

WHO'S GUILTY



SECOND STORY The Tight Rein

In Jeremiah McCall's great factory at Leaping River, it was estimated that a pair of shoes was turned out every seven and a half seconds. The big rolls of leather—dry, lifeless skins of cattle, goats and horses—came in at one end of the plant, and passed out at the other as the finished article, millions of them, shining, lacquered, complete in neat pasteboard boxes.

Conversely, the factory took hundreds of young girls, cheery-cheeked, bright-eyed, glossy-haired, bursting with youth, and turned them into dry, lifeless old women, leathery of face and leathery of soul.

Among the new applicants for work—the raw material of the system—one day came Amy Prentice. It happened to be a day in April—a tricky day with big, white clouds sailing lazily over the bluest kind of sky, and a warm, soft breeze which rustled in at the open windows to whisper all sorts of fanciful suggestions. By a coincidence, it happened to be the birthday of young Jock McCall, the son of the owner of the plant—his twenty-third birthday.

One by one, the applicants passed before his desk to be perfunctorily questioned as to age, experience, references.

Then suddenly he glanced up to encounter a face which in its wistful delicacy, and almost childlike charm of expression, seemed to him the very counterpart and embodiment of the day.

"You are looking for work?" he asked, yet hardly knew his own voice. It was as if he were saying, "I love you."

She started a little at his question, showing plainly that she too had been dream gathering; then murmured an acquiescence.

She was absolutely green and without experience, and for untrained labor of that sort McCall usually paid from three to five dollars a week. Jock mentally strained a point as to the factory's necessities, and assigned her to piece work on a stitching machine where, if she were quick and capable, she could earn from twenty to twenty-five.

"Amy Prentice, age twenty," was the way she had filled in the application blank he had given her; but his heart had christened her, "April's Lady," before he ever knew her name.

The entrance of the head of the concern aroused him from his idle musings. Jeremiah McCall was a tall, spare man as hard and dry and brown as the leather in which he dealt.

They talked business for a few minutes—routine matters—then Jock emboldened by the faint diminution of austerity in the other's manner, ventured to broach a request which had been in his mind for some time.

"Say, father," he plunged in daringly, "I've been around the plant here for three years now, ever since I came back from college. You told me you wanted me to learn the business, and

now with a significant twitch to the corners of her lips. "It's to be a sort of engagement party."

"Engagement party?" Jock repeated vaguely.

"Yes. A kind of opening gun to arrange the marriage between you and myself."

Jock halted abruptly and stood back staring at her.

"The marriage between you and myself!" he gasped incredulously. "Good Lord!"

Gertrude burst into a ringing laugh of sheer amusement.

"Flatterer!" she mocked. "Really, Jock, you couldn't look more horrified if I had told you that you were going to be electrocuted. What's the matter with me, anyhow? I think I would make a wife for any man to jump at."

"You want me to marry you?" he said feebly.

"Good Lord, no!" She was as emphatic in her disclaimer as himself. "It isn't what you or I want that I'm bothering about. It's what our two fathers are after."

"Let those two old men scheme and plan all they please. They can lead us to the water, but they can't make us drink, not if we both make up our minds to it." Then she stopped and scrutinized him sharply in the light of a street lamp. "Jock McCall," she exclaimed, "there's another girl."

"How did you guess that?" he stammered.

"Why, from the very look of you. I hadn't the chance to see your face plainly before. Oh, glory!" she clapped her hands. "Now I know I can count on you."

So with a perfect understanding established, he escorted her to her gate, and then went on home to report his success in obtaining the release to his father.

"It took me longer than I expected," he said, "and it cost me the full hundred dollars, but I finally argued them into signing."

It was the first time he had ever deceived his father on a business matter, but he justified himself on the ground that he was not being treated squarely from the other side.

Nor was this by any means the last

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father started to speak, "you will tell me that you give me the privilege of going to the various stores and charging things up to your account, always knowing that you will look over the bills. Then too, if I want five or ten dollars for spending money I can generally get it by asking you and explaining just exactly what I am going to do with it. Probably I get, all told, a fair remuneration for my services."

"Then what are you complaining about?" questioned McCall coldly. "What do you want?"

"I want a regular salary. I want to spend it as I see fit, without anyone having the right to stop or question me. I want—freedom."

"Suppose," he flushed a trifle self-consciously, "I should meet some girl that I would want to marry. How could I ever think of entertaining such an idea, when I am nothing more than a dependent—receiving only what you choose to give?"

The old man's lips relaxed somewhat from their stubborn set.

"The day you marry," he said, "I'll take you into partnership."

He turned back to his desk with an air of having ended the discussion, and Jock, knowing how useless it was to continue when his father adopted that time-is-money tone, went.

Meanwhile, McCall scratched off his signature to a basket of letters which the stenographer brought in. Then allowing himself a breathing spell at last, he stepped to the window and gazed meditatively toward a group of factory buildings over on the other side of the river, belonging to his friend and competitor, Peter Jordan.

The two concerns combined would make one of the largest plants in the world; and that is what he saw in his mind's eye already accomplished—a mammoth establishment, which under the name of McCall, would be carried on by his grandsons and great-grandsons.

Jordan had already given tacit consent to the plan; for Jordan had no son to succeed him, and was very willing that his only daughter, Gertrude, should marry such a steady-going, dependable lad as Jock McCall.

Jeremiah decided as he rubbed his thin hands together to bring the matter to a head. He stepped to the telephone and calling up his home, directed his wife to invite the Jordans, father and daughter, up for dinner some evening that week.

It never occurred to him for a moment that Jock would enter objections to the proposed arrangement, any more than it had to Jordan that Gertrude might have other ideas as to the disposition of her hand—ideas not unconnected with a certain handsome young foreman in one of her father's shops.

McCall never doubted that Jock would obediently fall in with the scheme, when it was outlined to him.

Young Jock, returning from the task of straightening out the dilatory letters, had made a long and quite unnecessary detour to pass through the shop where his little protégée of that morning was at work.

He saw with a little catch of anxiety that with her inept handling of the big machine at which she was set, there was grave danger of disaster. Awkwardly pushing the upper, on which she was engaged, across the machine, Amy's hand had strayed out of place and the sharp, strong needle was driven completely through.

Before it could descend a second time, almost before the quick cry of pain broke from her lips, Jock had sprung forward and thrown a lever which brought the swiftly moving mechanism to a halt. Then as the girl reeled back half fainting in her seat, he threw an arm about her and supported her, while a group of nearby employees hurriedly leaving their machines gathered around them.

"Oh," he appealed as he gazed at the white, pain-convulsed face leaning against his shoulder, "isn't there anybody here who knows what to do in a case like this?"

Fortunately there was. Minor casualties of the sort were of no infrequent occurrences in that department, and a meddlesome state bureau had compelled the installment of a "first aid" equipment. With this forthcoming now, the girl was given such relief as the circumstances permitted.

The color came back to her pale cheeks—came back rather strongly as she realized where her head was pillowed—and she raised herself a trifle hurriedly.

"I am quite all right now," she insisted. "If someone will only go out with me as far as the car, I am sure I can get home without the slightest trouble."

But Jock would listen to nothing of the sort. Already he had sent out for a luxurious limousine, and so, despite her protests, Amy rode home in state and escorted by the son of McCall to the shabby little cottage in a poor quarter of the town, where she lived with her widowed mother.

He was obliged to ask his father to pay for the limousine he had hired, and so he called upon to relate his whole adventure.

"Limousine, eh?" snorted Jeremiah. "To take home one of the girls who got hurt out in the stitching room?"

"However, since you've done it, I suppose I'll have to settle," he grudgingly took a five-dollar bill from the safe and handed it over. "Tell Miss Hastings to charge that up to my personal account and give her the girl's release to put on file."

"Her release?" Jock gave an uneasy start.

"Certainly. Do you mean to say that after all this hauling of her around like she was some visiting royalty, you didn't get her to sign up and release the firm from liability? Thunder and guns, boy, where are your wits? Why, I'll bet some personal injury shyster is out there now drawing up the papers for a suit. Here," he waved a peremptory arm, "grab your hat and streak it out there again as fast as you can make it. Or, wait a minute," he seized a pen and scribbled a line across the sheet of a memorandum pad.

"Take this and tell Miss Hastings to give you a hundred dollars in currency. The sight of the cash will sometimes land them when they'd turn their nose up at a check. Strike as good a bargain with her as you can and don't come back without that release."

Jock vanished, glad to get off with no stronger a reprimand.

On his arrival at the cottage he found that the girl was only too willing to waive any claim for compensation to which she was entitled. Jock pulled out and tendered the one hundred dollars as a "small indemnity from the firm for the loss of time and extra expense to which they would be put."

Then walking home in the soft April dusk, his mind full of entrancing visions of Amy as she sat propped up at a tea table almost smothered in her flowers, he encountered Gertrude Jordan.

He was about to pass her with a mere lifting of the hat and a word of greeting; but she turned, as if upon impulse, and fell into step beside him.

"Father and I are invited up to your house on Thursday," Gertrude said

deception that he practiced in the next few weeks. Under Gertrude's tutelage—a woman can always give a man lessons in duplicity—he gave the impression that he was falling in with his father's wishes and assiduously courting the daughter of old Jordan, thus avoiding the raising of any issue, while all the time he was spending stolen hours with Amy.

But Leaping River was too small a place and the son of Jeremiah McCall too prominent a person in the community for his actions long to escape comment; and when Amy, with only a healed scar to show for the injury she had received, returned to work, and Jock made a practice of escorting her to and from the factory every day, some of the gossip that was rife came to the ears of the stern, old head of the concern.

He satisfied himself that the information was authentic. Then he moved swiftly to action. First he gave orders for the discharge of the "hussy" as he termed her—it was not hard to find a cause of dismissal, when she was so plainly incompetent—then calling his son into the office, he laid down the law in six vitriolic sentences.

Pretending surrender, he promised compliance to all the old gentleman's demands, and that night after a tearful farewell interview with Amy, he skipped out.

When the safe at McCall's was opened the next morning, it was found that five hundred dollars in cash was missing, and in its place lay the following letter:

Father: I have taken \$500. I suppose you will say I have stolen it. But I have figured carefully, and have decided that over and above what I have had from you, there is more than this due me at the lowest wage rate paid at the factory. You have steadfastly refused me the wages and the independence you give to your cheapest hand. Now I am off to win my own way.

Old Jeremiah made no comment when he read this letter. His hard old face grew a shade grimmer, perhaps; he drove his working force possibly a trifle more ruthlessly; otherwise there was no change in him. He simply ceased to mention his son's name.

That all resentment was not dead within him, though, was shown by the significant fact that when he chanced to learn that the girl he blamed for Jock's downfall was employed at Jer-



The Girl Was Given Such Relief as Circumstances Permitted.

dan's, he called up his competitor on the phone and asked as a personal favor to himself that she be discharged.

Jock, through some influence he commanded there had secured the place for her before he went away, telling her that as soon as he was fairly settled and making his own way they would be married; but of course old Peter Jordan cared nothing for that, and was quite willing to oblige his friend.

To the two women in the little cottage where Jock had spent so many happy hours, however, it was nothing more or less than a tragedy. The semi-invalid mother, broken by the years in which she had fed her youthful vigor into those big machines clanking away in the factories along the river, was incapable of self-support, and Amy was apparently black-listed.

What had happened at Jordan's was almost certain to happen at any other place in Leaping River where she might secure employment; for Jeremiah McCall was not the one either to forgive or forget and his word was very potent.

In short, there seemed nothing for the girl except to go away.

To make her lot more hard, she had heard nothing from Jock for several weeks. He had not written her, nor did she even know where he was.

In her dilemma, New York with its countless opportunities seemed to offer the only refuge, and like many another girl who finds herself at a disadvantage against the barriers of her home environment, she turned her eyes toward the shining towers of Manhattan.

One afternoon when she had been wearily tramping Broadway all day in the vain search for work, she turned into the employment bureau of a big department store. She had had nothing to eat since breakfast, and then only a glass of milk and a couple of rolls.

So, as she stood there in the long line of applicants, tired, footsore and weak from hunger, she suddenly collapsed in a faint.

When she came to herself again, she was lying on a couch in one of the retiring rooms of the establishment,

while a couple of saleswomen hovered over her with a bottle of smelling salts.

The manager of the department, a big, pompous man, bustled in and took a look at her.

"Ah! coming around all right, eh?"

He seemed kind, and so she was shyly led her on to talk, it was not long until Amy had acquainted him with the main details of her long struggle for work, and had also revealed to him how utterly alone and friendless was her state.

"Well, well," he patted her hand gently. "I shall certainly have to try and do something for you. Call around tomorrow morning about ten o'clock when I have more time to talk with you."

"Or, say," he added, as he walked with her in casual fashion to the door, "come to think of it, I won't have a moment to spare in the morning. I wonder if it would be possible for you to drop up to my apartment and have a chat with me this evening. Here is the address." He slipped a card into her hand as he spoke.

Amy eagerly assented. She was entirely willing to meet his convenience, she told him. And so that night, all unsuspecting, she went to the address he had given her.

The next day a girl with wide blue eyes in which lurked a shrinking horror and a mouth whose tender curves were drooping and forlorn, wandered through New York debating in her despair whether she should throw herself into the river, or into the gutter. Of one thing she was certain, she could never go back to Leaping River, or even to the lodging house where she had been stopping in New York.

In the end—perhaps because the love of life is strong even when all else is gone, and because she was tired and hungry and had no place else to go—she crept back to the department manager from whom that morning she had flung herself away with words of utter loathing and contempt, and this time she stayed.

And the pity of it was that at the lodging house she had deserted, Jock McCall was besieging the door in the effort to get some information in regard to her; for in spite of his silence, he had never forgotten or wavered in his determination to come back and get her.

For a time, when discouragements fell thick about him, and it seemed that he would never get on, he had been too heartsick to write and then after that he had fallen ill and had been in the hospital for many weeks. But at last with health recovered, he had managed to annex a small job in his own line, and had shown such marked capabilities that he had been rapidly advanced through successive promotions until now he was an assistant superintendent with excellent prospects of an even higher post.

He had saved his money sedulously, and as soon as he felt that he had enough he came back to Leaping River.

As he walked up briskly to the factory, old Jeremiah McCall from his window saw him like another father of whom we are told, "while he was yet a long way off." But unlike that other father, Jeremiah did not go out and fall upon the neck of the returning prodigal. On the contrary, he sat stonily still with his hard eyes fixed upon the framed text "The Wages of Sin is Death." And he did not change from that attitude even when his boy entered the room.

Jock hesitated a moment on the threshold; then as he realized the significance of the severe back turned so relentlessly toward him, his head went up, and he stepped quickly forward to lay an envelope on his father's desk.

"I am returning, sir," he said, "with interest, the five hundred dollars I borrowed from your safe. I considered them and I consider still that the money was justly due me; but I am no longer in need of any assistance from you, so I have brought it back."

There was no answer, nor did the old man change in any degree his stiff pose of disapproval. Jock waited a moment for some word, some sign of yielding; then with his head thrown up higher than ever, he stalked from the room.

This first duty accomplished, Jock left the factory, and hastened to the cottage of Mrs. Prentice. Had it been the other way about and he had been thus informed of old Jeremiah's scurvy trick in securing the discharge of the girl from Jordan's visit to his father might have been of a less pacific tenor. As it was, so great was his disappointment over finding Amy gone, and so hot his resentment over the cause of her leaving that he was strongly tempted to return to the factory and give his father what he called "one good bawling out."

He had, however, but twelve minutes in which to catch a train for New York, and therefore felt obliged to defer the interview until a later occasion. At the station, he sent a wire to apprise Amy of his coming. It arrived just ten minutes after she had left the house to keep her ill-fated engagement.

And so, for three days, Jock suffered every quail of anxiety, apprehension and panic. The lodging house woman equally with himself was at a loss to account for the girl's inexplicable absence; such a thing had never occurred before, she said.

Jock spent a small fortune in advertising for her, and wandered Broadway like an uneasy ghost in the vain hope that he might pick up some clue.

Then on the fourth day, the mystery was solved. In response to one of his

advertisements there came to the lodging house, addressed to Jock McCall a blotted and tear-stained note. The handwriting was very shaky, but still it was unmistakably Amy's.

It was brief, scarcely more than half a dozen lines, and it told him that he might as well give up the search for her and go back to where he came from. She did not want to be found.

And this last was underscored three times.

Still, Jock did not give up the search. He abandoned his position and all his fine prospects, and settled down in New York to devote himself to that one end—finding Amy. He went to places where the light laughter of women rises like the bubbles in their brimming wine cups. To cabarets and



Suddenly Collapsed in a Faint.

dance palaces, and all-night restaurants he went, and even to places of worse repute. But he never set eyes upon her.

One day he saw crossing Broadway at Forty-second street, his old playmate, Gertrude Jordan. She had grown stout and matronly, since he had seen her last, but there was a look upon her face which he had never known in the old days, and which made her homely features almost beautiful. Then he recognized the cause, for beside her was the stalwart foreman-husband, now the manager of Jordan's and on his shoulder was a chubby, two-year-old boy.

Jock did not try to speak to them.

"There, except for my father's meddling," he muttered bitterly, "goes Amy Prentice and myself."

But at last he found her. It was just as he had often pictured it. She was at a fast restaurant with a gay party.

He paused beside her.

"Amy," he said.

She glanced up at him quickly, and half drew back, her face paling under the rouge.

"I am going to take you home, and let you change that gown for something more suitable," he said as he led her to the door, "and then we're going over to Jersey and get married. I have a friend there who will manage the license for us."

"Oh, no, Jock," she faltered. "It's too late. Don't you understand? I could never be your wife—anybody's wife now."

She would have said more, perhaps, but at that minute, the manager from the department store, beginning to sense what was in the wind, strode forward.

"Go back to your seat," he ordered dropping a heavy hand upon her shoulder.

Almost simultaneously, Jock's fist shot out and the manager went down to the floor with a crash that nearly knocked the glasses off the tables.

A dozen waiters rushed forward to interpose; but before they could get half way across the room, Jock had whisked Amy out of the door, and into a taxi-cab standing in front. A moment later they were whirling off to her apartment.

"Hurry now, dearest," he urged her, as he opened the door with the key she gave him, and they passed inside together. "I am going to telephone the minister at Hoboken that we will be there in half an hour."

But again doubts and compunctions assailed her.

"The past is past, Amy," he said masterfully. "We have both gone wrong, and have suffered for it. But the future is ours, and by the Eternal, we'll share it together."

Suddenly, the door was dashed open, and the enraged manager, wild-eyed and hatless and disheveled, confronted them with a revolver in his hand.

The next morning, Jeremiah McCall picked up his newspaper and read that his son had shot and killed Amy Prentice and then killed himself. There was nothing in the account to indicate what had been their direct motive. But Jeremiah McCall raised his eyes grimly to the text on his office wall: "The Wages of Sin is Death."

The newspaper account of the tragedy of these two young lives gave Jeremiah McCall no hint that the manager of the department store had followed his quarry, taken his desperate revenge and made good his escape. The police were satisfied with the evidence that appeared to their eyes, but the moral law still questions:

"WHO'S GUILTY?"

(END OF SECOND STORY.)



Amy Was Discharged.

I've gone ahead and tried to do it. I'm not throwing any bouquets at myself, but I do think that I've made reasonably good, and that you'd have more or less of a hard time getting anyone to fill my place."

"Well!" the old man's tone was absolutely without expression.

Jock hesitated. "Tell me, first," he parried with a touch of shrewdness, "what you think. Have I, or have I not made good?"

McCall was rigidly honest in speech as well as in action. "I've no complaints to make of you," he said dryly. "Then," demanded Jock, "why don't you pay me a salary, as you would have to with any other man who did the work for you that I am doing?"

"Oh, I know," he broke out as his