

# The Destroying Angel

By LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

THE POOL OF FLAME, THE BROUZE BELLS, THE BLACK BAG, THE BRASS BELL  
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## CHAPTER XIV—Continued.

There was no lack of fodder for the flames. By dint of several wheelbarrow trips between the knoll and the farmyard, he had presently constructed a pyre of impressive proportions; and by that time it was quite dark—so dark, indeed, that he had been forced to hunt up a yard lantern, carrying the which the girl had accompanied him on his two final trips.

"Here," he said clumsily, when all was ready, offering her matches. "You light it, please—for luck."

Their fingers touched as she took the matches. Something thumped in his breast, and a door opened in the chambers of his understanding, letting in light.

Kneeling at the base of the pyre, she struck a match and applied it to a quantity of tinder-dry excelsior. The stuff caught instantly, puffing into a brilliant patch of blaze; she rose and stood back, in silhouette, delicately poised at attention, waiting to see that her work was well done. He could not take his gaze from her.

So what he had trifled and toyed with, fought with and prayed against, doubted and questioned, laughed at and cried down, was sober, painful fact. Truth, heart-rending to behold in her stark, shining beauty, had been revealed to him in that moment of brushing finger-tips, and he had looked in her face and known his unworthiness; and he trembled and was afraid and ashamed.

The girl retreated to his side, returning the matches.

A tongue of flame shot up from the peak of the pyre, and a column of smoke surpassed it, swinging off to leeward in great, red-bosomed volutes and whorls picked out with flying regiments of sparks.

They seated themselves with their backs to the fire and at a respectful distance from it, where they could watch the jetting blades of light that ringed the far-off headland. Whitaker reclined on an elbow, relapsing into moody contemplation. The girl stirred uneasily, turning her head to look at Whitaker.

"You know," she said with a confused attempt to laugh: "this is really so canny, this place. Or else I'm barmy. I'm seeing things—shapes that stir against the blackness, off there beyond the light, moving, halting, staring, hating us for butchering their age-old peace and quiet. Maybe I'll forget to see them, if you'll talk to me a little."

"I can't talk to you," he said, ungracious in his distress.

"You can't? It's the first time it's been noticeable, then. What's responsible for this all-of-a-sudden change of heart?"

"That's what's responsible." The words spoke themselves almost against his will.

"You're very obscure. Am I to understand that you've taken a sudden dislike to me, so that you can't treat me with decent civility?"

"I've always understood women knew what men meant before the men did, themselves." His voice broke a little. "Oh, can't you see how it is with me? Can't you see?" he cried. "God forgive me! I never meant to inflict this on you, at such a time! I don't know why I have . . ."

"You mean," she stammered in a voice of amazement—"you mean—love?"

"Can you doubt it?"

"No . . . not after what's happened, I presume. You wouldn't have followed—you wouldn't have fought so to save me from drowning—I suppose—if you hadn't—cared. . . . But I didn't know."

"Then you're not—offended?" he asked, sitting up.

"Why should I be?" The firelight momentarily outlined the smiling half-wistful countenance she turned to him. "What woman would be who received as great and honorable a compliment—from you, Hugh? Only—again the whimsical little laugh that merged into a smothered sigh—"I wish I knew!"

"Wish you knew what?"

"What's going on inside that extraordinary head of yours; what's in the mind behind the eyes that I so often find staring at me so curiously?"

He bowed that head between hands that compressed cruelly his temples. "I wish I knew!" he groaned in protest. "Since you called me to supper, a while ago, by name—I don't know

why—your voice, as you used it then, has run through my head and through, teasing my memory like a strain of music from some half-remembered song. It half-maddens me; I feel so strongly that everything would be so straight and plain and clear between us, if I could only fasten upon that fugitive, indefinable something that's always fluttering just beyond my grasp!"

"You mean all that—honestly?" she demanded in an oddly started voice.

"Most honestly." He looked up in excitement. "You don't mean you've felt anything of the sort?"

"No, I"—her voice broke as if with weariness—"I don't mean that, precisely, I mean . . . Probably I don't know what I do mean. I'm really very tired, too tired to go on, just now—to sit here with you, badgering our poor wits with esoteric subtleties. I think—do you mind?—I'd better go in."

She rose quickly, without waiting for his hand. Whitaker straightened out his long body with more deliberation, standing finally at full height, his grave and moody countenance strongly relieved in the ruddy glow, while her face was all in shadow.

"One moment," he begged humbly—"before we go in. I . . . I've something else to say to you. If I may."

She waited, seriously attentive.

"I haven't played fair, I'm afraid," he said, lowering his head to escape her steadfast gaze. "I've just told you that I love you, but . . ."

"Well?" she demanded in an odd, ringing voice. "Isn't it true?"

"True?" He laughed unnaturally. "It's so true I—wish I had died before I told you!"

"Please explain," she urged a trace wearily.

"I," he stammered—"I am already married."

She gave a little, stifled cry—whether of pain or horror or of indignation he could not tell.

"I'm sorry—I—" he began.

"Don't you think you might have thought of this before?"

"I . . . you don't understand—"

"So it would seem," she put in cruelly.

"Please hear me! It was several years ago I married a girl I'd never seen before, to help her out of a desperate scrape she'd got into. We never lived together, never even saw one another after that hour. She had every reason to think me dead—as I should have been, by rights. But now she knows that I'm alive—is about to sue for a divorce."

After a long pause, during which neither stirred, she told him, in a faint voice: "Thank you."

She moved toward the house.

"If you will forgive me—"

"Oh, I forgive you, Mr. Whitaker. My heart is really not quite so fragile as all this implies. I think I'll go to bed. I'm very, very tired, in spite of my sleep on the sands. That didn't rest me, really."

They returned to the kitchen.

In silence, while Whitaker fidgeted about the room, awkward and unhappy, the girl removed a glass lamp from the shelf above the sink, assured herself that it was filled, and lighted it. Then over her shoulder: "I hope you don't mean to stay up all night."

"I—well, I'm really not sleepy."

"As soon as you feel the least need of sleep, you'll go to bed?"

"I promise."

"Very well, then."

The insistent note faded from her tones. She moved toward the table, put the lamp down, and hesitated in one of her strange, unexpressed moods of diffidence, looking down at the finger-tips with which she traced a meaningless pattern on the oil-cloth.

"You are kind," she said abruptly, her head bowed, her face hidden from him.

"Kind?" he echoed, dumfounded.

"You are kind and sweet and generous to me," she insisted in a level voice. "You have shown me your heart—the heart of a gentleman—with-out reserve; but of me you have asked nothing."

"I don't understand—"

"I mean, you haven't once referred to what happened last night. You've been content to let me preserve my confidence, to remain secretive and mysterious in your sight. . . . That is how I seem to you—Isn't it?"

"Secretive and mysterious? But I have no right to your confidence; your affairs are yours, inviolable, unless you choose to discuss them."

"You would think that way—of course!" Suddenly she showed him her face illuminated with its frank, shadowy smile, her sweet eyes, kind and as fearless as the eyes of a child. "Other men would not, I know. And you have every right to know."

"I—"

"You; and I shall tell you. . . . But not now; there's too much to tell, to explain and make understandable; and I'm too terribly tired. To-morrow, perhaps—or when we escape from this weird place, when I've had time to think things out—"

"At your pleasure," he assented gently. "Only—don't let anything worry you."

Impulsively she caught both his hands in a clasp at once soft and strong, wholly straightforward and friendly.

"Do you know," she said in a laughing voice, her head thrown back, soft shadows darkening her mystical eyes, the lamplight caressing her hair until it was as if her head were framed in a halo of pure gold, bright against the somber background of that mean, bare room—"Do you know, dear man, that you are quite blind?"

"I think," he said with his twisted smile, "it would be well for me if I were physically blind at this instant!"

She shook her head in light reproof. "Blind, quite blind?" she repeated.

"And yet—I'm glad it's so with you. I wouldn't have you otherwise for worlds."

She withdrew her hand, took up the lamp, moved a little away from him, and paused, holding his eyes.

"For Love, too, is blind," she said softly, with a quaint little nod of affirmation. "Good night."

He started forward, eyes aflame; took a single pace after her; paused as if against an unseen barrier. His hands dropped by his sides; his chin to his chest; the light died out of his face and left it gray and deeply lined.

## CHAPTER XV.

**Discovery.**

He was up and out in the cool of dawn, before sunrise, delaying to listen for some minutes at the foot of the stairway. But he heard no sound in that still house, and there was no longer the night to affright the woman with hinted threats of nameless horrors lurking beneath its impenetrable cloak. He felt no longer bound to stand sentinel on the threshold of her apprehensions. He went out.

The day would be clear. In the white magic of air like crystal translucent and motionless, the world seemed more close-knit and sane. What yesterday's veiling of haze had concealed was now bold and near. In the north the lighthouse stood like a horn on the brow of the headland, the lamp continuing to flash even though its light was darkened, its beams out-



A Tongue of Flame Shot Up.

stripped by the radiant forerunners of the sun. On the nearer land human life was quickening; here and there pale streamers of smoke swung up from hidden chimneys on its wooded rises.

Whitaker eyed them with longing. But they were distant from attainment by at the least three miles of tideway through which strong waters raced. He wagged a doubtful head, and scowled; no sign in any quarter of a boat heading for the island, no telling when they'd be taken off the cursed place!

In his anxious irritation, the screaming of the gulls, over in the west, seemed to add the final touch of annoyance, a superfluous addition to the sum of his trials. What was the matter with the addle-pated things, anyway?

There was nothing to hinder him from investigating for himself. The girl would probably sleep another hour or two.

He went forthwith, dulling the keen edge of his exasperation with a rapid tramp of half a mile or so over the uneven uplands.

The screaming was well-nigh deafening by the time he stood upon the verge of the bluff; beneath him gulls clouded the air like bees swarming. And yet he experienced no difficulty in locating the cause of their excitement.

Below, a slow tide crawled, slavering, up over the bowlder-strewn sands. In a wave-scooped depression between



In the Pool Lay the Body of a Man.

two of the large bowlders, the receding waters had left a little, limpid pool. In the pool lay the body of a man, face downward, limbs frightfully sprawling. Gulls fought for place upon his back.

The discovery brought with it no shock of surprise to the man on the bluff; horror alone. He seemed to have known all along that such would be the cause. But he shrank shuddering from the thought of the work that lay to his hand—work that must be accomplished at once and completely; for she must know nothing of it. She had suffered enough, as it was.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

## HELICGRAPH USED IN AFRICA

Wireless Telegraphy Has Not Entirely Supplanted Sunlight Signaling.

The heliograph, although largely superseded by wireless telegraphy, still is used on the frontiers of India and in South Africa, where the air is clear and signals can be seen over long distances.

Both men are using it, and so are his opponents, though perhaps they seldom think this method of signaling by means of flashing reflections of the sun's rays is more than 2,000 years old, being invented by Tacitus. The shields of soldiers, grouped in a prearranged manner, were used, but, of course, the system was very primitive and transmission slow, only the simplest expressions being possible.

Under favorable conditions a heliograph signal can be read for very long distances, 770 miles being not at all uncommon, while 15 years ago Major Home, on the staff of General French, managed to send messages for 92 miles, for long a record.

Recently this has been outdone, and the same officer was able to read quite clearly signals which were flashed from a distance of 130 miles. Captain Sadler of the Carabiniers, using a 5-inch heliograph from Compass Bag talked to Major Home on the Cockscombe mountain, near Ultenhage, a record which remains unbeaten.

## The Country Weeker.

Dr. Horace Leavenworth Hall, the pioneer of the children's country week movement in the West, said the other day in Denver:

"The examples of slum children's ignorance are as incredible as they are innumerable.

"A farmer's wife pointed out to a slum urchin a flock of birds winging their way across the evening sky.

"'Oh, look at the pretty birds!' she said.

"'Poor things!' said the urchin. 'Poor little things! They haven't got no cages, have they?'"

## No Trouble at All.

Friend—I suppose if people would do just what you tell them you would have a great deal less trouble.

Doctor—Yes, indeed! I would tell some of them to settle their accounts.

# BOY SCOUTS

(Conducted by National Council of the Boy Scouts of America.)

## THE BOY SCOUT OF AMERICA

(Dedicated to Troop No. 4, Detroit.)

When'er I see a troop of scouts, bright-eyed and clear of skin,  
When'er I hear their healthy shouts, somehow deep down within  
The soul of me I feel a thrill of honest joy and pride,  
For these are boys that will be men ere many years have died.

There in the making are the men on whom the land must lean,  
And they shall come unto their work with well-trained hands and clean,  
And they shall stand at Duty's post, heads up and shoulders square,  
Prepared for all the day's commands and self-reliant there.

They shall have learned the ways of life, the fields and running brooks,  
And have a knowledge of the trees that wasn't gained from books;  
They shall know honor as a real, substantial gem to pride,  
And come to manhood and its cares equipped and qualified.

When I behold a troop of scouts I fancy I can see  
How strong through them the years to come safeguarded well shall be,  
There will be less of selfishness and more of kindness when  
The troop is mustered into life and all the scouts are men.

—EDGAR A. GUEST.

## SCOUTS FEEDING BIRDS.



Suet, Grain and Bread Crumbs Are Placed in the Box and on the Limbs.

## MESSAGE TO THE SCOUTS.

How many boy scouts have looked up the meaning of the word "scout"? Probably but few know that a hidden meaning is the one most appropriate to the organization.

The word is not a newly coined one. In the old French, it was "escouter or escolter" and was used only in the military sense of the spy.

The Portuguese, Spanish and Italian forms are somewhat similar to the old French, both in form and meaning, but the Latin "auscultare" is used in the broader sense—"to hear with attention, to listen to."

In present-day English, the military meaning "to reconnoiter" is that most often applied, yet the broader meaning which has come down from the Latin is the one underlying the constructive principles of the great society of boys.

## SCOUTS RESPOND IN HURRY.

At 3:20 o'clock in the afternoon six blasts of the fire alarm at Foxboro, Mass., sounded. This is the mobilization call in Foxboro for the boy scouts.

The scouts were widely scattered about town at the time. They were in ignorance as to the cause of the emergency call, but knew it was their duty to make all speed for home, don their scout uniform and report at headquarters.

In about 20 minutes 40 members were ready for duty. At the Scout hall the boys were asked to make a house-to-house canvass for funds for the Halifax sufferers. The boys worked from 4 to 8 p. m., and the amount of their collections was \$123.40.