POOR COPY

HIS LAST ASSIGNMENT

By Charles E. Van Loan

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e sporting editor stood at the win- and drummed on the sash with his eil. Three blocks away, over the s of Newspaper row, a column of me shot into the night, and the clang hurrying engines rose sharply from e clattering streets below.

"Great Jehoshaphat! That's a big re, Chester; close too. Who's got it?"

The city editor came to the window, opy in hand, and flattened his nose gainst the pane.

"She is a roarer, isn't she? I sent oung Stanley out on that. I didn't know it was going to be a big thing or I'd sent some one else. Looks like more than he can handle, I'm afraid."

The sporting editor ceased his tapping on the window and turned to the speaker.

"Say, Ches, what's the matter with the youngster anyway? From the way he shaped up at first I thought he was going to make a top notcher, but Eddy Rice of The News and Tim Barnes of The Reporter skin him alive whenever they're out on the same assignments. I don't understand it. And he was such a big help to me last winter with that football stuff too; knew all the team like a book; played on one of 'em year before last, if you remember. He's as steady as a clock and as willing as a boy can be, yet every time he gets a chance to do something big he goes up in the air."

"I know that," said the city editor. "This is strictly on the q. t., but the old man sent for me only last night to talk to me about that very thing. He says the boy hasn't shown any natural itude for newspaper work, and unhe makes good he'll have to be d." And the city editor went his blue pencil again.

down the smoky street came ed roar of human voices. The editor threw up the window out.

, by George! Hear 'em, here must be something dothere; fireman making a play most likely. I can are head tomorrow, 'Our addies.' Hey?"

s later one of the office in, breathless and excited. Chester, you otter been t. There's three women op floor of th' building an' everybody thinks s, 'cause th' streets is sewers, an' th' firemen there wit' th' towers. A ough th' ropes an' runs et wit' his coat over his s they could nab him in front door. Th' next we he was up on th' roof a piece of rope to th' th' women was. Th' a short one, an' so he on th' roof where he is, s what he is goin' to do. three story brick what's ell, they's a wire runs th' big buildin' down to slant, about so." And icated an angle of about e hitches th' littlest wo- s wire wit' a piece of loose. I didn't watch, scared it wouldn't hold an' she got down all e sends th' next one said a word. We was breath. While he was woman th' whole inildin' caves in, an' I s both gone for sure. moke clears away there edge of th' wall, wi' m, and th' last woman Th' rest of th' rope r himself must have th' fire, for he looks st once an' then swings down that wire hand a circus actor. When that he was a-goin' to t, they cut loose, an' I bet you could have heard 'em over in Jersey. They swarms around th' brick buildin' to meet him when he comes down, but somehow he makes a clean getaway, an' there don't nobody know who he is nor nothin'."

And Bobby paused for breath, much abashed to find that every one had drawn near to listen.

The city editor threw up his hands and groaned.

"Now, isn't it just my luck to send Stanley out on a story like that? Why, Billy Kimball would have got three columns out of that, besides a signed interview with this unknown person and maybe a picture of him thrown in. Dexter, you go out and get what you can of this, will you?"

An hour afterward a tall, broad shouldered young fellow came quietly into the room and laid a bunch of copy on the city editor's desk. Chester looked up and nodded a greeting, his practiced fingers already sorting the penciled sheets.

"Looks a little sloppy, don't it?" said he. "What's this—blood?"

The young man dived his hands into his coat pockets and replied hurriedly, "Yes, I'm afraid it does look a little that way, but I cut my hand down there, and I haven't had time yet to have it fixed up."

Chester had reached the bottom sheet, and when he spoke again his voice came like the click of a steel trap.

"How does this happen, Stanley? Didn't you see this man get the woman off the roof?"

"Yes," said the reporter. "I saw as much of that business as any one did, I guess."

"And do you mean to tell me that such a thing as that is only worth three or four lines of copy? Didn't you make any attempt to find out who the man was or get any story out of him?"

Chester was getting angry now. Stanley's voice came clearly across the hush that lay on the room.

"Well, you see, Mr. Chester, it didn't strike me that that business amounted to so very much. Any man would have done the same thing. Don't you think so?"

The city editor was now fairly roused, and his voice rang like a clarion. "Why, good Lord, man, don't you know that The News and The Reporter will everlastingly scoop us on this proposition? Here's a man that takes his life into his bare hands to do a brave thing—to save three women from being burned alive—and because you fall down on the story you try to belittle the whole thing! You ought to be ashamed, sir! Why, tomorrow morning the whole city will be ringing with that man's name, and here we are high and dry and scooped all because it didn't strike you as amounting to much."

The young man was pale, and he mopped at his forehead with his handkerchief, but when he spoke his voice was steady.

"I don't think we'll be scooped this time," said he. "The man slipped away from them all. They haven't any more idea of where he is now than—you have, Mr. Chester."

"How do you know that?" rapped out the city editor. "I suppose you know who he is and all about it, eh?"

"Yes," said the young man very quietly; "I know who he is."

The city editor leaned back in his chair and stared, fairly gasping for breath.

"Well, I'm damned!" said he at length. "And you can stand there and tell me that you know who this man was and yet you made no attempt whatever to get the story?"

Stanley bowed his dead without a word.

"Then all I've got to say to you is that you've botched this business in a way that ought to everlastingly disgrace the youngest cub reporter on the street."

Stanley stood a moment, swaying slightly, and then, putting out a hand to steady himself, he spoke:

"I guess you're right, Mr. Chester," said he. "I know as well as you can tell me that I haven't shown any ability in this line of work. You've been very patient with me, and I appreciate it. I don't suppose there will be any need for me to write out a resignation, will there?" And, turning, he walked out of the room.

The sporting editor caught him at the head of the stairs and laid a kindly hand on the boy's shoulder.

"Harry, old man, I'm awfully sorry—I am for a fact. Don't take what Chester said too much to heart. He's away off tonight anyway. But why didn't you tell him who the man was, Harry?"

The younger man put out his hand, but winced at the grip that met it.

"Joe," said he, "I know I'm not cut out for this business, and it's just as well I quit it now as later, only—only I'm sorry I had to fall down so hard. It wasn't because I didn't know it would have made a good story, but—I can't give the man's name."

The sporting editor spoke quickly: "Why, man, your hand is bleeding! Let's have a look at it."

Across the palm and the joints of the fingers ran deep parallel cuts, and as the sporting editor bent over them a great light came to him. Their eyes met, and the older man's were full of tears.

He strode back to the editorial rooms.

"Chester!" he called, and the city editor looked up. "We've got the man's name, and, by heavens, it's more than a scoop for us!"

Brahms, the Composer.

For everything fresh, simple and genuine Brahms had the heartiest love. He is said to have always carried candy in his pocket for the children he knew, and a lady described in a letter how she had seen him on the hotel piazza on all fours clambered over by his young playmates. He was on cordial terms with waiters and servants and told Mr. Henschel with emotion the story of a serving maid who lost her position in order to shield a careless postman, who, being married, could not afford to lose his.

Another pretty story, showing at once his modesty and his catholicity of taste, recounts how all the musical friends of the daughter of Johann Strauss, the great waltz composer, were writing their names, with phrases from their works, in her album. When it was his turn, the composer of the German requiem wrote the opening phrase of the "Blue Danube" waltz and underneath it the words, "Not, I regret to say, by your devoted friend, Johannes Brahms." So wholesome and unaffected was the character of this great man.—Outlook.

A Queer Living.

"The man with the strangest occupation I ever met," said a man who recently returned from abroad, "was a young fellow in Paris. He made his living by giving birthday parties. He did not make a good living, it is true, but he kept body and soul together.

"He would invite a number of friends to come up to spend the evening with him in honor of his birthday. He was poor, but a good musician. They had a pleasant time, and then some one would suggest a drink. The host was poor, he explained, but he would go for the drink. On each trip he made he held out a small sum. This supported him for a day or two until he could pick up more friends and have another party."

ONE TRIP AND—ANOTHER...

By MARIE ALICE PHILLIPS

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The importunate cabbies and bustling porters failed to attract the attention of Frank Ryals except so far as a nervous person would notice mosquitoes or flies. He brushed them away without so much as a look as he passed down the long pier. With bent head and quickening footsteps he walked, unheeding and unnoticed, through the sweat and turmoil of the city to his home. As he rang the bell his hand shook and the muscles of his throat tightened.

The faithful butler, who had been valet to Frank Ryals before his marriage, held the door open and inquired solicitously if "Mis' Ryals" got off safe and sound.

The reply came after a pause, "Yes, Brown, thank you," but the white, drawn look of his beloved master's face repelled further inquiry, and the butler retired to the kitchen, there to unbosom himself to Cynthia.

"It's my opinion Marse Frank is mighty cut up 'bout Mis' Bess goin' off to Europe 'ithout no warnin' hardly at all."

Cynthia sniffed.

"And her a bride of jes' three months," continued the indignant Brown. "It's my opinion she don't care much about 'im, and 'im the best and jolliest man that ever lived." Brown was growing more aggrieved every minute.

"Gus Brown, would you have a 'oman tied to a man's coattails always jes' 'cause she happens to be married to 'im?" And Cynthia set the pan down sharply on the table.

"I don't expect much of women folks at no time," replied Brown stoutly, injecting as much scorn into his tones as he thought safe, "but I didn't much expect a young bride to go off so cheerful-like and leave her husband for six months on a stretch."

Cynthia turned sharply and looked into the face of the worthy butler. "Did you say six months, Gus Brown—six months?"

The faithful Brown could only bow his head in assent, and Cynthia, detecting traces of real grief in his usual woodeny countenance, was too shocked to take much account of the blister made on her hand by the overturned gravy.

Presently Brown put his head in the doorway of the drawing room to announce dinner, but, seeing his master with bowed head and bent shoulders, retired quietly to the kitchen.

Cynthia called Brown "a white livered coward" on his return, which emboldened that functionary to go back and touch his master's elbow.

"I don't care for dinner, Brown, thank you."

"'Thout so much as movin'," Brown confessed to Cynthia as they prepared to do justice to the dinner now almost cold.

* * * * * * *

Letters came across the ocean to Frank Ryals, full of life and vivacity, now brimming over with the joy of some bright experience, now breathing awe and wonder of the grandeur of some old cathedral or mystery of nature, but never once did she say "I miss you, dear," or "I wish I were back at home with you," or "I wonder what you are doing." Frank Ryals searched her letters feverishly for some such expression, but it never came.

Old friends welcomed him back to the club, and occasionally he went to the opera. Dinners at home were scarce and finally ceased altogether. Six months had extended into eight because Mrs. Raine wanted to take her party into Egypt, but now they were coming home.

The man who stood on the pier waiting for the North German Lloyd steamer to cast anchor on a bright April day looked very much like the same Frank Ryals who had stood there eight months before except for a certain air of composure and two little patches of gray hair on his temples that contrasted oddly with his fresh face. He received Bess and her friends cordially and told the latter he had made all arrangements to have them at his home during their short stay in New York.

Everybody talked at once at dinner, there was so much to say and the joy of being once more on American soil was so keen. The company rose, protesting vigorously when their host bade them good evening as he prepared to leave the house.

"We refuse to stay and turn you out of house and home this way. It is atrocious," they said.

"It is my pleasure," was the grave answer, "and you must stay."

Bess for the first time in her life was thoughtful and said little. On the fourth evening after her arrival, when the guests had all departed and the clock was on the stroke of 11, Frank Ryals rose and, taking hat and cane, said good night.

Bess rose also.

"Where are you going, Frank?"

"To the club," he calmly answered.

For a moment she gasped with astonishment. Then pain, anger and wounded vanity chased in quick succession over her mobile face.

"Our first evening together," she managed to say, and, as he still held his hat and looked steadily at her, "Has the club grown so dear to you—that you can't give it up—one evening?"

"One has time to become attached to anything attractive in eight months," he said, "especially if it represents one's boyhood friends and companionship. The boys at the club have been very good to me, and I have come to depend on them. I would choose them in preference to scenery any time, I think," he commented, with a strained smile.

All color and brightness had fled from her face, and as she stood in the firelight, her white evening gown clinging about her, she looked almost pathetic.

"I—would like to know—the worst, Frank. Is it—any other woman?"

"No," he said; "I have never loved but one woman, and when I found it was all a mistake I suffered a great deal, more than you will ever know. But it is all over now. She didn't love me, and I have learned to do without her."

A pause. "We are on an equal footing now, Bess." And he stroked the gray hair on his temples without looking at her. "It is not as much happiness as—as the other way, but there is not so much pain."

Bess had lost all power of speech and was staring at him with eyes almost set in their horror. But he mistook the cause.

"Don't bother your head, Bess, about what the world will say. It need never know. You bear my name, you are the mistress of my home, and you will be free to enjoy your pleasures just as you see fit. You are welcome to all I have."

"Except your love."

"You had that, too, once. How long ago has it been, Bess? It seems years! Good night," he said as she made no answer. "The old servants are here, and you will be perfectly safe."

Still she said nothing, and he went out, closing the vestibule door quietly after him. Bess recovered sufficiently to reach the window in time to see him move down the lighted street toward the club.

"Oh, my God!" she moaned. "What have I done? Have I been dreaming all these months?"

She was awake now, with ten thousand accusing demons contending for the mastery of her soul.

Two months later Mrs. Raine was ushered unceremoniously into Mrs. Ryals' boudoir and found a grave faced young woman bending over the smoldering fire.

"Oh, my dear, I am so fortunate to find you at home!" was her cheery greeting. "I am in the greatest hurry, but I do so want you to join my party to the Yellowstone park tomorrow. It'll be such a glorious trip. I telephoned Mr. Ryals, and the dear, sweet man said he left it entirely with you. Really, my dear, you are to be congratulated— Why, Bess"—

Her hostess had risen and now stood facing her, a grayish pallor spreading over her face.

"Don't speak to me of traveling! I hate the word—the thought of boats and cars and hotels! I want to be left alone—alone!"

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(Continued on page seven.)

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