

# THE DESTROYING ANGEL

By LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

## SYNOPSIS.

Young Hugh Whitaker's doctors tell him he has but a few months to live, and his sweetheart jilts him. His friend, Peter Stark, finds him despondent and proposes a sea voyage. Whitaker runs away to a strange town and finds young Mary Ladislak, deserted by the man with whom she eloped, about to commit suicide.

One about to die surely must feel more at ease about his future if he is conscious of having really done some good in the world. And in the scheme of things beyond our understanding perhaps a single big unselfish act—one that saves another from a grievous deed—will balance our million mean little transgressions and leave us with credit on the Big Book. In the installment given here there's a mighty fine story involving just this point.

## CHAPTER III—Continued.

"I didn't have any money to speak of, but I had some jewelry—my mother's—and he was to take that and pawn it for money to get married with."

"I see."  
The girl in her turn went to one of the windows, standing with her back to the room. Whitaker drew a chair for her and took a seat a little distance away, with a keen glance appraising the change in her condition. She seemed measurably more composed and mistress of her emotions, though he had to judge mostly by her voice and manner, so dark was the room.

"Don't!" she cried sharply. "Please don't look at me so—"

"I beg your pardon. I didn't mean to—"

"It's only—only that you make me think of what you must be thinking about me—"

"You've had a narrow but a wonderfully lucky escape."

"Oh! . . . But I'm not glad . . . I was desperate—"

"I mean," he interrupted coolly, "from Mr. Morton. The silver lining is, you're not married to a blackguard."

"Oh, yes, yes!" she agreed passionately.

"And you have youth, health, years of life before you?"

He sighed languidly . . .

"You wouldn't say that, if you understood?"

"Have you thought of going home? Have you written to your father—explained?"

"I sent him a special delivery three days ago, and—yesterday a telegram. I knew it wouldn't do any good, but I . . . I told him everything. He didn't answer. He won't, ever."

She bent forward, elbows on knees, head and shoulders cringing.

"It hurts so!" she wailed . . . "What people will think . . . the shame, the bitter, bitter shame of this! I've earned my punishment."

"Oh, I say—"

"But I have, because—because I didn't love him. I didn't love him at all, and I knew it, even though I meant to marry him. . . ."

"But, why—in Heaven's name?"

"Because I was so lonely and . . . misunderstood and unhappy at home. No mother, never daring to see my sister (she ran away, too) . . . my friendships at school discouraged nothing in life but my father to bully me and make cruel fun of me because I'm not pretty. . . . That's why I ran away with a man I didn't love—because I wanted freedom and a little happiness."

"Good Lord!" he murmured beneath his breath, awed by the pitiful, childish simplicity of her confession and the deep damnation that had waited upon her.

"So it's over!" she cried—"over, and I've learned my lesson, and I'm disgraced forever, and friendless and—"

"Stop right there!" he checked her roughly. "You're not friendless yet, and that nullifies all the rest. Be glad you've had your romance and learned your lesson—"

"Please don't think I'm not grateful for your kindness," she interrupted. "But the disgrace—that can't be blotted out!"

"Oh, yes, it can," he insisted bluntly. "There's a way I know—"

A glimmering of that way had only that instant let a little light in upon the darkness of his sollicitous distress for her. He rose and began to walk and think, hands clasped behind him, trying to make what he had in mind seem right and reasonable.

"You mean beg my father to take me back. I'll die first!"

"There mustn't be any more talk, or even any thought, of anything like that. I understand too well to ask the impossible of you. But there is one way out—a perfectly right way—if you're willing and brave enough to take a chance—a long chance."

Somehow she seemed to gain hope of his tone. She sat up, following him with eyes that sought incredulously to believe.

"Have I any choice?" she asked. "I'm desperate enough . . ."

"God knows," he said, "you'll have to be!"

"Try me."

He paused, standing over her. "Desperate enough to marry a man who's bound to die within six months and leave you free? I'm that man; the doctors give me six months more of life. Will you take my name to free yourself? Heaven my witness, you're welcome to it."

"Oh," she breathed, aghast, "what are you saying?"

"I'm proposing marriage," he said, with his quaint, one-sided smile.

"Please listen: I came to this place to make a quick end to my troubles—but I've changed my mind about that, now. What's happened in this room has made me see that nobody has any right to—hasten things. But I mean to leave the country—immediately—and let death find me where it will. I shall leave behind me a name and a little money, neither of any conceivable use to me. Will you take them, employ them to make your life what it was meant to be? It's a little thing, but it will make me feel a lot more fit to go out of this world—to know I've left at least one decent act to mark my memory. There's only this far-fetched chance—I may live. It's a million-to-one shot, but you've got to bear it in mind. But really you can't lose—"

"Oh, stop, stop!" she implored him, half hysterical. "To think of marrying to benefit by the death of a man like you—!"

"You've no right to look at it that way." He had a wry, secret smile for his specious sophistry. "You're being asked to confer, not to accept, a favor."

"There is something I can do for you!" he inquired with punctilious courtesy.

"If you will be kind enough to direct me to a minister . . ."

"I am one."

"I thought so," said Whitaker. "We wish to get married."

The gentleman looked from his face to the girl's, then moved aside from the gate. "This is my home," he explained. "Will you be good enough to come in?"

Conducting them to his private study, he subjected them to a kindly catechism. The girl said little, Whitaker taking upon himself the brunt of the examination. Absolutely straightforward and intensely sincere, he came through the ordeal well, without being obliged to disclose what he preferred to keep secret. The minister, satisfied, at length called in the town clerk by telephone; who issued the license, pocketed his fee, and in company with the minister's wife, acted as witness.

Whitaker found himself on his feet beside Mary Ladislak. They were being married. He seemed to hear the droning of the loom of the Fates. . . .

And they were man and wife. The door had closed, the gate-latch clicked behind them. They were walking quietly side by side through the scented night, they whom God had joined together. Neither found anything to say. At the station, Whitaker bought his wife a ticket to New York and secured for her solitary use a drawing-room in the sleeper. Whitaker possessed himself of his wife's hand-bag long enough to furnish it with a sum of money and an old envelope bearing the name and address of his law partner. He explained that Drummond would issue her an adequate monthly allowance and advise her when she should have become her own mistress once more; in a word, a widow.

She thanked him briefly, quietly, with a constraint he understood too well to resent.

Both, perhaps, were sensible of some relief when at length the train thundered in from the East, breathing smoke and flame. Whitaker helped his wife aboard and interviewed the porter in her behalf. Then they had a moment or two alone in the drawing-room, in what was meant to be their first and last parting.

She caught him suddenly by the shoulders with both her hands. Her eyes sought his with a wistful courage he could not but admire.

"You know I'm grateful . . ."

"Don't think of it that way—though I'm glad you are."

"You're a good man," she said brokenly.

He knew himself too well to be able to reply.

"You mustn't worry about me, now. You've made things easy for me. I can take care of myself, and . . . I shan't forget whose name I bear."

He muttered something to the effect that he was sure of that.

She released his shoulders and stood back, searching his face with tormented eyes. Abruptly she offered him her hand.

"Good-by," she said, her lips quivering—"Good-by, good friend!"

He caught the hand, wrung it clumsily and painfully and . . . realized that the train was in motion. He had barely time to get away . . .

He found himself on the station platform, stupidly watching the rear lights dwindle down the tracks and wondering whether or not hallucinations were a phase of his malady. A sick man often dreams strange dreams. . . .

A voice behind him, cool with a trace of irony, observed:

"I'd give a good deal to know just what particular brand of foolishness you've been indulging in, this time."

He whirled around to face Peter Stark—Peter quietly amused and very much the master of the situation.

"You needn't think," said he, "that you have any chance on earth of escaping my fond attentions, Hugh. I've fixed it up with Nelly to wait until I bring you home, a well man, before we get married; and if you refuse to be my best man—well, there won't be any party. You can make up your mind to that."

CHAPTER IV.  
Willful Missing.

It was one o'clock in the morning before Whitaker allowed himself to be persuaded; fatigue re-enforced every stubborn argument of Peter Stark's to overcome his resistance. "Oh, have your own way," he said at length, unconsistently iterating the words that had won him a bride. "If it must be . . ."

Whitaker has consented to go seafaring. But his mind is on the girl he has just married. What do you think he will do now?

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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## IF BACK HURTS USE SALTS FOR KIDNEYS

Eat less meat if Kidneys feel like lead or Bladder bothers.

Most folks forget that the kidneys, like the bowels, get sluggish and clogged and need a flushing occasionally, else we have backache and dull misery in the kidney region, severe headaches, rheumatic twinges, torpid liver, acid stomach, sleeplessness and all sorts of bladder disorders.

You simply must keep your kidneys active and clean, and the moment you feel an ache or pain in the kidney region, get about four ounces of Jad Salts from any good drug store here, take a tablespoonful in a glass of water before breakfast for a few days and your kidneys will then act fine. This famous salt is made from the acid of grapes and lemon juice, combined with lithia, and is harmless to flush clogged kidneys and stimulate them to normal activity. It also neutralizes the acids in the urine so it no longer irritates, thus ending bladder disorders.

Jad Salts is harmless; inexpensive; makes a delightful effervescent lithia-water drink which everybody should take now and then to keep their kidneys clean, thus avoiding serious complications.

A well-known local druggist says he sells lots of Jad Salts to folks who believe in overcoming kidney trouble while it is only trouble.—Adv.

### Author No Asset.

At a local bazaar they were offering autographed copies of books by Indianapolis authors.

"Here is a very delightful book, suitable for a gift, and autographed by the author. Only a dollar and a half," said the smiling manager of the booth.

"A dollar and a half!" gasped the prospective purchaser, a little woman who held her tempted purse close to her breast.

"Yes, a dollar and a half. The autograph, you know, has an especial value."

"Why, I can get a copy of that book at a downtown store for a dollar."

"Yes, I know you can, but not autographed by the author."

The prospective purchaser's face suddenly took on a look of high wisdom and then she blurted:

"Oh, well, I know who wrote it, anyhow."—Indianapolis News.

## FOR SKIN TROUBLES

That Itch, Burn, Torture and Disfigure Use Cuticura—Trial Free.

The Soap to cleanse and purify, the Ointment to soothe and heal. They usually afford immediate relief in itching, burning eczemas, pimples, dandruff and most baby skin troubles. They also tend to prevent little skin troubles becoming great if used daily.

Free sample each by mail with Book. Address postcard, Cuticura, Dept. L, Boston. Sold everywhere.—Adv.

### No Firebug.

Father—I guess that young man of yours is all right, daughter, but he'll never set the world on fire.

Daughter—I should say not; he's in the insurance business.—Boston Transcript.

Constipation can be cured without drugs. Nature's own remedy—selected herbs—is Garfield Tea.—Adv.

**With the Fingers!**  
Says Corns Lift Out  
Without Any Pain

You reckless men and women who are pestered with corns and who have at least once a week invited an awful death from lockjaw or blood poison are now told by a Cincinnati authority to use a drug called frezone, which the moment a few drops are applied to any corn or callous the soreness is relieved and soon the entire corn or callous, root and all, lifts off with the fingers.

Frezone dries the moment it is applied, and simply shrivels the corn or callous without inflaming or even irritating the surrounding tissue or skin. A small bottle of frezone will cost very little at any of the drug stores, but will positively rid one's feet of every hard or soft corn or hardened callous. If your druggist hasn't any frezone he can get it at any wholesale drug house for you.—Adv.

## A BAD COUGH

is risky to neglect. Take it in hand, and safeguard your health by promptly taking

**PISO'S**

"It's a Bargain."  
It's just an act of kindness to a hopeless man. I'd go mad if I didn't know you were safe from a recurrence of the folly of this afternoon.

"Don't!" she cried—"don't tempt me. You're no right. . . . You don't know how frantic I am. . . ."

"I do," he countered frankly. "I'm depending on just that to swing you to my point of view. You've got to come to it. I mean you shall marry me."

She stared up at him, spellbound, insensibly yielding to the domination of his will. It was inevitable. He was scarcely less desperate than she—and no less overwrought and unstrung; and he was the stronger; in the natural course of things his will could not but prevail.

The last trace of evening light had faded out of the world before they were agreed. Darkness wrapped them in its folds; they were but as voices warring in a black and boundless void.

Whitaker struck a match and applied it to the solitary gas-jet. A thin, blue, sputtering tongue of flame revealed them to one another. The girl still crouched in her armchair, weary