

Held in Trust

GEORGE KIBBE TURNER

Illustrations by Irwin Myers

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SYNOPSIS

CHAPTER I—Jasper Haig and Hasbrouck Rutherford were searching for a young woman—a girl who resembled Adelaide Rutherford enough to serve as her double. For Haig was manager of the great sixty-million-dollar Gorgam trust-benefit, created by old Daniel Gorgam in his will for the benefit of his daughter Adelaide during her lifetime; Rutherford, the husband of Adelaide, shared her great wealth. And Adelaide Rutherford was dying, was already unconscious.

CHAPTER II—They found the young woman—Mary Manchester, a work-wear but still beautiful young shop girl who was thoroughly discouraged with life, and arranged for a meeting with her in a rooming house.

CHAPTER III—Mary lived with a drunken stepfather who had no interest in her, so it happened that when Haig—after explaining that Adelaide and her husband had lived apart for some years—offered her great wealth, he found her in a receptive mood, but she demanded to see things for herself.

CHAPTER IV—Finding conditions as they had been described to her, she accepted the proposition and on that night the real Adelaide Rutherford died.

CHAPTER V—To the new servants who replaced the old ones in the Rutherford household it became apparent that their mistress was rapidly improving—though they, like everyone else, had been given to understand that her mind was unbalanced. Her physician confided to Stanford Gorgam, a cousin of Adelaide and Hasbrouck Rutherford, and a personal enemy of the latter, that his patient was not insane.

CHAPTER VI—Stanford promptly went to see his cousin and was denied admittance by a new doorman. Suspicious, he employed a latch-key to a private entrance, a key once given him by the elder Gorgam. Confronting "Adelaide," he recognized her to be an impostor. "And yet," he incredulously said to himself afterward, "murder—with that face!"

CHAPTER VII—Ignorant of Stanford's identity, Adelaide assumed from her possession of the key that he was her supposed husband and sent for Hasbrouck—who came, found her pleading and insisted that when he came next she be kind to him, otherwise he would have her confined as insane.

CHAPTER VIII—Stanford Gorgam in a second interview all but accused her of being a murderess.

CHAPTER IX—Desperate, Adelaide tried to escape and was prevented.

CHAPTER X—Then she found a note from Gorgam under her dog's collar offering to come and take her away. By the same mail carrier she answered: "Tonight at eight-thirty."

CHAPTER XI—The note is intercepted by a maid, a spy in the employ of Haig. Haig and Rutherford, in a panic at the fear of exposure, plot to kill young Gorgam and fix the blame on Adelaide. The plot goes wrong and Jasper Haig is killed by Rutherford.

CHAPTER XII

Was it pure accident which at the last moment held back Stanford Gorgam from the appointment for which he had waited impatiently all day—a prisoner first of a broken crank-shaft in the infirm old taxicab he had summoned, and again of the law in the second cab, which he had finally obtained and in which he waited, detained inexorably a mile away from his destination by the inflexible majesty of a traffic officer affronted by speeding? He thought so certainly at the time. He thought so again, with sharp regret and apprehension, as he stood turning the key in the inside door of the passageway to his dead uncle's study.

The sound of a woman screaming warning, pounding upon the opposite side of a door—in spite of its obvious purpose—not really calculated to stay for long its opening—especially with the sudden ceasing of the outcries immediately following the other most suggestive sound of a body thrown violently upon the floor. The door opened quickly, and through the entrance came Stanford Gorgam.

"Stand still!" said a voice which, though strained to an unnatural pitch, he still recognized.

He stood still—rigidly staring into the muzzle of the revolver in the hands of his old ill-wisher Hasbrouck Rutherford. Behind the latter, at one side upon the floor, lay the body of the young woman he had come to meet—apparently unconscious.

"What is this?" asked Stanford Gorgam sharply.

He had noticed with hope a certain unsteadiness in the weapon aimed at such close range at his own body. He caught, he thought, the condition of the man's mind and nerves. He was not a bad wrestler, and there are certain advantages, as he knew, before a physical struggle of any kind, in the catching and diverting of attention—the holding of eyes of your opponent. If the other man did not shoot at first, that was something!

"What is this?" demanded Stanford Gorgam—and waited.

"The end!" said Hasbrouck Rutherford rather slowly. "The end of the Gorgam Trust. It will stop here—and everything that is in it—or that

has touched it. It's committing suicide," he added jocularly, "tonight!" "Keep out!" he broke off to cry. "If you know what's good for you!" For now the servants—or whoever was in the hall—evidently had decided it was time to do something to break in.

"Yes," said Stanford Gorgam, seconding him, "keep out." For he felt—by instinct as well as by reason—that he would have a longer and a better chance to manipulate this thing if left alone.

"What is it you want," he asked the man whose eye he held. And he saw with growing satisfaction the hand holding the revolver now somewhat lowered—held for support more closely to the body of the other. "A little more!" he thought, as the other was discarding.

"You!" replied Hasbrouck Rutherford simply, with a gleam of high satisfaction in his eye. "You first! You thought you'd get it, didn't you? You thought by this move now you'd take over all the Gorgam money as residuary legatee? You won't. Not now—or ever!"

It was soon clear to Stanford Gorgam that it was not his old acquaintance's purpose to act before he talked—and at considerable length. He could see, he thought, that the pleasure to which this man looked forward in settling old scores by murdering him would lose a great part of its piquancy if he could not discuss it beforehand with the man he proposed finally to execute.

Rutherford did so now—ventilating his soul, discussing at length his grievances of all kinds—first against Stanford Gorgam, and his uncle, and Jasper Haig; and then at still greater length against that immaterial thing, now grown more real than flesh and blood itself in his mind—the Gorgam Trust. It was a curious thing to watch and hear; he seemed both to hate the Trust and to be in terror of it, as a great, implacable, living enemy.

"Neither you nor I nor this thing on the floor," he said, again indicating Jasper Haig, "nor all the other men and women it has managed were a match for it. The thing," he explained, "is cunning. Cunning!" he repeated with an unpleasant smile.

"As cunning as it is powerful! It's that—really that paper devil that's to blame, that's brought us here together now, and is going to kill us.

"Did I think," he inquired, "when I came here that I'd kill Haig? Or this girl here? No. Not for a minute! You—but not them! It wasn't I that did this thing, or planned it. Nor Haig either! It's this thing—this ink-and-paper devil—that planned it all, and is doing it now. I can see that—anybody can but a fool.

"It's as simple as can be. I thought for years," he explained, "that I could fool it. This thing here," he said of Jasper Haig again, "thought so, too. Nothing doing! We did always what it planned for us to do—in the end—like now!"

"Like now! I'm not doing this," he protested with a touch of self-pity in his voice, "not myself! Nor this thing here," he said, indicating Haig once more, "nor anybody in the world. This is the doing—the act of this thing that's got us all. It's big—it's cunning. It's got us all, ending us! It's always done exactly what it wanted. I've overheard it too, plotting and planning several times lately," he stated, "plotting, planning! Coming around, speaking to itself—in my bedroom nights—when it thought I was asleep!"

"But," he said, now rather boastfully—speaking in the manner of a man who talks a great and terrible secret finally out loud, in spite of who or what may hear it, "there's something else in this now. It's had us, always. But now I've got it, too! When we're gone," he cried out boldly, "when this is all over—it will be gone itself! In fifteen seconds, now, the Gorgam Trust will be dead—dead as we are!"

Stanford Gorgam, standing rigidly like a soldier at attention, could see quite clearly that the end had come—whatever it was to be. The end of the lecture on his own shortcomings, the speaker's wrongs and the diabolical machinations of the Gorgam Trust was now at hand—in action. And still the uncertainty in the muzzle of the revolver which he had hoped and watched for had not yet appeared.

But at that time an unexpected happening intervened. Suddenly, without any intimation of life, the body of the girl behind his opponent raised itself from the floor and staggered, uncertainly, but with a surprising rapidity, toward the hall door from behind which still came the whispers of people and the growling of the dog.

An acute change in the situation had been created by this act.

"Stop!" called Hasbrouck Rutherford.

It was a confusing development to a mind not exactly in condition for quick decision—after twenty-four hours of persistent drinking. If he turned to fire at her, he exposed himself to the enemy in front.

"Stop!" he cried, but still the obstinate little fool of a girl went on toward the locked door regardless—to let in that crowd outside and the dog. She staggered but did not falter. It was necessary to do something. Hasbrouck Rutherford fired one shot—missing. For before he turned, the other man was on him. He had only time to turn again and shoot him somewhere in the body when the door was opened and that crowd and that dog were in! The situation was now squarely reversed.

It had been the intention of Hasbrouck Rutherford at least to turn to

lying just before him on the floor. But this, he now saw, would be impossible.

Like a brown projectile the dog was on him. It was an ugly thing—vicious, wiry; it must have weighed seventy-five pounds. He fired and missed it. Fortunately, though, the brute itself missed its aim in a way. It caught instead of flesh the breadth of the coat upon his shoulder, too lightly to hold—and struck, confused for a second, against the wall.

He started to fire again at the beast, but before he really could recover himself to do so, the thing was up again. It tore at his extended hand, unfortunately, and he lost his weapon—it fell clattering on the floor.

There was nothing to do now but to escape from this thing, for that crowd on the other side of the room could never interfere in time to save him from it, probably—even if they tried to. The unmangled hand of Hasbrouck Rutherford was on the knob of the outside door into old Daniel Gorgam's private passageway. He opened it with what quickness he could, managed to start through it. But unfortunately the dog came with him. The spring lock clicked behind; he found himself at the head of those long white stairs, that bare, empty spiral staircase, with nothing but one hand for defense—and that half-mad dog upon him. Caught like a rat with

a weasel at the entrance of a stone rat-hole!

No wonder Hasbrouck Rutherford cried out so hoarsely that they heard him through the thick door, with that great beast at his throat!

They found him when they came in, far down at the bottom of the shiny stairs, a great, loose bulk against the outside door—the dog standing over him.

"They're that way," said the English servant who had lifted him, commenting afterwards, "those dogs! I've seen them in the old country. They never touch a thing that's dead!"

"He must have fallen backward when the beast jumped at him—from just near the top," said the other to whom he spoke, discussing the probabilities of what no man actually saw.

"What could you expect?" asked the other. "A heavy man like that—striking backward on his neck."

But whatever may have been the exact and unanticipated cause of Hasbrouck Rutherford's own death, his prophecies concerning the extinction of the Gorgam Trust had not yet been fulfilled. In fact, a very singular situation had been created by his last act. The two chief active agents—the physical brain and body, so to speak, of that great legal person—had gone. But the Trust itself lived on. And it still held in its incorporeal grasp the young ward around whose person it had been constructed.

CHAPTER XIII

To students of large financial affairs it will be of more than ordinary interest to know—what has never been announced so far as yet—the intimate and inside story of the steps leading up to the final demise of that now widely-famous creature of the law, the Gorgam Trust—and incidentally of the termination of its power over the young woman with whom it had been brought into such a remarkable and dominating relation. The end actually came, it may now be announced—as so often in legal intricacies of this kind—by means of a compromise.

The first instinct of the Trust's ward, after that terrible night, was to flee, to get as far away from this place and its influences—from this great intangible power which held her—as possible. But a little reflection showed her how impossible this would be. The Trust was still alive, and she its ward. And even if she could escape—which she probably could not do—she would be still in the eyes of the law Adelaide Rutherford, still always liable to capture and return as a legal ward, mentally irresponsible. The more she considered the situation, the more she realized that she was still the prisoner of the Trust, and would remain so until she was released by the one person who could do this.

He still remained, that one person who was able to free her, like the young deliverer from the monster in a Greek legend—bound fast by his weakness, his wound. Desperately hurt, he was slowly recovering. One outside can probably only faintly realize the suspense and apprehension with which the ward of the Gorgam Trust heard each morning the daily news which came from behind the high dark door of the sick-room into which young Gorgam had been taken.

For naturally she was terribly concerned over what she had done and caused to be done to others—taking the blame personally to an extent, it seems, not believed by other observers justified by the actual part she had taken in the matter at the invitation of Jasper Haig. And not unnaturally she was more than all concerned over this young man for whose dangerous condition she felt especially responsible and guilty.

As Stanford Gorgam grew gradually better, it was a time of intense and more or less mingled emotions to the girl; finally after a number of requests on his part, he was allowed to see her. The happenings of that last evening were forbidden to discussion. To Mary Manchester's great remorse and shame, the patient did, however, mention the matter of her having saved his life—as he saw it. Feeling it was not so, knowing what she had really done to endanger his life, this was an intense strain upon the girl's emotions, especially as she was forbidden any discussion, or contradiction of the patient.

She now felt an added sense of responsibility and guilt of which she could not rid herself, and because of which the idea came to her, it appears, that it was her duty to do so personally for her acts in every possible way. And when she was finally, at the end of a considerable number of interviews, allowed the possibility of freer talk with the patient, she broke into a distinct and bitter vein of self accusation.

The young man watching her from his invalid's chair interrupted finally with a gleam of characteristic amusement in his eye. He was of a humorous and quizzical temperament, evidently.

"All this is pretty hard on me!" he interjected with a smile.

"What?" she asked, surprised a little.

"One part especially—the part where I come in. You take it rather lightly."

"I," she stammered, "take it lightly!" For that certainly was not true.

"What do you mean?"

"About my life being saved, by some one we might mention in this room—at the risk of her own."

"Yes," she said, her face flushing, "after planning to rob you! After bringing you in where you were almost killed!"

"Don't talk to me like that!" he said laughingly. "It's bound to make my temperature rise!" For of course he was not yet very strong.

"You've got to let me go now," she said, aroused, seeing he would never take her seriously. "I'm going to leave here—stop this farce of pretending to be what I am not—go away. And if I've done this wrong," she said, "for that was almost her obsession now, 'I want to come out and take my punishment.'"

"And do what, then?" he asked her smiling. "Go where?"

"I don't know yet."

"Then how can you go?"

"I shall, I must," she insisted.

"Oh, what's the hurry?" he asked her. He refused entirely, it seemed, to take her seriously.

"There you go again," he said, "raising my temperature—opposing me. You wait. I can't have you doing this—yet."

It was a surprise to her, in a way all very different from what she had expected. She saw very clearly now what must be done by her. She must confess publicly, show who she was take whatever punishment there was for her act; end this Trust and turn the great fortune over to its rightful owner. All that was necessary was for him to consent—to help her show the situation, who she really was. And this she had supposed he would do most readily. She was therefore most surprised at his attitude. He might not care, it seemed to her, to keep the Gorgam Trust alive, but he certainly had no haste about ending it.

"What do you take me for?" he asked her with an approach to seriousness when she kept urging him. "Do you think I'll let you do what you are talking about? Drive this thing through courts—and incidentally yourself? Get smeared with publicity like a common criminal?"

"Why shouldn't I be? I am one."

"There seems to be," he said, "a difference of opinion upon that point between you and me. And besides," he said with a rather masterful and peremptory way he seemed to be talking with her at times lately, "I don't propose you shall! You are not strong enough—well enough, for one thing; and you know it."

But she insisted that she was, and that she would go in some way. And he must let her. Finally he mentioned the possibility of a compromise.

"I'll tell you what I will do, though," he conceded. "I believe that between us we can work out a compromise. Just wait. Be patient."

It was some little time—after he was able finally to be driven out to take care of business matters to some extent—before he brought out, one night when they were together in the smallest and most homelike of the great downstairs rooms, the compromise which he had been working out.

Lately she had been more and more insistent on having matters settled, more and more determined to get away from her false position—and in a way, from him, the man whom she had conspired to injure and keep from his rights.

"I'll tell it all to you in order," he said. "—my scheme for a compromise. I've been working on it for some little time."

"Go on, please," she said.

"In the first place," he told her, "I have done this: It was necessary, you see," he said, explaining, "that some one be appointed to the position of Jasper Haig as active manager of the Trust."

"Yes," she said, waiting.

"So I had myself appointed. You don't object?" he asked her when she did not answer but sat looking at him.

"Object, no!" she said. "Why shouldn't I? It's all yours, anyway—not mine. Yet I don't understand it," she added somewhat suspiciously. It seemed to her that it might be another scheme of evasion or delay on his part—to keep her from doing what she intended to do.

"I thought," he said, "that perhaps you might thank me for it! But you will—yourself understand it later. That's the first point. Now the second point in my scheme: I've arranged it now, what you wanted, so that you are no longer Adelaide Rutherford—that is you will not have the unpleasant features of her! I've fixed it so you will be no longer under that cloud of being legally insane."

"That does not change—"

nation about Adelaide Rutherford," she objected, "—the one thing that would be almost impossible to bear."

"What?"

"Her reputation of having been insane."

"Her reputation," he said, "—with whom?"

She of course did not know directly. "I guess you don't," he said. "You innocent! Do you imagine that the Gorgam family ever let that be known? Is it customary to advertise family skeletons? Not half a dozen people in the world know it; and they, you may be sure, always have been and will be strangely silent."

"Even if they are," said Mary Manchester, still obstinate, "that will make no difference in my plans. I'm not Adelaide Rutherford. I'm Mary Manchester and I won't be Adelaide Rutherford much longer," she said, flushing, growing a little angry.

"That's it," he said, smiling, "that's just it. The third point of our compromise!"

"Our compromise?" she echoed after him.

"Don't you know?" he asked, and caught her hand—but not yet her eyes.

"No," she said with somewhat questionable truthfulness.

"I want you to be—let us say—Mrs. Gorgam," he explained with his half-mocking but now comparatively serious smile. "Will you agree—to my compromise?"

He was greatly surprised by her next action.

"No," she said, springing to her feet. "No," she said vehemently. "No—no! I won't have it so. I'm Mary Manchester. I've never been Adelaide Rutherford, and I won't—I won't—I won't! I'm going back to be declared what I am legally."

"Another thing," she said, still finding objections. "Is that money. It doesn't belong to me. It belongs to you. Why keep up this farce?" she asked. "—this awful farce of a Trust for me, when you know just who I am!"

"I thought," he said with a somewhat less certain smile, "that was one of the fine points of my scheme. If I controlled that, the Trust, I would control all the money and incidentally you!"

But she was obstinate, he found—surprisingly so for so frail a creature. "I've done wrong," she insisted. "I know it. And I'll take my punishment. I'm going to be Mary Manchester again some way. And then I'm going as far away as I can—away from here and this and you." And she tried now desperately to wrench herself free.

"So you don't like my compromise?" he said, releasing her at last with a rather wry smile. He was clearly both surprised and disappointed.

"No," she answered. "It is neither right nor honest—nor anything."

"Listen!" he said, catching her hand and holding her. He looked down into her flushed face. "Listen," he said sternly, "you young criminal! I want to talk to you—and I shall. Let us go back," he proposed, "and take the old method Jasper Haig always used to use. Let's work out the theory of a possible case."

"Suppose," he said, when she found herself unable to get away, but still did not answer, "a case where a young woman—who is incidentally, I may say, very good to look at—saves a man's life at the very great risk of her own?" She tried to speak then, but he would not permit her.

"And suppose she had a crazy idea that she had done wrong, and must go through and take her punishment—and straighten everything out publicly, in spite of all reason and common sense. Calling herself a criminal!"

She tried again in vain to get away from him.

"And then suppose the man, whose life she had saved, and who was also for other good and sufficient reasons absolutely determined to marry her, offered her a most reasonable compromise—by which, as his wife, he would have control both of her and of her money—and that she deliberately refuses—because she feels he would have too great control over her," he added, smiling just the mere fraction of a teasing smile.

"It's nothing of the kind," she answered him, speaking for the first time, "and you know it."

"And supposing," he went on, disregarding her remark, "that under the law he had absolute control over her legally already. What would he do," he asked, "especially when he saw that she was worrying herself sick over matters? What could he do," he asked when she did not answer, "except try again—offer one more compromise—which will be an ultimatum?"

"What?" asked Mary Manchester unguardedly.

"This," he said quickly, taking advantage of her question: "Mary, will you marry me?"

"No," she answered again more vehemently than was necessary.

"Wait!" he commanded her. "That's only half of my plan—the new compromise. If," he said, bringing out the other half, "I will let you afterward go to court, publish yourself a criminal, smash this Gorgam Trust to a million pieces—do anything you want to?"

"Shall I be Mary Manchester again?" demanded his opponent grimly.

"Not for very long. You'll have to marry me beforehand, while I've still got you. You've got to marry me beforehand. And then we'll finish up that legal dragon of Jasper Haig—together!"

"What do you say?" asked the offerer of the compromise. There was no answer; both stopped speaking for the time being. But this last compromise, it appeared, was finally accepted.

It was finally, through this compromise, it seems, long before the coming of this matter into court, that the widely famous termination and dissolution of the Gorgam Trust was brought about—concerning which the reader no doubt has long ago learned the more familiar features through he public press.

(END)

Changing fish to water of a different temperature from that to which they are accustomed will, according to a Danish scientist, after several generations, produce a new type, modified in form and structure, especially in the rays of the fins and the number of the vertebrae.

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