

The TRUANT SOUL

by Victor Rousseau

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"WHO'S THERE?"

SYNOPSIS.—Nurses in the Southern hospital at Avonmouth are angered by the insolent treatment accorded them by Dr. John Lancaster, head of the institution, and there is a general feeling of unrest, into which Joan Wentworth, probationary nurse, is drawn. Doctor Lancaster is performing a difficult operation, for which he has won fame. Joan, with other nurses, is in attendance. She is upset, through no fault of her own, and makes a trivial blunder at a critical moment. The patient dies and Doctor Lancaster accuses her of clumsiness. She is suspended, the action meaning the end of her hope of a career as a nurse. Without relatives or friends, and desperate, Joan, urged by her landlady, goes to Doctor Lancaster's office to ask him to overlook her blunder and reinstates her. She overhears a violent altercation between Doctor Lancaster and other men she does not see. Joan is struck by the favorable change in the appearance and demeanor of the doctor, recalling that at times in the hospital he has been gentle and thoughtful and at others supercilious and bullying. He tells her he can do nothing for her at the hospital, but offers her a position in a nursing institution in the country, telling her she can be of "great assistance" to him. A man named Myers demands she tell him what the doctor had said to her. She denies him the information, and he covertly threatens her. At the institution, which is owned by Doctor Lancaster, Joan finds Myers. He tells her he is the secretary. She instinctively dislikes and fears him. The only patient at the institution is a Mrs. Dana, demoralized but harmless. Joan is vaguely uneasy, feeling that there is some mystery about the place. Doctor Lancaster arrives. Joan accuses him of deceiving her, declaring her intention of leaving. He tells her he is the patient who needs her, saying he wants help in a "big fight," but makes no further explanation. She decides to stay. Evidently Doctor Lancaster is afraid of Myers. Joan discovers that the doctor is a victim of the morphine habit. Joan takes charge of him, helping him to overcome temporarily his craving for the drug. Myers accuses her of "meddling," but she refuses to leave or to give up her care of Lancaster. Mrs. Fraser, the matron, admits all at the institution are afraid of Myers, but will not say why. She begs Joan to "save the doctor." Joan in a measure succeeds in freeing Lancaster from his craving for drugs.

CHAPTER VI—Continued

"It is not what Doctor Lancaster says," answered Joan. "It is what I say, Mrs. Fraser, please give me the storeroom key."

The woman, looking askance at Myers, let her hand slip down toward the bunch at her side.

"The key, please," repeated Joan, and received it. Quickly she locked the door and put the key in the pocket of her uniform.

"Now," she said, "I want you all to understand this situation. I am employed by Doctor Lancaster. I am under orders not to go until the month is ended. I am in charge of him. Until he is responsible for his actions I shall remain in charge, under Doctor Jenkins. Doctor Jenkins, is it your order that Doctor Lancaster is to receive a whole dose of morphine every few hours, of the amount he has been taking?"

"Why, Miss Wentworth, I never ordered that," protested Jenkins. "You see, Miss Wentworth—"

"Until you do," interposed Joan bluntly, "I shall continue the treatment as I learned it in Doctor Lancaster's hospital at Avonmouth. And if the storeroom is opened by anyone but myself I shall take legal action to protect Doctor Lancaster's interests."

"Miss Wentworth!" cried Myers, "you are making a tragedy where none exists. Nobody wants to harm the doctor. We all have one sole thought, to help him. Don't we, doctor?" he continued, addressing Lancaster.

"You are all—very kind to me," Lancaster mumbled.

"There, you see!" said Myers, turning toward Joan again. "There may exist differences of opinion," he continued in a facile manner, "and maybe I've expressed myself too forcibly. But we're all at one in wishing the doctor to get well as quickly as he can."

He was almost fawning now, but Joan remained inflexible. She knew that if she relaxed from the nervous tension that was upholding her she would become hysterical.

The group dispersed. Myers followed the girl out upon the veranda and stood for a long time near the door, watching her as she sat at the farther end, trying to compose herself. At last he came up to her.

"See here, Miss Wentworth," he began impetuously; "I've come to you twice and spoken fairly to you. Maybe you see now that you would have been wiser to have met me in the same spirit. Come, now, are we to work together as friends or not?"

"I have no objection," answered Joan, "but my duty concerns nobody but the doctor."

"You mean you won't co-operate with me in saving him from himself?" He looked at her with sullen challenge in his eyes.

"I do," said Joan.

Myers thrust his hands into his pockets. "Right!" he said. "Three

times is enough. I understand. And that's the last you'll hear from me about it."

He went away, and Joan sat staring out across the darkening hills. How had she managed to fight this blind battle of hers to a successful issue? She did not know; but, whatever the hold might be that Myers had over Lancaster, she felt that Myers himself was in dread of its discovery.

Presently she saw the matron come cautiously out of the house and hurry toward her.

"How did you do it, Miss Wentworth?" she asked in awe. "You did what none of us would have dared to do—not me, nor Doctor Jenkins."

"Why not?" asked Joan. "Mrs. Fraser, of whom are you afraid? And Doctor Lancaster? It is not of that man Myers, whom he could send about his business at any time when he found strength of will. Who is it?"

"O, Miss Wentworth, I don't know," the matron sobbed. "But save the doctor! O, do save the doctor from that man who is trying to kill him!"

Chapter VII

Joan had had supper with Lancaster, and it was night, and once more the fight was raging.

She had sat on the veranda with him, had talked with him, had seen the better soul of the man rise to the surface as he struggled with the morphine devil; then she had given him his half dose again, and, as his strength revived and the agony departed, she had seen the facile, lying spirit enter into him.

He was lying, wrapped in his dressing gown, upon his bed, and she sat at his side, at grips with the devil in him that clamored for its victim's body, that it might possess it entirely, as surely a spirit of evil, though its shrine was a little glass bottle holding a few drops of fluid.

She was fighting for Lancaster, fighting for the better Lancaster again, and he was writhing in torment and pleading with her to go, to leave him to his fate, since the suffering was intolerable and subjection preferable.

There was an hour of hideous battle, but somehow she managed to keep him quiet till midnight. And, seated beside him, watching him, Joan came to the conclusion that this was one of those strange cases of double personality of which she had read in medical books. It was impossible to reconcile this Lancaster in any way with the man whom she had seen mo-



"How Did You Do It, Miss Wentworth?" She Asked in Awe.

mentally at the hospital, and with the tyrant of the operating room. For that man was essentially base and ignoble, and this man was honor and truth, when the morphine fiend retired, baffled for a space, and under that pitiful load of shame she sensed the cleanness of the man's soul and its integrity.

Somehow she held his devil at bay until midnight, and then, with a second victory to his credit, he stretched out his arm for the hypodermic. Then Joan saw the look of contentment come into his face, heard the satisfied sigh—and there was the old Lancaster before her, shifty, furtive and false.

No, not altogether, for something of that victory remained with him, the promise of renewed manhood; the morphine devil was losing its grip. Ground had been won. It should never be ceded. Joan swore that as she watched by the bedside.

"Doctor Lancaster, you have promised me to sleep till six," she said. "Can I trust you?"

"How can you doubt my word, Miss Wentworth?" asked Lancaster, with an affectation of surprise. "Of course you can. You know, I am not a regular user of drugs. I have been over-worked, and I took morphine to make me sleep, and somehow it got hold of me. I think I must be unusually susceptible to the drug."

The old lie of the stupid drug devil! But Joan had the storeroom key, and she knew that it would require a hammer or ax to break down the strong door. And she would wake and hear him, and fight again as she had fought that morning.

"Then I am going to bed till six," she said.

"But, Miss Wentworth," he protested, "six hours is an impossibly long

period. Every three hours is my time, and now that I am on half-doses—you remember what Jenkins said this morning. You must go slowly with a confirmed drug-user like myself."

"Stop! Don't listen to me!" he added suddenly. "You can trust me, Miss Wentworth. I'm going to fight this out, and win."

"You are winning," answered Joan, bending over him. "Don't forget that. Say 'I am winning' whenever the pain seems uncontrollable and your will seems gone. It won't last long. Doctor Lancaster, you are your own self at this moment, and nothing can harm you. Fight the good fight!"

He caught her hand and carried it to his lips. "Miss Wentworth, you are my good angel!" he cried. "I secured the services of an angel unawares," he added, looking at her with that pathetic humor which went straight to her heart. "I want to win for your sake. But why are you taking so much trouble for a worthless old fellow like me?"

"Don't flatter yourself that it is all for you, Doctor Lancaster. Perhaps I may want to save the most distinguished surgeon in the South."

At her words he started; he stared at her, and then fell back upon the pillow, hiding his face. Joan turned away. Again she had touched some hidden spring of memory; what it was she could not know, but it was evident that she had wounded him to the quick.

Perhaps it was the contrast between the office he held and the man he had become. Perhaps it was the knowledge of his secret bondage which had broken him down at last and driven him back to the institute, and Myers.

"Miss Wentworth, I want you to lock my door and take away the key," he said. "I may have a secret supply somewhere."

"I don't think you have," answered Joan. "You have none in this room, have you?"

"No."

"I believe that. And, anyway, I am going to trust you. That is part of your fight. I am going to trust you till six."

He said good night in a low tone and turned away. Joan went up to her room. She lay down, but did not undress. She was afraid, and she admitted that she was afraid, and nothing but Lancaster's desperate need of her would have kept her an hour longer in the institute. But she was exhausted from the day, and soon she was asleep.

She slept that sleep which brings no recreation for the jaded body or the overworked mind. All the while she was back with Lancaster in his room below, in spirit. She knew that, as he had said, the drug bondage was only the climax of his difficulties. What had there been that had wrecked the man? Jenkins' hint at stolen funds? Of one thing she was sure: Lancaster, sunken as he was, was incapable of dishonesty. No, she must have placed a wrong construction on Jenkins' words.

And in her sleep her brain went on puzzling over the problem. Only her body was quiescent, and it lay wearily in the bed like some chained captive.

But suddenly the urgent summons of the brain shook from it the trammels of sleep. Joan listened intently, awake upon the instant, as some wild creature of the woods that senses danger. Somebody was coming along the corridor.

The footsteps were so soft and stealthy that she might have thought she was dreaming but for the sense of imminent danger, the knowledge of some malevolent design. The steps stopped and began again, the merest touches of sound against the silence of night, the lightest patter of bare feet outside the door.

Then the door began to open.

There was no moon, and the faint starlight outside only seemed to render darker the obscurity within. Yet, through the darkness Joan knew that a hand lay on the door jamb, and that a figure watched her across the room.

She leaped from her bed. "Who's there?" she called, in tones that seemed to shock the silence.

She could see nothing now, and she dared not turn aside to light her lamp. She knew that the figure was crouching somewhere. She heard the softest breathing, but could not locate it in the room. She felt the atmosphere of evil that surrounded her. She started to cross the room, groping, with arms outstretched. Then she found the intruder and flung herself upon it.

Her left hand closed about a wrist, supple and strong. Her right hand held another hand. They wrestled in the darkness, their bodies tense but motionless, only the hands and wrist muscles at strife. Not a sound came from their lips.

Joan thought it was a woman's hands she held. Her fingers sought the menace in the closed fists. The left hand of the intruder was empty; but in the right was a jagged piece of a broken tumbler that tinkled to the floor.

So a woman is the mystery! Now why is she so bent on revenge?

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Heavenly Music

He was a zealous preacher and his subject was "Heaven." "Mah frien's," he said, "de music in heaven beats anything yo' eber heard. De fines' concerts can't compare with it. If yo' take the band in the United States an' place it 'longside de heavenly quish, it would sound lak de squeak of a mouse beside de mighty roar ob Niagara."—Boston Transcript.

MAKING GOOD IN A SMALL TOWN

Real Stories About Real Girls

By MRS. HARLAND H. ALLEN

PANSIES FOR PROFIT

"PANSIES for thought," the flower-lover says; yet, paradoxically, when it comes to raising a garden specialty for the market she seldom thinks of them.

A little pansy-specialist I know tells me that the pansy is the best of all flowers for the girl-gardener who is a novice at her work. This particular pansy-specialist lives in a town of only 5,000 people; yet she never has to go outside it to sell her flowers—so I take her word for what she says.

"All you need is a south window and some pansy seeds," she tells people. "You put your seeds in some good earth and the sunshine does the rest."

"I get the very best seed," she explained in more detail. "Then I bore holes, for drainage, in wooden boxes. Then I plant my seeds, exactly according to the directions on the packet. The seeds should be planted neither too deep nor too near the surface, and should be pressed down well. They should be watered regularly with a fine spray, and kept warm."

"When the first plants appear, they should not have too much light. They should be kept partly covered. And when the little shoots get a good start, they should be transplanted into another box. After that, all the pansy-grower needs to do is to give the plants proper amounts of sun and air."

If the pansy grower prefers, she may, when she transplants the young plants, put them into the garden instead of into other boxes. In the winter time, the beds should be lightly covered.

The pansies may be sold in baskets. They may be sold in bunches, as boutonnières for use at club dinners and parties. But when they are sold in pots, the pansy-grower will probably make her best profits, since the flowers keep better in this form. She could use either ordinary pots in smallest possible sizes; or get diminutive fancy pots or holders.

The girl with an artistic eye and a skillful hand will increase her sales still further by artistic arrangement of the flowers in these little centerpieces.

As for her market—she may advertise in her local papers, or have a "pansy sale" and tea in her own home. She may succeed in selling her flowers to candy stores and to the town hotels. If there is a florist's shop, she can usually find a sale for her wares there. Sometimes grocery stores or other shops will exhibit them, and sell them on a commission. The girl-gardener may be fortunate enough to get an order from a florist in a large neighboring city for cut flowers to be sent two or three times a week. By working out different methods of selling, she will be able really to apply the phrase "pansies for thought."

"JUST AN OLD-FASHIONED GARDEN"

"OLD-FASHIONED" is not a particularly popular word among the shingle-bobbed jazz-enthusiastic daughters of 1923. Yet girls who are growing and selling "old-fashioned" flowers are "making good" in quite a modern way.

"My friends say my business is the only 'old-fashioned' thing about me," bragged a little girl, "just out" of high school a few years, who specializes in old-fashioned nosegays.

She attributed her success to the "quality" of the flowers, and to the fact that no one else in town had yet thought of going into the business. Another factor in favor of old-fashioned blooms in preference to other kinds is, she told me, that they grow easily and thrive with comparatively little attention.

And what are old-fashioned flowers? When I asked her that question, she led me a couple of blocks down "Main Street" and took me inside what was called (I saw by the sign over the door) "The Old-Fashioned Flower Shoppe." She showed me little, round-shaped bunches of phlox, heliotrope and marigold, hardy wallflowers, sweet alyssum, forget-me-nots, old-fashioned single pinks, and "dwarf" marigolds.

There is room in every town for an "old-fashioned flower garden" and perhaps for an "Old-Fashioned Flower Shoppe." For the girl who wants to make money growing and selling flowers, there is no better specialty.

The biggest sale for these nosegays is to be found at exclusive hotels and clubs; they are popular with women who entertain; tea rooms and candy shops buy them; and they are just the thing for the bridesmaid's bouquet, or for any corsage bouquet.

It is well to make some flowers up into bunches to be put in little, shallow tin pans. The old-fashioned flower-girl does not tie the flowers with a string, which would soon crush and wilt them, but sticks them upright into the moist sand with which she has filled the pans. Then she puts the pans into good-looking but inexpensive brown baskets. The nosegay baskets are popular for use whenever the flowers are not to be worn, and are to be kept for some time.

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Natural Attraction
"Why do all the old maids go to church?" "Because of the hymns, I presume."

Do You Know
That one-half of a teaspoonful of Calumet Baking Powder added to your poultry stuffing makes it light and fluffy and prevents any sogginess?

If women were as fond of appearing in print as they are in silk there would be more woman writers.

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It's easier for some men to make love than it is for them to make a living.

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The trouble with the man who knows nothing is that he is always the last to find it out.

Mothers, Read This!
Seattle, Wash.—"While bringing up my family Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription was of great benefit to me as a tonic and nerve. It kept me strong and able to do my housework during expectancy and I believe it prevented me from having any trouble with my kidneys. I think I owe a great deal of my present good health and strength to the condition I kept myself in at those trying periods, with Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription."—Mrs. F. Harrison, 3402-26th Ave., N. E. All dealers.



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