

WHO'S GUILTY?

by MRS. WILSON WOODROW

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SEVENTH STORY

Truth Crushed to Earth.

The champion, sword in hand, was defending his lady love from the murderous attack of the dragon. The group of nurses lounging on the park bench saw only five-year-old Tommy Blake and four-year-old Marjorie Lampton, playing with a very big and very friendly colt. But Tommy, the champion, knew better. He knew the dragon would surely swallow Marjorie or drag her away to its lair, unless her defender could frighten away the monster with his sword.

So while Marjorie squealed with delight, Tommy wielded the wooden sword right doughtily, shaking it in front of the barking colt's nose and assuring his little playmate he would save her.

It was a wonderful game. But presently the colt tired of it and trotted away. Tommy (thrilled at the triumphant thought that he had vanquished the dragon) gave chase. He had not run three steps before his foot slipped and he tumbled face downward in a very large and very sloppy mudpuddle.

The nurse swooped down upon him and dragged him homeward. Mrs. Blake was at this moment engaged in preparing an address which she expected to read two nights later before the Parents' club.

A shutting door, a sound of weeping, the hurry of footsteps checked her flow of inspiration. She laid down her pen and turned with a frown toward the library doorway.

On the threshold appeared the nurse half leading, half dragging the tearful and muddy child. At sight of the havoc wrought on Tommy's new suit Mrs. Blake called in sudden loss of temper:

"Tom!" she wailed. "Oh, Tom! You poor, poor boy! I'm so sorry! But why did you tell him it was you that broke the vase? Why didn't you say it was Harry?"

"I-I had to tell him the truth," panted the boy. "There wasn't anything else to do."

From the days when he had defended her from the colt-dragon, Tom Blake had loved Marjorie Lampton. And now, at twenty-one, it was no longer the affection of a child for a child, but the whole-souled adoration of a man for a woman.

And one evening he told her so. It was during his senior year at the university. He had but three months more to study. After graduation he was to go into business with his father.

He and Harry Lampton were in the same class at the university. But their childhood acquaintance had not ripened into friendship.

It was on the evening after his father had promised to take him into the business that Tom called on Marjorie with the good news.

But, Tom! came the quavering reply over the wire. "I can't, dear. I can't! The president knows Dad. He'd be certain to mention it to him. And then I'd be in awful trouble. That's why I didn't interfere last night. Harry threatened to tell Dad I was with you. And—"

"All right, sweetheart," said Tom gently. "Don't be frightened. I'm not worth it. I'll manage somehow without your testimony."

He returned to the president. "I regret, sir," said Tom. "That my witness cannot testify. But I have given you my word of honor that I—"

"That will do," the president cut him short. "Good day."

At a meeting of the faculty that afternoon Tom Blake was duly and publicly expelled from the university.

He himself brought home the news. His mother burst into a flood of tears. His father, as stirred as she, took the matter more stoically.

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Tom opened a drawer of his desk; then reconsidered, and decided the money would be safer in his own keeping. Office thefts were not uncommon and there was always the danger of fire.

So he took out a long envelope, wrote his name and the firm's address on it, put the money in the envelope, sealed it and placed it in the inside pocket of his vest. Then he locked the office and went out into the street.

The hour was late and he was sleepy as well as hungry, so he took a short cut through a network of squalid streets to bring him to his own boarding place. He had gone only a few blocks when he noticed on a curtained street window the sign:

"Harding's cafe."

The window was not over-clean and the street was uninviting. But hunger is seldom fastidious.

Choosing a meal from the list displayed on the greasy and much-thumbed menu, he gave his order and sat back to wait.

Lizzie Reisen was a lady who lived by her wits. And she had good sharp wits to live by. She did not care for her patronymic, and early in her career she had changed it to "Luzette Fortescue." But an unappreciative police force had renamed her "Light-Fingered Liz."

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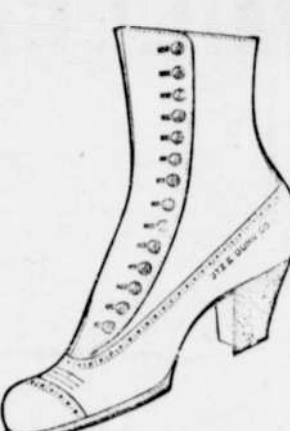
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"Harry Has Threatened to Tell Father if I Say Anything!"

top drawer of my desk last night," Tom was saying as they went in, "and locked it. I hope I did right! It seemed safer to carry it around with me. I—what's the matter?" he broke off in loud-voiced dismay.

A group of employees were standing in the center of the room, staring at the havoc wrought on the previous night.

"Somebody's broke in here!" piped the office boy at sight of his employer. "Someone got in last night!"

Tom, with a gasp of apprehension, ran to his desk.

"Gone!" he shouted, as he surveyed the wreckage. "The Sullivan money's gone!"

"Man from police headquarters to see you, sir," reported the office boy, ushering in a wooden-faced plain-



"Cannot Employ You Any Longer!"

"Dearst—I'm a coward, and I don't suppose you can forgive me. But you don't know what Dad is, when he's in one of his rages. There is nothing he wouldn't do if he found out I'd deserted him. I couldn't help you, Tom. I just couldn't. But there's something I can do. And I've done it. Frank Rowe was my god-father, and he loves me better than anyone else. I've just been to him and told him the whole story."

"I'll help you both out. Send Tom Blake to me and I'll give him a chance in my own office. Since you believe in him, so will I. And in a year you'll be of age. Then you can marry anyone you want to. By that time, if he's any good, he'll be making a merry little salary. Tell him to come and see me tomorrow. Please go to him, Tom. It's our one chance—Neatly broken."

"P. S.—I love you."

The next year was one of tireless work and steady achievement for Tom Blake. He more than justified the "chance" that Roger Lampton gave him by bringing to his new job a restless energy, enthusiasm and adaptability that quickly won his employer's approval.

"I thought I was doing you a favor, Marjorie," Roger Lampton said to the girl one day, "by hiring young Blake. But it was you who did me a favor by getting me such a man to work for me. He's had two promotions this past year. And he's going to get a third and bigger raise next month."



"Harry Has Threatened to Tell Father if I Say Anything!"

Well, take my advice—marry Tom Blake that day. And I'll make your peace with your father afterward."

(END OF SEVENTH STORY.)