

THE DESTROYING ANGEL

By LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

SYNOPSIS.

Young Hugh Whitaker's doctors tell him he has but a few months to live, and his sweetheart bids him. His friend, Peter Stark, finds him disconsolate and proposes a sea voyage.

Can you imagine a more tragic figure than a young girl deserted in a ratty hotel by the man with whom she eloped, and given notice that her people have cast her out of their lives and she must shift for herself? One little maiden in such a plight thought there were but two courses ahead for her. One was dishonorable. So she emptied a little black bottle into a glass of water and—well what happens is told in this installment with dramatic effect.

CHAPTER II

"Mrs. Morten."

It was three in the morning before Peter Stark, having to the best of his endurance and judgment tired Whitaker out with talking, took his hat and his departure from Whitaker's bachelor rooms. Whitaker shut the hall door and turned back wearily into his living-room. It was three in the morning; his body ached with fatigue, yet he made no move toward his bedchamber.

Picking his way across a floor littered with atlases, charts, maps and guide-books, he went to the bathroom and took a bottle of chloral from the medicine closet.

What he took brought him three hours of oblivion. He rose at eight, ordered his breakfast up by telephone, bathed and dressed. When the tray came up, his mail came with it. Among others there was one letter in which he read:

Dear Hugh: I can call you that, now, because you're Peter's dearest friend and therefore mine, and the proof of that is that I'm telling you first of all of our great happiness. Peter and I found out that we loved one another only yesterday, so we're going to be married the first of June and . . ."

Whitaker read no more. He could guess the rest, and for the moment he felt too sick a man to go through to the end. Indeed, the words were blurring and running together beneath his gaze.

After a long time he put the letter aside, absent-mindedly swallowed a cup of lukewarm coffee and rose from an otherwise untasted meal.

"That settles that, of course," he said quietly. "And it means I've got to hustle to get ahead of Peter."

Whitaker packed a hand-bag with a few essentials, not forgetting the bottle of chloral. He was not yet quite sure what he meant to do after he had definitely put himself out of Peter Stark's sphere of influence, but he hadn't much doubt that the drug was destined to play a most important part in the ultimate solution, and would as readily have thought of leaving it behind as of going without a toothbrush or railway fare.

Leaving the bag in the parcels-room at the Grand Central Station, he went down-town to his office. Happily his partner, Drummond, was out of town for the day. He worked expeditiously, having no callers until just before he was ready to leave. Then he was obliged to admit one who desired to make a settlement. He took Whitaker's receipt for the payment in cash, leaving behind him fifteen one-hundred-dollar notes. Whitaker drew his personal check for the right amount and left it with a memorandum under the paper-weight on Drummond's desk; put a match to a shredded pile of personal correspondence in the fireplace; and caught a train at the Grand Central at one-three.

Not until the cars were in motion did he experience any sense of security from Peter Stark. He had been apprehensive until that moment of some unforeseen move on the part of his friend; Peter was capable of wide but sure casts of intuition on occasion, especially where his affections were touched. But now Whitaker felt free, free to abandon himself to meditative despair. Cold horror crawled in his brain like a delirium—horror of himself, of his morbid flesh, of that moribund body unfit to sheathe the clean fire of life.

At about four o'clock the train stopped to drop the dining-car. Wholly swayed by blind impulse, Whitaker got up, took his hand-bag and left the car.

On the station platform he found himself pelted by a pouring rain. He imprisoned himself in the body of an aged and decrepit four-wheeler, and as they rocked and crawled away, the lead windows wept unceasingly, and

unceasingly the rain drummed the long roll on the roof.

In time they stopped before a rambling structure whose weather-boarded facade, white with flaking paint, bore the legend: "Commercial House." Whitaker carried his hand-bag up the steps and across the rain-swept veranda into a dim, cavernous hall. A cubicle fenced off in one corner formed the office proper. Whitaker waited by the desk, a gaunt, weary man, haggard by fear. There was in his mind a desolate picture of the room up-stairs when he—his soul—the imperishable essence of himself—should have finished with it. . . .

At his elbow lay the hotel register, open at a page neatly headed with a date in red ink. Whitaker registered; but two-thirds of his name was all he entered; when it came to "Whitaker," his pen paused and passed on to write "Philadelphia" in the residence column.

The thought came to him that he must be careful to obliterate all laundry marks on his clothing.

In his own good time the clerk appeared. His welcome was an indifferent nod and a glance at the register which seemed unaccountably to moderate his apathy.

"Mr. Morton—uh?" he inquired. Whitaker nodded without words.

The youth shrugged and scrawled a hieroglyph after the name. "Here, Sammy," he said to the boy—"Forty-three." To Whitaker he addressed the further remark: "Trunks?"

"No."

The youth seemed about to expostulate, but checked when Whitaker placed one of his hundred-dollar notes on the counter.

"I think that'll cover my liability," he said with a significance misinterpreted by the other.

"I ain't got enough change—"

"That's all right; I'm in no hurry."

Her eyes met his with a look of negation clouded by fear and bewilderment. Then she turned her head away. Dragging a pillow beneath it, he let her down again.

"Good," he said in accents meant to be enheartening; "you'll be all right in a moment or two."

Her colorless lips moved in a whisper he had to bend close to distinguish.

"Please . . ."

"Yes?"

"Please don't . . . call anybody. . ."

"I won't. Don't worry."

The lids quivered down over her eyes, and her mouth was wrung with anguish. He stared, perplexed. He wanted to go away quickly, but couldn't gain his own consent to do so. She was in no condition to be left alone, this delicate and fragile child, defenceless and beset. A strange girl, to find in a plight like hers, he thought; not pretty, but quite unusual; delicate, sensitive, high-strung, bred to the finer things of life—this last was self-evident in the fine simplicity of her severely plain attire.

A variety of impressions crowded upon his perceptions in little more than a glance. For suddenly Nature took her in hand; she twisted upon her side, as if to escape his regard, and covered her face, her palms muffling deep tearing sobs while waves of pent-up misery racked her slender little body.

Whitaker moved softly away. . . .

Once, pausing by the centre-table, he happened to look down. He saw a little heap of the hotel writing-paper, together with envelopes, a pen, a bottle of ink. Three of the envelopes were sealed and superscribed, and two were stamped. The unstamped letter was addressed to the Proprietor of the Commercial House.

Of the others, one was directed to a Mr. C. W. Morton in care of another person at a number on lower Sixth Avenue, New York; and from this Whitaker began to understand the singular manner of his introduction to the wrong room; there's no great difference between Morton and Morten, especially when written carelessly.

But the third letter caused his eyes to widen considerably. It bore the name of Thurlo Ladislav, Esq., and a Wall Street address.

Whitaker's mouth shaped a still-born whistle. He was re-calling with surprising distinctness the fragment of dialogue he had overheard at his club the previous afternoon.

CHAPTER III.

Mrs. Whitaker.

He lived through a long, bad quarter hour, his own tensed nerves twanging in sympathy with the girl's sobbing—like telegraph wires singing in a gale—his mind busy with many thoughts, strangely new and compelling, wearing a fresh complexion that lacked altogether the coloring of self-interest.

couldn't hear. He swore softly with exasperation, threw his hat to a chair and dropped to his knees beside the woman. It seemed as if the high gods were hardly playing fair, to throw a fainting woman on his hands just then, at a time when he was all preoccupied with his own absorbing tragedy.

Even while this thought was running through his mind, he was gathering the slight young body into his arms; and he found it really astonishingly easy to rise and bear her to the bed. Then turning to his hand-bag, he opened it and produced a small, leather-bound flask of brandy; a little of which would go far toward shattering her syncope, he fancied.

It did, in fact; a few drops between her half-parted lips, and she came to with disconcerting rapidity, opening dazed eyes in the middle of a spasm of coughing. He stepped back, stopping the flask.

"That's better," he said pleasantly. "Now lie still while I fetch you a drink of water."

As he turned to the washstand his foot struck the tumbler she had dropped. He stopped short, frowning down at the great, staring, wet, yellow stain on the dingy and threadbare carpet. Together with this discovery he got a whiff of an acrid-sweet effluvia that spelled "Oxalic Acid—Poison" as unmistakably as did the druggist's label on the empty packet on the washstand.

In another moment he was back at the bedside with a clean glass of water, which he offered to the girl's lips, passing his arm beneath her shoulders and lifting her head so that she might drink.

She emptied the glass thirstily. "Look here," he said almost roughly under the lash of this new fear—"you didn't really drink any of that stuff, did you?"

Her eyes met his with a look of negation clouded by fear and bewilderment. Then she turned her head away. Dragging a pillow beneath it, he let her down again.

"Good," he said in accents meant to be enheartening; "you'll be all right in a moment or two."

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He mixed a weak draught of brandy and water and returned to the bedside. She made an effort to rise. The effect was quickly apparent in the color that came into her cheeks, faint but warm. After a moment she asked:

"Please—who are you?"

"My name is Whitaker," he said—"Hugh Morten Whitaker. I didn't want to be known, so registered as Hugh Morten. They mistook me for your husband."

The girl swung to her feet. "I want to tell you something." She faced him bravely, though he refused the challenge of her tormented eyes. "Won't you listen?"

He crossed to a window, where he stood staring out. "I'd rather not," he said softly, "but if you prefer—"

"I do prefer," said the voice behind him. "I'm Mary Ladislav."

"Yes," said Whitaker.

"I . . . I ran away from home last week—five days ago—to get married to our chauffeur, Charles Morton . . ."

She stammered.

"Please don't go on, if it hurts," he begged without looking around.

"I've got to—I've got to get it over with. . . . We were at Southampton, at my father's summer home—I mean, that's where I ran away from. He—Charles—drove me over to Greenport and I took the ferry there and came here to wait for him. He went to New York in the car, promising to join me here as soon as possible. . . ."

"And he didn't come," Whitaker wound up for her, when she faltered. "How much money of yours did he take with him?"

There was a brief pause of astonishment. "What do you know about that?" she demanded.

"I know a good deal about that type of man," he said grimly.

What will Whitaker do with this frail girl on his hands? What would you do in such circumstances?

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

MAMMOTH LOAVES OF BREAD

Those Baked by French People Are From Four to Five, or at Times Even Six Feet in Length.

The biggest loaves of bread baked to be eaten are those made in France and Italy. In the case of the pipe bread of the latter country, the loaves are between two and three feet in length, and occasionally even longer; while the French people make their loaves in the shape of very long rolls of bread, ranging from four to five feet, and in a few instances even to six feet in length.

Bread in Paris is distributed almost exclusively by women. These go to the various bakehouses at 5:30 a. m. and spend about an hour brushing the long loaves with special brushes. When their loaf is cleaned of grit and dust the portouse de pain goes round to the customers.

Customers who live in flats have their loaves propped up against the door of their apartment. Shopkeepers, restaurateurs and other customers, who have entrances to their premises in the street, find their portion of the staff of life leaning against the front door when they take down the shutters. The wages of these bread carriers vary from 50 to 60 cents a day, their work being generally over at ten or twelve o'clock in the morning.

Tests of Patriotism.

Two million of boys, averaging but nineteen years of age, went into the Civil war to save the Union. And if you had asked them what the Union was few could have given a better answer than that it was the thing they were fighting for, an idea not to be expressed in words symbolized by a few stripes and stars.

Has there ever been a time when we did not stand the test? The time when the American spirit came nearest to falling was 150 years ago when New York would not join in signing the Declaration of Independence and Rhode Island refused so long to ratify the Constitution. And when I read New York or Rhode Island papers criticizing some of our western states for lacking spirit because they are not yet convinced that we need military training for our boys, I just turn back to the old school history and ask a few disagreeable questions about the past.—Franklin K. Lane, Secretary of the Interior.

Great Food Value of Bananas.

One acre planted to bananas is said to produce as much food value as 40 acres of potatoes or 133 acres of wheat.

IF BACK HURTS USE SALTS FOR KIDNEYS

Eat less meat if Kidneys feel like lead or Bladder bothers.

Most folks forget that the kidneys, like the bowels, get sluggish and clogged and need a flushing occasionally, else we have backache and dull misery in the kidney region, severe headaches, rheumatic twinges, torpid liver, acid stomach, sleeplessness and all sorts of bladder disorders.

You simply must keep your kidneys active and clean, and the moment you feel an ache or pain in the kidney region, get about four ounces of Jad Salts from any good drug store here, take a tablespoonful in a glass of water before breakfast for a few days and your kidneys will then act fine. This famous salt is made from the acid of grapes and lemon juice, combined with lithia, and is harmless to flush clogged kidneys and stimulate them to normal activity. It also neutralizes the acids in the urine so it no longer irritates, thus ending bladder disorders.

Jad Salts is harmless; inexpensive; makes a delightful effervescent lithia-water drink which everybody should take now and then to keep their kidneys clean, thus avoiding serious complications.

A well-known local druggist says he sells lots of Jad Salts to folks who believe in overcoming kidney trouble while it is only trouble.—Adv.

Author No Asset.

At a local bazaar they were offering autographed copies of books by Indianapolis authors.

"Here is a very delightful book, suitable for a gift, and autographed by the author. Only a dollar and a half," said the smiling manager of the booth.

"A dollar and a half!" gasped the prospective purchaser, a little woman who held her tempted purse close to her breast.

"Yes, a dollar and a half. The autograph, you know, has an especial value."

"Why, I can get a copy of that book at a downtown store for a dollar."

"Yes, I know you can, but not autographed by the author."

The prospective purchaser's face suddenly took on a look of high wisdom and then she blurted:

"Oh, well, I know who wrote it, anyhow."—Indianapolis News.

FOR SKIN TROUBLES

That Itch, Burn, Torture and Disfigure Use Cuticura—Trial Free.

The Soap to cleanse and purify, the Ointment to soothe and heal. They usually afford immediate relief in itching, burning eczemas, pimples, dandruff and most baby skin troubles. They also tend to prevent little skin troubles becoming great if used daily.

Free sample each by mail with Book. Address postcard, Cuticura, Dept. L, Boston. Sold everywhere.—Adv.

No Firebug.

Father—I guess that young man of yours is all right, daughter, but he'll never set the world on fire.

Daughter—I should say not; he's in the insurance business.—Boston Transcript.

Constipation can be cured without drugs. Nature's own remedy—selected herbs—Is Garfield Tea.—Adv.

With the Fingers! Says Corns Lift Out Without Any Pain

You reckless men and women who are pestered with corns and who have at least once a week invited an awful death from lockjaw or blood poison are now told by a Cincinnati authority to use a drug called freezone, which the moment a few drops are applied to any corn or callous the soreness is relieved and soon the entire corn or callous, root and all, lifts off with the fingers.

Freezone dries the moment it is applied, and simply shrivels the corn or callous without inflaming or even irritating the surrounding tissue or skin. A small bottle of freezone will cost very little at any of the drug stores, but will positively rid one's feet of every hard or soft corn or hardened callous. If your druggist hasn't any freezone he can get it at any wholesale drug house for you.—Adv.

A BAD COUGH

Is risky to neglect. Take it in hand, and safeguard your health by promptly taking

PISO'S