

Sinners in Heaven

(Continued from page 2)

"This Alan—after going to fetch water and remaining to bathe—found her, upon his return. He set down the basket, then bent over her."

"What is the matter?"
"She half drew away from his touch. Bending closer, he removed the hands from her head, and raised it back against his breast."

"What's troubling my dearest, on this day of days?"

"She looked up into the ardent gray depths so close above her; then at the photograph upon the wall. His look followed hers, and quick comprehension dawned."

"Ah!" he ejaculated. "Well?"
"Don't you see?" she asked. "All this is—impossible!"
His eyes hardened a little; and he loosed her.

"You and I have gone too far, now, to draw back because of scruples, Barbara!"

"They are not scruples! It is a matter of honor." She half raised her left hand, showing the little hand of diamonds.

With one swift movement he had seized the hand and ripped off the ring.

"Honor be d—d, then!"
She sprang up, alarmed at his violence. He towered over her, his face blazing.

"Do shed the remnants of the parson's daughter, my dear girl! Face things squarely! You drifted into this engagement when a mere child, not realizing all it meant. As you developed, it ceased to fill your life. His nature did not satisfy yours. I saw that at once. But until I knew your heart was free, I could do nothing—save keep away!" He laughed bitterly.

"I have wanted you and craved for your love, day after day, night after night, all these desolate months here together like—like two icebergs in the Garden of Eden! Do you think now, when I have got it, I am going to lose it again? Would he or any sane man wish it—or expect it—after all this? Don't you realize what—the world would think—now?"

She looked puzzled over this sentence, not having been acquainted with a malicious-minded world beyond her old horizon. But she knew the truth of every other word he uttered. Her awakened heart understood now the affectionate comradeship alone aroused by Hugh. Her whole nature yearned toward this man who had mastered it; her heart fluttered—wavered. The conscience warring against it made another dying attempt.

"I—I can't shatter a man's lifelong faith. It would be murderous—"

"Do you love me?" he interrupted, taking her firmly by the shoulders.

"Ah! you—know it," she breathed.

"Yet you would put—this—between us, with no hope of rescue?"

Loosing her abruptly, he turned and looked long at the pictured face. Then, with a stifled exclamation, he pulled it from the bamboo. Before she realized his motive, he had torn the photograph into shreds, and scattered them upon the ground.

"Alan!" she gasped, almost frightened by his vehemence. He wheeled, facing her with burning eyes.

"I'm not a lap-dog! If we get rescued, we shall, of course, go straight to Hugh and tell him the truth. But—if not—"

He suddenly threw his arms around her, straining her to him.

"Have you realized that probability—now, Barbara? We may be here forever—just you and I—where the mazes of civilization give way to Truth—where no laws exist save those of nature—no conventions!"

He swept her off her feet, and his kisses burned upon her lips, her neck, her short hair. . . . Once more her life seemed to sink from her own keeping into his.

He set her down at last, still clasping her to him.

"Doesn't—that—decide it all?" he murmured unsteadily. "Don't you understand that we have bigger issues to face—here—than useless scruples?"

She turned in his arms, looking into his eyes through the gathering darkness. The distant thundering surf was the only sound; and it seemed to suggest approaching storms more terrible than any she had faced before. Freeing herself a little, she pressed him from her.

"You have won your way—as usual, Alan. But—ah! Be merciful!" As she had appealed before, so the cry came again from her unprotected heart.

"That pitiful entreaty and her surrender reached where resistance might have failed. The passion in his face faded a little; and, seeing this, she pressed her advantage.

"Isn't the present joy—sufficient? You are mine and I am yours. Don't let us spoil the glory of it all!"

For a long moment there was silence in the darkening hut.

Then this man, who had ever been wont to sweep aside all obstacles to his will, bent his head slowly, and kissed in turn the small hands clasped upon his breast.

"We must keep our faith in each other—whatever the future brings," he whispered. And tenderly, almost reverently, he kissed her lips.

PART THREE

Deep Chords

I

A ring of stakes, lolling drunkenly

to one side, encircled the hut, at a distance of about twenty yards. With a small rock for hammer, Alan was pounding them into the ground, during the hour before sunset. He had conceived the idea of building a palisade.

Occupation! It was what they craved. Though neither confessed the fact to the other, both tacitly acknowledged the need. They seized on any excuse that would supply food for their thoughts, toil for their limbs, fatigue for body and mind. For, deep in the heart of each, below all the ecstasy of their joy together, lurked grim fear—not fear of each other, but fear of themselves; above all, fear of nature, of her smiling face and irrevocable laws. Resolutely, each buried the skeleton out of sight, covering it with a hundred pretty-colored reeds. But sometimes, unexpectedly, it stirred below the thick layers, stretched out its skinny arms. . . .

"I'll bring the river down here some day," the inventor of modern aircraft observed, thumping in a stake with his stone-age hammer. Why are you smiling in that vacant manner?"

"Alan," she murmured, "you have been a revelation. I thought you a bully, only intent upon getting your own way, regardless of everybody."

"Well?" He laughed gently. "Haven't I got it?"

"Ah, but not until it proved to be my way too."

"Merely because I realized it would be worthless otherwise. I learned that first of all the many things you taught me."

"Yes, you." He raised her chin possessively. "Don't you think you have been a revelation, too? And hasn't the 'spirit' of the island you spoke about been a revelation to us both? It seems to me," he laughed, "the only thing to save the world from being choked by materialism is to wreck it on a desert isle! Make everybody begin life afresh, back in prehistoric days."

Barbara caught at this idea. "But," she said, following the train of thought it engendered, "if all discontented people had the chance to come, wouldn't every tree be crowded?"

"Not at all. Only a handful would arrive. The majority are too peacefully asleep to realize they are being choked. Commercialism is the god they worship. Although, when there is nothing better to do, they go to church—in their best clothes."

"You are very bitter!" she exclaimed in surprise.

"To Barbara, this man had ever been full of surprises; but she had spoken the truth when she had called him a revelation. For, during the two months since Christmas, he had been so at every turn. Not until love opened her own eyes; until she knew the meaning of passion herself, and understood the tempestuous force of his, did she realize the strain under which he had been living. Since Christmas night the nature she had thought arrogant had revealed a thousand wonderful mysteries. As a tree, cold and hidden in the snows and frosts of winter, responds to the glory of spring, so he had opened in the glory of their love."

She drew away from him, and clasped her arms round her raised knees. Mountains, dark and threatening to those whose way lies across them, are little heeded when shrouded in mist, below which the sun shines. But now and then a jagged peak thrusts through; and, with the journey's progress, more appear behind. . . . Generally, these frequent peaks were instinctively shunned; but to-day Alan went on recklessly.

"After all, marriage was made for man, like all other conventions. We are not their slaves. What do forms and ceremonies matter—here? They are often tush. A pauper marries an heiress, and vows to endow her with all his worldly goods! If he did, he would have to take the clothes off his back and go stark naked. You and I would vow to forsake all others, when there is nobody here to forsake. You would hardly want to elope with Babooma? If you did, I should soon catch you. That's another point; we couldn't separate if we wanted to! So what would be the good of a wedding? Of vows we couldn't possibly break!"

She sprang to her feet, breathing quickly.

"Alan! What are you saying? Don't! Don't!"

"Why not?" he asked, getting up, too. "We can't remain blindfolded forever."

The mists fell from a huge mountain peak, and the color ebbed from the girl's face.

"Ah!" she murmured, clasping her hands. "Isn't the present—perfect? Don't precipitate—"

He took her by the shoulders, forcing her to face him. "We are only human," he said, in a low voice; "and, Barbara—I want my wife!"

She pressed her clenched hands against him, hiding her head upon them. "Oh, not yet! Don't think me obtuse. Alan. I have thought, too, and—and feared—"

"What have you feared?"

"She did not reply for a moment; he waited, motionless."

When every accustomed bulwark of life has been demolished, the foundations of a fresh building are laid necessarily in a troubled soil composed of struggle, temptation, agonies of uncertainty. The undeveloped girl, blindly groping after the "hidden want" in a materialistic environment,

had gone forever. As the ripened corn sprung from its buried seed, the woman, sublime in her love, glories in the growing courage of the inner self she had tried to stifle, had arisen.

"We have found the true keynote here," she murmured brokenly at last. "and we must keep it tuned aright. I wouldn't, for the world, spoil the beauty of everything."

"You couldn't—ever," he whispered into her hair. "But love is a terrific force which can't be turned on and off like hot water; or compressed into narrow preconceived channels."

He suddenly threw his arms round her and strained her to him. "Barbara! why should we be done out of our rights? We've been chucked out of the world; stripped of everything that made life worth living. But now we have discovered the greatest treasure of all. Are we to give that up because of—scruples? By G—d!"

With sudden anger he loosed her, clenching his hands. "I won't! I'm d—d if I'll agree to that! It isn't fair. You say I always get my way. Well—some time—"

She met calmly the passion and threat in his eyes. These untamed forces no longer alarmed her, as they would have done six months ago.

"Alan!" she protested, holding out her hand. He ignored it, gazing still upon the peculiar radiance of her face. She went to him, lifting both hands to his shoulders, her lips tremulous. "There is more to be considered. . . . not—not only ourselves. . . . My darling! don't you realize we are man and woman, and—"

Her flushed face sank on his breast. "Don't you see?" she whispered. "Others! Not—scruples!"

A long silence succeeded her broken words. His arms closed around her again, and again he hid his face in her hair.

He raised his head at last; and as he pulled her hands down into his own his face looked strangely drawn.

"God help us both, Barbara!" he muttered huskily. "For we are in the very h—l of a position. There was a strange blending of fear and adoration in the eyes of both, while they looked upon each other. "But I—I swear I'll never force you to anything. Always remember that. And, for heaven's sake, don't—let me forget! I'm so d—d human," he added, with naive paths.

For the first time since she knew him, she heard a lack of confidence in his tone. Conscious of those forces of nature against which they were but puppets, all the woman in her rose to meet him.

"We can never lose faith in each other, Alan. That will help us. But—" she looked at the dearly loved figure. For one illuminating instant, all that marriage would mean between them flashed into her heart, awakening the mother dormant within her. "Ah! But it's going to be hard—hard—hard!"

The cry burst, involuntarily, from her lips. All the love and longing which inspired it shone in the gaze which seemed to envelop him as a glowing fire. . . . For a space he stood silent, lost with her in a world which neither had dreamed of before. Then he stepped forward with a muttered ejaculation, and they clung together as they had clung on their first night on the island—two derelict beings swept over the world's edge.

"Go in," he whispered tremulously, at last. "I can't come to supper tonight. I must go away alone for a bit. . . . and think. . . . You've opened a new world to me tonight."

He kissed her with lingering gentleness, and turned away toward the shore.

Barbara walked slowly into the hut. But to her, also, food seemed impossible just then. That moment's illumination had opened up a new world for her, too—a world which, it seemed, she was never to enter! . . . With a little sobbing breath she went into the sleeping hut and threw herself face downward on her bed.

For a long time neither alluded to this conversation. A new chord had been struck between them, too deep for idle talk. A subtler difference, a shade more of seriousness, came into their relations. The shadow cast by the mountain peaks enveloped them. Try as they would, they could never quite free themselves from it.

Distractions of any sort became urgent; but to find them, in this small island, was no easy matter. However, Alan, after mentally viewing the land, took what frail material there was and wove it into ropes of support. That the ropes might break he could not foresee.

He turned once more, in pathetic hope, to the natives.

During the months since their first visit to the settlement, he had come to occupy the unique position of a set-divine Overlord. His orders, issued at first in the spirit of bluff, were obeyed. This at first surprised, then amused, him. After a time, it afforded him intense interest. His orders regarding cleanliness were receiving extraordinary consideration; irrigation work had been undertaken. Now, he plunged with new zest into this novel training of prehistoric minds. He ordered the cultivation of taro to be re-instituted; tapestry-weaving from reeds to be revived. All this originating from fear, not inclination, slowly awakened the natives' interest, which, increasing, caused much of their lethargy to vanish.

Within a few weeks, the last signs of a threatening new epidemic of sickness vanished, and the settlement became more wholesome. This being attributed to the what man's magic, their fear blended into a crude awesome affection, which struck Alan as pathetic. Gradually his visits became hailed even with delight. For, in matters of dispute, Chimababoh appealed to him, relying more and more on his counsel. And, swayed by none of the opposing elements, he dealt with a severe justness, yet humaneness, which they found both novel and attractive. Withal, he traced them, stimulating their latent powers, much in the same way in which he had stimulated Barbara, by the mere force of his own vitality.

His own interest in these people grew apace. From Alan she learned some of the dialect, very soon being able to speak a little herself. Sometimes she brought the children odd bits of ribbon or lace, which produced an excited uproar. Weeks later, she used to see these scraps adorning some woman's dark form, with ludicrous incongruity.

But, among these "children of nature," as among other children, not of nature but of civilized education, there existed under-currents of strife, ambition, ill-feeling. These were resonant—

but catching at straws; yet, eagerly, such frail aids were welcomed.

After a short consultation with Chimababoh, Roowa was commanded to take up his residence in the north, to help the "white chief" in work upon the land, while Meama served his "wife."

The ruined huts were strictly taboo, haunted by the spirits of those slain there. Roowa, proudly radiant, began to build a new hut, to which Meama and his two children could be fetched. Within a short time smoke arose from Meama's cooking; and two small black figures danced, like imps, among the palms.

(To be continued)

Tongue Twisters

Allie and Allister ate all Allen Ackley's apples.

Frank fought Fred for fun Friday.

Mildred Morrison mended many mittens.

Susanna Stockum sang several Sunday school songs sweetly.

Mildred made many mittens Monday.

Daddy's Evening Fairy Tale
by MARY GRAHAM BONNER
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CHRISTMAS PENNIES

Mahalia wanted to have some Christmas presents and she wanted to do this with her very own money.

Now, Mahalia didn't have any money of her own. But she asked her daddy and her mother and her grandmother, who lived down the block, and her aunt and uncle, who lived four blocks away, if she couldn't earn some money.

"I should have lots of errands to run," said her daddy, "around Christmas time at the store. People will want small packages in a hurry—string or ribbon or tissue paper, and every time you run an errand I'll pay you just as I'd pay anyone."

"I'd like to be paid in pennies," said Mahalia.

"Pennies will be paid to you," said her daddy.

"I will give you a penny a day if you eat a piece of bread at each meal without a fuss," said her mother, "and if you eat two pieces of bread I will give you two cents." Mahalia did not like bread.

Her uncle told her he had an old desk which he hadn't time to clean out, and he had always told her aunt that he would be doing it himself some time so she shouldn't bother about it. But now, he said, if Mahalia would take all the papers and put them together, and all the elastic bands in another pile and all the pencils without points in still another, and put everything nicely sorted and arranged on a table nearby and then dust the desk in every corner thoroughly, he would give her lots of pennies.

"I will go over the papers then and throw away what I don't want, and really have that desk in order. It would be useful to me if it were in order. As it is I don't want to put anything in it for fear it should get mixed up with all the trash there now."

"Of course you must be very, very particular in a job of this sort."

And Mahalia promised she would be.

Her uncle told her that she could do it between supper time and bedtime, and then it would not interfere with the work she was going to do for her daddy.

Her aunt told her that when she got through with the work for her uncle she could spend several evenings fixing up work baskets about the house.

"The threads and pieces of silk are all mixed up. They're all in a tangled mass. I shall be delighted to see them in order."

Her grandmother told her that if she would come over and brush off the

front steps each morning before she went up to the store she would get pennies for that.

"Of course the snow would be too heavy for you, but it would be a great help at this time to have the steps done, for we're so busy with cooking that we haven't time."

Well, as you can see, Mahalia had a busy time of it. But they all saw that she didn't overdo. She loved the work. Of course she wouldn't have cared to have been busy like that all the year.

But in the holidays before Christmas when everyone was so busy, anyway, it was fun to be busy.

And oh, how lovely it was when she had her own pennies to spend.

She had many pennies, too. And she bought every Christmas present that year with her very own money she had earned.

She had felt so much more important, too, than if she had simply been given the money, and they all had said well.

The way those pennies she earned jingled in the little bag she carried wherever she went! How beautifully they jingled.

To Mahalia it seemed as though they kept saying:

"Merry Christmas from Mahalia. And maybe, after all, that was really just what they were saying, those jingling, well-earned, jolly Christmas pennies!"



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