THE DESTROYING ANGEL

By LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

SYNOPSIS.

—3—

Young Hugh Whitaker's doctors tell him he has but a few months to live, and his sweetheart jilts him. His friend, Peter Stark, finds him disconsolate and proposes a sea voyage. Whitaker runs away to a strange town and finds young Mary Ladislas, deserted by the man with whom she eloped, about to commit suicide.

One about to die surely must feel more at ease about his future if he is conscious of having really done some good in the world. And in the scheme of things beyond our understanding perhaps a single big unselfish act—one that saves another from a grievous deed—will balance our million mean little transgressions and leave us with credit on the Big Book. In the installment given here there's a mighty fine story involving just this point.

CHAPTER III—Continued.

"I didn't have any money to speak of, but I had some jewelry—my mother's—and he was to take that and pawn it for money to get married with."

"I see."

The girl in her turn went to one of the windows, standing with her back to the room. Whitaker drew a chair for her and took a seat a little distance away, with a keen glance appraising the change in her condition. She seemed measurably more composed and mistress of her emotions, though he had to judge mostly by her voice and manner, so dark was the room.

"Don't!" she cried sharply. "Please don't look at me so—"

"I beg your pardon. I didn't mean to—"

"It's only—only that you make me think of what you must be thinking about me—"

"You've had a narrow but a wonderfully lucky escape."

"Oh! . . . But I'm not glad . . . I was desperate—"

"I mean," he interrupted coolly, "from Mr. Morton. The silver lining is, you're not married to a blackguard."

"Oh, yes, yes!" she agreed passionately.

"And you have youth, health, years of life before you!"

He sighed inaudibly . . .

"You wouldn't say that, if you understood."

"Have you thought of going home? Have you written to your father—explained?"

"I sent him a special delivery three days ago, and—and yesterday a telegram. I knew it wouldn't do any good, but I . . . I told him everything. He didn't answer. He won't, ever."

She bent forward, elbows on knees, head and shoulders cringing.

"It hurts so!" she wailed . . . "what people will think . . . the shame, the bitter, bitter shame of this! I've earned my punishment."

"Oh, I say—"

"But I have, because—because I didn't love him. I didn't love him at all, and I knew it, even though I meant to marry him. . . ."

"But, why—in Heaven's name?"

"Because I was so lonely and . . . misunderstood and unhappy at home. No mother, never daring to see my sister (she ran away, too) . . . my friendships at school discouraged nothing in life but my father to bully me and make cruel fun of me because I'm not pretty. . . . That's why I ran away with a man I didn't love—because I wanted freedom and a little happiness."

"Good Lord!" he murmured beneath his breath, awed by the pitiful, childish simplicity of her confession and the deep damnation that had waited upon her.

"So it's over!" she cried—"over, and I've learned my lesson, and I'm disgraced forever, and friendless and—"

"Stop right there!" he checked her roughly. "You're not friendless yet, and that nullifies all the rest. Be glad you've had your romance and learned your lesson—"

"Please don't think I'm not grateful for your kindness," she interrupted. "But the disgrace—that can't be blotted out!"

"Oh, yes, it can," he insisted bluntly. "There's a way I know—"

A glimmering of that way had only that instant let a little light in upon the darkness of his solicitous distress for her. He rose and began to walk and think, hands clasped behind him, trying to make what he had in mind seem right and reasonable.

"You mean beg my father to take me back. I'll die first!"

"There mustn't be any more talk, or even any thought, of anything like that. I understand too well to ask the impossible of you. But there is one way out—a perfectly right way—if you're willing and brave enough to take a chance—a long chance."

Somehow she seemed to gain hope of his tone. She sat up, following him with eyes that sought incredulously to believe.

"Have I any choice?" she asked. "I'm desperate enough . . ."

"God knows," he said, "you'll have to be!"

"Try me."

He paused, standing over her.

"Desperate enough to marry a man who's bound to die within six months and leave you free? I'm that man: the doctors give me six months more of life. Will you take my name to free yourself? Heaven my witness, you're welcome to it."

"Oh," she breathed, aghast, "what are you saying?"

"I'm proposing marriage," he said, with his quaint, one-sided smile. "Please listen: I came to this place to make a quick end to my troubles—but I've changed my mind about that, now. What's happened in this room has made me see that nobody has any right to—hasten things. But I mean to leave the country—immediately—and let death find me where it will. I shall leave behind me a name and a little money, neither of any conceivable use to me. Will you take them, employ them to make your life what it was meant to be? It's a little thing, but it will make me feel a lot more fit to go out of this world—to know I've left at least one decent act to mark my memory. There's only this far-fetched chance—I may live. It's a million-to-one shot, but you've got to bear it in mind. But really you can't lose—"

"Oh, stop, stop!" she implored him, half hysterical. "To think of marrying to benefit by the death of a man like you—!"

"You've no right to look at it that way." He had a wry, secret smile for his specious sophistry. "You're being asked to confer, not to accept, a favor.

"It's a Bargain."

It's just an act of kindness to a hopeless man. I'd go mad if I didn't know you were safe from a recurrence of the folly of this afternoon."

"Don't!" she cried—"don't tempt me. You've no right. . . . You don't know how frantic I am. . . ."

"I do," he countered frankly. "I'm depending on just that to swing you to my point of view. You've got to come to it. I mean you shall marry me."

She stared up at him, spellbound, insensibly yielding to the domination of his will. It was inevitable. He was scarcely less desperate than she—and no less overwrought and unstrung; and he was the stronger; in the natural course of things his will could not but prevail.

The last trace of evening light had faded out of the world before they were agreed. Darkness wrapped them in its folds; they were but as voices warring in a black and boundless void.

Whitaker struck a match and applied it to the solitary gas-jet. A thin, blue, sputtering tongue of flame revealed them to one another. The girl still crouched in her armchair, weary and spent, her powers of contention all vitiated by the losing struggle. Whitaker was trembling with nervous fatigue.

"Well?" he demanded.

"Oh, have your own way," she said drearily. "If it must be . . ."

"It's for the best," he insisted obstinately. "You'll never regret it."

"One of us will—either you or I," she said quietly. "It's too one-sided. You want to give all and ask nothing in return. It's a fool's bargain."

He hesitated, stammering with surprise. She had a habit of saying the unexpected. "A fool's bargain"—the wisdom of the sage from the lips of a child. . . .

"Then it's settled," he said, businesslike, offering his hand. "Fool's bargain or not—it's a bargain."

She rose unassisted, then trusted her slender fingers to his palm. She said nothing. The steady gaze of her extraordinary eyes abashed him.

They left the hotel together. Whitaker got his change of a hundred dollars at the desk—"Mrs. Morten's" bill, of course, included with his—and bribed the bell-boy to take the suitcase to the railway station and leave it there, together with his own handbag. Since he had unaccountably conceived a determination to continue living for a time, he meant to seek out more pleasant accommodations for the night.

The rain had ceased, leaving a ragged sky of clouds and stars in patches. The air was warm and heavy with wetness. Sidewalks glistened like black watered silk; street lights mirrored themselves in fugitive puddles in the roadways; limbs of trees overhanging the sidewalks shivered now and again in a half-hearted breeze, pelting the wayfarers with miniature showers of lukewarm, scented drops.

Whitaker, taking his heart and his fate in his hands, accosted a venerable gentleman whom they encountered as he was on the point of turning off the sidewalk to private grounds.

"I beg your pardon," he began.

The man paused and turned upon them a saintly countenance framed in hair like snow.

"There is something I can do for you?" he inquired with punctilious courtesy.

"If you will be kind enough to direct me to a minister . . ."

"I am one."

"I thought so," said Whitaker. "We wish to get married."

The gentleman looked from his face to the girl's, then moved aside from the gate. "This is my home," he explained. "Will you be good enough to come in?"

Conducting them to his private study, he subjected them to a kindly catechism. The girl said little, Whitaker taking upon himself the brunt of the examination. Absolutely straightforward and intensely sincere, he came through the ordeal well, without being obliged to disclose what he preferred to keep secret. The minister, satisfied, at length called in the town clerk by telephone; who issued the license, pocketed his fee, and in company with the minister's wife, acted as witness. . . .

Whitaker found himself on his feet beside Mary Ladislas. They were being married. He seemed to hear the droning of the loom of the Fates. . . .

And they were man and wife. The door had closed, the gate-latch clicked behind them. They were walking quietly side by side through the scented night, they whom God had joined together. Neither found anything to say. At the station, Whitaker bought his wife a ticket to New York and secured for her solitary use a drawing-room in the sleeper. Whitaker possessed himself of his wife's hand-bag long enough to furnish it with a sum of money and an old envelope bearing the name and address of his law partner. He explained that Drummond would issue her an adequate monthly allowance and advise her when she should have become her own mistress once more; in a word, a widow.

She thanked him briefly, quietly, with a constraint he understood too well to resent.

Both, perhaps, were sensible of some relief when at length the train thundered in from the East, breathing smoke and flame. Whitaker helped his wife aboard and interviewed the porter in her behalf. Then they had a moment or two alone in the drawing-room, in what was meant to be their first and last parting.

She caught him suddenly by the shoulders with both her hands. Her eyes sought his with a wistful courage he could not but admire.

"You know I'm grateful . . ."

"Don't think of it that way—though I'm glad you are."

"You're a good man," she said brokenly.

He knew himself too well to be able to reply.

"You mustn't worry about me, now. You've made things easy for me. I can take care of myself, and . . . I shan't forget whose name I bear."

He muttered something to the effect that he was sure of that.

She released his shoulders and stood back, searching his face with tormented eyes. Abruptly she offered him her hand.

"Good-by," she said, her lips quivering—"Good-by, good friend!"

He caught the hand, wrung it clumsily and painfully and . . . realized that the train was in motion. He had barely time to get away . . .

He found himself on the station platform, stupidly watching the rear lights dwindle down the tracks and wondering whether or not hallucinations were a phase of his malady. A sick man often dreams strange dreams. . . .

A voice behind him, cool with a trace of irony, observed:

"I'd give a good deal to know just what particular brand of foolishness you've been indulging in, this time."

He whirled around to face Peter Stark—Peter quietly amused and very much the master of the situation.

"You needn't think," said he, "that you have any chance on earth of escaping my fond attentions, Hugh. I've fixed it up with Nelly to wait until I bring you home, a well man, before we get married; and if you refuse to be my best man—well, there won't be any party. You can make up your mind to that."

CHAPTER IV.

Willful Missing.

It was one o'clock in the morning before Whitaker allowed himself to be persuaded; fatigue re-enforced every stubborn argument of Peter Stark's to overcome his resistance. "Oh, have your own way," he said at length, unconsciously iterating the words that had won him a bride. "If it must be . . ."

Whitaker has consented to go seafaring. But his mind is on the girl he has just married. What do you think he will do now?

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

BEST TONE FROM GOLD FLUTE

Experiments Have Amply Demonstrated That Employment of Precious Metal Is Advisable.

By some pretty experiments with organ pipes of different materials Dr. Dayton Clarence Miller, professor of physics in the Case School of Applied Science, Cleveland, O., has proved that the quality of tone in a wind instrument depends upon its material far more than is generally believed. Writing of flutes in his book, "The Science of Musical Sounds," he says:

"The traditional influence of different metals on the flute tone are consistent with the experimental results obtained from the organ pipe. Brass and German silver are usually hard, stiff and thick, and have but little influence upon the air column, and the tone is said to be hard and trumpet-like. Silver is dense and softer, and adds to mellowness of the tone. The much greater softness and density of gold adds still more to the soft massiveness of the walls, giving an effect like the organ pipe surrounded by water. Elaborate analyses of the tones from flutes of wood, glass, silver and gold prove that the tone from the gold flute is mellower and richer, having a longer and louder series of partials than flutes of other materials."

Unforeseen.

Helen was attending her first party. When refreshments were served she refused a second helping to ice cream with a polite "No, thank you," although her look was wistful.

"Oh, do have some more ice cream, dear," the hostess urged.

"Mother told me I must say, 'No, thank you,'" explained the little girl, "but I don't believe she knew the dishes were going to be so small."

Excess of Speed.

The motor car shot down the hill at the speed of an express train, and then overturned, pinning the driver beneath it. The village policeman approached pompously. "It's no use your hiding under there," he said sternly, to the half-smothered driver. "You were exceeding the speed limit, and I must have your name and address."

SAGE AND SULPHUR DARKENS GRAY HAIR

It's Grandmother's Recipe to Restore Color, Gloss and Attractiveness.

Almost everyone knows that Sage Tea and Sulphur, properly compounded, brings back the natural color and lustre to the hair when faded, streaked or gray. Years ago the only way to get this mixture was to make it at home, which is mussy and troublesome. Nowadays, by asking at any drug store for "Wyeth's Sage and Sulphur Compound," you will get a large bottle of this famous old recipe, improved by the addition of other ingredients, for about 50 cents.

Don't stay gray! Try it! No one can possibly tell that you darkened your hair, as it does it so naturally and evenly. You dampen a sponge or soft brush with it and draw this through your hair, taking one small strand at a time; by morning the gray hair disappears, and after another application or two, your hair becomes beautifully dark, glossy and attractive.

Wyeth's Sage and Sulphur Compound is a delightful toilet requisite for those who desire dark hair and a youthful appearance. It is not intended for the cure, mitigation or prevention of disease.—Adv.

In a Dry Town.

"Everybody in Crimson gulch seems to think prohibition is a good thing," remarked the stranger.

"Yep," replied Broncho Bob. "A man kin go ahead now an' drink plain water without gettin' the reputation of bein' stingy."—Exchange.

WOMEN'S PART IN WAR

Shall we say that women contribute only the bandages, the socks and the "kits"? No, they contribute the fighters! What sort of soldiers will the women of the present day contribute to the nation and the world? Can they hope to be capable mothers or efficient wives if they are enfeebled and broken down by the diseases and weaknesses of the sex?

An affection confined to women must have its cause in the womanly nature. There is no doubt that a diseased condition of the delicate womanly organs, is in general responsible for feminine nervousness and an undermined constitution. The use of Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription makes women happy by making them healthy. There are no more crying spells. "Favorite Prescription" is for inflammation and female weakness. It makes weak women strong.

Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription is and has been for nearly 50 years just the medicine. It is not a secret prescription, for its ingredients are printed on the wrapper; it's a temperance medicine, a glyceric extract from roots.—Adv.

The Usual One.

Manager—Has this play of yours any plot?

Aspiring Author—Oh, yes. It's a scheme of mine to make money quick."

THE BEST BEAUTY DOCTOR

Is Cuticura for Purifying and Beautifying the Skin—Trial Free.

For cleansing, purifying and beautifying the complexion, hands and hair, Cuticura Soap with touches of Cuticura Ointment now and then afford the most effective preparations at the minimum of cost. No massaging, steaming, creaming, or waste of time.

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

The Advantages.

"Smith told me he had just installed a dumb waiter in his house."

"That's a good idea. Now he can eat at table without having all his family affairs and quarrels repeated to the neighbors' servants."—Louisville Courier-Journal.

A postal card to Garfield Tea Co., Brooklyn, N. Y., asking for a sample will repay you.—Adv.

A Sad Case.

"I was always unfortunate in love."

"How so?"

"Whenever I wanted to marry for love the girl turned out to be too poor."—Boston Transcript.

Laugh When People Step On Your Feet

Try this yourself then pass it along to others. It works!

Ouch! ? ! ? ! ! This kind of rough talk will be heard less here in town if people troubled with corns will follow the simple advice of this Cincinnati authority, who claims that a few drops of a drug called freezone when applied to a tender, aching corn or hardened callous stops soreness at once, and soon the corn or callous dries up and lifts right off without pain.

He says freezone dries immediately and never inflames or even irritates the surrounding skin. A small bottle of freezone will cost very little at any drug store, but will positively remove every hard or soft corn or callous from one's feet. Millions of America's women will welcome this announcement since the inauguration of the high heels. If your druggist doesn't have freezone tell him to order a small bottle for you.—Adv.