

THE ROOT OF EVIL

BY THOMAS DIXON



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"Think she took a fancy to me, how?"

"Nonsense, Nan," he said, with annoyance. "She couldn't have seen you. I didn't know she was here until she kissed her father."

"Perhaps my eyes are keener than yours."

The captain of the district brushed past the line of police into the open space and sprang into his automobile. He waved his hand to his chauffeur. His gesture was mistaken by a pair of keen, restless eyes for a command to his reserves to disperse the crowd.

A pale, shabby young fellow leaped past the line of police into the open space and rushed straight for the reserves. His long, thin arm was lifted high in the air clutching a black thing with a lighted fuse sparkling from its end.

A murmur rippled through the crowd. The police stood still and stared, and the next moment the bomb exploded in the boy's hand, and his body lay on the stones a mangled heap of torn flesh and blood-soaked rags.

The police charged the crowd and clubbed them without mercy. The people fled in confusion in every direction, and in five minutes the square was cleared.

Stuart had hurried Nan to her car and rushed back to the scene of the tragedy. He readily passed the lines of the police, who recognized him as the district attorney.

The doctor reached the spot and Harriet was holding the dying boy's head in her lap.

Stuart bent over her curiously and slowly asked:

"You were not afraid to rush up here with your father and take that poor mangled thing in your arms?"

"Of course not," she replied simply. "Papa says he's dying—nothing can be done for him. They've sent for an ambulance."

The doctor pressed Stuart's arm and spoke in low tones:

"I've made some big mistakes in my life, boy. I'm just beginning to see them. I've read a new message in the flutter of this poor fellow's pulse. I'll not be slow to heed it."

When the doctor reached home the face of the dying boy haunted him. He began to fear his struggle with Bivens in his long drawn and fiercely contested lawsuit was an act of the same essential quality of blind physical violence. He began to see that the real motive back of his struggle was hatred of the man—this little counter-jumper who had destroyed his business. It was the irony of such a fate that sank its poisoned dagger into his heart. He faced the fact at last without flinching. He rose and paced the floor of his library for a half hour with measured tread. He stopped suddenly and clinched his big fists instinctively.

"I do hate him—with undying, everlasting hatred, and I pray God to give me greater strength to hate him more!"

He rose with sudden determination. He would not surrender. He would fight it out with this little swarthy scoundrel, win or lose. His house was mortgaged; the last dollar of his savings he had spent in helping others, and the money set aside to finish Harriet's course in music had been lost in the panic. He would fight it out somehow and win. But the one thing that must not fail was the perfection of his girl's value. The court of appeals would certainly render its decision before her next term's work would begin. She could rest during the summer. It would do her good. If he could be firm with his tenants and collect his room rents promptly from every one, the income from his house was still sufficient to pay the interest on the mortgage and give him a little to eat. It would be enough. Food for the soul was more important. He resolved to ask Stuart to collect his rents.

He looked up and Harriet stood at his side.

"What have you been crying about?" he asked anxiously.

"Oh, nothing much," was the low answer. "I really don't know—perhaps the thing that makes the birds out there in the square chirp while the snow is still on the ground, the feeling that spring is coming."

"You're keeping something from me, dearest," he whispered, slipping his arm about her waist. "Tell me."

"You really believe in my voice, don't you?" she asked slowly.

"Believe in it? Do I believe in God?"

"Could I go abroad right away and finish my work there?"

She asked the question with such

painful intensity, the father looked up with a start.

"Why do you wish to go now, child?" he asked.

"I've a confession to make, papa, dear. I'm in love, desperately and hopelessly."

A sob caught her voice, and the father's arms drew her to his heart and held her.

"But why hopelessly, my baby?" he asked. "Your hair is beaten gold, your eyes are deep and true, your slender little form has all the symmetry and beauty of a slyph. You are young, radiant, glorious, and your voice the angels would envy."

"But the man I love doesn't realize all that yet, papa, dear. He is bound by the memories of the past to a woman he once loved, a woman who is evil at heart, and though she betrayed him for the lust of money is determined to hold him still her slave. But she shall not. I'll fight for him! And you'll help me, papa, won't you?"

The father drew her close.

"Won't I—just wait and see! But you haven't told me his name? I've been very blind, I fear."

"You've never guessed?"

She lifted her face to his in surprise.

"No."

"Jim."

"Our Jim Stuart?"

She nodded. Her voice wouldn't work.

"Oh, I see, I see!" the father mused. "The first love of a child's heart grows slowly into the great passion of life."

Again the little head nodded.

"You understand now why I wish to get away, to finish my work abroad. I'll be nearer to him with the ocean between us. He'll miss me then. I feel it, know it. When I return he will be proud of my voice. I shall go mad if I stay here and see him dangling at that woman's heels. I shall sing when he hears me as I never sang before, and I shall say to him then all the unspoken things I dare not put in speech."

The father kissed the trembling lips and answered firmly:

"I'll raise the money for you right away."

And then for half an hour she lay in his arms while he whispered beautiful thoughts of her future. When he sent her to bed he had kissed the last tear away.

"And now I've got to surrender," he said to himself.

CHAPTER XIV. The Unbidden Guest.

THE bitter reference to Bivens and the crime of his corner in wheat had roused Nan's fighting blood. She would accept the challenge of this rabble and show her contempt for its opinions in a way that could not be mistaken. She determined to give an entertainment whose magnificence would startle the social world and be her defiant answer to the critics of her husband. At the same time it would serve the double purpose of dazzling and charming the imagination of Stuart. She would by a single dash of power end his indecision as to Bivens' offer and bind with stronger cords the tie that held him to her.

Her suggestion was received with enthusiasm by her husband.

"All right," he said excitedly, "beat the record. Give them something to talk about the rest of their lives. I don't mean those poor fools in Union square. Their raving is pathetic. I mean the big bugs who think they own the earth, the people who think that we are new comers and that this island was built for their accommodation. Give them a knock out."

Nan spared no expenditure of time, money and thought to the perfection of her plans. She employed a corps of trained artists, took them to her home, told them what she wished and they worked with enthusiasm to eclipse in splendor New York's record of lavish entertainments—but always with the reservation which she had imposed that nothing be done that might violate the canons of beauty and good taste.

The long dreamed night came, and her guests had begun to arrive. One was hurrying there to whom no engraved invitation had been sent, and yet his coming was the one big event of the evening, the one thing that would make the night memorable.

The confession of love for Stuart which Harriet had sobbed out in her father's arms had been the last straw that broke the backbone of his fight against Bivens. In a burst of generous feeling he made up his mind to eat his pride, drive from his mind every bitter impulse and forget that

he had ever hated this man or been wronged by him. He could see now that he had neglected his little girl in the fight he had been making for other people and that her very life might be at stake in the struggle she was making for the man she loved.

Bivens had once offered to buy his business. He had afterward made him a generous offer to compromise his suit. He had never doubted for a moment that a compromise would be accepted the moment he should see fit to give up.

He instructed his lawyer to withdraw the appeal before the day fixed for filing the papers. The lawyer raved and pleaded in vain. The doctor was firm. He wrote Bivens a generous personal letter in which he asked that the past be forgotten and that he appoint a meeting at which they could arrange the terms of a final friendly settlement.

The act had lifted a load from his heart. The sum he would receive, if but half Bivens' original offer, would be sufficient to keep him in comfort, complete his daughter's course in music and give him something with which to continue his daily ministry to the friendless and the lowly. It was all he asked of the world now.

He wondered in his new enthusiasm why he had kept up this bitter feud for the enforcement of his rights by law when there were so many more urgent and important things in life to do.

He waited four days for an answer to his letter and receiving none wrote again. In the meantime the day for final action on his appeal had passed and his suit was legally ended. On the last day his lawyer pleaded with him for an hour to file the appeal suit and then compromise at his leisure. The doctor merely smiled quietly and repeated his decision:

"I'm done fighting. I've something else to do."

When Bivens failed to reply to his second letter he made up his mind to see him personally. He was sure the letter had been turned over to a lawyer and the financier had never seen it. He called at Bivens' office three times and always met the same answer:

"Mr. Bivens is engaged for every hour today. You must call again."

On the fourth day, when he had stayed until time for closing the office, a secretary informed him that Mr. Bivens was too busy with matters of great importance to take up any new business of any kind for a month and that he had given the most positive orders to that effect to all his men. If he would return the first of next month he would see what could be done.

The doctor left in disgust. He determined to break through this ceremonial nonsense, see Bivens face to face and settle the affair at once.

When he should see him personally it would be but a question of five minutes friendly talk and the matter would be ended. Now that he recalled little traits of Bivens' character he didn't seem such a scoundrel after all. Just the average money man who could see but one side of life. He would remind him in a friendly way of their early association and the help he had given him at an hour of his life when he needed it most. He wouldn't cringe or plead. He would state the whole situation frankly and truthfully and with dignity propose a settlement.

It was just at this moment that the



"Mr. Bivens is engaged for every hour today."

doctor learned of the preparations for the dinner and ball at the Bivens palace on the Riverside drive. The solution of the whole problem flashed through his mind in an instant. They would have professional singers without a doubt, the great operatic stars and others. If Harriet could only be placed on the program for a single song it would be settled. Her voice would sweep Bivens off his feet and charm the brilliant throng of guests. He would have to accompany her there, of course. At the right moment he would make himself known. A word with Bivens and it would be settled.

He lost no time in finding out the manager of the professional singers for the evening and through Harriet's enthusiastic music teachers arranged for her appearance. From the moment this was accomplished his natural optimism returned. His success was sure. He gave his time with renewed energy to his work among the poor.

On the day of the ball Harriet was waiting in a fever of impatience for his

return from the hospital to dress. At half past 7 their dinner was cold and he had not come. It was 8 o'clock before his familiar footstep echoed through the hall.

He ate a hasty meal, dressed in thirty minutes and at 9 o'clock led Harriet to the side entrance of Bivens' great house on the drive.

He was in fine spirits. He rejoiced again that he had made up his mind to live the life of faith and good fellowship with all men, including the little swarthy master of the palace he was about to enter. And so with light heart he stepped through the door which the soft white hand of death opened. How could he know?

As Stuart dressed for Nan's party he brooded over his new relation to his old sweetheart with increasing pleasure. Never had Bivens' offer seemed more generous and wonderful. His pulse beat with quickened stroke as he felt the new sense of power with which he would look out on the world as a possible millionaire.

He gazed over the old square with a feeling of regret at the thought of leaving it. He had grown to love the place in the past years of loneliness, but was deciding too soon, perhaps. There were some features of Bivens' business he must understand more clearly before he could give up his freedom and devote himself body and soul to the task of money making as his associate.

He went across the square to take a cab at the Brevoort. His mood was buoyant. He was looking out on life once more through rose tinted glasses. At Eighth street he met at right angles the swarming thousands hurrying across town from their work—heavy looking men who tramped with tired step, striking the pavements dully with their nailed shoes, tired, anxious women, frowzy headed little girls, and eyed boys, half awake—all hurrying, the fear of want and the horror of charity in their silent faces. And yet the sight touched no responsive chord of sympathy in Stuart's heart as it often had. As he drove uptown the avenue flashed with swift, silent automobiles and blooded horses. These uptown crowds through whose rushing streams he passed were all well dressed and carried bundles of candy, flowers and toys.

Stuart felt the contagious enthusiasm of thousands of prosperous men and women whose lives at the moment flowed about and enveloped his own.

What was it that made the difference between the squalid atmosphere below Fourth street and the glowing, flashing, radiant, jeweled world uptown? Money! It meant purple and fine linen, delicacies of food and drink, pulsing machines that could make a mile a minute, the mountain and the sea, freedom from care, fear, drudgery and slavery!

After all in this modern passion for money might there not be something deeper than mere greed, perhaps the regenerating power of the spirit pressing man upward? Certainly he could see only the bright side of it tonight.

As his cab swung into Riverside drive from Seventy-second street the sight which greeted him was one of startling splendor. Bivens' yacht lay at anchor in the river just in front of his house. She was festooned with electric lights from the water line to the top of her towering steel masts.

The illumination of the exterior of the Bivens house was remarkable. The stone and iron fence surrounding the block, which had been built at a cost of a hundred thousand dollars, was literally ablaze with lights. The house was illumined from its foundations to the top of each towering minaret with ruby colored lights.

Stuart passed up the grand stairs through a row of gorgeous funkies and greeted his hostess.

Nan grasped his hand with a smile of joy.

"You are to lead me in to dinner, Jim, at the stroke of 8."

"I'll not forget," Stuart answered, his face flushing with surprise at the unexpected honor.

"Call wishes to see you at once. You will find him in the library."

Bivens met him at the door.

"Ah, there you are!" he cried cordially. "Come back downstairs with me. I want you to see some people as they come in tonight. I've a lot of funny things to tell you about them."

The house was crowded with an army of servants, attendants, musicians, singers, entertainers and reporters.

The doctor had been recognized by one of the butlers whom he had befriended on his arrival from the Old World. The grateful fellow had gone out of the way to make him at home, and in his enthusiasm had put an alcove which opened off the ball room at his and Harriet's disposal. The doctor was elated at this evidence of Bivens' good feeling and again congratulated himself on his common sense in coming.

Bivens led Stuart to a position near the grand stairway, from which he could greet his guests as they returned from their formal presentation to the hostess.

He kept up a running fire of biographical comment which amused Stuart beyond measure. It was a revelation of the crooked ways in which Bivens' guests or their fathers or grandfathers had amassed their millions, many of them by robbing the government, the people.

"The world has never heard most of these stories—that's funny!" Stuart exclaimed after a time.

"Not so funny, Jim, when you think of the power of money to make the world forget. God only knows how many fortunes in America had their origin in thefts from the nation during the civil war, and the systematic

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