

MAFALDA

By John Goodwin

"Why, then," returned the foreman with equal doggedness, "there are three of you against nine; we must try to come to an agreement. For if we don't, there's no verdict."

The foreman consulted his notes, 40 minutes later, and looked around gloomily.

"All agreed then?" he said.

"Agreed," was the reply.

The foreman sighed, and stepping to the wall pressed the electric bell.

The jury entered the court and filed stolidly back to their places, amid a dead hush from the packed audience. The accused had been

brought back into the dock. Jill sat erect and still unveiled.

The clerk put the question.

"Members of the jury, do you find the prisoner Gaete guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty of manslaughter."

There was a sharp intaking of breath on every side.

"Do you find the prisoner Seaton guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty of manslaughter."

"We wish, my lord," said the foreman huskily, "to add the strongest possible recommendation to mercy, and—and we consider that Seaton is

only technically and not morally guilty."

"Prisoners at the bar, have you any reason to give why sentence should not be passed on you?"

Pete said nothing whatever. Jill, for her part, was incapable of speech.

"Pietro Gaete," said the judge, "you have been ably defended, and the jury has found you guilty of this crime. With that verdict I agree; and but for the able manner in which the evidence was collected by the police it might not have been brought home to you. I have to consider also the fact that you made a previous attempt upon the life of Brough. Taking all things into consideration, I sentence you to be kept in penal servitude for the term of nine years."

With scarcely a pause he addressed himself to Pete's fellow prisoner.

"Jill Seaton, the jury has returned a verdict against you upon which I shall make no comment except that it is the only verdict they could return. The sentence of the court is that you be imprisoned for two years."

There was a momentary hush. Jill raised her head; her face was dead white.

"I am innocent," she said quietly. Hailo Pete remained dumb. He stared at the judge with burning, resentful eyes.

There was a touch on Jill's shoulder and she passed down the little flight of stairs in the dock floor.

CHAPTER XXXI

A Visitor

Gareth Pembroke opened the little leaded casement on the left of the garret, and stared across the court at the back windows of Fisher's alley.

"Well, I thought I'd be glad to get back," he said slowly, "but the place is full of ghosts, somehow. Don't you feel it?"

Owen, sitting at the broken drawing table, looked around the garret, his face white and wistful. To Gareth he seemed to have aged 10 years.

"Gareth," he said, "do places change when things go wrong? This old room where we've had such good times is all altered now. Jill—my poor Jill!"

He buried his face in his hands.

"The infernal cruelty of it! By some odd chance that innocent little soul is dragged through all the beastliness and degradation of the criminal court. The sharpest brains of the day are brought against her. A vast machine is set in motion to break a girl who has never known guilt of any sort; just a little, harmless, good girl who has asked no

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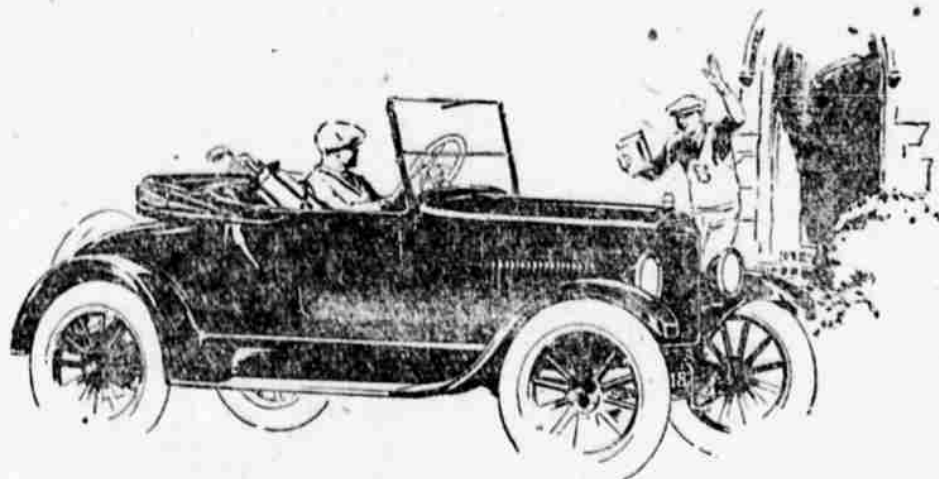
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little of life—and received that! It is a mad, blundering world!" Gareth was silent. What could he say?

"What can we do, Owen?" Owen's face was white and set.

"Do? Why, do what we can to help her—there may be a way yet! And while we're searching for it and hoping, stick to what we have held to all the time," said Owen. "Stick to what this garret stands for—an ideal! It's the ideal that is true all the time, Gareth, and stronger in the long run than all circumstance. Circumstances has so far been too strong for Jill and for us."

"Jill has been condemned on purely circumstantial evidence. She has

paid for the faults of those about her. If Maffie had not been faulty, this business would never have come into her life at all. If Brough had not been a scoundrel, it could not have happened. If John Brough had not been a money getter, a man whose only ideals were wealth and power, he would not have bred a son like Tatham Brough. The burden of the sins of the guilty will always be car-

ried by the innocent. But for the innocent there is always a day of resurrection, and on the day of her

resurrection I shall be at the iron gates waiting for Jill!" (To be continued)

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