His Brother's Keeper; Or, Christian Stewardship.

BY CHARLES M. SHELDON,

Author of "In His Steps," "The Crucifixion of Philip Strong," "Robert Hardy's Seven Days," "Malcom Kirk," Etc.

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square and out into the road leading up to the Duncan house. And so, with the love of the men whose lives and happiness were to be henceforth so deeply mingled with theirs, in the company of the friends who had shared so largely of their experiences and were to be even more to them in coming days, this man and woman began the life that not even death can part, for they are one in Jesus Christ.

A week from that same evening, in a large mansion on a fashionable avenue in New York, Louise Duncan and Hal Vasplaine were married. A card announcing the event was sent to Stuart by Aunt Royal, at whose house the event took place. No notice of the marriage was sent to Rhena as Stuart's wife. It was the first intimation Stuart had had of the fact, the card reaching him two days after. He grieved over the event deeply and felt that the gulf between his sister and himself was impassable, but his life was crowded with great objects, and Rhena was all in all to him, and as time went on he found the sharpness of this pang lessened, though he never for a moment ceased his prayers and love for Louise.

The demands on both Stuart and Rhena were certainly no less now that the mines were opened again. The cottages were completed, but Stuart contemplated a general tearing down of all the old cabins on the range. In this he was met by an unexpected and irritating obstinacy on the part of the miners, who did not want to be disturbed.

"They're the most ungrateful lot on earth," said the doctor, to whom Stuart was talking about it. "If I was you, I'd hire some one to touch off every last cabin some windy night and burn up every last one of 'em—I mean the cabins. They, I mean the men, haven't got brains enough among them all to start a home for feeble minded old women!"

Stuart was wrestling with this problem and at the same time adding to his plans for the Hall of Humanity. Many and many a long conference was held in Eric's cottage, at Andrew's and in his own house over the project. Rhena had also proposed another plan, at first stoutly opposed by Eric and even Andrew, but afterward heartily seconded by them. It was, in brief, the shaping of the Duncan mansion into a modern hospital, to be in charge of Dr. Saxon. The house was too large for a living house. Stuart and Rhena wanted to be nearer the town, and Stuart had made his plans to build at once a house that would represent their ideas of what a home should be and enable them to be of more use in very many ways. They were too far away from the people. Rhena still continued her army work to a large

The miners sent up a cheer as they dashed into the square.

extent, and the people all knew that her marriage had not lessened her love for them or her desire and willingness to save them. It was simply a question of using to the very best advantage the wealth which was in their power to use. In many respects the old mansion was admirably adapted for a hospital, and the doctor was certainly entitled now to a position where he could spend the remainder of his life in usefulness and peace.

Stuart and Rhena were talking this all over one evening in early spring. The foundation for the Hall of Humanity was going up very fast, and they were also running over their plans for the great number of things they hoped the building would represent. The lights had been turned on, and it was getting on in the evening. A soft rain was falling outside, and the big pines were sobbing the approach of a heavy storm. Stuart was sitting at the big table in the dining room with plans scattered about, and Rhena was walking up and down, her face alive with enthusiasm over some great idea, when the bell rang.

Something about the sound of it caused Stuart to rise and go to the door himself. As he flung it open the wind blew a fine mist of rain into the hall along with the fragrant odor of the dripping pines. But he was conscious of only one thing.

There on the stone steps lay a woman's form, and he knew as he stooped and lifted her that his sister had remembered what he said such a cruelly brief time before. He carried her into the chamber where his father had died and laid her on the same bed. As he did so and as Rhena gently threw back the wet fold of a cloak which lay across the face Louise moved and then opened her eyes and looked up at Stuart and Rhena. They will never forget that look. It told them as plainly as words that Louise had come home to die.

Ah, the Nemesis of the world is very bitter when it does come—and it always comes—in God's time.

CHAPTER XII.

For a moment Louise looked at Stuart and Rhena as if she knew them. Then she sat up, partly supporting herself by one hand and with the other seeming to grope after something. There was a look of madness in her eyes.

"Father! He's hurt! Don't you know, Stuart? The horses ran away. We were thrown out! Why doesn't some one send for the doctor?"

Rhena slipped out of the room and telephoned for Dr. Saxon. Stuart fell on his knees by the bed, and the next half hour was one of the most agonizing he ever knew. Louise raved and wept. She kept going over the old times, repeating word for word exactly many conversations between herself and Stuart at the time he had begun to decide on a new life. Everything dated from Ross Duncan's death. There were also mingled with all that was so painful in Stuart's memory a great many expressions and exclamations which made him shudder and put his hands over his ears, words which revealed experiences of the life Louise had known since leaving Champion. Stuart did not dare yet to imagine all that these words meant.

When Dr. Saxon finally reached the house and entered the room, Louise was lying down, moaning. The doctor went right up to her and spoke her name. She opened her eyes and looked him full in the face. She shrieked out hysterically: "Doctor, doctor, save me! I'm going mad! I am mad!"

"You poor child!" And that was all he said.

Then Louise began to cry terribly. She spoke her Aunt Royal's name in a voice that made even the doctor quiver a little. And after that, as suddenly as if she had been struck dumb, she fell back like one dead and lay so still that Stuart thought at first the end had come already.

He and Rhena stood pale and stricken. It had all come upon them so suddenly. The doctor did all in his power. There was not much he could do. At the end of half an hour Louise came out of the condition of exhaustion into which she had fallen and cried again, this time calling out the name of Vasplaine with such terror that Stuart could not endure the sound and went into the other room across the hall. Rhena followed him.

"This is awful!" said Stuart, with a groan. "What do you suppose this all means? What has that villain done?"

"It means that he has left her and that"— Rhena had guessed so much. It had come like a sudden blow to them. She stepped up to Stuart and confronted him.

"Please God, we'll save her life!" he cried.

"And her reason," added Rhena gravely. "Pray God we may!"

They went back together into that chamber and, with the doctor, watched through the night, fearing, at the doctor's suggestion, lest she should suddenly rise and go out into the storm which before morning beat on the mansion in great fury, while the big pines sobbed like a requiem over dead hopes and buried loves.

With the gray light of morning a change came. The doctor noticed it first. He had not closed his eyes once. Now he rose and went into the library, signing to Stuart to follow him.

"She is out of immediate danger," he said as Stuart stood there by him, nervous with the strain. "She has had some terrible mental shock. It is doubtful if she can recover. But she has the Duncan constitution. All things are possible. I think she will be quiet through the day. If she isn't, send for me at once."

He wrung Stuart's hand and went down into the town through the storm, and an hour later Stuart saw him dashing up the hill and past the house over the Beury road to attend some desperate case out on the hills. How the doctor lived without sleep was always a wonder to all Champion.

As for Louise, she lay in a condition of stupor through the day and the following night. When occasionally she roused at Stuart's calling her name, she seemed to know him, but did not express surprise at being back in her old home. Gradually the truth grew upon Stuart and Rhena that nearly the entire period of Louise's life since her marriage was a blank to her. She would lie for hours silent and without expression in her great eyes, which were still beautiful, although her once lovely face had grown old and haggard. When she spoke, it was with the fretful, complaining voice she had used when Stuart had angered her. To his great surprise and relief, she did not appear to dislike Rhena. She accepted her gentle, loving nursing as a matter of course, neither showing gratitude nor expressing resentment. She grew feebler and more exacting in her demands, so that Rhena had her powers taxed to the utmost in providing for her many wants. She asked constantly for the most expensive and difficult articles of food to be prepared, demanded costly flowers for the decoration of the room and was continually begging Stuart to buy her jewels to wear. He went down town and took out of the office safe, where they had been lying ever since his mother's death, a necklace of pearls and another of diamonds, together with a ruby bracelet and several turquoise rings. Ross Duncan had bought these for his wife when he had been able to say that he was worth a million dollars, and the entire value of them would have kept a dozen families in comfort all their lives. Mrs. Duncan had not cared much for these playthings and had seldom worn them. Ross Duncan had willed them to Stuart instead of Louise because of a whim he took one day. He said they were family jewels and ought to remain with the son of the house.

Louise seized on these baubles of light with an eagerness and a love of display that were terrible to Stuart. She wore first the diamonds and then the pearls around her small white neck and finally put them both on, wearing them together with the bracelet and the rings. She cried continually for new dresses, and at last Rhena, at Stuart's suggestion, brought out some of Stuart's mother's silk gowns which had been packed away in a chest in the attic, and with a little changing they were made to fit Louise, who, although she was able to sit up only a few hours, took the most pitiably childish delight in putting on all this finery, with Rhena's help, and then, with a hand mirror constantly within reach, commenting on her appearance with the greatest eagerness.

One day Rhena slipped away from her while she was busy in this manner, and as she was going into the library Stuart came in from the drawing room. He had been down superintending the new building.

"Oh, Stuart, Stuart," Rhena almost sobbed as she closed the door so that Louise could not hear. "It is so horrible! It seems so like—so like clothing Death itself in tinsel and glitter. Oh, the mockery of it makes my heart ache! If we only knew more of the real cause of Louise's trouble, we might know how to bring her back to reason! Only"—

"Only what, dear?" Stuart asked, taking her in his arms to comfort her as he remembered how faithful she had been to her great trust in caring for his sister.

"Only—the end is not far off, I fear. She is wasting away like the snow on the hills in spring."

Stuart groaned. "I have seen it, dear. The doctor has done all he can. He gives no hope." He was silent. Then he spoke with calm strength. "I am going down to New York, and I am going to see Aunt Royal and probe the thing to the end. I have written her, but had no reply. And all our efforts to find Vasplaine have failed. The family knows nothing of him. I must go down anyway to see after some necessary materials for the building. I will be back inside of a week."

So that was the way Stuart came to be in New York just before Aunt Royal had planned to pack her trunks and go abroad for the summer.

He was ushered into the great drawing room of the mansion on the avenue and remained standing by one of the windows waiting for Aunt Royal to come down. His heart was heavy as he thought of Louise. He tried to compose himself for the interview, remembering his Christian faith and all that it required of him in all circumstances.

Her entrance was hardly noticed by him when she finally appeared. Velvet carpets are made to deaden the footsteps of market gardeners' daughters who have made their money by investing in tenement and saloon property.

"This is an unexpected pleasure, Stuart, I am sure," said Aunt Royal in her usual polite, gentle voice.

"You know what I am here for, aunt?" Stuart asked, coming to the point at once.

"No; I don't know that I do. I suppose some business in connection with your philanthropic schemes in Champion. I hear the strike is all over. I suppose the miners have learned sense by their folly."

"Aunt," said Stuart firmly, ignoring all she said, "I have come down here to learn the truth about Louise. Tell me all you know about it. It may help to restore her reason before she dies. For God's sake, aunt, if you know what I ought to know, let me have it."

Aunt Royal's face paled just a trifle. "Restore her reason?"

"Yes," replied Stuart, with some sternness of tone, "her reason. She is out of her mind. Her memory of events since her marriage is a blank. She must have received some great shock. Of course we know Vasplaine has deserted her. And she is dying. After all, if"— Stuart paused, and his heart almost stood still as he caught the expression on Aunt Royal's face. He was not looking at her, but at her reflection in the large cheval glass. And it was the reflection of an absolutely selfish and heartless enjoyment of social standing, unruffled by the coarse sins and miseries and aches of a dying humanity.

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