

The Destroying Angel

By LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

THE PAUL OF FLAME THE BRONZE BELL THE BLACK DAG THE BRASS BOW

A FAMOUS neurologist said recently in a lecture: "We don't give our patients much medicine any more. We give them something to think about. If we can make a man put his thoughts on something constructive and shift the focus of his mind from his bodily ills, we can give him a good start on the road to health." And this is the big idea out of which the story of "The Destroying Angel" is woven. If any of our readers need to get their minds entirely off themselves and their troubles, they will find in this new serial an uncommonly strong magnet. For Louis Joseph Vance, you know, never wrote a tiresome yarn. He keeps your mind electrified and your interest eager from start to finish.

CHAPTER I

"Then I'm to understand there's no hope for me?"

"I'm afraid not..." Greyerson said reluctantly, sympathy in his eyes.

"None whatever." The verdict was thus brusquely emphasized by Hartt, one of the two consulting specialists.

Having spoken, he glanced at his watch, then at the face of his colleague, Bushnell, who contented himself with a tolerant wriggle of his head, apparently meant to imply that the subject of their deliberations really must be reasonable.

Whitaker looked quickly from one to the other of his three judges, acutely sensitive to the dread significance to be detected in the expression of each.

Falling to extract the least glimmering of hope from the attitude of any one of them, he drew a long breath, unconsciously bracing himself in his chair.

"It's funny," he said with his nervous smile—"hard to realize, I mean. You see, I feel so fit—"

"Between attacks," Hartt interjected quickly.

"Yes," Whitaker had to admit, dashed.

"Attacks," said Bushnell, heavily, "recurrent at intervals constantly more brief, each a trifle more severe than its predecessor."

Evidently Bushnell considered the last word his prerogative.

There was a brief uneasy silence in the gloomy consulting room. Then Whitaker rose.

"Well, how long will you give me?" he asked in a strained voice.

"Six months," said Greyerson, miserably avoiding his eye.

"Three," Hartt corrected jerkily.

"Perhaps..." The proprietor of the last word stroked his chin with a contemplative air.

"Thanks," said Whitaker, without irony. He stood for an instant with



"Well, How Long Will You Give Me?"

his head bowed in thought. "What a damned outrage," he observed thoughtfully. And suddenly he turned and flung out of the room.

Greyerson jumped to follow him, but paused as he heard the crash of the street door. He turned with a twitching, apologetic smile.

"Poor devil!" he said, sitting down

at his desk and fishing a box of cigars from one of the drawers.

"Married?" Hartt inquired.

"No. That's the only mitigating circumstance," said Greyerson, distributing glasses. "He's quite alone in the world, as far as I know—no near relatives, at least. He's junior partner in a young law firm downtown—senior a friend or classmate of his, I understand: Drummond & Whitaker. Moves with the right sort of people. Young Stark—Peter Stark—is his closet friend."

Hugh Whitaker stood for a long time—how long he never knew—bareheaded on a corner, just as he had left Greyerson's office: scowling at nothing, considering the enormity of the wrong that had been put upon him. Later, realizing that people were staring, he clapped on his hat to satisfy them and strode aimlessly down Sixth Avenue.

He turned across town toward Fifth Avenue, came to his club, and went in. Passing through the office, force of habit swung his gaze to the letter-rack. There was a square white envelope in the W pigeonhole, and it proved to be addressed to him. He knew the handwriting very well—too well; his heart gave a great jump as he recognized it, and then sank like a stone; for not only must he die, but he must give up the girl he loved, and had planned to marry. The first thing he meant to do was to write to her and explain and release her from her promise. The next thing...

He refused to let the idea of the next step form in his mind. But he knew very well what it would be. In the backwards of his understanding it lurked—a gray, grisly, shameful shadow.

The elevator kept him waiting a moment or two, just round the corner from the grill-room door, whence came a sound of voices talking and laughing. Whitaker heard what was being said without, at first, comprehending—heard and afterwards remembered in vivid detail.

"Seems to be the open season for runaways," Hamilton was saying. "It's only a few days since Thurlow Ladislus' daughter—what's her name?—Mary—took the bit between her teeth and bolted with the old man's chauffeur."

Somebody asked: "How far did they get before old Ladislus caught up?"

"He didn't give chase. He's not that kind. If he was put to it, old Thurlow could play the unforgiving parent in a melodrama without any make-up whatever."

"He's just like that," said Hamilton. "Remember his other daughter, Grace, eloping with young Pettit a few years ago? Old Ladislus had a down on Pettit—who's a decent enough kid, notwithstanding—so Grace was promptly disowned, and they've no hope of ever touching a penny of the Ladislus coin."

"But what became of them—Mary and the stoker-person?"

"Nobody knows, except possibly themselves."

"What's she like, this Mary-quite-contrary?" inquired George Brenton's voice.

"Oh, nothing but a kid," said little Fiske.

"Not over eighteen."

The elevator was waiting by this time, but Whitaker paused an instant before taking it, chiefly because the sound of his own name, uttered by Hamilton, had roused him out of the abstraction in which he had overheard the preceding conversation.

"Anyhow, I'm sorry for Hugh Whitaker. He's going to take this hard, mighty hard."

George Brenton asked, as if surprised: "What? I didn't know he was interested in that quarter."

"You must be blind. Alice Carstairs has had him going for a year. Everybody thought she was only waiting for him to make some big money—he as much as anybody, I fancy."

Brenton added the last straw. "That's tough," he said soberly. "Whitaker's a white man, and Alice Carstairs didn't deserve him. But I wouldn't blame any man for feeling cut-up to be thrown over for an out-and-out rotter like Percy Grimshaw."

Whitaker heard no more. At the first mention of the name of Alice Carstairs he had snatched her letter from his pocket and was reading. Nobody will ever know just what Alice Carstairs saw fit to write to Hugh Whitaker. The blood ebbed from his face and left it ghastly, and when he had torn the paper to shreds and let them flutter about his feet, he swayed perceptibly—so much so that one of the pages took alarm and jumped to his side.

"Beg pardon, Mr. Whitaker—did you call me?"

Whitaker steadied himself and stared until he recognized the boy. "No," he said thickly, "but I want you. Give me a bar order."

The boy produced the printed form and Whitaker hastily scribbled his order on it. "Bring that up to the library," he said, "and be quick about it."

He stumbled into the elevator, and presently found himself in the library. There was no one else about, and Whitaker was as glad of that as it was in him to be glad of anything just then. He dropped heavily into a big armchair and waited, his brain whirling and seething, his nerves on edge and screeching. In this state Peter Stark found him.

Peter sauntered into the room with a manner elaborately careless. Beneath that mask he was anything but indifferent, just as his appearance was anything but fortuitous. Moreover, Peter had already heard about Alice Carstairs and Percy Grimshaw.

"Hel-lo" he said, contriving by mere accident to catch sight of Whitaker, who was almost invisible in the big chair with its back to the body of the room. "What you doing up here, Hugh? What's up?"

"It's all up," said Whitaker, trying to pull himself together. "Everything's up!"

"Don't believe it," said Stark, coolly. "My feet are on the ground; but you look as if you'd seen a ghost."

"I have—my own," said Whitaker. The page now stood beside him with a tray. "Open it," he told the boy, indicating a half-bottle of champagne; and then to Peter: "I'm having a bath. Won't you jump in?"

Peter whistled, watching the wine cream over the brandy in the long glass. "King's peg, eh?" he said, with a lift of disapproving eyebrows. "Here, boy, bring me some Scotch and plain water for common people."

The boy disappeared as Whitaker lifted his glass.

"I'm not waiting," he said bluntly. "I need this now."

"I hope," Peter said thoughtfully, "that the man who started that lie about drink making a fellow forget the death of a dog. He deserved to, anyway." He stopped at Whitaker's side and dropped a hand on his shoulder. "Hugh," he said, "you're one of the best. Don't..."

Whatever he had meant to say, he left unfinished because of the return of the page with his Scotch; but he had said enough to let Whitaker understand that he knew about the Carstairs affair.

"That's all right," said Whitaker; "I'm not going to make a fool of myself, but I am in a pretty bad way. Boy—"

"Hold on!" Peter interrupted. "You're not going to order another? What you've had is enough to galvanize a corpse."

"Barring the negligible difference of a few minutes or months, that's me," returned Whitaker.

"I'd like to know what you mean by that," Peter remarked, obviously worried. "What's the matter with you?"

"Ask Greyerson. I can't remember the name—it's too long—and I couldn't pronounce it if I did."

Peter's eyes narrowed. "What foolishness has Greyerson been putting into your head?" he demanded. "I've a good mind to go punch his—"

"It isn't his fault," Whitaker asserted. "It's my own—or rather, it's something in the nature of a posthumous gift from my progenitors; several of 'em died of it, and now it seems I must. Greyerson says so, at least, and when I didn't believe him he called in Hartt and Bushnell to hold my ante-mortem. They made it unanimous. If I'm uncommonly lucky I may live to see next Thanksgiving."

"You can't make me believe that," Peter insisted. "It just can't be so. A man like you, who's always lived clean... Why, look at your athletic record! I won't believe it!"

His big, red, generous fist described a large and inconclusive gesture of violence.

"Well," he growled finally, "grant all this—which I don't, not for one little minute—what do you mean to do?"

"I don't mind telling you," said

Whitaker: "I don't know. Wish I did. At the same time, I've got to do something—get away somewhere."

Abrupt inspiration sparked the imagination of Peter Stark, and he began to sputter with enthusiasm.

"I've got it!" he cried, jumping to his feet. "A sea trip's just the thing. Chances are, it'll turn the trick—bring you round all right-O, and prove what



"You Look as if You'd Seen a Ghost."

asses doctors are. I can have the Adventures put in commission within three days. We'll try that South Seas thing we've talked about so long. What d'you say?"

A warm light glowed in Whitaker's sunken eyes. He nodded slowly.

Just suppose now that in Whitaker's battered mind the seed thought of suicide has started to swell and sprout—do you believe that the anticipation of a sea trip will kill the seed? There's a hint in this question.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

IF MASKS WERE TAKEN OFF

Would People Be Any Happier If They Should Say to One Another Exactly What They Thought?

Do you suppose the time ever will come when all men and women are sincere and will say to one another exactly what they think? And do you suppose the world really would be any happier in such a time? Would the old man whose days are nearly spent be any happier if he knew precisely what the younger folk think about him? Would the young woman walking in pride on the street or loling in her limousine be happier if she could read the thoughts of those she meets? Would the callers be happier if they knew what was said about them when they left—if, instead of a kiss and a "Come again, dear," there were a blow and "I hope you will never come again"? Would the people themselves who look an admiration they do not feel and speak compliments they do not mean be any happier if all were known?—From the Columbus Dispatch.

Sweet Girl Graduate.

A very clever girl had one of the principal graduation prizes, and her friends crowded around her at the close of the exercises to congratulate her.

"My, but you must have been awfully afraid you wouldn't get it, Grace," said one of her friends, "when there were so many contestants."

"Scared," cheerily answered Grace, "not on your life. I knew I could put it all over them on most of the subjects, and when it came to English grammar and composition I had 'em skinned a mile."

Excessive Neutrality.

Some are born neutral, others achieve neutrality, and still others have it thrust upon them. The Englishman born in Roumania, who arrived in New York with a German wife on a Spanish ship and took out naturalization papers from Uncle Sam, declined to be interviewed on the war on the ground of neutrality for all three reasons.

Not a Thief.

Man who broke into the house while the owner was away and took nothing but a shave could scarcely be called a thief, because he went out with less than he came in with.

Harm in Nonsense.

It usually takes a lot of common sense to get a man out of the trouble a little nonsense gets him into.

NOT ALL NARROW

Skirts of Comfortable Width Seen Despite Season's Edict.

Women Learning to Express Individuality in Dress Instead of Blindly Following "The Style."

Women are learning more and more to express individuality in their dress and to select styles that are individually becoming rather than to seek and accept what is bulletined as "the style."

Early this season fashion announcements stated that skirts were to be longer and narrower.

This is true. Skirts that are longer and narrower than for several seasons are shown, and they have had the formal approval of fashion. But it also is true that very short skirts are worn, and that skirts of comfortable width are seen as often as are the tight, semihobble effects. All this means inspiration for style designers. If a uniform width or length is accept-



Skirt of Comfortable Width.

ed the designers have little encouragement to go ahead with new and different things, says the Washington Star.

The clever little afternoon frock here shown, which may be made of satin or velvet combined with either chiffon, georgette or net, corrects any belief that all skirts are to be extremely narrow. This has a comfortable width—two and a quarter to two and a half yards. The touch of fur gives a pretty finishing touch, and altogether it has an excellent model for dressy afternoon wear.

In this fabric combination an excellent suggestion for making over a last season dress is found.

EASY FOR HOME MILLINER

Wide Range in New Fashions Brings Joy to Heart of the Woman Who Makes Her Own Hats.

Even before the war inspired sensible economy in the matter of dress many women had acquired the habit of making their own hats, and the hat styles shown this winter should certainly inspire home talent, says a fashion authority.

Generous leeway in style rulings makes "becomingness" practically the one rule to be followed, and great individuality may thus be expressed in one's millinery without breaking one of Dame Fashion's rules.

A hat must be becoming and it must be comfortable. With these rules obeyed the home milliner may allow her fancy full sway.

All black hats are very good style because they really go well with anything; but colors are not at all taboo—in fact, quite the contrary. Few stiff-looking hats are shown, and this also is a point in favor of the home milliner.

Empire Effects for Small Tots.

For the little tots, empire effects continue to prevail for "best" and everyday wear. In this range there are velvets and velveteens or lustrous broadcloths in subdued wintry shades for the most part, though now and then a gleam of brass, canary, fawn or military khaki divert one from the rest.