around to the side entrance of the Warden's house.

"You'll help me—then," she stammered as she paused at the foot of the stairs. "You'll take me to see him?"

"Never—so help me God!" He spoke under his breath.

"Oh, I must—I must see him! Don't you see it's killing me not to be with him—now, now when he needs me! Oh, I beg of you!"

"Never!" Kerr swore as he left her there.

Yet within a fortnight she had her wish. Though she did not know it, Maniloy had been in the hospital for some weeks, recovering from a slight operation. Every afternoon, when the prisoners were in the yard on the other side of the prison, she was sent to the roof to bring down the freshly washed linen for the baby she tended. Often from this height she had seen patients in the prison hospital, suffering, striped back within it. But after the first shuddering shock of sympathy she instinctively turned her back upon the place.

A torturing passion of pity for one prisoner monopolized her; thought or sight of others she avoided as one shuns a blow.

The wind was blowing her apron from her as she stood, a slender, chaste figure in the scant nurse's gown and cap, from which faint brown tendrils of her hair escaped. Her arms were stretched above her head where the linen flapped and tossed, when from the sun house, below and apart, came a low call.

"Blossom! Blossom!"

She knew his voice instantly, and the name he alone called her. She wheeled and, with her arms still full of the linen, ran to the low ramparts that fenced in the roof, and bent over.

"You've been ill?" she cried, a world of anxiety in her voice, as she peered toward the single figure that lay outstretched in an invalid's chair.

Maniloy nodded.

"Very ill? But you're better?"

"Oh, yes, I'll be well enough to hang in a week or so."

She gave a faint cry and pressed her hands together.

"You care!" he asked.

"Oh, I—I can't bear it," she cried.

"What'd you come here for, then?"

"To—to be!"—The words died on her lips.

"Peachblossom!" He laughed, gratified.

"You look like 'em now. No, I thought you came to be in at the hanging. It'll be a nice one, they're feeding me up so it'll all go off fine."

She shook her head vigorously, like a child, but speechless and shuddering.

"Sure I did," he insisted mockingly.

"Is—there anything I can do?" she asked, after another helpless negative and a silence.

"You'd lose your job if you did."

"Oh—this!" she plucked contemptuously at her gown. "Do you think I care for this?"

He pulled himself up to look curiously at her. "You don't mean to say you've got money?"

"Me?" She opened innocent, bewildered

eyes. "Why, you know I came down from the farm to be with my aunt. She's all the folks I've got. And now, since—since you know—"

Her voice trailed off into silence.

"Since what?" he asked, curiously.

"Since it's all been in the papers about you and—me," she stammered, "she won't have anything to do with me. No."

Her voice was firmer now. "I'll starve when I quit here, but what do I care?"

"I wonder why you care, Blossom," he said slowly.

"Because—I can't help it," she cried passionately, and covered her face, sobbing. "It's so cruel, and you—you're so brave about it."

"You don't catch Mother Maniloy crying when there's no reporter around. Say," he sat up with sudden suspicion in his voice, "are you in with them? Mother Maniloy's turning me into cash, writing weekly letters about her gifted son to the press. But if you dare, I'll find a way—I swear I will!"

"Oh," her tear-stained face hung appealingly over him, "don't you trust me? Do—do trust me. I'll kill myself before I'll hurt you again. I'd do anything in the world to prove it. You couldn't think of anything I'd not try for you."

He lay back, appeased, persuaded.

"Sweet little Blossom," he murmured, looking up.

She fell upon her knees there by the parapet, resting her hot face upon her arm, and, as she did so, suddenly she felt a hand upon her shoulder. She jumped to her feet and faced Kerr. His big square face was white.

"You can't do this. I'll see that you don't get another chance here, but if you find any other way I'll tell the old man, and out you go, sure as my name's Michael Kerr," he said, firmly. "Now, go down stairs."

She stood like a terrified thing, mechanically folding the clothing she had in her arms. But she let it drop with a gasp when Maniloy's voice came up to them.

"Take your hands off my girl, Kerr," he cried, with a sudden desire to assert himself audaciously to this quiet man, whose judgment of himself Maniloy's infallible instinct had divined. "Just keep off."

"I've ordered you back to your cell, Maniloy. To the girl Kerr's deep voice seemed to fall like lead upon the man he loved, who was looking down upon him.

"Keep a civil tongue in your head. You don't want to attract anybody else's attention to the girl and get her in trouble."

"Where! Are you sweet on her, too?" laughed Maniloy. "Something in the jailer's voice had betrayed him to the murderer's keen ear, and he relished rivalry in which he had so clearly the upper hand."

The girl wrung her hands in silent agony.

"Go down stairs, I tell you," said Kerr to her.

"Blossom!" called Maniloy, "wait a minute. Can't you wait to say goodbye? It's the last time, you know, and—"

With a mad cry she ran down from the jailer and flew to the parapet, her arms outstretched.

"You cur!" the jailer, as he stood beside her, was looking down upon him with a cold, hard eye.

"To take advantage of an innocent little thing like her." He got between the girl and the parapet, his hands keeping her eyes upon her, silently walked toward her. She retracted, half mad with misery and excitement, but step by step she moved back toward the stairs.

"Blossom—Blossom!" called Maniloy, a sudden resolution in his voice.

The girl attempted to answer, but Kerr pushed her gently within and shut the door behind her.

CHAPTER VI.

"I pronounce you man and wife."

The prison chaplain had hurried through the ceremony. He hurried away now from the death cell, like one who is glad to be done with an unpleasant affair.

For a moment the Peachblossom Girl stood, her hand still reached between the bars, resting in Maniloy's. Then she sank into a chair which the guard had placed for her in the corridor beside the grating.

The girl leaned her head against the grating. She seemed half dazed by the strain she had undergone and leaned dumbly against the grating. She had not spoken a word except the half heartily late "Yes" in answer to the chaplain's question.

The prison of her relaxed, helpless little figure found Maniloy.

"Funny little Blossom!" he said, carelessly.

She lifted her lips to his, a meaning look in her eyes. He bent to kiss her on the mouth, then suddenly put his hand to his eyes.

"Hush! Take care!" she whispered, rising to cover him from the eyes of the guard at the other end of the corridor.

Didn't they say in the Press yesterday that the pity of the mothers of the world must go to Rebecca Maniloy in her loyalty to her miserable son? Well, any way, it made the notice in the News much

more valuable. I hope they sent you something for it. Money goes so fast with me. Fortunately, in here you don't need much."

"No, but the girl may."

"Nonsense, Eustace! You can't be meaning to leave your share in the ranch to her?"

A gray shade seemed to be settling over his face as he sat up to look at her.

"Leave it!" he gasped.

"Then, you, too, believe. Why haven't you told me the truth?" he cried, his voice breaking hysterically.

She murmured a protest that she had believed he would get another trial—that she still believed; indeed, she did.

But he raved that it was a world of liars that deserved to have its neck wrung, as Draxler had been, for lying, just for lying, nothing else; that Shaw, too, had not been near him since he had signed over his share of the ranch to him; that he was left to die like a rat in a trap; that even if he were guilty—which he wasn't—wasn't—wasn't—many worse men had got off; that he wished he could get out for just a day to show people what he thought of them!

Mrs. Maniloy shivered as she sat there helpless. She had never known the things mothers say—the native poetry of the race that, like a deep, sweet spring, is forever welling up from their hearts. She was afraid now, and touched, too, in a part of her nature so seldom appealed to, that it had become rusty and inflexible.

She had a sense of oppression, of nervous exasperation. She longed passionately for him to stop, to be his own hard, mocking self again, a self that had never required anything from her lean sympathy.

He did stop, for the German tapped Mrs. Maniloy on the shoulder and told her time was up.

"Goodbye, Eustace," she said, touching her lips to his perspiring forehead close to the bars. "Keep up your spirits; you'll be better soon. I'll tell Shaw he mustn't desert you now. And it'll be all right. Perhaps by the next time I come you'll have got the good news. I'll be here soon again. It was mean of him to take you last cent. He's made enough out of you, but counting the newspaper notice he gets. Well," she sighed, "I must get along. I best I can, I suppose. It costs so much to make these little trips out here."

He wiped the perspiration from his face and put out his hand to her through the bars.

She received the money it contained with a grateful exclamation.

"Promise me, Eustace, you won't let yourself break down," she said, as she kissed him again. "Don't want to have you go to worry about, too."

"I promise," he said in a low voice. "But I want you to promise, too, to be good to her—the girl—I do care, mother—care." The words came wrung from him.

He lay quite still after she was gone till the German asked him to get up while the cot was moved back into the corner.

"It will be easier soon—tomorrow," said the German. Always as comes had in his cell at first.

But exhausted now, he had a swift, terrible vision of his predecessors who had passed out of the death cell.

He closed his eyes and came more, he said, after a silence. "She thinks she'll come again before the last day."

The German looked over at him; it was Maniloy's first admission that there was a last day.

"Tell her the warden won't let anybody in any more. She and I, we won't, we'll be so unfeeling, Eustace," he exclaimed.

The guard nodded. He had finished his task and was taking up the German newspaper (of which he could have mastered but a line an hour, so interminable was his reading), when Maniloy spoke again.

"Send for her—the girl—will you? Get her to come back again. I want her back."

VII.

He bent to kiss her when she stood again outside the bars. But she drew back, blushing miserably.

"Why?" he protested, "you yourself—the other time?"

"But that was because I had no other way to give you—"

"The bottle, eh?" Mechanically he glanced toward the corner near his cot where he had concealed the poison before a scraped out bit of mortar.

"Queer little thing you are," he said musically, at last, "aren't you?"

"Yes," she said humbly.

"The warden's got angry, and you come back even if it."

She thrust both her hands between the bars. It was a rarely expressive gesture for her.

"And you keep away from those jackal reporters. And you tell the truth."

He pressed her hands hard, as if for a moment, then he said, "You must be tired," he said, after a minute. And he pulled his own stool close and sat down by her with only the bars between them. "How'd you get up?"

"I walked."

"It's awful hot out, they say?"

He nodded.

He sat silent, still holding her hands absently.

"Been staying down at the inn?"

She nodded again, silently—her clear eyes, which had at first been unaccustomed to the light, bent with pitying worship upon him. His features were grayed, old and thin, and something even she had not seen there till now was dawning in his face. As she looked upon him (it was a primitive instrument, this high keyed, one stringed nature of hers) it seemed to her that the preliminary tortures of his agonizing death were already being administered.

He reached down into his pocket and put his last gold piece in her hands. Mechanically her fingers closed on it for a moment. Then it fell ringing to the stone floor while, withdrawing her hands from his, she covered her face and burst into passionate tears.

He watched her very pale and puzzled, a baffled longing growing in his eyes. "You don't want it—you won't take it. Behind her hands she shook her head, in childlike, vigorous denial.

"Don't cry," he said stiffly; "don't."

She wiped her eyes and composed herself. "I'm so—so—so sorry," she gasped, struggling bravely to control her voice. "It—breaks my heart—for you," she sobbed.

"And," his pale lips writhed, "it breaks my heart—for you."

The German's heavy step came to end their interview and waked both from their absorption. She clung to him then, drawing his hand out between the bars and laying her head upon it in dumb misery.

He bent, and with his lips close to her ear, "You're the—the whitest thing in

the whole world. You don't believe I did it?" he whispered.

"No, no; how could I?"

"And if you should ever hear later. After—"

"No, no, never. Oh, believe me. You do trust me."

"I wish I could trust him, up there, as I trust!"

His voice failed and he buried his face in his hands.

"Listen!"—she was clinging a moment longer to the bars—"always I will think of you and—be proud of you and care for you. And I will never listen to a word against you, nor read one. And—no matter what the world will be saying the day after—tomorrow, you will know that one person knew truly about you. It's like a picture," she went on, speaking rapidly now that she had but a moment more "like a picture," she said, "that everybody has been daubing, covering with mud, scratching, tearing; but so long as there's one clean copy of it in the world it's really not destroyed. And that picture I've got here."

Her hands were clasped over her breast.

After the chaplain went away Maniloy could not sleep. Yet he was too excited and weakened physically to make the effort to be fully awake. So he lay feverishly dozing, waking with a shriek of agony from a dream with the cold sweat on his forehead, as though he had ventured too far into the future and the damp breath of death were already upon him; then, composing himself and lying down, he would be waked by the sound of death that night held for him.

The hammering on the gallows in the yard had ceased when he looked up to see Kerr standing over him, a glass in his hand.

"What is it?" Maniloy whispered.

"Just something that'll quiet you."

The death watch held the sedative to his lips, every feeling gone from him except the charity of the strong for the weak.

Maniloy sipped it tremulously.

A dull red suffused the jailer's face. He did not answer, but withdrew his arm and walked over to the table to set down the glass.

"You're thinking," Maniloy spoke with the slow effort of exhaustion; "you're saying to yourself that it's all over. My love that came to me—my little love—there's one thing I can do for you, now that you're tied to me—one—only one, and—"

—and that I can do because you believe in me, believe that I am capable of—"

He caught Kerr's glance, as, fighting for composure, the jailer turned away from him; and he knew that this strong man was something to comfort him, and he was conscious suddenly of an old, triumphant reversal of conditions that made him as much stronger now than this strong man as the death watch had been the night before, when he was a shivering, shrieking coward being carried inexorably on toward day and execution.

But Maniloy's strength was nearly spent. He could only stagger to his couch, seek the tiny bottle she had brought him, and draw the cork with his teeth.

Then he drank the whole draught down.

When Kerr found him the sneer had left his face, which smiled tranquilly. His head lay back upon its pillow, proud and



pure in the supreme solemnity of death. And, as by an ennobling miracle of self-sacrifice, every eye that looked upon his dead face saw, not Eustace Maniloy, the murderer, but the living picture, the Peachblossom Girl carried in her breast.

THE END.

pure in the supreme solemnity of death. And, as by an ennobling miracle of self-sacrifice, every eye that looked upon his dead face saw, not Eustace Maniloy, the murderer, but the living picture, the Peachblossom Girl carried in her breast.

THE END.

pure in the supreme solemnity of death. And, as by an ennobling miracle of self-sacrifice, every eye that looked upon his dead face saw, not Eustace Maniloy, the murderer, but the living picture, the Peachblossom Girl carried in her breast.

THE END.

pure in the supreme solemnity of death. And, as by an ennobling miracle of self-sacrifice, every eye that looked upon his dead face saw, not Eustace Maniloy, the murderer, but the living picture, the Peachblossom Girl carried in her breast.

THE END.

pure in the supreme solemnity of death. And, as by an ennobling miracle of self-sacrifice, every eye that looked upon his dead face saw, not Eustace Maniloy, the murderer, but the living picture, the Peachblossom Girl carried in her breast.

THE END.

pure in the supreme solemnity of death. And, as by an ennobling miracle of self-sacrifice, every eye that looked upon his dead face saw, not Eustace Maniloy, the murderer, but the living picture, the Peachblossom Girl carried in her breast.

THE END.

pure in the supreme solemnity of death. And, as by an ennobling miracle of self-sacrifice, every eye that looked upon his dead face saw, not Eustace Maniloy, the murderer, but the living picture, the Peachblossom Girl carried in her breast.

THE END.

pure in the supreme solemnity of death. And, as by an ennobling miracle of self-sacrifice, every eye that looked upon his dead face saw, not Eustace Maniloy, the murderer, but the living picture, the Peachblossom Girl carried in her breast.

THE END.

pure in the supreme solemnity of death. And, as by an ennobling miracle of self-sacrifice, every eye that looked upon his dead face saw, not Eustace Maniloy, the murderer, but the living picture, the Peachblossom Girl carried in her breast.

THE END.

pure in the supreme solemnity of death. And, as by an ennobling miracle of self-sacrifice, every eye that looked upon his dead face saw, not Eustace Maniloy, the murderer, but the living picture, the Peachblossom Girl carried in her breast.

THE END.

pure in the supreme solemnity of death. And, as by an ennobling miracle of self-sacrifice, every eye that looked upon his dead face saw, not Eustace Maniloy, the murderer, but the living picture, the Peachblossom Girl carried in her breast.

THE END.

pure in the supreme solemnity of death. And, as by an ennobling miracle of self-sacrifice, every eye that looked upon his dead face saw, not Eustace Maniloy, the murderer, but the living picture, the Peachblossom Girl carried in her breast.

THE END.

pure in the supreme solemnity of death. And, as by an ennobling miracle of self-sacrifice, every eye that looked upon his dead face saw, not Eustace Maniloy, the murderer, but the living picture, the Peachblossom Girl carried in her breast.

THE END.

pure in the supreme solemnity of death. And, as by an ennobling miracle of self-sacrifice, every eye that looked upon his dead face saw, not Eustace Maniloy, the murderer, but the living picture, the Peachblossom Girl carried in her breast.

THE END.

pure in the supreme solemnity of death. And, as by an ennobling miracle of self-sacrifice, every eye that looked upon his dead face saw, not Eustace Maniloy, the murderer, but the living picture, the Peachblossom Girl carried in her breast.

THE END.

pure in the supreme solemnity of death. And, as by an ennobling miracle of self-sacrifice, every eye that looked upon his dead face saw, not Eustace Maniloy, the murderer, but the living picture, the Peachblossom Girl carried in her breast.

STRUCK BY BOSTON TRAIN NEAR LINGLEY

Miss Madeline de Bury Overtaken While Walking on Track Saturday Morning—Now in Private Hospital Here—Injuries Not Thought Serious

While walking along the C. P. R. track a short distance above Lingley station Saturday morning about 11 o'clock Miss Madeline de Bury, daughter of Count de Bury, was struck by the Boston train. The train was pulling up at the time and it is thought she has escaped without serious injury. She was brought to town on the train and taken to the private hospital, where she was reported to be resting easily last night.

Miss de Bury holds the position of mathematical instructor in Dunham Ladies' College, Cowansville (P. Q.) and has been spending the vacation with her sister, Mrs. Daniel Mullin, at the latter's cottage, about a quarter of a mile above Lingley. On Saturday morning Miss de Bury started to walk to Lingley station and was overtaken by the train.