

THE DESTROYING ANGEL

By LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

CHAPTER XVII—Continued.

At six that evening, returning to his rooms to dress, Whitaker found another note waiting for him, in a handwriting that his heart recognized with a sensation of wretched apprehension. He comprehended its contents with difficulty, half blinded by a swimming mist of foreboding.

My Dear: I find my strength unequal to the strain of seeing you tonight. Indeed, I am so worn out and nerve-racked that I have had to consult my physician. He orders me immediately to a sanatorium, to rest for a week or two. Don't worry about me. I shan't fail to let you know as soon as I feel strong enough to see you. Forgive me. I love you dearly.
MARY.

The paper slipped from Whitaker's trembling hand and fluttered unheeded to the floor. He sprang to the telephone and presently had the Waldorf on the wire; it was true, he learned: Mrs. Whitaker had registered at the hotel in the morning, and had left at four in the afternoon. He was refused information as to whether she had left a forwarding address for her mail.

He wrote her immediately, and perhaps not altogether wisely, under stress of distraction, sending the letter by special delivery in care of the hotel. It was returned him in due course of time, embellished with a penciled memorandum to the effect that Mrs. Whitaker had left no address.

He communicated at once with Ember, promptly enlisting his willing services. But after several days of earnest investigation the detective confessed himself baffled.

"If you ask me," he commented at the conclusion of his report, "the answer is she means to be let alone until she's quite ready to see you again."

Whitaker raged. "She—she loved me there on the island. She couldn't change so quickly, bring herself to treat me so cruelly, unless some infernal influence had been brought to bear upon her."

"It's possible, but I—"
"Oh, I don't mean that foolishness about her love being a man's death warrant. That may have something to do with it, but—but—I conquered that once. . . . No; somebody has got hold of her, worked on her sympathies, maligned me. . . ."

"Do you object to telling me whom you have in mind?"

"The man you suspect as well as I—the one man to whom her allegiance means everything—the man you named to me the night we met for the first time, as the one who'd profit the most by keeping her from leaving the stage!"

"Well, if it's Max, you'll know in time."

"I'll know before long. As soon as he gets back in town—"

"So you've been after him?"

"Why not? But he's out on the Pacific coast; or so they tell me at the theater. Expected back about the middle of July—they say in his office."

"Then that lets him out."

"But it's a lie."

"Well—?"

"I've just remembered: Max was at the Fiske place, urging her to return, the night before you caught Drummond at the bungalow. I saw them, walking up and down in front of the cottage, arguing earnestly: I could tell by her bearing she was refusing whatever he proposed. But I didn't know her then, and naturally I never connected Max with the fellow I saw, disguised in a motoring coat and cap. Neither of 'em had any place in my thoughts that night."

Ember uttered a thoughtful "Oh?" adding: "There may be something in what you say—suspect, that is. If I agree to keep an eye on him, will you promise to give me a free hand?"

"Meaning—?"

"Keep out of Max's way: don't risk a wrangle with him."

"Oh—go ahead—to blazes—as far as you like."

"Thanks," Ember dryly wound up the conference; "but these passing flirtations with your present-day temper leave me with no hankering for greater warmth."

Days ran stolidly on into weeks, and these into a month. Nothing happened. Max did not return; the whispered rumor played wildfire in theatrical circles that the eccentric manager had encountered financial difficulties insuperable. The billboards flanking the entrance to the Theatre Max continued to display posters announcing the reopening early in September with a musical comedy by Tynan Dodd; but the comedy was not even in rehearsal by September 15.

Ember went darkly about his various businesses, tactful—even a trace more than ever reserved in his communication with Whitaker—preoccupied, but constant in his endeavor to enhearten the desponding husband.

Mary Whitaker made no sign. Now and then Whitaker would lose patience and write to her. He received not a line of acknowledgment.

Sometimes, fretted to a frenzy, he sought out Ember and made wild and unreasonable demands upon him. These failings of any effect other than the resigned retort, "I am a detective, not a miracle-monger," he would fly into desperate, gnawing, black rages that made Ember fear for his sanity and self-control and caused him to be haunted by that gentleman for hours—once or twice for days—until he resumed his normal poise of a sober and civilized man. He was, however, not often aware of this sedulous espionage.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Temperamental.

September waned and October dawned in grateful coolness: an exquisite month of crisp nights and enlivening days, of mellowing sunlight and early gloamings tenderly colored. Country houses were closed and theaters reopened. Then suddenly the town blossomed overnight with huge eight-sheet posters on every available hoarding, blazoning the news:

JULES MAX
begs to announce the return of
SARA LAW
in a new Comedy entitled "Faith"
by **JULES MAX**
Theater MAX—Friday October 15th

But Whitaker had the information before he saw the broadsides in the streets. The morning paper propped up on his breakfast table contained the illuminating note under the caption, "News of Plays and Players:"

Jules Max has sprung another and perhaps his greatest surprise on the theater-going public of this city. The astute manager has been out of town for two months secretly rehearsing the new comedy entitled "Faith," of which he is the author and in which Sara Law will return finally to the stage. Additional interest attaches to this announcement in view of the fact that Miss Law has authorized the publication of her intention never again to retire from the stage.

The opening performance of "Faith" will take place at the Theater Max tomorrow evening, Friday, October 15.

Whitaker glanced up incredulously at the date line of the sheet. Short notice, indeed: the date was Thursday, October 14. Max had planned his game and had played his cards cunningly, in withholding this announcement until the last moment.

After a pause Whitaker rose and began to walk the length of the room, hands in his pockets, head bowed in thought.

Search as he would, he could discover no rankling indignation, nothing but some self-contempt, that he had allowed himself to be so carried away by infatuation for an ignoble woman, and a cynic humor that made it possible for him to derive a certain satisfaction from contemplating the completeness of this final revelation of herself. Returning to the breakfast table, he took up the paper, turned to the shipping news, and ran his eye down the list of scheduled sailings: nothing for Friday; his pick of half a dozen boats listed to sail Saturday.

The telephone enabled him to make a hasty reservation on the biggest and fastest of them all.

He had just concluded that business and was waiting with his hand on the receiver to call up Ember and announce his departure, when the doorbell interrupted. Expecting the waiter to remove the breakfast things, he went to the door, threw it open, and turned back instantly to the telephone. As his fingers closed around the receiver a second time, he looked round and saw his wife.

His hand fell to his side. Otherwise he did not move. But his glance was that of one incuriously comprehending the existence of a stranger.

The woman met it fairly and fearlessly, with her head high and her lips touched with a trace of her shadowy, illegible smile. She was dressed for walking, very prettily and perfectly. After a moment she inclined her head slightly. "The hallboys said you were busy on the telephone. I insisted on coming directly up. I wish very much to see you for a few moments. Do you mind?"

"By no means," he said, a little stiffly but quite calmly. "If you will be good enough to come in—"

He stood against the wall to let her pass.

"I had to come this morning," she explained, turning. "This afternoon we have a rehearsal. . . ."

He bowed an acknowledgment.

"Won't you sit down?"

"Thank you." Seated, she subjected him to a quick, open appraisal, disarming in its naive honesty.

"Hugh . . . aren't you a bit thinner?"

"I believe so." He had a match for that impertinence: "But you, I see, have come off without a blemish."

"I am very well," she admitted, unperturbed. Her glance embraced the room. "You're very comfortable here."

"I have been."

"I hope that doesn't mean I'm in the way."

"To the contrary; but I sail day after tomorrow for Australia."

"Oh? That's very sudden, isn't it? You don't seem to have done any packing. Or perhaps you mean to come back before a great while?"

"I shan't come back, ever."

"Must I believe you made up your mind this morning?"

"I have only just read the announcement of your opening tomorrow night."

"Then . . . I am driving you out of the country?"

Her look was impersonal and curious.

His shoulders moved negligently.

"Not to rant about it," he replied: "I find I am not needed here."

"Oh, dear!" Her lips formed a fugitive, petulant moue: "And it's my fault?"

"There's no use mincing matters, is there? I am not heartbroken, and if I am bitterly disappointed I don't care to—in fact, I lack the ability to dramatize it."

"You are taking it well, Hugh?" said she, critical.

Expressionless, he waited an instant before inquiring pointedly: "Well?"

Deliberately laying aside her light muff, her scarf and handbag, she rose: equality of poise was impossible if he would persist in standing. She moved a little nearer.

"Hugh," she said in a voice of sincerity, "I'm awfully sorry—truly I am!"

He made no reply; waited.

"Perhaps I'm wrong," she went on, "but I think most women would have spared themselves this meeting—"

"Themselves and the man," he interjected dryly.

"Don't be cross, Hugh. . . . I had to come. I had to explain myself. I wanted you to understand. Hugh, I—"

She was twisting her hands together

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

for appreciation of the artistic delineation of emotion, true or feigned. That . . . that is why, when you showed me you had grown to love me so, I responded so quickly. You were in love—more honestly than I had ever seen love revealed. It touched me. I was proud to have inspired such a love. I wanted, for the time being, to have you with me always, that I might always study the wonderful, the beautiful manifestations of your love. Why, Hugh, you even managed to make me believe I was worth it—that my response was sufficient repayment for your adoration. . . ."

He said nothing. She glanced furtively at him and continued:

"I meant to be sweet and faithful when I left that note for you on the yacht, Hugh; I was grateful, and I meant to be generous. . . . But when I went to the Waldorf, the first person I met was Max. Of course I had to tell him what had happened. And then he threw himself upon my compassion. It seems that losing me had put him in the most terrible trouble about money. He was short, and he couldn't get the backing he needed without me, his call upon my services, by way of assurance to his backers. And I began to think: I knew I didn't love you honestly, Hugh, and that life with you would be a living lie. What right had I to deceive you that way, just to gratify my love of being loved? And especially if by doing that I ruined Max, the man to whom, next to you, I owed everything? I couldn't do it. But I took time to think it over—truly I did. I really did go to a sanatorium, and rested there while I turned the whole matter over carefully in my mind, and at length reached my decision to stick by Max and let you go, free to win the heart of a woman worthy of you."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

JAPAN FIFTH IN POPULATION

Country of the Little Brown Men Has Been Growing Rapidly During Last Decade.

Japan has been growing in population since the war with Russia at a rate comparable with Germany's, in the generation just passed. The expansion of territory following the war, contributed some millions, so that the aggregate for Greater Japan as now officially declared is 71,793,078.

But Japan proper contains 53,356,295, making her fifth in population among the world's nations—following China, Russia, the United States and Germany, in order. The density is even greater than in Holland or England. And particularly interesting is the statement of the census bureau that the males are in excess—102.14 for every 100 females. That, of course, is contrary to the general rule except in the colonies, territory where the stage of pioneer development has not been completed, or in some of our western states.

With Japan growing at a rate apparently more rapid than any other country except the United States, considering also the limited territory for sustaining her people, no other explanation is necessary to account for the tendency of the Japanese to emigrate. That tendency is of some concern to the United States, and to all the commonwealths or colonies in the Pacific.—Houston Post.

Easy for "Trouble Man."

Every telephone company has a "trouble department" where all complaints of bad service and defective equipment go. The men who make the repairs and adjustments are known as "trouble men," and they have to be not only expert workmen, but chaps of intelligence and common sense, for they meet many problems that are not set down in the books. Thoughtless people can do many things to put a telephone out of commission and some of them are simple—a wet umbrella leaned up against the wiring in such a way that it grounds the current, and of course makes the phone useless. In this particular case the umbrella remained where it ought not to have been while the owner of the phone fretted and fumed because he could not get Central, and then went to a neighbor's and called up the telephone company. When the "trouble man" arrived he saw at once what the matter was and picked up the umbrella. "Now call Central," he suggested, and the irate patron got an immediate response.—Leslie's.

Mirror Held in Mouth.

So that a woman's hands may be free while she is arranging her hair, a Frenchman has invented a mirror that is supported by a bracket held in the mouth.

FOR BETTER ROADS

CONCRETE ROAD GREAT HELP

Farmer Enabled to Double Size of Load to Market and Reduces Strain on Horses.

No extensive road improvement in any community can be carried on without more money than can usually be raised by direct taxation extending through a short term. It is unjust to expect the taxpayers of today to assume the total cost of an improvement which is to last into the next generation, so bonds are usually issued to finance the building of roads that will permanently cut down maintenance expense and reduce hauling costs. These bonds are sold and thus converted into money. Interest on the bonds is paid and the bonds retired by funds obtained from current road taxes. When the bonds have been paid the community still has its concrete roads in excellent condition.

No community can afford to spend its money with less caution than a private individual would display. The community should do likewise. When you are asked to vote for a bond issue to build concrete roads you are not raising public money to spend it, but to invest it. As concrete road mileage in a community is increased, the burden of road maintenance decreases, and the saving thus resulting will not only pay interest on the bonds, but provide funds to retire them as they fall due. In this way borrowing is made profitable.

Touring possibilities at all seasons of the year and every day in the year go hand-in-hand with the concrete road. "Safety first" is realized as the result of the non-skid surface. Concrete boulevards through the open



Superior Type of Concrete Road.

country make riding pleasurable by doing away with the jar, dust in dry weather and mud in wet weather. A smooth surface makes steering easy, reduces tire cost, lessens fuel consumption. These are some of the ways in which a concrete road benefits the motorist.

Reduced to simple terms, a concrete road helps the farmer haul two loads at one trip instead of one load at two trips; or, it doubles the size of the load and cuts in two the tractive power necessary to transport farm produce. With less capital tied up in horses there is more cash to put into equipment to produce more cash. The concrete road reduces the strain on horses and lengthens their lives. It reduces wear on wagons and harness. Where motortrucks are used it lessens tire and fuel expense. It puts the farmer in a state of preparedness to reach markets quickly when prices are best, and he can take his profits and get home with more cash than he could by slow hauling on a bad road. It adds to the acreage value of a farm because it increases its earning possibilities. A concrete road makes all of these advantages permanent, bringing its toll of profit to the farmer daily in the form of time, money and effort saved.

BUILDING ROADS IN FORESTS

Co-operative Projects Carried On With Funds From Forest Service and Local Communities.

In 1917 nearly \$430,000 was available for roads and trails within the national forest boundaries from the ten per cent fund derived from receipts. As in previous years co-operative projects were carried on with funds contributed by the forest service and by local communities.