

THE MILL ON THE HILL

BY F. R. P. DASHON
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SYNOPSIS: Damaris Ellwood, a young Englishwoman, resolves to hide her identity and live for a time among the employees of her large cotton mills in order that she may learn to understand the working people and appreciate the trials they are forced to undergo. She is an orphan, and has for companions at her home an uncle, Joseph Ellwood, and Mrs. Mitchinson, a chaperon. There is a close understanding between the uncle and the chaperon, and while they openly oppose the girl's plans, it is evident that they are not averse to her losing herself for a time. Before she goes, however, there is a mysterious burglary, the evident intent of which is to secure some secret family papers which have been closely guarded since the death of Miss Ellwood's father.

(CONTINUED FROM LAST SUNDAY.)

CHAPTER XII

The Eve of a New Life

EVERYTHING connected with her approaching departure Damaris was aware that she betrayed quite a feverish impatience, so that she could not help wondering sometimes whether to others as well as to herself her haste seemed to partake of the nature of a flight. Yet it was flight, the anticipation of it brought to her a sensation of intense relief at the idea that she was cutting herself off entirely from all chance of ever again meeting Clifford Brown—at least, until he was safely in the custody of the police.

Of her late adventure she said very little. To her uncle, indeed, and to Mrs. Mitchinson, in both of whom she placed such trust, she told nearly everything—nearly, but not quite—and to the private detective, Oatie, she told as much as she thought it was advisable for him to know. But the rest of the world knew little more than that some obscure attack had been made upon Miss Ellwood's chaperon, and an unsuccessful attempt made to rob her herself, which attempt had very nearly resulted in the assassin's capture.

Of the two men who had appeared on the scene with such threatening vagueness—the old, white-haired man, the big man with the blue-eyes—no one heard much. It was even suggested that they were comparatively harmless rascals, who only happened to be on the spot by accident. This was a view that both Mr. Ellwood and Mrs. Mitchinson strongly implied to see that Damaris implied, she observed to Oatie, during an interview with him before her departure, that this man Clifford Brown, or whatever his real name may be, just simply took advantage of the presence of two tramps for his own purposes.

"But then," said Oatie thoughtfully, "what were his own purposes, miss? As I understood it, he just saw you home; he made no attempt to take your purse or your watch, miss?"

"No, no," said Damaris, hurriedly, and furious with herself to find the blood rising in her cheeks.

She rose to her feet quickly and went toward the window. Her heart beat so violently that she felt as if she were suffocating, and she reflected with relief that this man would never find her out in her new life as a mill girl, while when she returned from that experiment surely she would be in custody. In any case, she would soon be free of him, and without turning round she said over her shoulder:

"Well, one hardly needs to ask the purpose of a man one finds trying to open one's safe in the middle of the night."

"Ah! but there's this lock, miss," said Oatie. Damaris moved impatiently. Then she came back from the window and sat down again.

"Ah, yes," she said, "what do you think can have been on that safe?"

"The paper you—er—swallowed, miss?" Damaris nodded.

"I could have given anything for just one peep," she said. "I want to see what it was. You couldn't risk losing it. If I knew what was in it, miss, I dare say everything would be explained."

"Well, no one will ever know now," observed Damaris, "no one. Oh, Mr. Oatie, did I tell you going on a morning tour in France for three months?"

"Why, miss?" he exclaimed, startled; "and leave me all of it just now?"

Damaris did not answer. It was precisely "just now" that she was anxious to leave "all of it," but she had no intention of explaining her departure to the detective.

"But, miss," he said again, doubtfully, "supposing while you are away we happen to lay hands on this Clifford Brown?"

"Then let him be prosecuted," she returned quickly.

"Of course, if my evidence is required, I will return. Well," she added, seeing how Oatie looked at her, "what are you staring like that for, miss?"

"But it's peculiar about that lock, miss," he protested uneasily, "and it's just possible—"

"Oh, anything is always possible in this world, I suppose," interrupted Damaris impatiently, "but the paper in the lock is destroyed, and no one can ever know what was on it. That seems to settle everything, doesn't it? And, anyhow, theft and burglary remain theft and burglary, I suppose. The man is nothing to me, but people who choose to behave like that must take the consequences."

"You would mean prison—penal servitude," muttered Oatie, uneasily, "and your father, miss, he did say he would never be able to hear again the thought of—"

"You forget yourself, Mr. Oatie," said Damaris, with a severe look. "I am as good a judge of what is right and fitting as you, I think. Do you wish me to consider you impertinent?"

"I only said what I thought I ought to say, miss," muttered Oatie sulkily.

"I do not employ you to say things to me," returned Damaris sternly. "If you presume so far again, I shall have to part from you. She paused to let her words sink into the unlicky Oatie, who was looking sufficiently uncomfortable at the thought of losing by far his best client. "You understand that your business is simply to find this man and place him in the hands of the police?"

"And I'll do my best to do it, miss," said Oatie, in a voice that had in it just a suggestion of a threat. "But I want to let you know anything while you are away, miss, how shall I manage?"

"Oh, through Mr. Ellwood," answered Damaris; "he will know where I am. And if I should wish to communicate with you, I will send you a telegram in the key, of course. But I am going away for the sake of peace and quietness, and I do not wish to hear anything that is not of the very first importance."

"I'll remember, miss," said Oatie, and went away wondering.

"She does seem to have taken a terrible dislike to this young man," he mused; "a pity, too; for it's honest enough motives, who knows? Of course, it isn't very likely for honest folk don't go burgling, when we know so little ourselves. But an offer of a bit of reward might have good results. It's a pity she so dead set against him she won't hear of offering rewards for anything but catching him. It's astonishing awkward she should have taken such a dislike to him, regular case of hate at first sight, I tell you," said Mr. Oatie, with a sigh, as he made his way back to the railway station.

He had not been gone many minutes when Mr. Ellwood tapped at the study door and entered.

"My dear Damaris," he said, "I have seen and made the usual arrangements with him. He will meet the train at Broadmoor as arranged, and will introduce you there as his daughter Polly. Of course, he has no idea



"Declined the twopence she offered him on the ground that no doubt she wanted it more than he did."

of your actual identity; to him you are just a young lady in hiding to avoid a distasteful marriage. All the inquiries I have made show that Frears is a most respectable man, and his daughter, with whom you will live, Lizzie Frears, seems a most trustworthy person. I understand she has already put down your name as Polly Frears, of course, for the next loom there is to let at the mill where she works herself. I have made inquiries about this mill, for you must be careful not to attempt too much. But it seems very suitable and they do a very good class of work. For example, they do not size too heavily. A 10 per cent is about their limit, they say, and that makes a lot of difference, you know. The air will be very different from that in some of the places where they size up to 200 per cent or so. I am told they only find it necessary to sweep up once a week. The manager seems to have a good reputation, and I inquired particularly about that—in the weaving shed where you will work decent room is allowed between the looms; there is none of that crowding together which is responsible for so many accidents. On the whole, I do not know that there is any place, if you are still bent on carrying out this idea of yours, where you could do it more safely and comfortably."

"Dear uncle," said Damaris, gratefully, "you think of everything."

"I have tried to do so," he said, and he put his hand before his eyes as if there were something that he wished to shut out from his vision.

"I am quite eager to begin," Damaris continued. "I feel as if I were going to start a new life."

"Ah, yes," said Mr. Ellwood, rising abruptly from his chair. "I am sure you will."

She glanced up at him, for something in his tone grated on her ears, but the impression passed.

"And I, too," she remarked, "have asked to think of everything. I have cleared the safe out, for one thing, and sent everything it contained of any value to the bank till I return; so if any burglars come, they will have their labor for their pains."

"Ah, Damaris," said Mr. Ellwood, slowly, his face very pale, "you are more thoughtful than I am; I should not have thought of that."

"I arranged it yesterday," said Damaris, carelessly, turning again to her paper on the desk before her. "I thought it better, as there were some rather important documents I keep in there, so I arranged with the bank that they are only to be given up to me in person."

"Ah, how prudent," he said, and he turned his face to the wall and seemed to swallow something in his throat. "You are very prudent, Damaris."

"Or to my heirs, of course, in case of my death," Damaris added carelessly, beginning to sign some letter. "The bank made me insert that provision to satisfy their scruples."

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Ellwood, with a laugh, "banks have so many scruples, have they not? But this one, I must say, seems rather absurd. Well, Damaris, my dear, during your absence I shall have to try to show myself as thoughtful as you."

"Oh, I am sure you will do that," dear uncle," murmured Damaris, as she hurriedly checked a calculation.

"Who knows? Who knows?" he said in a whisper, and went quickly out of the room.

CHAPTER XIII

On the Edge

MR. ELLWOOD had concealed well enough while he was with Damaris the intense emotion that her words had caused him; she had no idea of the dark fear, of the hurrying despair, or the panic that had gripped him outward like a spear that once again he was enduring. But when he was in his own room and alone he nearly broke down altogether.

"I cannot stand this strain much longer," he muttered; "she puts me on the rack every hour almost. Oh! I cannot stand it much longer. One would think she knew all and did all this to torture me—to show me my helplessness. Well, she may push it too far, then."

He paced his room restlessly, biting at his hands, and now and again muttering to himself. After a time he went out and down into the small drawing room, where, as he expected, he found Mrs. Mitchinson busy with some fancy work.

"Hannah," he said, hoarsely, "it's all up. She's beaten us before it's begun."

"How?" asked Mrs. Mitchinson, matching her silks.

"She has emptied the safe and sent all its contents to the bank," he answered, groaning.

"Ah!" said Mrs. Mitchinson, "our dear Damaris was always so prudent. She is not careless and hasty like some girls. But, surely, if you are in charge of her interests during her absence, as you will be, I suppose, the bank will permit you."

"She has arranged," he said, "for nothing to be given up save to herself in person."

"That is awkward," said Mrs. Mitchinson, "but do not despair. She puts me on the rack every hour almost. Listen," he began, and paused.

"Oh, I am," she said, looking carefully at her silks. "With a gesture of uncontrollable agitation she snatched the work from her and flung it to the ground."

"That gets on my nerves," he said, breathing hard. "But in case of her death, then, of course the bank will give up the documents to her heirs. She told me so herself. What do you think of that?"

"Why, I think that you have spoiled my work," she answered, "and that our dear Damaris is less prudent than I supposed."

He sat looking at her moodily and not offering to help her as she picked up and straightened her work.

"One would think she did all this on purpose," he burst out.

"Oh, hardly that," answered Mrs. Mitchinson, laughing.

"Well," he asked, "what are we to do?"

"We must think about it," she replied, "and we will decide when Damaris is enjoying her morning tour in France."

He got up and walked heavily to and fro in the room.

"It's not my fault," he muttered. He made a gesture with his hands. "I am forced into the position," he declared.

"Go and have a whisky and soda," suggested Mrs. Mitchinson. "Damaris has been eyes; she might see you look upset."

Apparently he thought the advice good, for he nodded and opened the door. Just as he was going out Mrs. Mitchinson observed, casually:

"Oh, by the way, I suppose that you would be Damaris' hair?"

He gave her a frightful look, but did not speak, and in a moment had stepped into the passage and closed the door behind him. With the greatest care, and as if he had no other thought in her mind, Mrs. Mitchinson continued to match her silks, while in the billiard room Mr. Ellwood rang the bell and told the footman who answered it to bring him a whisky and soda. Violent as were the storms of emotion to which at this time he seemed subject, yet he appeared to have the faculty of recovering from them very quickly. When Damaris saw him again a little later on he noticed nothing odd in his behavior.

Almost all the necessary arrangements had been made, and only a few minor details remained to be settled. This day was a Friday; on Saturday some final matters were arranged and some farewell calls paid. Sunday was a quiet day, and on Monday Damaris started in the company of Mr. Mitchinson on what the world in general understood was to be a motor tour in France; on what Damaris herself hoped would be a valuable experience, rendering her most fit for the position in life she held on when Joseph Ellwood and Mrs. Mitchinson, hiding their dark imaginings even from themselves, yet thought might turn out strangely enough, and which of these three beliefs was right, or whether all were right or all were wrong, lay as yet hidden in the dark recesses of the future.

As far as London, where they were to spend the night, Damaris and Mrs. Mitchinson traveled together. But on the Tuesday morning, though they left the hotel together for Charing Cross, yet Mrs. Mitchinson arrived there alone. And Damaris, wearing a cheap ready-made costume she had purchased in Manchester for this occasion, cotton gloves—a detail that pleased her artistic sense of the fitness of things as much as it made her horribly uncomfortable about the handsill-fitting boots that nearly lamed her, and such a hat as in her wildest moments she had never expected to appear in public in, arrived instead at Euston.

She had been booked to Manchester, buying, still impelled by her sense of the fitness of things and her desire to set up to her new character, a third-class ticket; and she discovered with some surprise that there was a much difference between making a journey in a saloon car and in a crowded third-class compartment. This discovery tended to make her thoughtful, though she felt she could have borne it all much better but for those atrocious cotton gloves, which, however, she continued to keep on with the meek endurance of a martyr in a good cause, and—except for the cotton gloves—fairly enjoyable. She found herself also receiving fresh lights on life at every moment, and she much enjoyed observing the changed attitude of the villagers themselves coming to the mill, and the fact that one in a manufacturing country, and the farms that now and again slip in between the conquering mills have somehow a furtive and apologetic air, as if they knew they were only there on sufferance, waiting the moment when they, too, would be absorbed by their rivals. The very cows in the pastures have an air of apologizing for themselves, and even the trees and as if they feel they ought to be doing something more energetic while the stray fields of wheat one sometimes sees appear more like solitary and overlooked survivors rather than serious competitors with the all-conquering cotton that in this whole district reigns so triumphantly.

Broadmoor itself is quite a small village—one calls it a village for lack of a better word, though the suggestion of sylvan peace and quietness that its name implies is far enough removed from its busy commercial activities—and lies in a valley of the moors that stretch all around it for many miles. The mills, large and small, spinning mills, slipper mills, weaving sheds, seem everywhere, some in the valley itself, some perched on the bare, rising slopes that ascend to the moors above. Scattered between them are clusters of little houses that line also the one road which passes through the valley from east to west. Nor is there any place where the triumph of man seems more striking than here where nature has given only a bare, wind-swept countryside, with soil so thin and infertile that it would seem only a starving peasantry would be able to extract from it a scanty subsistence. Yet here man has made a busy hive of industry, and the smoke of his chimneys floats far on the blustering moorland winds; and the silence of the moor, for so many generations unbroken by the roar of the engine and loom, to the continued clatter of machinery, to all the varied activities of twentieth century commerce.

Damaris, looking from the window of her compartment, found herself already surveying the scene with the eyes of one to whom it meant a sphere of work and not merely a great organization for the sole purpose of making money. She found her point of view impressively enlarging, and she discovered herself anticipating with eagerness the moment when she, too, should join in this fight, share this burden, and know what existence meant to those who bore the burden and heat of the day and reaped therefrom so scanty a reward, when she should become herself one of those who hitherto had seemed to her but insignificant cogs in the wheels of the huge machine that by day and by night spun forth for her a reward of "Is it right?" she mused, "so many working for one—is it right?"

And she realized with a shock that she had never before asked that question of herself.

With some impatience she put these thoughts from her, saying to herself that she had come here for facts and not for theories—theories are for the drawing room, which she had left, not for the weaving shed, where she should find intense relief as she reflected that here she was not only escaping from the artificialities of her own life, but also from the strange audacities of that Clifford Brown, who, somehow, had managed to impress his personality so strongly upon her. She had a sense of triumph somehow, though she had baffled him; she felt like one who, pressed by unknown purposes, has at last found a way out.

The train slowed down, and she realized that as last they were approaching Broadmoor itself, that at last she was on the threshold of her new life. As the train entered the station she looked eagerly up and down the platform for those she expected to meet her there, and

Yet the incident remained in her mind, making her vaguely uneasy and uncomfortable, and it was as well for her peace of mind she could not know that though Mrs. Mitchinson had arrived at Charing Cross alone, yet she reached Doyer in the company of a fashionably dressed young lady who introduced herself as Damaris, and to whom she referred as MISS ELLWOOD.

CHAPTER XIV

Lizzie's Welcome

DAMARIS' first concern was how to get her box up to the house, for there did not seem to be either cabs or porters available. But this problem Frears solved in a way that at once showed Damaris how superior in simplicity and effectiveness her new life was to her old. "Oh, aye," he stooped and lifted it up to his shoulder. "Art ready, lass?" he asked.

It set off, Damaris following meekly behind and remembering with wonder that any luggage, however small in quantity, belonging to Miss Ellwood, of the Ellwood Mills, generally required at least three porters and a couple of footmen and a carriage and pair, though it safely on the way. She was a trifle relieved, however, to notice that nobody paid them any attention or appeared to regard this effective method of handling luggage as in any way singular, as Damaris had half feared might be the case.

Just opposite the station was a very large slipper mill, a huge building in red brick. Passing this, they entered the main street of the village, where the handsome co-operative store was faced by a large draper's shop, over the magnificent plate-glass windows of which was inscribed the legend: "John Hart, Broadmoor and Paris."

None of the other shops matched in magnificence either the stores or the establishments of Mr. Hart, of Broadmoor and Paris, and to Damaris it seemed that a disproportionate number of these other shops was devoted to the sale of cooked viands. She was aware of an impression that in Broadmoor the domestic virtues are not much cultivated, and that the culinary and allied arts have comparatively little attention paid them.

A turning from the main road led them into a small street of small houses, all exactly similar. At the very end one there was standing a buxom, middle-aged woman, with a large mouth, a flat nose and reddish hair. She was looking eagerly down the street, and the moment Frears and his companion appeared she came toward them.

"See, Polly, lass," said Frears, turning to Damaris, "this is thee sister, well, Lizzie," he called.

Lizzie came up to them, looking curiously and rather shyly at Damaris, who experienced a sudden twinge of conscience at the deception she was practicing on this rather simple-looking woman. She tried to console herself by reflecting that it was only for three months, and that she would make it up to Lizzie and Polly and all concerned in the most handsome manner.

"So, that's Polly," said Lizzie, surveying her with deep interest. "Eh, I should have known thee anywhere, that it so like thee mother, an' that's like me, too. Coom in, lass, and welcome."

She led the way inside the house. It was one of the ordinary cottages of the district, a kitchen and back kitchen on the ground floor, and two bedrooms above. The kitchen itself looked comfortable enough with a bright fire burning in the grate and a table ready laid for tea on a spotlessly white cloth. The chief article of furniture in the room was a large dresser with glass handles that occupied all the side of one wall, and the top of which was covered by a wonderful collection of china and glass ornaments of all kinds, and other photographs, constituting chiefly either representations of Lizzie's friends or of views of Blackpool. Over the dresser hung two large photographs, one of the Blackpool tower, the other of the Blackpool sands; and others of Blackpool in a storm, of Blackpool promenade, of Blackpool wheel, adorned the mantelpiece. On the wall opposite the window hung two enlargements of photographs, atrociously colored; one being easily recognizable as Mr.



"Reckon any one could see as me, thee an' she wer' all to th' one family!"

who were to be her companions in her new existence. Then on a sudden all faded from her, the day, the place, the people whom she saw waiting the train's arrival, all vanished and were gone; and instead it seemed to her she was back in darkness and loneliness, a strange, adulating man at her side, and distant in the dark night, threatening and sinister, two men searching for them, of whom one was old and white-haired, yet of strong appearance, and the other tall and of singularly powerful build.

It was only for a moment that these faded this delusion, vision, apparition, warning—let it be called what one will. Then the train drew up with a jerk, and Damaris, recalled to herself, remembered where she was and why, yet the impression remained strong on her, and she could not resist a shudder when she saw coming straight toward her, a welcoming smile on his face, a man who seemed old, for his hair and beard were white, and who yet bore himself with signs of undiminished strength.

"Eh, Polly, lass, so thee that's," he said heartily, opening the door of her compartment and holding out his hand to her. "I'm Dick Frears, the chaperon," he added in a whisper, "and you're the young lady as is to pass as my lass, Mr. Ellwood said. Is that all right?"

"Yes, yes," she answered quickly, "but tell me who is the man—that tall man who was standing near you on the platform?"

"Eh?" said Frears, looking round blankly. "I didn't see any one there."

But now that Damaris looked again she could see no sign of any such man. It seemed that he had vanished.

"Why, thou wert dreaming, lass," said Frears, laughing.

Damaris almost thought so, too, for look as she might she could see no sign of the tall man she had seemed to see so plainly only a few moments before.

Frears in his younger days and the other, representing an elderly lady, it was equally easy to guess was the late Mrs. Frears.

"Feyther, take Polly's box up to the front bedroom," said Lizzie, bustling hospitably about. "Why, Polly, lass, what art standing out there for? Coom right in an' welcome."

"Oh, thank you," murmured Damaris, taking a desperate step forward against an odor that seemed to her to overpower her, though there could be room for nothing else in the house. "You—you've been cooking, haven't you?" she murmured faintly.

"Aye," said Lizzie, with some complacency. "Boaters," she added, most unnecessarily, "art a good 'un at th' cooking, Polly."

"Not very," Damaris admitted. "I've never done much."

"Seems to come by natur wi' me," observed Lizzie thoughtfully, "but it don't wi' all, I know. I'm fond of a bloater for tea. Art thou?"

"Oh, yes, very," said Damaris, and Lizzie, who had been cooking, said, "That's rest," said Lizzie heartily; "we'll often have 'em."

Damaris wondered how it was that in her anticipations of her new experiences she had had never thought of blisters.

"There's feyther comin' down," Lizzie continued, as his foot was heard on the stairs. "Me an' thee'll cheer the front room, lass, an' he can ha' back 'un. 'Twill be like owd times, for I've been lonesome since I owd back 'un. Yet I didn't want to sa' down to him. Eh, Polly, lass, but that's fair wonderul like thy mother. She took Damaris by the arm and put her elbow on the atrociously-colored and antiquated sofa. "Dinna thee think so thyself," she asked. "Polly often say as I take after her, too, reckon any one could see as me, thee an' she wer' all to th' one family."

(CONTINUED NEXT SUNDAY.)