

THE DESTROYING ANGEL

By LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

CHAPTER XVIII—Continued.

She paused again, but still he was mute and immobile.

"So now you know me—what I am. No other man has ever known or ever will. But I had to tell you the truth. It seems that the only thing my career had left uncalculated was my fundamental sense of honesty. So I had to come and tell you."

And still he held silence, attentive, but with a set face that betrayed nothing of the tenor of his thoughts.

Almost timidly, with nervously fumbling fingers, she extracted from her pocketbook a small ticket envelope.

"Max was afraid you might upset the performance again, as you did on my last appearance. Hugh," she said; "but I assured him it was just the shock of recognizing you that bowled me over. So I've brought you a box for tomorrow night. I want you to use it—you and Mr. Ember."

He broke in with a curt monosyllable: "Why?"

"Why—why because—because I want you—I suppose it's simply my vanity—to see me act. Perhaps you'll feel a little less hardly toward me if you see that I am really a great actress, that I give you up for something bigger than just love—"

"What rot!" he said with an odd, short laugh. "Besides, I harbor no resentment."

She stared, losing a little color, eyes darkening with apprehension.

"I did hope you'd come," she murmured.

"Oh, I'll come," he said with spirit. "Wild horses couldn't keep me away."

"Really, Hugh? And you don't mind? Oh, I'm so glad!"

"I really don't mind," he assured her with a strange smile. "But . . . would you mind excusing me one moment? I've forgotten something very important."

"Why, certainly . . ."

He was already at the telephone in the hallway, just beyond the living-room door. It was impossible to escape overhearing his words. The woman listened perforce with, in the beginning, a little visible wonder, then with astonishment, ultimately with a consternation that shook her with violent tremblings.

"Hello," said Whitaker; "get me Rector two-two-hundred."

"Hello? Rector two-two-hundred? North German Lloyd? . . . This is Mr. H. M. Whitaker. I telephoned you fifteen minutes ago about reservation on the George Washington, sailing Saturday . . . Yes . . . Yes. I promised to call for the ticket before noon, but I now find I can't be able to go. Will you be kind enough to cancel it, if you please. . . . Thank you. . . . Goodby."

But when he turned back into the living room he found awaiting him a quiet and collected woman.

"Why did you do that?" she asked evenly.

"Because," said Whitaker, "I've had my eyes opened. I've been watching the finest living actress play a carefully rehearsed role, one that she had given long study and all her heart to—but her interpretation didn't ring true. Mary, I admit, at first you got me: I believed you meant what you said. But only my mind believed it; my heart knew better, just as it has always known better, all through this wretched time of doubt and misery and separation you've subjected us both to. And that was why I couldn't trust myself to answer you; for if I had, I should have laughed for joy. O Mary, Mary!" he cried, his voice softening, "my dear, dear woman, you can't lie to love! You betray yourself in every dear word that would be heartless, in every adorable gesture that would seem final! And love knows better always. . . . Of course I shall be in that box tomorrow night; of course I shall be there to witness your triumph! And after you've won it, dear, I shall carry you off with me . . ."

He opened his arms wide, but with a smothered cry she backed away, placing the table between them.

"No!" she protested; and the words were almost sobs—"No!"

"Yes!" he exclaimed exultantly.

"Yes! A thousand times yes! It must be so!"

With a swift movement she seized her muff and scarf from the chair and fled to the door. There, pausing, she turned, her face white and blazing.

"It is not true!" she cried. "You are mistaken. Do you hear me? You are utterly mistaken. I do not love you. You are mad to think it. I have just told you I don't love you. I am afraid of you; I daren't stay with you for fear of you. I—I despise you!"

"I don't believe it!" he cried, advancing.

But she was gone. The hall door slammed before he could reach it.

CHAPTER XIX.

One Way Out.

Toward eight in the evening, after a day-long search through all his accustomed haunts, Ember ran Whitaker to earth in the dining room of the Primordial. The young man, alone at table, was in the act of topping off an excellent dinner with a still more excellent, cordial and a super-excellent cigar.

He wore rough tweeds, and they were damp and baggy; his boots were muddy; his hair was a trifle disorderly. The ensemble made a figure wildly incongruous to the soberly splendid and stately dining hall of the Primordial club, with its sparse patronage of members in evening dress.

Ember, himself as severely beautiful in black and white as the ceremonious livery of today permits a man to be, was wonder-struck at sight of Whitaker in such unconventional guise, at such a time, in such a place. With neither invitation nor salutation, he slipped into a chair on the other side of the table, and stared.

Whitaker smiled benignantly upon him, and called a waiter.

Ember, always abstemious, lifted his hand and smiled a negative smile.

Whitaker dismissed the waiter.

"Well . . . ?" he inquired cheerfully.

"What right have you got to look like that?" Ember demanded.

"The right of every free-born American citizen to make an ass of himself according to the dictates of his conscience. I've been exploring the dark backwards and abyss of the Bronx—afoot. Got caught in the rain on the way home. Was late getting back, and dropped in here to celebrate."

"I've been looking for you everywhere, since morning."

"I suspected you would be. That's why I went walking—to be lonesome and thoughtful for once in a way."

Ember stroked his chin with thoughtful fingers.

"You've heard the news, then?"

"In three ways," Whitaker returned, with calm.

"How's that—three ways?"

"Through the newspapers, the billboards, and from the lips of my wife."

Ember opened his eyes wide.

"You've been to see her?"

"She called this morning—"

But Ember interrupted, thrusting a ready and generous hand across the table:

"My dear man, I am glad!"

Whitaker took the proffered hand readily and firmly. "Thank you. . . . I was saying; she called this morning to inform me that, though wedded once, we must be strangers now—and evermore!"

"But you—of course—you argued that nonsense out of her head."

"To the contrary—again."

"But—my dear man!—you said you were celebrating; you permitted me to congratulate you just now—"

"The point is," said Whitaker, with a bland and confident grin; "I've succeeded in arguing that nonsense out of my head—not hers—mine."

Ember gave a helpless gesture. "I'm afraid this is one of my stupid nights . . ."

"I mean that, though Mary ran away from me, wouldn't listen to reason, I have, in the course of an afternoon's hard tramping, come to the conclusion that there is nothing under the sun which binds me to sit back and accept whatever treatment she purposes according to me by courtesy of Jules Max."

Whitaker bent forward, his countenance discovering a phase of seriousness hitherto masked by his twisted smile.

"I mean I'm tired of all this poppycock. Unless I'm an infatuated ass, Mary loves me with all her heart. She has made up her mind to renounce me partly because Max has worked upon her feelings by painting some lurid picture of his imminent artistic and financial damnation if she leaves him, partly because she believes, or has been led to believe, in this 'destroying angel' moonshine. Now she's got to listen to reason. So, likewise, Max."

"You're becoming more human word by word," commented Ember with open approval. "Continue; elucidate; I can understand how a fairly resolute lover with the gift of gab can talk a weak-minded, fond female into denying her pet superstition; but how you're going to get around Max passes my comprehension. The man unquestionably has her under contract—"

"But you forgot his god is Mammon," Whitaker put in. "Max will do anything in the world for money. Therein resides the kernel of my plan."

It's simplicity itself: I'm going to buy him."

"Buy Max!"

"Body—artistic soul—and breeches," Whitaker affirmed confidently.

"Impossible!"

"You forget how well fixed I am. What's the use of my owning half the gold in New Guinea if it won't buy me what I already own by every moral and legal right?"

"He won't listen to you; you don't know Max."

"I'm willing to lay you a small bet that there will be no first performance at the Theater Max tomorrow night."

"You'll never persuade him—"

"I'll buy the show outright and my wife's freedom to boot—or else Max will begin to accumulate the local color of a hospital ward."

Ember smiled grimly. "You're beginning to convince even me. When, may I ask, do you propose to pull off this sporting proposition?"

"Do you know where Max can be found tonight?"

"At the theater—"

"Then the matter will be arranged at the theater between this hour and midnight."

"I doubt if you succeed in getting the ear of the great man before midnight; however, I'm not disposed to quibble about a few hours."

"But why shouldn't I?"

"Because Max is going to be the busiest young person in town tonight. And that is why I've been looking for you. . . . Conforming to his custom, he's been giving an advance glimpse of the production to the critics and a few friends in the form of a final grand dress rehearsal tonight. Again, in conformance with his custom, he has honored me with a bid. I've been chasing you all day to find out if you cared to go—"

"Eight o'clock and a bit after," Whitaker interrupted briskly, consulting his watch. "Here, boy," he hailed a passage page; "call a taxicab for me." And then, rising alertly: "Come along; I've got to hustle home; and make myself look respectable enough for the occasion; but at that, with luck, I fancy we'll be there before the first curtain."

This mood of faith, of self-reliance and assured optimism held unruffled throughout the dash homeward, his hurried change of clothing and the ride to the theater. Nothing that Ember, purposely pessimistic, could say or do availed to diminish the high buoyancy of his humor. He main-

ained a serene faith in his star, a spirited temper that refused to recognize obstacles in the way of his desire.

In the taxicab, en route to the Theater Max, he contrived even to distill a good omen from the driving autumnal downpour itself.

"On such a day as this," he told his doubting friend, "I won her first; on such a day I shall win her anew, finally and for all time!"

From Broadway to Sixth avenue, Forty-sixth street was bright with the yellow glare of the huge sign in front of the Theater Max. But this night, unlike that other night when he had approached the stage of his wife's triumphs, there was no crawling rank of cabs, no eager and curious press of people in the street; but few vehicles disputed their way; otherwise the rain and the hurrying, rain-coated wayfarers had the thoroughfare to themselves. . . . And even this he chose to consider a favorable omen; there was not now a public to come

between him and his love—only Max and her frightened fancies.

The man at the door recognized Ember with a cheerful nod; Whitaker he did not know.

"Just in time, Mr. Ember; curtain's been up about ten minutes."

CHAPTER XX.

Black Out.

The auditorium was in almost total darkness. A single voice was audible from the stage that confronted it like some tremendous, moonlight canvas in a huge frame of tarnished gold. They stole silently round the orchestra seats to the stage-box—the same box that Whitaker had on the former occasion occupied in company with Max.

They succeeded in taking possession without attracting attention, either from the owners of that scanty scattering of shirt bosoms in the orchestra—the critical fraternity and those intimates bidden by the manager to the first glimpse of his new revelation in stagecraft—or from those occupying the stage.

The latter were but two. Evidently, though the curtains had been up for some minutes, the action of the piece had not yet been permitted to begin to unfold. Whitaker inferred that Max had been dissatisfied with something about the lighting of the scene. The manager was standing in mid-stage, staring up at the borders—a stout and pompous figure, tenacious to every detail of that public self which he had striven so successfully to make unforgettably individual; a figure quaintly incongruous in his impeccable morning coat and striped trousers and flat-brimmed silk hat, perched well back on his head, with his malacca stick and lemon-colored gloves and small and excessively glossy patent-leather shoes, posed against the counterfett of a moonlit formal garden.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

MR. SMOOTH'S NEAT GETAWAY

Insurance Agent With Keen Eye to Business Came Near "Putting His Foot in It"

Slipping on an untenanted banana skin, the homely young woman, sat on the pavement with an unmusical splash. With efficient presence of mind, Eustace Smooth, agent for the General and Particular Insurance company, slipped on another peel and sat down beside her, with two muttered curses.

"Accidents will happen on the best regulated pavements, won't they?" he observed with a snarl. "Oh, well, luckily I happen to be an insurance agent, and I can insure you against slipping on banana peelings or even on a cake of ice for the small sum of \$14 a week, and the first time you slip after being insured, one of our automobiles, with absolutely no advertising matter on the outside, will take you home for \$7.29, or, if you prefer, to any old hospital."

"The idea!" scoffed the enraged woman. "It's too much!"

"But think of the risk we run," pursued Smooth. "Now, other kinds of insurance, such as insurance against being bitten by wild beasts, come as low as \$19 a month."

"I'll take one of them," she said promptly. "I always was a great one for bargains." And she handed him her card, which read: "Miss. Kutie, Wild Animal Trainer, Lions, Tigers and Leopards a Specialty."

"Excuse me a moment, I gotta see a man," stammered Eustace Smooth.

Listen to the Uplifter.

We think rural people are pretty good-natured, especially when the chautauqua comes to town. There's always a man there who comes on the platform and scolds the audience. He usually calls himself a community expert, or a "town doctor," or something of the kind. He is almost as bad as an editor about giving advice, and isn't half as polite about it. If we scolded you as frankly as a recent town doctor, that we happened to hear, scolded his audience, you would probably say, "Stop my paper." Yet the audience was paying the town doctor for telling them what misguided mutts they were. Probably he told them the truth, in the main—or what seemed to be the truth—and maybe it was good for their souls, as he declared. It seems almost pathetic to us, sometimes, this eagerness with which we benighted country folk will sit at the feet of the uplifter, who comes from afar to point out our faults and tell us how to remedy them. Yet we could probably get the uplifter on a bench and stand up on the platform and roast him just as delightedly and truthfully as he has been roasting us. Only we never do it. The game isn't played that way.—Farm Life.

FOR BETTER ROADS

CONCRETE ROAD GREAT HELP

Farmer Enabled to Double Size of Load to Market and Reduces Strain on Horses.

No extensive road improvement in any community can be carried on without more money than can usually be raised by direct taxation extending through a short term. It is unjust to expect the taxpayers of today to assume the total cost of an improvement which is to last into the next generation, so bonds are usually issued to finance the building of roads that will permanently cut down maintenance expense and reduce hauling costs. These bonds are sold and thus converted into money. Interest on the bonds is paid and the bonds retired by funds obtained from current road taxes. When the bonds have been paid the community still has its concrete roads in excellent condition.

No community can afford to spend its money with less caution than a private individual would display. The community should do likewise. When you are asked to vote for a bond issue to build concrete roads you are not raising public money to spend it, but to invest it. As concrete road mileage in a community is increased, the burden of road maintenance decreases, and the saving thus resulting will not only pay interest on the bonds, but provide funds to retire them as they fall due. In this way borrowing is made profitable.

Touring possibilities at all seasons of the year and every day in the year go hand-in-hand with the concrete road. "Safety first" is realized as the result of the non-skid surface. Concrete boulevards through the open



Superior Type of Concrete Road.

country make riding pleasurable by doing away with the jar, dust in dry weather and mud in wet weather. A smooth surface makes steering easy, reduces tire cost, lessens fuel consumption. These are some of the ways in which a concrete road benefits the motorist.

Reduced to simple terms, a concrete road helps the farmer haul two loads at one trip instead of one load at two trips; or, it doubles the size of the load and cuts in two the tractive power necessary to transport farm produce. With less capital tied up in horses there is more cash to put into equipment to produce more cash. The concrete road reduces the strain on horses and lengthens their lives. It reduces wear on wagons and harness. Where motortrucks are used it lessens tire and fuel expense. It puts the farmer in a state of preparedness to reach markets quickly when prices are best, and he can take his profits and get home with more cash than he could by slow hauling on a bad road. It adds to the acreage value of a farm because it increases its earning possibilities. A concrete road makes all of these advantages permanent, bringing its toll of profit to the farmer daily in the form of time, money and effort saved.

BUILDING ROADS IN FORESTS

Co-operative Projects Carried On With Funds From Forest Service and Local Communities.

In 1917 nearly \$430,000 was available for roads and trails within the national forest boundaries from the ten per cent fund derived from receipts. As in previous years co-operative projects were carried on with funds contributed by the forest service and by local communities.