



TURNING POINT

By Mary Imlay Taylor

W. N. U. RELEASE



THE STORY THUS FAR: Sherwin reached the unconscious Stenhart, and painfully regained the ledge. He looked down to see the tree which had held his cousin fall into the stream below. The sheriff waited for the two men, then put the handcuffs on Sherwin. Stenhart regained consciousness, and supported by Jim began the descent. "I can't understand it," Stenhart said; "he was going to kill me." Jim reminded him that Sherwin had saved his life. A sharp report came from the thicket and Stenhart crumpled. He had been shot. The posse fired into the bushes and killed the man who fired. It was Jordan! Stenhart was taken to the ranch house and a doctor summoned. The nurse said he was dying.

CHAPTER XI

Shocked and dismayed, Jim hustled his sister into the old hall. Unconsciously he dropped into the chair at his desk. "I wish to heaven the doctor would get here!" he exclaimed roughly.

"He started at once—as soon as I phoned," Jane replied absently, touching the old desk affectionately; she remembered Sherwin there.

Jim, huddled in the chair, ruminated. "Jordan must have got us confused in the storm—he was a crack shot. Poor Max—it was for me and he got it!"

Jane said nothing; her hands were clasped on the desk. The wind swept the door open and drove the rain across the hall. Her brother rose and forced it shut, bolting it. Then he turned on her, at the limit of his patience.

"Good Lord, Jane, haven't you a heart? Max is dying—he loves you! You're—you're a perfect stick, standing there and staring in front of you!"

She looked up and her white face twitched with pain. "I'm sorry for Max, but I'm thinking of the man he sent to—a living death!"

Jim bit his lip. "Look here, Jane, he's a brave man, I acknowledge it, but he's been convicted of a cruel crime; you've got to let him drop!"

"He's not guilty," she said firmly; "I'll never believe him guilty. No guilty man would have done that splendid thing—he saved his accuser!"

"Fine, I grant it. Nevertheless, he goes back to jail for life—you understand that, Jane? For life!"

"Not if there's any way on earth that I can save him!" she cried passionately.

"You!" Jim spoke with brotherly scorn.

"You can help, too, Jim," she went on, not heeding his derision. "Delay them, keep him here—and give him a chance to escape!"

"To what purpose?" Jim asked her dryly. "To be a fugitive always, to hide away somewhere, in South America, perhaps, under a false name, hunted, advertised for, never to know a moment's peace—a condemned murderer! Bah, I'd rather go to jail! There's no capital punishment in his state."

"You've never been in jail!" Jane retorted. "And you—you phoned for Cutler, you know you did!"

"Stenhart—" Jim began, and stopped.

"Oh, I know!" Jane's gesture was eloquent.

Jim, remembering the man suspended between the ledge and eternity, to save his enemy, began to walk up and down the hall. Jane dropped into his vacant chair and laid her head on the desk. She could hear the fury of the wind outside. It grew dusky, too, in the old hall, for the day was passing swiftly; tomorrow—

"I'm sorry, but I can't do a thing!" said Jim hoarsely.

She made no reply. A shiver ran through her; tomorrow he would be on his way east! There is so little in a day—and so much. Then, suddenly, she heard Fanny's voice calling to Jim. Her brother answered hurriedly, went into the sickroom and the door closed behind him.

For the first time Jane was alone. She straightened herself in the old worn chair and looked about her. In the daygloom of the old hall she saw only shadows here and there. A clock ticked loudly over the desk, and it seemed to remind her of the brevity of the span of life. The rain no longer beat with such fury on the window-panes, but the wind shrieked and howled in the distant canyons. Sherwin was in the other building still. The men were there; she could see Jose and Pete Rooney rubbing down their horses in the open door of the stables. She rose cautiously and fled softly down the hall, past Stenhart's closed door; it seemed to her that she heard voices but she did not stop to listen. She opened a little side door that led past the kitchen and ran into the rain. It was falling lightly now; the gray clouds had broken on the distant ranges and the high peaks shone in clear weather. It seemed almost like a promise, this lifting of the clouds, and she called Mac softly.

The old man emerged from his quarters with a long face. "You mustn't get wet, Jane, better run back," he warned.

But she caught at his sleeve with shaking hands. "Mac, I've got to see him!"

MacDowell hesitated. "He's got guards alongside of him, Jane; it ain't no place for you—"

She lifted her blue eyes steadily to his. "Mac, I must see him—it's—" she choked—"it's the last time!"

The old man looked away, swallowing hard. He had known Jane when she was five years old; he hated to see her face now.

"Quick, Mac, I've only got a little while—they may call me back—they think Stenhart's very bad!"

Her hands, on his arm, shook, and he felt them. Reluctantly, he led the way into the long low building; Jane caught a glimpse of the vacqueros at supper and, with them, some men who belonged to Cutler's posse. But Mac got her past them to a door in the end of the room.

There was a moment of delay and then it was opened. Mac had spoken to Cutler and the guard came out and sat down outside the door as Jane went in alone. The little room, with its one tiny window-slit, too small for a man's body to pass through, was dim with the coming of dusk, but she saw the tall man who sat at the little table, a tray of untasted food before him, his head upon his hands. Expecting no one whom he cared to see, he did not even look up and the despair in his attitude went to her heart. She thought of him, as she had seen him, brave and free, going down on that thin rope over the abyss to save his enemy! A proud light shone suddenly in her blue eyes, and she came close to him.

"John!" she said softly. He raised his head and their eyes met. For an instant he seemed dazed, then he rose to his feet. "You've come to me—a prisoner?"

"I saw you," she said; "I'm so proud of you!"

He drew a long breath. "Jane, you did it! I'd vowed to kill him—I'd tracked him like a murderer—I had nothing in my heart but hate. I was waiting to kill him when you came up there, but when I found you cared, your touch drove out the poison—I couldn't do it!"

She looked up proudly. "You didn't know yourself, John, even I didn't know you, for when I saw you there, waiting for him, I thought you'd kill him. But it was never really in your heart, John Sherwin, for you're a brave man—no brave man is a murderer! You've—made good."

He smiled bitterly. "You forget what—I am!"

"No, I remember! Some day it will come right; the truth can't be always hidden. I'll believe in you always!"

Emotion choked him, then, in a broken voice: "It means only misery for you to care; I'm as good as a dead man. Forget me, Jane, be happy!"

"Never," she answered softly. "Always I'll remember—until we meet again!"

He held her hands in a grip that almost hurt them, looking down into her brave eyes.

"You gave up your chance for him—and he's dying, John. Jordan's shot will kill him."

Sherwin was dumb, his head bowed in utter despair.

"Oh, if I could only get you out!" she murmured brokenly, then with sudden hope. "I've thought of a way—there used to be a shuttered window back here—" she ran to the wall, feeling it—"it's here—you're strong—come!" she whispered.

His heart leaped. Liberty! It would not give her to him, but free, he might carve out a destiny, retrieve something yet. His hands actually shook as he followed her guidance. In the darkening room he

could just see the fastenings, old and covered with dust, half papery over. It resisted and he drew his table fork—they had not allowed him a knife—along the crevices. At last he released the shutter, turned it softly and looked out. He faced an open slope and the light from another window streamed across it. Sherwin drew back with a grim smile.

"They've beaten us, Jane!"

A man was sitting there, with his rifle across his knees. The sheriff, having caught a jail-breaker, was taking no chances.

Jane was crying bitterly now, but Sherwin tried to comfort her.

"At best, I'd have been only a hunted fugitive, dear girl; we must part—" He could not go on. Her sobs shook him with an even deeper emotion.

There came a soft knock at the door and old Mac's voice, a bit husky. "Time's up, Jane, an' the doc's here; he says Stenhart's dyin'—they want you!"

"God keep you!" Sherwin said hoarsely; all other words failed.

The girl, blind with tears, stumbled out, old Mac holding her up.

"They're callin' for you, Jane," the old man explained. "I had to come all fired quick. Jim's got th' sheriff an' two others, two that come with th' posse. Teresa's sayin' prayers with two candles in th' kitchen an' Ah Ling's outside, chatterin' something awful in Chinese."

As he spoke he guided the faltering girl on to the veranda and opened the door. A flood of light streamed out. Jim was sitting supinely at his desk, sagged in his chair. Beside him towered the big sheriff, and a deputy was writing something on a paper at the table. Jane, coming in, half dazed and blind with weeping, felt Fanny's arms go around her.

"He's dead, Jane; it's over—Jim, tell her!"

Jim, speechless, made a sign to Cutler. "You do it!"

But the big sheriff had lost his nerve; he only made motions with his lips like chewing. It was Fanny who drew Jane down beside her on a bench by the door.

"He told us before he died, Jane," she said, "and the deposition was taken—he confessed to the murder of his uncle. It was done in the garden; the man who swore that Max was with him at the time was a perjurer, paid by Max. His uncle quarreled with him and told him that he was going to change his will and leave every cent he had to Sherwin. Max broke out, they quarreled violently, and the old man struck him with his cane, as he would a little boy. Infuriated, Max snatched the pruning-knife and struck back without thinking. He killed him! He ran out and hid, saw Sherwin come, and the scheme to save himself and get the money leaped into his crazed brain. He swore to a lie to save himself; he framed it all up—Sherwin was utterly innocent!"

For a moment Jane neither moved nor spoke. She hid her face in her hands.

"Oh, Fanny, think of all those years!" she gasped at last.

Fanny nodded. "I know! Max used to tell us in his delirium; Teresa heard it, too. I thought it was the worry of the trial—delirium, fever dreams—but old Teresa always believed it!"

Jim, who had not spoken at all, rose suddenly and went out. With him went the sheriff and his deputies. The two girls were alone.

Fanny, trying to still Jane's broken sobs, put her arms about her again.

"He's suffered so much!" Jane said, "and he gave up his chance to escape today to save Max! Think of it, to save the man who had ruined him!"

Fanny touched her softly on the shoulder. "Look up, Jane!"

The girl lifted her head. The door stood open and on the threshold, erect and radiant, stood Sherwin.

(THE END)

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AROUND THE HOUSE

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Tie a simple bow-knot in your hose with the nozzle protruding upward. Support it on a block, and presto, you have an improvised sprinkler head.

Heat or water rings on a tabletop sometimes are only in the surface wax and may be removed with a little polishing. However, if they go deeper, remove the shellac with alcohol and apply a resin varnish.

Place a piece of waxed paper under the centerpiece you have on your fine table. Prevents stains from water and keeps cloth from sticking fast in hot weather.

When you go swimming and there's no dressing-room available daub the windows of your car with a paste of kitchen cleaning powder and water and dress in the car. A damp cloth and box of cleanser are little trouble to take with you, and windows can easily be cleaned afterward with a soft dry cloth.

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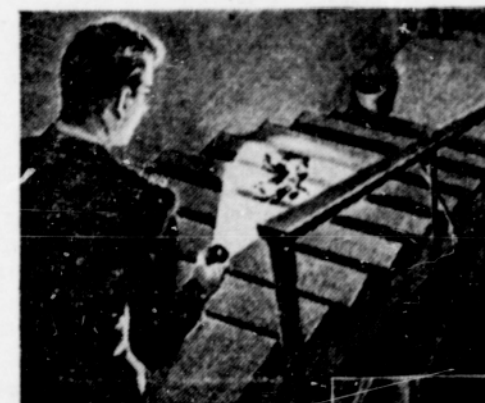


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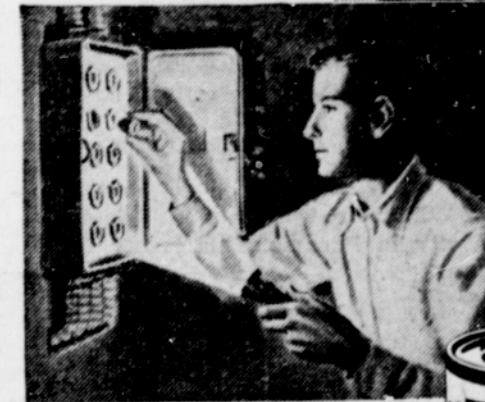


What you can't see CAN hurt you—says the National Safety Council

1 About 5,000,000 Americans are injured every year at home—33,500 fatally! Largest single cause: falling. To avoid shin-catching obstructions and other lethal "booby traps," carry your "Eveready" flashlight in dark areas.



2 Be sure all obstacles are cleared away. Linoleum or carpeting should be tacked down firmly. In attic or basement, pack all loose objects in nonflammable boxes stored against the walls. Don't rely on your knowledge of where obstacles are located—the next person may not have that knowledge. Moreover—



3 Know in advance where your fuse box, main water and gas valves, etc., are located; have a clear path to them. Armed with your "Eveready" flashlight, you can approach without fumbling in an emergency. Be sure loose wires are out of your way.

4 Keep your "Eveready" flashlight always in the same convenient place—so you won't be tempted to do without it because it can't be located. Keep it filled with "Eveready" batteries—they're again available at your dealer's. "Eveready" batteries are the largest-selling flashlight batteries in all the world!

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