

UNFAITHFUL TO HIS TRUST

(Continued from page 10)

On entering his office an hour later she found him in a brown study.

"Dearest," he whispered, leading her to a chair, "you should not have exposed yourself to gossiping tongues by coming here."

"But I'll go insane if I stay home brooding. Floyd"—she stopped short and gazed at his troubled face—"they say you have prepared a strong case against my father."

He patted her cheek tenderly.

"I know, dear. They are saying everything they can think of, while I am simply doing my duty. I can't run away."

"But they say your interest results mostly from your own loss," she said, and immediately regretted her speech.

"Eugenia!" he cried. There was an accusing tone of reproach in his voice.

"Is it true?" she inquired, hurt by his tone.

"Would you believe me guilty of such?"

"I'd hate to," she answered, as a strange impulse seized her. "But you could resign."

"Resign—resign!" he repeated, pressing his palm to his forehead. "I couldn't shirk my duty, even if it were my own father. Gene, Gene, don't be a hard task master! I'll find some way to save your father!"

Eugenia felt hurt and militant. Self-preservation swept logic and reason to the winds. She rose from her chair and levelled her chin with his shoulder.

"Your ambition is stronger than your love. And if my father is convicted I shall never speak to you again."

"Gene, Gene!" he cried. She turned her back and hurried from the room.

The following Friday the trial was held and the two men were convicted. Joynes received a ten-year sentence, while the banker, as the result of a strong plea by Floyd, had sentence suspended, with a pardon promised, provided he made restitution. When the verdict was brought in Eugenia uttered a scream and fell backward. Willing hands caught her and assisted her to another room. Her father tottered in shortly after and dropped into a chair. Floyd came in and offered his hand, but she ignored him. He bit his lips in chagrin and left the room. Eugenia saw nothing but her ruined parent, and her one thought was to flee far from the scene.

When the tenseness and excitement of the trial had worn away she began to realize the false position she had taken, as well as the unreasonable demands she had made, but her pride prevented her from taking any steps to bring about a reconciliation. Her father's mind had been poisoned by Joynes, and he was in no mood for sober reflection, which might have changed his views.

As soon as the old banker had put his business affairs in shape he and his daughter started for the south, where he had a bungalow, telling only Dr. Andrews, the family physician, and the housekeeper, of their destination.

Three weeks of exercise with rod and gun among the southern woods were sufficient to restore the rose bloom to Eugenia's cheeks and the lustre to her brown eyes, but they could not erase the past with its painful pleasure. Occasionally while in the woodland, with the joy of living expanding her heart she would delude herself that the past was past; but at twilight, when solitude brought memories with a handsome face hovering near, she knew that she would never forget. And if she required additional proof it came in the form of a newspaper item, which stated that Floyd had broken down under the strain of work and worry. The tears that trickled down her pretty cheeks were concrete evidence of an aching heart. To her father she said nothing.

One bright morning as she was about to start out with her gun she received a letter from Dr. Andrews. The physician wrote that he was sending Floyd down to his bungalow to recuperate, which was a short distance from that occupied by Eugenia, and closed his letter by suggestion that she might be of some service in restoring Floyd to health. With a palpitating heart, she read the letter several times, and then broke the news to her father.

"The best thing we can do is to clear out of here," her father frowned.

"Oh, no, Daddy. No use running away like little children. Much as we have turned against him we must at least credit him with being a gentleman, not likely to intrude. There is no reason for our having to meet him, and perhaps, after all, we have been a bit harsh."

Her father looked at her knowingly and smiled.

"All right, girlie, have it your own way. Women are all alike."

Floyd came into her life again quite unexpectedly. She was seated at the window that afternoon gazing dreamily at the distant valley when she was suddenly startled by seeing him come from behind a row of bushes and make toward the house. Acting on a wild impulse, she ran to the kitchen and instructed the colored

boy to show him to one of the spare rooms.

"Tell him that you have been told to show him to his room and to look after his wants, but don't say anything about father or me."

Her father on being told of her action, simply shrugged his shoulders and said she was becoming too sentimental, but that she could follow her own dictates. She did not share his views, and returned to her room. The colored boy found her there shortly after.

"Miss Genee," the boy grinned, "that man wouldn't come in here when he found out it wasn't the doctor's place. I told him he could have a nice room here, and the other things you said, but he wouldn't come in nohow. He done gave the cook two bits to show him to the doctor's bungalow."

Eugenia sighed and swallowed hard, but the boy's primitive mind divined nothing. Floyd having no knowledge of her presence, could not have declined on her account; nevertheless, she felt hurt and disappointed. Her father, on hearing of it, smiled in a pleased manner.

The following morning, while she stood talking to a neighbor, with whom she had an appointment for a hunting trip, she saw Floyd go down a hill and disappear, closely followed by a guide. Her companion at that moment was paying a compliment to her nymph-like beauty, but his words fell on deaf ears, for her thoughts and eyes were following another's trail. Then, to her companion's surprise, she said she had a headache and postponed the trip.

When Floyd had been at the bungalow two days the colored boy turned in his first report.

"He's sure gettin' to look nicer all the time," the boy grinned. "And he sure am a fine lookin' man. But there's somethin' 'bout him, so sad like, just like he lost his bes' friend. Yesterday he looked at me like I was his father, and asked me if I ever lost anybody I loved more than all the world."

Eugenia colored a deeper red and bit into her lip.

"I done told him, Miss Genee," the boy resumed, "nobody ever let me love him so much, and he kinder laughed."

"How does he spend his time?" she queried.

"He just reads, and dreams, and hunts—just like he was waitin' for judgment day. Once when I went in he was lookin' at the picher of a beautiful lady in white—looks somethin' like you."

Eugenia felt the blood rushing to her temples, and sent the boy on an errand. She heard nothing more of Floyd for two days, but he was never out of her dreams. A hundred times she had pondered over the outcome. Would he, as soon as he had regained his health, leave and end all, or would Providence step in?

While she was lingering over her breakfast the following Monday the boy came in and told her that Floyd's guide had been taken ill, and that he had been sent in search of a substitute. Eugenia stared at Sambo as a wild plan began to take root in her brain.

"You go back, Sambo, and tell him that if he will be at the end of the road that leads to the lake, a guide will be there to meet him in half an hour."

As soon as the boy had gone she disguised herself as a boy in her own guide's clothes, turning the coat collar up so that it would conceal her hair at the back of her head. Then she started out for the lake, nervous and trembling. On reaching the lake she sat down to await his coming, wondering if she would be able to conceal her identity by keeping her back constantly to him and using arm motions to guide him. She knew that she had taken a wild and foolish step, but she had been unable to resist the temptation.

While she pondered over future possibilities she saw a flock of ducks circling over a clump of shrubbery a short distance to her left. The target was a tempting one, and she raised her gun. To her amazement the weapon went off unexpectedly, and the shot lodged in the heart of the shrubbery. As the noise died away she heard a groan, like that coming from a wounded person. Dropping her gun, she dashed toward the shrubbery and came upon the unconscious form of Floyd.

"Floyd, oh, Floyd!" she cried, wringing her hands in anguish as she fell to his side.

As her fingers came in contact with his brow he opened his eyes, and a strange look crept into them, as if he had recognized her. He attempted to speak, but the words died on his lips, his eyes closing involuntarily.

Eugenia, trembling and desperate, looked about wildly for assistance. Two passing hunters gladly offered their aid, and carried Floyd to his bungalow. A doctor was summoned and pronounced Floyd's wounds painful but not dangerous. Eugenia explained the accident, and offered to act as nurse, assisted by her cook.

Left to herself, she questioned the wis-

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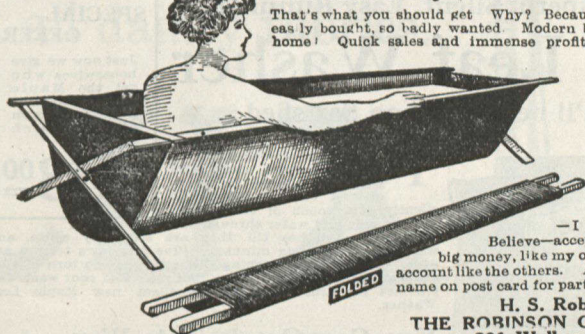
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