

belt of willows and osiers, but a path to the left would bring her to the boathouse, while the same path to the right crossed another shooting alley some two hundred yards farther on.

In the gloaming of that midsummer night Doris Waverton could see the water shining like a sheet of burnished silver above the fringe of willows. She stepped out smartly, and gave no heed to the bolting of white-tailed rabbits or the rustling of birds. Much to her relief, she saw no one during that traverse of the wood. But it did not follow that because she did not see she was therefore unseen.

As she turned into the narrow path bordering the lake a man rose from the wood's undergrowth, amid which he had crouched when her dainty figure appeared in the alley.

"Unless I'm losin' me eyesight, that's Mrs. Waverton," soliloquized the apparition, who had "hobo" writ large on face and garments. "I couldn't see her pretty phiz, bless her little heart; but I'd swear to her walk an' style among a thousand. Now, what's she after? What's she doin' here? The papers said—but curse the papers: they mostly tell lies! Joe, me boy, you believe your own eyes, an' p'raps, if you're lucky, your ears."

And with that he followed his quarry, stalking her with a wary skill born of the woodland and the wild.

CHAPTER IX. Husband and Wife

DORIS WAVERTON halted at the edge of the wood, and gazed wistfully across the smooth plateau of the park at the Old World front of the house that Claude Waverton's father had built with treasure extracted from the mountains of Colorado.

Lights were shining dimly in some of the windows; but the house stood out boldly from its background of tall trees, and the girl-wife's eyes filled with tears as she looked at the mansion that had witnessed her homecoming as a happy bride, in which her child was born, and where her dream of wedded bliss had been converted into a long agony of utter wretchedness.

All during that pause, in the peace and solitude of the stately park, a doubt, a misgiving, which had peeped up in her secret soul at a certain momentous interview in the lawyer's office, and had troubled her actively since a letter from her husband came to hand a few hours ago, grew into a sort of unnerving obsession.

Could the man who had written that letter have been so utterly vile and contemptible as her imagination had painted him? Had she striven, honestly and with single-mindedness, to reclaim him when they began to drift apart? Had she not been too ready to shrink from him with loathing when he lurched into her presence and outraged her delicacy with coarse jibes and crudely hateful innuendos?

Poor girl! In the days of expanding maidenhood she had regarded marriage as the crown and desire of life, and it had proved to be little more than a sordid bondage, a slavery of convention hard and cruel as the yoke of servitude in some Arab-ridden village of mid-Africa. Nevertheless, the influence of early training was stubborn. It had not been wholly obliterated even by her tears, and the sprig of hope and faith that took root in her heart when she learned that her scamp of a husband had saved little Kathleen's life grew into a vigorous plant with the reading of the letter sent to her at Narragansett Pier.

Studiously moderate and impersonal in tone, it had warned her against the insidious arts of John Stratton Tearle. It pretended to be dictated only by regard for her future well being; but what woman would fail to discover in every line a passionate longing and regret inspired by herself? Certainly it was cold, almost austere, in tone. But there, again, her woman's heart argued that pride restrained her husband from revealing his true intent. For that was the saddest feature of all her suffering. Despite the solemn pronouncement of the law, she still regarded Claude Waverton as her husband, and Tearle had blundered badly in thinking that her tortured soul would seek consolation in a second matrimonial venture, save under the last and worst indignity of a marriage between Waverton and Mrs. Delamar.

The letter, it was true, forbade her emphatically either to write or to endeavor to seek an interview with "one who has gone out of your life forever"; but, beneath a somewhat frigid manner, poor Doris was essentially feminine and impulsive,—a glowing little volcano of love and passion coated with the ice of reserve, and shrouded, perhaps, under a thin veil of Puritanism.

And finally there was Kathleen, that engaging mite who would soon be asking why, if other girls had fathers, she had none!

So, after a dispute with Mrs. Daunt that approached perilously near a rupture be-

tween two devoted sisters, Doris had taken her courage in both hands and hied her to Lake Champlain. And now here she was, a trespasser on her husband's estate, a woman eagerly scanning the distant house and grounds for the appearance of the man she wished to drag out of the pit he had dug for himself!

She fancied she saw a figure emerging from one of the drawing room windows, which were of the French type and opened straight out on a grass lawn. Breathing a prayer for guidance in her task, she ran the few intervening yards to the boathouse, and hid in its deep veranda; for, on the park side, the building served as a summerhouse and dressing shed for polo players or baseball teams.

She was so intent on attaining her object—to remain unseen till Waverton was so near that he could not avoid her without literally running away—that she had no knowledge of the sinister form that crept out of the wood close to the water's edge, and crawled on hands and knees among the tall reeds and dwarf willows until it was lying at full length close to the side rail of the veranda.

Joe Brett, idler and village scapegrace, realized that Mrs. Waverton was waiting for someone. If so, it might be to his advantage if he could discover the object of this clandestine meeting; for by such means a poor man might put himself in the way of earning a dollar or two without undue exertion. Fearful of being seen against the luminous background of the lake, he nestled close to the foundation wall, and thus could not be-

come aware, till retreat was impossible, that the other party to the rendezvous was accompanied by a dog, a dog that might be old and lame, but whose nose was as keen as ever.

WAVERTON reached the path nearly two hundred yards from the boathouse, and the slow, firm tread of his approaching footsteps could be heard thenceforth in that silent air. He was smoking, and Bob walked soberly by his side, disdainful of the flurry of frightened water fowl or the quick plunge of a rat diving for safety. The two were abreast of the boathouse, when Doris emerged from its shadows. Instantly the dog barked, and his fur bristled on neck and spine; but his quick intelligence told him that this was no stranger. When he discovered his mistress's identity, he whined with delight, and capered stiffly up the few steps of the house to fawn on her.

She quieted Bob with an affectionate hand; but her eyes were fixed on her husband, who stood in the path as though rooted to it.

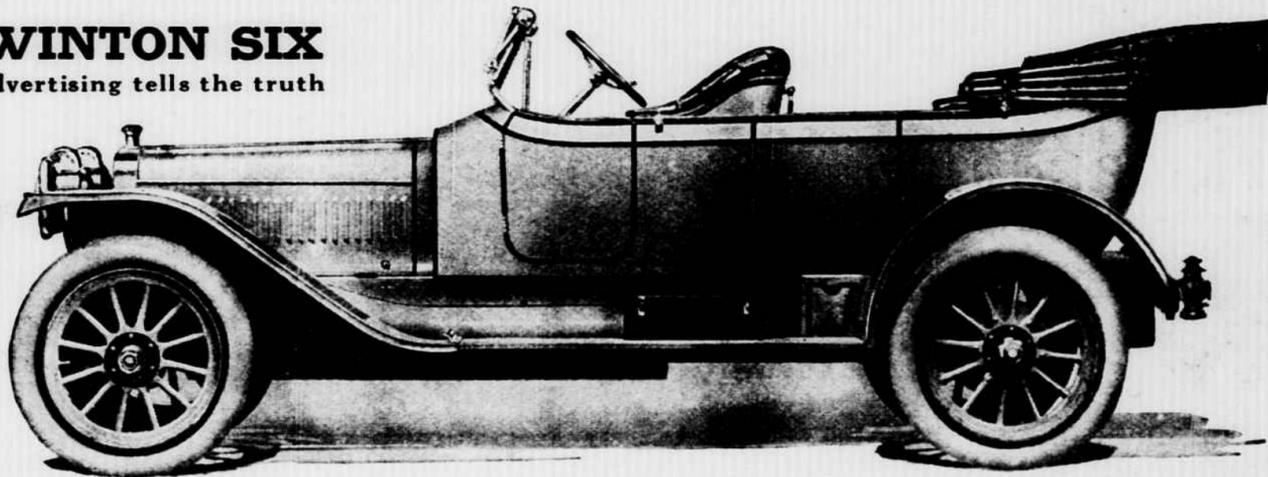
"Claude!" she said, and her voice was tremulous with excitement. "Claude, you must forgive me; but—"

Then she stopped, overwhelmed and distraught; for her husband, whose amazement and distress she interpreted as alarm, gasped brokenly, "You! Mrs. Waverton! Why are you here?"

She stepped out into the open, and they stood face to face, while the dog frisked between them. They were near enough to see each other plainly in the dusk; though the

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