

notice
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Jesse Ward

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The Fighting Hope

Novelized by
VIRGINIA LEILA WENTZ
From the Play by
WILLIAM J. HUREBURT

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[Continued from last week]

For a full hour, white faced and staring, she scarcely moved. It was not that she for a moment suspected her husband's loyalty to her—if he had taken any woman to luncheon yesterday it had probably been one of those little typewriters down in the sweltering offices, the tired and most pale faced among them—no one could deny Robert his kindness and susceptibility of heart. Oh, it wasn't that at all which had brought her to this cruel pass! It was that her husband, the father of her children, had proved himself beyond peradventure a deliberate liar. And to her!

That one lie had become, as it were, the torch which lighted up all the



WILL JONES

"THERE WAS A WOMAN HERE, I TELL YOU, A WOMAN!"

dark, perplexing things in Robert; all the odd little things that had refused flatly to be ignored in cropping up, but for which, hitherto, she had found no solution. She had groped through no merciful, slow-down to this understanding of him. Being incapable, disqualified by nature, of any conception of a mind that hedged by reflex action, the spelling of falsehood to her meant positive agony.

A breath from the honeysuckle vines entered her dilating nostrils. She sniffed it curiously. "That's how the honeysuckles smelt one summer night when Robert knelt beside me, told me

all his beliefs and hopes, swore that my standard of life was his, and I believed him, and I think I thrilled a little. Now, all Robert's beliefs and ideals put together couldn't make me one thrill, and I feel as if I had been alive and was dead, and—and— 'All the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't set Humpty Dumpty together again.' Oh, I hate him!" she cried suddenly in bitterness. "I hated my father, too; he was another liar."

Then presently, looking up at the stars, she became a little humble; she made no attempt to judge. What was she, in the audacity of her youth, to filch the privilege of the Almighty? Robert was a gentle little man, who could lie. She should have mated with a strong, big man who couldn't, that was all. Just one mistake among a myriad in a teeming world.

"And what I've got to do is to scurry back into my everyday self as quickly as I can," she concluded. "After all, nothing has happened. Robert is Robert, and I am I, just as we were when we pledged our troth. And yet I could have killed him tonight. To kill a man because he happens to be himself is scarcely reasonable or sane. With this weakness, inherent in his nature, he'll have need of me. And the children want me. I'm indispensable to all of them. I must take my life in my own hands. No one can help me now. It will be amusing to manage it, an excitement."

She rose, but her knees shook in an inebriate sort of way. She laughed a bit sharply out into the dark.

"I'm my mother all over again, I see. My young mother died of this sort of thing, I believe." She put her hand out to touch a tiny jutting spur twinkling silver in the new moon's rays and shivered. "But I'll not die of it; I shall fill out. The fall from a fool's paradise hurts—oh, it hurts—but it doesn't kill us in these days."

Closing the balcony door softly, she entered the nursery. The children were fast asleep in their cots. She touched them curiously to see if their soft, warm flesh would thrill her as it used to do.

"Poor little helpless souls! You will need me, won't you?" she said brokenly, crouching down at their side.

Robert junior stirred. "The roof—it has a lazy time," he murmured in his sleep.

Anna smoothed his soft hair and trembled.

"Dear little son," she said, "didn't mother tell you the roof couldn't help being where it is. It was made like that. And the walls—they have to hold it up. No, they do not have much fun."

Mr. Marshfield Craven, the confidential friend and legal adviser of the president of the Gotham Trust company, blustered into the president's library in his home up the Hudson, near Ossining. He had come from New York early that afternoon and had much to do before the president's arrival on the 2:30 express.

In hurried, whipping fashion, this drawer was opened, then that. Papers and documents were hastily strewn here, there and everywhere. Unopened envelopes which dunned for attention were quickly torn open and thrown into the wastebasket or on the floor, as the chance might be. All of which proved a sore trial to Mrs. Mason, the president's housekeeper, who was in the last stages of "tidying



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up" the library.

As usual, when Craven was bustling with work he noticed nothing of his surroundings. He pulled out his watch. Fifteen minutes, yes!

"See if you can rattle off this letter in time for the next post, Miss Graham. Take it directly on the machine," he said, plying his fingers through his thin, gray hair. And he began to dictate.

But there was no confirming click of the typewriter. Craven turned over his shoulder toward the secretary's desk and looked above the rim of his glasses.

"Bless my soul," he exclaimed, "if I hadn't clean forgotten the bird had flown. Humph, Mrs. Mason," he said suddenly, addressing the housekeeper, who stood mutely dusting a generous pipe rack. "what in the world induced Miss Graham to give up her job anyhow? She's been here over a year. She's given entire satisfaction; had her stipend raised twice; always treated considerably—the deuce if I can make it out!"

Mrs. Mason suspended her feather duster and smiled enigmatically.

"She said her health was bad and she wanted a rest."

"Health bad? Fiddlesticks!" grunted Craven. "She had cheeks like Bald-

(Continued on last page.)

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