



# The THIRD DEGREE

A NARRATIVE OF METROPOLITAN LIFE

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ILLUSTRATIONS BY RAY WALTERS

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### SYNOPSIS.

Howard Jeffries, banker's son, under the evil influence of Robert Underwood, fellow-student at Yale, leads a life of dissipation, marries the daughter of a gambler who died in prison, and is disowned by his father. He is out of work and in desperate straits. Underwood, who had once been engaged to Howard's step-mother, Alicia, is apparently in prosperous circumstances. Taking advantage of his intimacy with Alicia, he becomes a sort of social highwayman. Discovering his true character, Alicia denounces him to her father. He sends her a note threatening suicide. Art dealers for whom he acted as commissioner, demand an accounting. He cannot make good. Howard calls at his apartments in an intoxicating condition to request a loan of \$2,000 to enable him to take up a business proposition. Howard drinks himself into a maudlin condition, and goes to sleep on a divan. A caller is announced and Underwood draws a screen around the drunken sleeper. Alicia enters. She demands a promise from Underwood that he will not take his life. He refuses unless she will renew her patronage. This she refuses, and takes her leave. Underwood kills himself. The report of the pistol awakes Howard. He finds Underwood dead. Howard is turned over to the police. Capt. Clinton, notorious for his brutal treatment of prisoners, puts Howard through the third degree, and finally gets an alleged confession from the harassed man. Annie, Howard's wife, declares her belief in her husband's innocence, and calls on Jeffries. He refuses to help unless she will consent to a divorce. To save Howard she consents, but when she finds that the elder Jeffries does not intend to stand by his son, except financially, she seizes his help. Annie appeals to Judge Brewster, attorney for Jeffries. He, to take Howard's case, he declines. It is reported that Annie is going on the stage. The banker and his wife call on Judge Brewster to find some way to prevent it. Annie again pleads with Brewster to defend Howard. He consents.

### CHAPTER XVI.—Continued.

"Ah! I begin to understand. You knew Robert Underwood! Howard knows your voice—he heard you—talking to him—Oh, Mrs. Jeffries! Are you the woman who visited his apartments that night?"

The banker's wife bowed her head and collapsed on a chair.

"Yes," she murmured in a low tone. Annie looked at her in amazement.

"Why didn't you come forward at once?" she cried. "Think of the pain which you might have spared us!"

Alicia covered her face with her handkerchief. She was crying now.

"The disgrace—the disgrace!" she moaned.

"Disgrace!" echoed Annie, stupefied. Indignantly, she went on: "Disgrace—to you? But what of me and Howard?"

"Can't you realize what it means to be associated with such a crime?" she wailed.

"Disgrace!" cried Annie contemptuously. "What is disgrace when a human life is at stake?"

"It seemed so useless," moaned Alicia—"a useless sacrifice in the face of Howard's confession. Of course—if I'd known—if I'd suspected what you tell me—I'd have come forward and told everything—no matter at what cost." Tearfully she added: "Surely you realize the position it puts me in?"

A new light shone in Annie's eyes. What was this woman's misery to her? Her duty was to the poor fellow who was counting the hours until she could set him free. His stepmother deserved no mercy. Utterly selfish, devoid of a spark of humanity, she would have left them both to perish in order to protect herself from shame and ridicule. Her face was set and determined as she said calmly: "It must be done now."

"Yes," murmured Alicia in a low tone that sounded like a sob, "it must be done now! Oh, if I'd only done it before—if I'd only told Mr. Jeffries the whole truth! You speak of Howard's sufferings. If he didn't do it, he has at least the consciousness of his own innocence, but I—the constant fear of being found out is worse than any hell the imagination can conjure up. I dreaded it—I dread it now—it means disgrace—social ostracism—my husband must know—the whole world will know."

Annie was not listening. Still bewildered, she gazed with the utmost astonishment at her companion. To think that this mysterious woman they had been seeking was Howard's stepmother.

"So you're the missing witness we have all been hunting for!" she said; "I can't believe it even now. How did it happen?"

"He and I were once engaged. I broke it off when I found him out. After I married Mr. Jeffries I met Underwood again. Foolishly, I allowed the old intimacy to be renewed. He took advantage and preyed on my friends. I forbade him my house. He wrote me a letter in which he threatened to kill himself. I was afraid he meant it—I wanted to prevent him. I went to his rooms that night. I didn't tell Mr. Jeffries. When the truth is known and I acknowledge that I visited this man—can you see what it means?—what a fuss there'll be. Everybody will put the worst construction on it—"

"Trust them for that!" said Annie grimly. She was sorry for the woman's distress, yet, being only human, she felt a certain sense of satisfaction

In seeing her suffer a little of what she had been made to suffer.

"They'll say that I—God knows what they'll say!" went on Alicia distractedly. "My husband will be dragged through the mire of another public scandal—his social prestige will—oh, I dare not think of it—I know—my duty is to that unfortunate boy. I mustn't think of myself."

"Have you the letter that Mr. Underwood wrote you?" demanded her companion.

"Yes—I've never been able to destroy it. I don't know why I kept it, but thank God I have it!" Moaning, she went on:

"The disgrace!—the disgrace!—it's ruin—degradation! It's the end of everything!—the end of everything!"

Annie regarded with contempt this poor, weak, wailing creature who lacked the moral courage to do what was merely right. Her voice was not unkind as she said:

"I don't want to disgrace you—or ruin you. But what am I to do—tell me, what am I to do?"

"I don't know," moaned her companion helplessly.

"Howard must be saved."

"Yes."

"Will you tell Judge Brewster or shall I?"

"Judge Brewster? Why should he know?" cried Alicia, startled. More composedly and as if resigned to the inevitable, she went on: "Yes, I suppose he must know sooner or later, but, I—"

She broke down again and burst into tears. Annie watched her in silence.

"It's tough—isn't it?" she said sympathetically.

"Yes," sobbed Alicia through her tears, "it's—it's tough!" Rising, she dried her eyes and said hastily: "Don't say anything now. Give me a few hours. Then I can think what is best to be done."

Annie was about to reply when the office door suddenly opened and Judge Brewster entered. Addressing Alicia, he said:

"Pardon me, Mrs. Jeffries, I hope I haven't kept you waiting." Noticing her agitation and traces of tears, he

The clerk retired and the banker, completely ignoring the presence of his daughter-in-law, turned to his wife and said:

"I regret, my dear, that you should be subjected to these family annoyances."

Judge Brewster came forward and cleared his throat as if preliminary to something important he had to say. Addressing the banker, he said boldly:

"Mr. Jeffries, I have decided to undertake Howard's defense."

His aristocratic client was taken completely by surprise. For a moment he could say nothing, but stammered at the lawyer as if unable to believe his ears. With an effort, he at last exclaimed:

"Indeed!—then you will please consider our business relations to have ceased from this moment."

The lawyer bowed.

"As you please," he said suavely. The banker turned to his wife.

"Alicia—come."

He offered his arm and turned toward the door. Alicia, in distress, looked back at Annie, who nodded reassuringly to her. Judge Brewster rose and, going to the door, opened it. The banker bowed stiffly and said:

"Pray don't trouble. Good morning, sir."

As Alicia followed her husband out, she turned and whispered to Annie: "Come and see me at my home."

When she had disappeared the judge came back into the room and sat down at his desk.

"Well, that's done!" he exclaimed with a sigh of relief. Rummaging for a moment among his papers, he looked up and said with an encouraging smile:

"Now, if you please, we will go over that evidence—bit by bit."

### CHAPTER XVII.

The news that Judge Brewster would appear for the defendant at the approaching trial of Howard Jeffries went through the town like wildfire, and caused an immediate revival in the public interest, which was beginning to slacken for want of hourly



Each Was Absorbed in His Own Thoughts.

looked surprised. He made no comment but turned to Annie:

"I have been talking to Dr. Bernstein over the phone."

Annie approached him softly and said in a whisper:

"I've told Mrs. Jeffries that you have undertaken Howard's defense."

Judge Brewster smiled at his wealthy client, almost apologetically, Annie thought. Then addressing her, he said:

"Yes, I've been quite busy since I saw you. I have put three of the best detectives we have on the trail of the woman who visited Underwood that night. I don't think the police have been trying very hard to find her. They're satisfied with Howard's confession. But we want her and we'll get her—"

"Oh!" gasped Alicia.

The judge was proceeding to tell of other steps he had taken when the door opened and the head clerk entered, followed by Mr. Jeffries.

"I told Mr. Jeffries that Mrs. Jeffries was here," said the clerk.

"You might have told him that there were two Mrs. Jeffries here," laughed the judge.

stimulation. Rumor said that there had been a complete reconciliation in the Jeffries family, that the banker was now convinced of his son's innocence, and was determined to spend a fortune, if necessary, to save him. This and other reports of similar nature were all untrue, but the judge let them pass without contradiction. They were harmless, he chuckled, and if anything, helped Howard's cause.

Meantime he himself had not been idle. When once he made up his mind to do a thing he was not content with half measures. Night and day he worked on the case, preparing evidence, seeing witnesses and experts, until he had gradually built up a bulwark of defense which the police would find difficult to tear down. Yet he was not wholly reassured as to the outcome until Annie, the day following the interview in his office, informed him breathlessly that she had found the mysterious woman.

The judge was duly elated; now it was plain sailing, indeed! There had always been the possibility that Howard's confession to the police was true, that he had really killed Underwood. But now they had found the

one important witness, the mysterious woman who was in the apartment a few minutes before the shooting and who was in possession of a letter in which Underwood declared his intention of shooting himself, doubt was no longer possible. Acquittal was a foregone conclusion. So pleased was the judge at Annie's find that he did not insist on knowing the woman's name. He saw that Annie preferred, for some reason, not to give it—even to her legal adviser—and he let her have her way, exacting only that the woman should be produced the instant he needed her. The young woman readily assented. Of course, there remained the "confession," but that had been obtained unfairly, illegally, fraudulently. The next important step was to arrange a meeting at the judge's house at which Dr. Bernstein, the hypnotic expert, would be present and to which should be invited both Capt. Clinton and Howard's father. In front of all these witnesses the judge would accuse the police captain of browbeating his prisoner into making an untrue confession. Perhaps the captain could be argued into admitting the possibility of a mistake having been made. If, further, he could be convinced of the existence of documentary evidence showing that Underwood really committed suicide he might be willing to recede from his position in order to protect himself. At any rate it was worth trying. The judge insisted, also, that to this meeting the mysterious woman witness should also come, to be produced at such a moment as the lawyer might consider opportune. Annie merely demanded a few hours' time so she could make the appointment and soon returned with a solemn promise that the woman would attend the meeting and come forward at whatever moment called upon.

Three evenings later there was an impressive gathering at Judge Brewster's residence. In the handsomely appointed library on the second floor were seated Dr. Bernstein, Mr. Jeffries and the judge. Each was absorbed in his own thoughts. Dr. Bernstein was puffing at a big black cigar; the banker stared vacantly into space. The judge, at his desk, examined some legal papers. Not a word was spoken. They seemed to be waiting for a fourth man who had not yet arrived. Presently Judge Brewster looked up and said:

"Gentlemen, I expect Capt. Clinton in a few minutes, and the matter will be placed before you."

Mr. Jeffries frowned. It was great ly against his wish that he had been dragged to this conference. Peevishly, he said:

"I've no wish to be present at the meeting. You know that and yet you sent for me."

Judge Brewster looked up at him quickly and said quietly yet decisively:

"Mr. Jeffries, it is absolutely necessary that you be present when I tell Capt. Clinton that he has either willfully or ignorantly forced your son to confess to having committed a crime of which I am persuaded he is absolutely innocent."

The banker shrugged his shoulders "If I can be of service, of course I—I am only too glad—but what can I say—what can I do?"

"Nothing," replied the judge curtly. "But the moral effect of your presence is invaluable." More amiably he went on: "Believe me, Jeffries, I wouldn't have taken this step unless I was absolutely sure of my position. I have been informed that Underwood committed suicide, and to-night evidence confirming this statement is to be placed in my hands. The woman who paid him that mysterious visit just before his death has promised to come here and tell us what she knows. Now if Capt. Clinton can be got to admit the possibility of his being mistaken it means that your son will be free in a few days."

"Who has given you this information?" demanded the banker skeptically.

"Howard's wife," answered the judge quietly. The banker started and the lawyer went on: "She knows who the woman is, and has promised to bring her here to-night with documentary proof of Underwood's suicide."

"You are depending on her?" he sneered.

"Why not?" demanded the judge. "She has more at stake than any of us. She has worked day and night on this case. It was she who aroused Dr. Bernstein's interest and persuaded him to collect the evidence against Capt. Clinton."

The banker frowned.

"She is the cause of the whole miserable business," he growled.

The door opened and the butler, entering, handed his master a card.

"Ah!" ejaculated the judge. "Here's our man! Show him up."

When the servant had disappeared Mr. Jeffries turned to his host. With a show of irritation he said:

"I think you put too much faith in that woman, but you'll find out—you'll find out."

Judge Brewster smiled.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Unique Indorsement of Check. Perhaps the greatest curiosity the Bank of England possesses is a note of £1,000, the sum Lord Cochrane paid as a fine for his connection with a fraud on the public, with which he really had nothing to do. He indorsed the note thus: "My health having suffered by long and close confinement and my oppressors having resolved to deprive me of property or life, I submit to robbery to protect myself from murder, in the hope that I shall live to bring the delinquents to justice—Cochrane." He wrote from the grated chamber of King's Bench prison.

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