

# The Truant Soul

By Victor Rousseau

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## CHAPTER XII—Continued

She lit her lamp, but her fingers slipped over the glass, and it fell to the floor with a crash that startled all the echoes in the old building. The smoky wick flared up. Joan turned it down with difficulty until the blaze was extinguished, and staggered to the bed, amazed at her weakness.

She could not keep her eyelids open, and she let them close wearily. But sleep was far from her, and still she listened. And after while an unmistakable sound reached her. Somewhere within the institute she heard a key turn in a lock.

It was the slightest distant sound, but it cut the darkness like a knife. And to her mind, the sound, which might mean nothing, might be, indeed, the key of Lancaster's door, seemed like the snap of a trap.

She slept and could not waken. Or, rather, she did not sleep, could not have slept; yet sleep had paralyzed her limbs and left her brain untouched; and her mind seemed preternaturally acute, so that she felt and saw everything that was happening in the building.

Someone was coming along the passage, as on that night before. The hand was upon the door. Through her closed and paralyzed eyelids, Joan yet seemed to see the figure of a woman. Something was in her hand. It was the revolver which Joan had left upon the little table beside her.

Mrs. Dana stood over her, the weapon aimed at her, while her eyes sought her face.

Was she dreaming? Joan had waited through agony of centuries, and the woman was gone. Once more there was silence everywhere. And still she lay there, helpless, feeling all and knowing all, and that it had been no dream, but the prelude of worse to come.

It was strange, but she did not once picture Lancaster as in danger. It was as if the unchained spirit of evil, impotent to harm him, sought another victim. She waited, it seemed for aeons. And the blow fell.

She heard a man's scream of fear, dinned through her ears distantly, with the accompanying pistol shot. Yet she was unable to stir, and it passed into her memory, as of something infinitely long ago. Presently there came the hum of voices, chattering cries, bare feet that ran wildly along the corridor without, hands at her door.

It was Mrs. Fraser's voice. Now, with a mighty effort, Joan shook herself free from the spell. She staggered from the bed and groped her way across the room.

Nobody was at the door now, but when she unlocked it a whirl of smoke burst in. Smoke filled the passage. Upon the floor beneath a woman was screaming. There were voices outside, and the sound of men running along the passages, but Joan could not locate them.

She staggered through the smoke, feeling for the stairs. It blinded her. She fell into a wall, felt a rigid body before her, and perceived dimly Mrs. Dana's face, wearing a look of exaltation.

She had come too far; she had reached the door of Mrs. Dana's room. Through a break in the smoke cloud Joan saw that the door was closed. Behind it someone was hammering. Then Myers' screams broke through the din and confusion. He was battering against the door, and the strong door, built to resist such pressure, refused to yield. His cries were terrifying. Under the door came little creeping tongues of flame.

Joan caught at Mrs. Dana. "Come with me!" she murmured. "Come!"

The woman stood rigid as a statue. She felt like marble to the touch, but there was the same exaltation upon her face.

"Open the door!" whispered Joan with her last strength, and pointed. "Open it! Somebody is locked inside."

Myers was yelling as Joan had once heard a horse yell, trapped in a burning stable. The wood of the door was smoldering. Joan tried to reach the key. But the rigid body barred her way.

Then she heard her name called through the smoke. At the cry Mrs. Dana snatched the key from the lock and began to run along the corridor. Joan saw her dimly through the enveloping smoke. She staggered, and fell into Lancaster's arms.

That was her last effort. Incapable of speech, she felt him bear her along the passage, where the smoke clouds were now shot through with streaks of flame. They thickened about her, Lancaster was carrying her down the stairs now, while hungry flames sprang at them from the walls and door. He was staggering drunkenly when they reached the hall below.

He placed her on the grass, and plunged back into the flames. The institute was ablaze, fire streamed from the roof and windows. A group of villagers, clustered upon the lawn, looked on helplessly. Joan saw Jenkins, leading the matron, approaching her. She tried to tell him that Lan-

caster had gone back; she could not speak, but he understood her.

"The doctor's safe," he said, and as he spoke Joan saw Lancaster among a group of men who had gathered about something wrapped in a blanket.

He rose and came to her. That was all Joan remembered.

And for days and nights her memories of the past were cut short with Lancaster's return that night, borne back by the power of her love flung across the miles between them. She knew that he lived, and as the nightmare of the end filtered into her mind there came with it the sense of an abiding peace, as if the past was dead, with all its terrors.

Sometimes she felt that Lancaster was beside her; but when at last complete consciousness returned Joan found herself in bed in a strange house. Through the windows she could see the outlines of the familiar mountains, gilded in the red sunset glow against the blue of the sky. Beside her sat a figure which seemed to be so remotely of the past that it was difficult to refrain from laughing at the incongruity of the sight.

It was Jenkins, with his black head. As Joan stirred he turned toward her.

"That's right, Miss Wentworth," he said heartily. "Now you've rounded

the corner, and I reckon the lane lies straight before you."

"The doctor did not steal that money," murmured Joan weakly.

Jenkins laughed as if her words amused him immensely. "Why, Miss Wentworth, you've been saying that to me every time you woke these five days past," he said, "but I couldn't ever get you to tell me how you knew it."

"I don't remember saying it before," said Joan.

"I reckon you've been pretty weak, Miss Wentworth. But tell me now how you know it."

"I don't know. Why, yes, of course I do. Doctor Lancaster couldn't steal anything. Where is he?"

"I'll fetch him, Miss Wentworth. He wants to see you; he's been sitting beside you for days waiting till you really woke up."

"I'm not burned, Doctor Jenkins?" asked Joan in alarm.

"Not the least little bit, Miss Wentworth. I'll bring you a mirror."

"No, I take you on trust. What made me so ill, Doctor Jenkins?"

The doctor hesitated. The old obstinate look began to close down on his features. But Joan caught him by the arm ingratiatingly.

"Come, now, tell me," she said.

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"Did he—did he inject morphine into me?"

"No, Miss Wentworth," said Jenkins, unable to hold out. "It wasn't morphine. It was curare—the stuff that paralyzes the motor nerves without destroying consciousness." His face grew somber. "It doesn't leave traces, as morphine does, and that devil had put it into morphine bottles and made the doctor think he was a morphine fiend. They hoped to kill him more quickly, but somehow he got used to it, and I guess they were at their wits' ends when you came along. But I'll call the doctor, Miss Wentworth."

When he was gone Joan lay back on her pillows, looking out into the mountains. She knew what had occurred that night; in her drugged state she had seen the whole dreadful picture: Myers unlocking Mrs. Dana's door and leading her to her own room, where she had obtained the revolver; her journey to Lancaster's room, bent on her dreadful mission; the murder of Lawson, in the room opposite, instead, for reasons which would never be known, but were certainly providential.

She saw further, by the same intuition which told her that it had been Mrs. Dana's body wrapped in the blanket upon the lawn. Myers, knowing her to be drugged, and believing Lancaster dead, had waited in Mrs. Dana's room and given her the matches, on her return, with which to start the fire, hoping thus to make sure of his victims and cover up his tracks. And he had fallen into the trap he had baited. Strong as he was, there must have been a stronger Power fighting him with Mrs. Dana's arms that night, when she turned the key in the lock and left him to die as he had willed Joan should die.

But Joan knew that no word of this would ever pass between Lancaster and her. And indeed, as she lay back and looked across the fields toward the mountains, she felt that something had turned that page, so that it had become not only of the dead past, but unreal in a way, and only the present peace existed.

She heard a quick step without. Lancaster stood in the doorway, came toward her, knelt at her side and took her hands in his. And with that even the memories of the past became tenuous, half forgotten.

"Dear, it has come true," he said tenderly.

She lay happily in his arms, looking out all the time toward the sunset on the hills. There was so little to say, because their lives were only beginning.

"I don't want to go back to Avonmouth," she said at length.

"Nor I, Joan. This is our country. It must always be our country. But—but the fight, John?"

"I have fought a march on you, my dear," he answered gayly. "I have fought out my fight while you were ill. I have resigned from the hospital; nobody guesses anything there; and I have convinced the trustees here, by my appearance, and by the presentation of certain papers happily discovered after the fire, that I am a responsible, moral person, honest enough to head the new institute which we are going to build—guess where?"

She looked at him. Then—

"That village in the mountains," she cried happily. "Where our lives really began. I could not wish for anything better."

"And the patient is going to be our porter. And Doctor Jenkins will be house surgeon, resident, with his wife—Joan, he didn't tell you about Mrs. Fraser? Jenkins! Jenkins!" His voice rang through the little house.

"Come in at once and face the fire like a man, instead of slinking away into your consulting-room, you ruffianly young benedict!"

[THE END]

### Telephone to Teach Better Enunciation

Men who are trying to improve telephone service believe that the telephone will teach its users to speak clearly—not with one conversation, but in the course of time. And, certainly, business would be expedited with perfect enunciation over the telephone. Even a simple name like Dix, say, when passed over the wires may become almost anything—and then it is spelled for verification, thus: "D for Dan, I for Ike, X for X-ray"—words as difficult as the one to be understood.

Progress in plain talking does seem to lag, in the opinion of The Nation's Business. Any optimism in that direction is blighted by the hash in our daily speech. Ideas seem to have transmission as much by telepathy as by telephony. "Wassatygottado 'nighthub?" But a jumble of letters will make sound and so may give a message to sophisticated ears. The eye is more expert than the ear at registering words. Whoever was fooled by the blanks in the penny dreadful of the long ago? The d—s were promptly accepted at their full brimstone content, but a curse by tele-

phone might easily be garbled into a compliment. It's a wife's ear that knows its own tongue.

### It Happened in Boston

There had been a visitor, and to the lad she said: "And so this is little Walter? My, my! What a big ooy you've grown to be! I wouldn't have believed it possible."

"Mother," said Walter when the visitor had gone, "doesn't it pass your comprehension how persons in whom one would naturally expect an ordinary degree of intelligence appear to believe, all history and nature to the contrary notwithstanding, that the children of their acquaintance will always remain infants, and persist in expressing surprise when they observe the perfectly natural increase in one's stature?"—Washington Star.

### Not Satisfied to It

Mrs. Keyhammer—Don't you like my playing? You know, "Music hath charms to soothe the savage breast." Her Husband—Mebbe it bath. I s'pose I'm not savage enough.

## MY FAVORITE STORIES

By IRVIN S. COBB

(Copyright.)

### Where the Real Fault Lay

The tourist was one of that type which for some mysterious reason are more numerous encountered abroad than at home. He was doing the cathedral towns of England, not because he was particularly interested in English towns, or in English cathedrals either, but because the guide book advised him to do so.

Near the close of a glorious spring afternoon he stood on the greenward facing Canterbury cathedral with his legs planted far apart, his cap on the back of his head, his hands rammed deep into his trousers' pockets, his cigar stuck into one corner of his mouth, and on his face an expression betokening profound boredom.

The celebrated Canterbury chimes were ringing for vespers, filling all the air with silver melody, when a side door of the cathedral opened and there issued forth a little, plump, pink-checked, benevolent clergyman. He approached the visiting stranger and in cultured tones said to him:

"I take it, sir, that you are a stranger?"

"Hey?" inquired the American, cupping one hand about his ear.

The clergyman raised his voice:

"I assume, sir, that you are not a resident of these parts?"

"Nope," said the American. "I hail from Nebraska. It's a durned good state, too—best in the Union. You ought to come out there some time, elder, and give us the once-over."

"Eh—quite so," said the reverend gentleman. "Then," he continued, "since you are newly-come to this place it must seem to you, even as it does to those of us who dwell in these cloistered and holy precincts, that the music of our glorious bells comes floating down to one almost like the voice of the Almighty Himself, seeking through the medium of their old-bronze throats to communicate the message of peace, on earth goodwill to man, to us His children here below."

"Which?" inquired the visitor, inclining his head somewhat.

"Er—what I meant to say was," stated the clergyman, "is that one must carry away from here, after hearing our chimes, the conviction in his soul that really he has been in communication with Deity itself—that the voices of the angels have cried out to him. Er—is it not so, my friend?"

The American shook his head.

"I'm sorry, parson," he said regretfully, "but them d—n bells is making so much noise I can't hear a word you say!"

### What Might Be Called an Active Man

The wharf at New Orleans was crowded with foot travelers, vehicles and freight trucks. A brawny Irishman, driving a truck, locked wheels with another truck operated by a negro.

As the two trucks jammed the negro opened his mouth in profuse and highly disrespectful protest. But before he had freed six words of his speech unconsciousness shut off further utterance.

For the Irishman, with one flying leap had reached the earth. His left hand closed on the negro's ankle, and as the latter was jerked violently into space the enemy's right fist landed a wing shot squarely on the point of the jaw, and for the time being he knew no more.

Ten minutes later the victim half opened his eyes. A policeman was bending over him, applying first aid.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded the officer.

"A white man hit me," said the ducky, "an' I wants him arrested."

"What's his name?"

"I don't know what his name is, boss—never seed him befo' in my life."

"Well, then, what does he look like?"

"I don't rightly know dat, neither. Hit happen so quick-lak I didn't get a good look at 'im."

"Then how do you expect me to find him if you can't describe him?" asked the puzzled policeman.

"Boss, dat ain't goin' to be no trouble," stated the negro. "You jest go look for the doin'est man they is in New Orleans!"

### Sauce for the Goose

An East Sider of foreign birth and short term of residence in this country prospered to the extent where he graduated from the ranks of the Forsythe street sidewalk merchants and became a regular business man, with a store and showcases and everything. Also, for the first time in his life he was able to start a bank account.

One day he was engaged on the telephone by the assistant cashier of the bank where he kept his checking fund.

"Mr. Abrams," stated the cashier, "I called you up to tell you that on the first day of this month your account appears overdrawn \$108."

"So?" droned Mr. Abrams. "Say, young man, would you do it for me a favor?"

"Sure."

"Then, please, you should look at your books and tell me how stood the account on the foist day of last month."

In a minute or two the bank functionary was back at the phone.

"Oh, Mr. Abrams," he said, "on the first day of last month you had a balance to your credit of \$322.25."

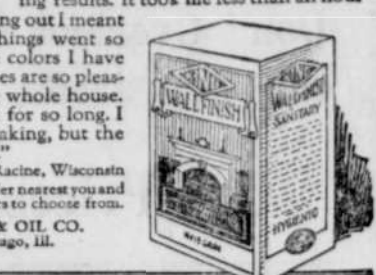
"So!" shouted Mr. Abrams. "Und did I call you up?"



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"Last fall I tried my hand at redecorating the walls of my home, using King Wall Finish. I was surprised at the pleasing results. It took me less than an hour

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### Queer Thing

Father William E. Cashin, who has resigned his chaplaincy of Sing Sing prison after 12 years' service, takes a deep interest in prisons and reformatories.

Talking about a reformatory of rather antiquated pattern, Father Cashin said the other day:

"A queer thing happened to a man in that reformatory in 1902."

"Yes? What happened?" said the reporter.

"He reformed," said Father Cashin.

### Cuticura Comforts Baby's Skin

When red, rough and itching, by hot baths of Cuticura Soap and touches of Cuticura Ointment. Also make use now and then of that exquisitely scented dusting powder, Cuticura Talcum, one of the indispensable Cuticura Toilet Trio.—Advertisement.

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The use of carbon-dioxide gas refrigeration instead of ice in shipping a consignment of 15,000 pounds of fresh fish from Halifax to Montreal was so successful that when the cargo was unpacked ten days later the fish was found to be free from odor and the natural color unchanged. The gas is carried in cylinders in refrigerator cars, and the system is expected to extend the market for fresh fish.—New York World.

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Aspirin is the trade mark of Bayer Manufacturing of Monacoelectroester of Salicylicacid  
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"He looks like a musical sort of fish."  
"Yeh, he's a piano tuna."

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