INTRODUCING
EARLE WILLIAMS as Tommy Barclay
ANITA STEWART as The Goddess
Written by GOUVERNEUR MORRIS
one of the most notable figures in American Literature
Dramatized into a Photo Play by CHARLES W. GODDARD
Author of "The Perils of Pauline"—"The Exploits of Elaine"

The Goddess

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Synopsis of Previous Chapter.

After the tragic death of John Amesbury, his prostrated wife, one of America's greatest beauties, dies. At her death Prof. Stilliter, an agent of the interests, kidnaps the beautiful three-year-old baby girl and brings her up in a paradise where she sees no man, but thinks she is taught by angels, who instruct her for her mission to reform the world. At the age of eighteen she is suddenly thrust into the world, where agents of the interests are ready to pretend to find her.

Fifteen years later, while in the Adirondacks, Tommy is the first to meet Celestia as she comes from her paradise; neither recognizes the other.

Tommy rescues Celestia from Stilliter. They hide in the mountains. Later Stilliter gets Celestia back, and taking her to New York places her in Beleview Hospital, where her sanity is proven.

Later she tells the world her message, quells a labor riot and begins to receive worship as a prophetess. Entering society, she upsets it. Becomes an international figure feared by the government. The people are about to place all power in her hands, which the interest have planned to have her transfer to them. When Tommy, having learned of her origin, discovers the cave. Returning, he takes Celestia back. Finding it to be a sham, she returns to the city, reaching there just in time to prevent the interest from carrying out their plans.

XIV INSTALLMENT

The sound was not repeated. Gradually the Professor's snarled lips relaxed and closed over his teeth. But for sometime longer he stood listening and trying to see into the shadows. Then he turned to Celestia, and after a moment of silent and greedy contemplation, spoke.

"We are going to be married," he said. "We are about to enter the church." And he followed suggestion by suggestion, it is not quite clear why, unless he had in him a streak of that quality which causes a cat to play with a mouse.

In Celestia's mind rose a shadowy picture of an altar, of a clergyman in a white surplice, of candles that burned in candelabra, of an altar boy, of a great bell made of flowers. She was standing facing the clergyman and the altar, at the foot of the steps which led to it. Why she was standing there she did not know. Oh, yes, she was going to be married. She was going to marry Professor Stilliter. She didn't know why. She didn't love him. He had made her say she did more than once. She had heard herself say that she loved him. But it had been only her lips that had said the word, not her mind, nor her heart nor her soul.

Now she was being married. The clergyman was asking her some long solemn question. Now she was repeating words after him, but only with her lips.

"I, Celestia, take"——

Freddie the Ferret had never been more puzzled in his life. He was not very familiar with the marriage ceremony, but still he recognized the fact that Professor Stilliter and Celestia standing a little way from the log hut were going through something of the kind.

But where was the priest? Freddie peering from under the tree which hid him, could not see any third person. Perhaps the Priest was in the hut speaking to them through the open door.

Driven by a curiosity which overmastered his fear of Stilliter Freddie crept out of his hiding place and advanced over a broad outcropping of granite on feet which made no sound.

The mockery of a marriage service over, Professor Stilliter no longer made any effort at self-control; he seized her in his arms, and was himself seized by the collar and jerked vigorously backward.

It was so sudden and so unexpected that for a moment Professor Stilliter's heart stood still, and he almost died of fright. Then with a kind of whining cry he tore himself loose and faced about.

There was murder in his eyes. It was that look of murder that Freddie who had succeeded in freeing one arm struck at.

Something bright and shining flashed in the moonlight, there was a sound of glass shivered to atoms, and for the moment Professor Stilliter was stone blind.

Professor Stilliter rose slowly to his feet, his face pale as with the anticipation of death. So he stood a moment, and then in a voice that shook, he called to Celestia who had remained standing in front of the hut.

"Come here, Celestia," he called.

She moved obediently toward him. But the Ferret threw himself in her way. Some instinct told him that these two people must be kept apart.

Professor Stilliter's commands to Celestia grew fainter and fainter, until at last they could no longer be heard. And now the moon had sailed her course through the heavens and had descended behind the mountain, and there was a darkness in which Freddie was almost as helpless as the victim of his chance blow.

He still had Tommy's knife and with this he cut a great pile of tender balsam for Celestia to lie on. By good fortune the night was not cold. Celestia lay till morning without moving or closing her half-open eyes. And Freddie stood guard over her, then sat guard, and then slept.

Stilliter also slept after a time. He had found his way to the hut, and had controlled his panic-stricken mind sufficiently to reason that if he was to find help or if help was to find him it would not be at night but in the day time.

He had many nightmares.

Toward dawn he walked in a cold sweat. In his sleep he had asked himself this question:

"How will I know when it is day?"

Tommy found his candle at last, lighted it, and retraced his steps by means of the chalk marked at the turns and forks to the mouth of the cave. He had not expected to find Celestia.

Why hadn't Freddie the Ferret given warning? Tommy thought that the poor boy had probably been shot down in cold blood. There was no time to look for the body. Tommy proceeded at a dog trot—not a run exactly, but that gait, a little faster than a walk that makes the least demand upon the wind and muscles. He kept this up, with occasional lapses into fast walking, until the moon set.

"They must have had a tremendous start of me," he thought, "or else," and his heart sank, "they're gone some other way." He paused abruptly and hesitated. "Why," he thought, "he wouldn't make the poor child take this long tramp again without a good rest. Even I don't like it any too well, and I'm strong as a horse. He's probably taken her somewhere just out of the ear-shot of the cave, he may know of some shelter, and I've been getting further and further from her instead of nearer to her."

Still Tommy could not make up his mind to go back to the cave. Nothing was sure. If Stilliter was somewhere ahead with Celestia, and Tommy gave up following, the game was up. If they were merely resting near the cave they would be coming along in the morning and he could ambush them somewhere along the trail. And he hurried on as best he could in the darkness.

His own car was as he had left it. Stilliter was standing just behind it. The driver had wrapped himself in a lap robe and was sound asleep in the tonneau. Also in the tonneau was a good-sized wicker picnic basket, which on examination proved to be well stocked with sandwiches, cold chicken and Thermos bottles containing hot coffee and soup.

Tommy carried the basket into the woods without asking permission of the sleeping chauffeur and ate a square meal. He had not until now realized how hungry and thirsty and tired he was. The choicest provisions in the basket he put aside for Celestia. "If I'm hungry and tired," he thought, "think what she must be! But I suppose Stilliter tells her that she's just had a quare meal and she believes the dog, but that can't last forever."

Having eaten Tommy rested for half an hour, took up the heavy basket, and once more hit the trail. But now he went slowly and stopped often to rest. He had seldom been so tired in his life, and only an overmastering love and anxiety for Celestia kept him going.

It was no longer night. It wasn't yet dawn; but that lovely interval between when in what appears to be pitch darkness, things become suddenly visible. Tommy stumbled on, shifting the heavy basket frequently from hand to hand.

As it got to be broad day, he was careful to make no noise. At any moment now he might hear sounds of Stilleter and Celestia approaching.

About this time Freddie and Celestia (or rather Freddie alone; for Celestia merely suffered herself to be led) were trying to find their way back to the cave. But for once the luck of the tenement dweller was at fault. A man brought up on numbered streets and rectangular city blocks has no incentive to develop a bump of locality, and at last Freddie, with cold fear in his heart, admitted to himself that he was hopelessly lost. I shouldn't have said hopelessly; the mariner has his sixtant and compass to guide him across the waters; the woodsman has the sun and the stars, and the mossy sides of trees to help out in intuitive sense of direction, and Freddie the Ferret, feeling in his inside pocket, found to his unmitigated relief that he had his pack of cards.

Forthwith he made Celestia sit down, and he knelt, and having shuffled his greasy and shabby deck, he dealt thirteen cards face down in a very accurate circle. Then one by one, a look of faithful expectancy on his face, he turned them over.

Twelve of the cards he then gathered up and put with the pack. The thirteenth was the ace of hearts.

This Freddie lifted with reverence and great care, so as not to change the direction in which it pointed, until it reached the level of his eye and he could sight along it.

A blasted pine standing alone was the first landmark to which the Goddess of chance directed Freddie the Ferret.

"We're not lost now," he said, and he helped Celestia to her feet.

You may call it what you please. The fact remains that Freddie the Ferret had had a return of his usual luck and had hit upon the general direction of the cave.

From the foot of the blasted pine he selected another landmark and pressed on.

At about this time Professor Stilliter waked from that sleep in which he had asked this question:

"How will I know when it is day?"

He got up and groped about in the hut until he had located the door. He opened this and went out. The door was on the shady side of the hut; no warm rays of the sun fell on the Professor to tell him that it was day. It was cool as night in the shadow. One hand always touching the hut, he felt his way along the side of it until he had turned the first corner. Here the logs felt warm to the touch, and he knew that day had come. He sat down in the warm sunshine to think out a plan.

Above all things he must guide himself by pure reason and logic. If he yielded to impulse, nothing good would come of it. He mustn't make a false start.

To begin with, what had become of the trusty guides who had lived in the vicinity to keep watch and ward over Celestia and the scout of the cave. Their pay went on; it always would; but Stilliter, sure of their good faith, where unfaith meant a hounding down with death at the end of it, had not kept close track of them. Old man Smellsgood, the Indian, probably still hunted and fished in the neighborhood. Or, if all these had gone, others perhaps had settled in the houses which they had built.

It was far better that Professor Stilliter should be found than that he should go through the dangers and agonies of seeking. Under ordinary circumstances he knew the region like the palm of his hand. The cave itself he could find his way about in as easily as in his own house. But knowing things, when you see them is very different from knowing them when you can't see them and can only touch them. What is merely a depression by day is an abyss by night.

In wooded countries there is nothing better than a fire to attract attention. If any lonely or hungry person is in sight of that fire, that person will go to it, across lakes and mountains if necessary.

Professor Stilliter had matches. He might or might not be able to find the materials for a fire in the neighborhood of the hut. He wished to make a big smoke, and one which would endure a long time.

"Doesn't any of it seem familiar?" Tommy asked.

After half an hour's work, never losing touch with the hut, Professor Stilleter had collected sufficient inflammable material to soft boil an egg. This would never do, and he was wasting time.

He was tormented by that feeling which perhaps gave rise to the adage the "more haste, the less speed." Time was vitally important, he had to do things quickly and he couldn't. He stood against each of the four walls of the hut in succession and shouted for help a few times at the top of his lungs. But, as he expected, nothing came of them.

"Well," he thought, "I'll have to burn my shelter. It will make just the big smoke I need. And I shan't be much the worse off. It won't look like a camp fire, but like the beginning of a forest fire. It ought to bring a watchman.

The logs of which the hut was built were thoroughly seasoned and full of pitch. By aid of the heap of old dried out balsam which had served him for a pillow during the night Professor Stilliter succeeded in setting it on fire. His ears told him that the fire was going to be a success, and presently, too, the heat that began to emanate from it.

He crawled to a little distance and sat down with his back to the fire. It wasn't likely that anyone would come in less than an hour; it might be many hours before anyone came. But he was very sure that his fire would bring someone eventually.

Sitting and waiting, now making attempts to calculate the passage of time, and failing signally, now thinking unhappy thoughts, and now vengeful passionate thoughts, he sat on and on for eternities of time.

He contrasted what might have been with what was. By now Celestia should have been his, linked to him by indissoluble bonds. Perhaps now, he thought, she would love me. He would have kept her in the cave for a while, and then he would have sneaked her, feasting his eyes on her beauty, to some far country, where her face and voice were not so well known. There he would marry her legitimately, and by him she could have many wonderful and beautiful sons and daughters.

That was what might have been. Instead, behold him, sitting in pitch darkness, his shelter burning behind him, as a call for that help which might never come. How long, oh, Lord, how long!

Suddenly through his right hand, which rested on the ground, there shot a sharp stab of pain. He jerked his hand upward with an oath. It flashed through his mind that he had been stung by a ground hornet. As a matter of fact, a little creeping tongue of flame had burnt him.

Professor Stilleter's fire was spreading. Crevices in the rock in which were lichens and dried mosses, carried little torches hither and thither, torches that were only too eager to find and set fire to something worth while.

The main fire made such a crackling and roaring now that Professor Stilliter had not heard the lesser sounds which it made in spreading. It was some moments before he realized that he had not been stung but burnt. It was a smell of burning cloth that made this clear to him. The Professor's coat had caught fire. He moved further away until there seemed to be nothing about him but unburnable rock. He found the place in his coat which was burning and managed to spit upon it till it was out.

He sat down once more. He was in the midst of one of those great open splashes of granite on the mountain side. As a matter of fact, he was near the edge of one of these masses. Within reach of his hand was a dense tangle of tinder dry scrub trees, shrubs and dead wood.

Suddenly this shrubbery caught and went off almost like an explosion. Professor Stilleter staggered backward from the intense heat, and realized presently that he was backing into another area of heat equally intense.

On his hands and knees he made off in a direction that took him winding between the two; he went quite a long way. In his breast was the first touch of panic.

Now for the second. Directly in his path there arose a steady, a vibrant, a horrid and incessant clashing; of all the sounds in this world. The coldest blooded and the most menacing and sinister.

The fire urged him forward. The rattlesnake coiled in his path, dared him to come on.

He rose to his feet, shivering and in an agony of fear and dread. Suddenly he cried aloud:

"My God! My God! What have I done to deserve this?"

Only the fire answered him and the rattlesnake. Presently it became necessary for him to go forward or to burn to death where he stood.

He went forward with slow high steps—a figure at once tragic and grotesque. But the snake, too, had grown uncomfortable in the increasing heat, and he, too, made off after one final balancing and drawing back of his head, the jaws wide open as if to strike.

Seven high arched steps Professor Stilleter took, before he dared once more to put his hands to the ground, and crawl. It was as well. One more step would have taken him over a little precipice.

Wherever he went the fire found him out and drove him on. A strong wind had risen, and as the flames winnowed their way down the mountain side and across they found more and larger stuff to feed on.

Professor Stilliter got heart every now and then. His hands and knees were lacerated, his face had had some hard knocks. His blind eyes smarted with smoke, and the air which he breathed half choked him.

He came at last to the forest and the fire followed him and drove him. Sometimes it would seem to him that it had taken a different direction, and that he was by way of escaping from it. It always ended, however, by finding him out, and driving him forward. For a while he could keep his distance easily; then for a while he would have to hurry. It was during these that he got his worst hurts. But his natural strength and stamina coupled with the furious desire to live, kept him going. Once despair of saving his life seized him, and there came into his head the desire to meet death in a manly and dignified way. "I will stand here," he said, "until I burn." And he stood and squared his shoulders and held his battered and bleeding head high and erect. But when the heat became so intense that his clothes began to give out smoke, he turned once more and fled.

To a man with average sight it would have been an easy matter to have eluded that fire. It had descended the mountain in a narrow path. It was Professor Stilliter's misfortune that he had been unable to side step it. By taking up his original stand at the back of the hut, instead of at the front, he need not have moved until help came.

Even now old man Smellsgood was standing at a comfortable distance from the red hot ruins of the hut and wondering what fool had set it on fire and why.

Through the forest itself the fire was only burning a broad path, confined to this by open barrens and swamps or by timber too green and well watered to burn. From the mouth of the cave it looked like a receding column of smoke, and there was no real menace in it for anyone but Professor Stilliter. Him it hounded on and on. And now, continually, like a child that babbles, he was asking God to save him, Christ to pity him.

As he lost blood, his progress became slower and slower, and death stared him in the back. He was to have one short reprieve. He came to a gravelly bank so steep that in trying to get down it he began to slide, could not save himself, and was dumped presently into ice cold deep water.

For a moment the shock refreshed and invigorated him and gave him hope. He could swim, and water cannot burn. Whether he was in a pond or a lake of some size he did not know. If a lake and not very large, he could swim across, and at least find safety from the fire. At first it was easy to swim in the right direction, guided by the heat that came from behind, but after a while it was not so easy.

He was a good swimmer, and while floating and treading water he managed to get rid of his shoes, and most of his clothes. He would need them when he got ashore. Yes, but he would have to do without them.

He began to tire again, and there was no sign of the opposite shore.

He was in one of the narrowest lakes in that part of the Adirondacks, but it was several miles long and he was trying to swim it from end to end. The jig was up.

When he realized this he hastened the inevitable by screaming and screaming and then by bursting into tears and sobbing.

After a while his final struggles stopped. He floated in the water with his face under; a kind of foam came to the surface from the corners of his mouth. Twice he drew up his knees and kicked feebly, as if he was still alive and trying to swim.

After a long time Freddie the Ferret, leading Celestia as if she had been blind, blundered to the foot of the cliff in which was the main entrance to the cave. Into this he penetrated a little way and there began to shout for Tommy with all his might. The only response was the echoing of his voice.

So Freddie went back to Celestia, and there she stood with a bewildered puzzled look on her face, and both her hands being held by Tommy Barclay himself, who was breathing as if he had been running up hill.

"Don't look puzzled now, Celestia," Tommy was saying, "you know me. It's all right. I'm the driver you know, and you have to obey the driver. So wake up. Be yourself."

Then Celestia spoke.

"The driver," she said, "is dead. Professor Stilliter told me."

"Told you I was dead?"

Celestia nodded and turned away as if the matter was of no further interest.

"Freddie," exclaimed Tommy, "what are we going to do about Celestia? Has she been this way ever since I went into the cave."

"She's bughouse," said Freddie simply.

"What's happened. How did you keep Stilliter from getting hold of her? He thought he'd shot me. I couldn't get out of the cave as quickly as he could. I supposed, of course, he'd run off with her."

"He did," said Freddie, laconically.

"But here she is. What became of him?"

"Dunno."

"What do you know, Freddie?"

Then the Ferret told his little story of battle, his fight to the finish in the moonlight.

"He gets me on me back," said Freddie, "and beats me face up. And I knocks his specs off and they busts, and he ain't got no more, and I ducks out from under, and he calls to her, and she wants to go to him and I won't let her."

"Where was this?"

"Dunno."

"Far from here?"

"Dunno."

"But you must know in a general way?"

Freddie shook his head.

"Look at me, Freddie! You do now."

But the Ferret's spine stiffened. And he met Tommy's eyes without flinching. He, too, had his standards of right and wrong. Let the evil doer suffer!

"I knows," he said, "but I don't tell."

"But, good God, Freddie—a blind man—in this wilderness"——

"Can go to Hell," said Freddie.

"Now, look here"——

"What are you two talking about?"

The man and the boy wheeled toward Celestia as suddenly and with as much wonder as if she had pointed a gun and shot at them. She had spoken in her natural voice. She spoke again.

"Stelliter?"

"Yes, Celestia; we were speaking of him. He is in awful trouble."

"He was in awful trouble," her voice was sweet and gentle, but very serious. "He's been trying to get me to help him, but Freddie wouldn't let me go, and he couldn't make me understand just where he was. The fire was after him. He couldn't see, and he got hurt trying to get away from the fire. But it chased him and chased him, until he fell into a lake and drowned."

Her words carried an astounding weight of conviction. She felt the horror of her knowledge, and she had suffered while her enemy suffered, and yet she was serenely sure that Stilliter's departure had left the world a little better off.

"We'll have a look for him, when we've had a bite to eat," said Tommy. I'm all in, at the moment. Freddie, run down the trail till you come to a big square basket, and bring it back here, will you?"

"What are we all doing here, anyway?" asked Celestia.

Tommy told her. It was quite a long story. It was hard to make her understand at first, but it grew easier and easier. It was as if she was rapidly convalescing from that sickness of mind into which Professor Stilliter's dark powers had thrown her. Freddie came with the basket, and he and Celestia ate ravenously, and Tommy less ravenously, because he had already broken his fast, and because it was so wonderful to be telling Celestia all about what had been happening and to have her understand.

"And that's the door of the cave where you say I was brought up?"

"Where you were brought up, Celestia—upon my word of honor."

She shook her head, but without conviction.

"I want to see," she said.

But Tommy leaped to his feet.

"You're the rascal that stole my clothes," he cried.

Old Man Smellsgood crinned from ear to ear.

"Well, I'll forgive you," said Tommy, "and give you money if you'll find Professor Stilleter.

The indian shook his head and said, "No good."

"He's got a lot of money on him, and he'll give you some if you find him and he's still alive."

"Dead?"

"Maybe." And Tommy told briefly what had happened and what Celestia believed had happened. The Indian set off at a great pace toward the column of smoke which marked where the fire had been checked by the lake.

Then Celestia and the two others lighted candles and went into the cave. They went in silence from cavern to cavern. Here the electric plant still looked in good running order. Here a man might hide and pretend to be a voice. They did not explore the whole extent of the great subterrene; only enough to prove that someone had lived there for many years in a state of pseudo magnificence, something like the settings of an expensive Broadway production.

"Doesn't any of it seem familiar?" Tommy asked.

She turned to him and threw her arms round his neck, and began to cry like a little child.

"Hell!" said Freddie.

"No," said Tommy stoutly. "It's turned out to be heaven after all. Beat it, Freddie!"

To Celestia the train seemed to move no faster than a snail. To get back to the world in time to undo what she had done, before it should be too late, occupied her mind to the exclusion of almost everything else. Stilliter was dead. His influence had no longer power on her. She became more rational and human with every passed hour, and she became no less sweet.

They had waited at the cave until old man Smellsgood came back with definite news of Stilliter's death.

"Him plenty enough dead," he said, and nodded repeatedly. Then, with a mouth so innocent that even butter wouldn't have melted in it, he said:

"He not got a lot of money on him."

"Not now. I know that," said Tommy, "as well as you do."

When at last they reached New York they proceeded at once to Madison Square Garden, where a tremendous pro-Barclay mass meeting was in session. The triumvirate were all present. Celestia, in a dark cloak, with a veil over her face, waited outside with Freddie until Tommy should signal to her to enter.

He came presently.

"Sturtevant is speaking," he said quickly. "He's explaining how you, your work done, have gone back to heaven—and, by heaven, Celestia, they believe him! You might think it was Matthew, Mark, Luke or John addressing a lot of early Christians; people are sobbing. Better come now and get it over with."

Sturtevant broke off in the midst of his peroration. A slim, white, commanding figure was moving slowly toward him. His jaw dropped. Then he dropped to his knees and, a look of rapture on his face, he cried in a voice of thunder, "Celestia!"

Even this piece of play-acting could not save the situation for him. The people had caught in his face the first swift-fleeting look of unutterable fright and dismay. And now they had caught sight of Celectia, and rose to her with a great roar of sound.

She passed slowly through them, mounted the platform, turned, lifted one hand a little, and there was silence.

She asked them to be patient with her. She had wronged them. Perhaps she had done irreparable harm in the world. But it would be wonderful if they would listen to her once more—they had always been so good to her——

And presently she had them enthralled in the spell of her clear, sweet voice. And she told them her story from the beginning. And when she had finished she just stood and looked straight ahead of her. And murmurs swept the vast place, as little breezes go dappling over smooth water. Then Celestia turned and pointed to the triumvirate.

And a man with a voice like a trumpet stoo dup in the midst of the hall and started for the platform, shouting, "Kill!" "Lynch!"

The man was Gunsdorf.

Then hell broke loose. And the three arch conspirators turned and, darting between the curtains at the back of the platform, fled for their lives.

But nobody hurt Celestia, or thought of hurting her, and after a time Tommy got her away and took her out of the city to a little town in Westchester County, and left her there, until he could get a license to stay there with her.

(To be continued.)