

... The ...
Coward
By CLARISSA MACKIE.
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"I must give you back your freedom. I will not tell you why, because you would call my reasons absurd. In justice to you it must be so. Try to forgive me." So wrote Jack Brierson when he broke his engagement, and Miss Abernethy pressed her white lips together scornfully and sent back the betrothal ring by registered mail in a very practical manner.

Then because the long, enervating spring days had robbed her cheeks of their wonted bloom and the germs of a convenient "malaria" had dulled the brightness of her brown eyes Rose Abernethy's guardian aunt carried her bodily away into the bracing Adirondack region, where they lived the simple life of the woods and inhaled vigor and peace with the sweet air.

Gradually the cynical lines faded from Rose's face, and when the summer brought a greater influx of visitors to the large hotels she found herself back in that whirl of pleasure of which she had always necessarily been a part.

One afternoon she went to her favorite retreat on the brink of the Falling Hill, where a huge bowlder under the pines afforded a comfortable seat.

Here she had come every day to witness the glorious pageantry of the sunset, and her joy in its recurring splendor was always tinged with dread of the sheer precipice that yawned at her feet.

Now she was reveling in the solitude of the spot when slow, hesitating steps broke the silence. She turned as a man came into view, parting the bushes with a familiar brown hand. It was Jack Brierson.

Apparently he did not see her, for he continued his faltering advance almost to the very edge of the hill. Then he stopped and looked away toward the west with level eyes and a face so stilled from all emotion that its very tenseness was eloquent of pain.

Rose Abernethy's face paled as she watched him curiously. It seemed very strange to be watching Jack at



"LET GO!" HE SAID HOARSELY. "YOU ARE RISKING YOUR LIFE!"

this remote distance with that empty feeling in her heart and brain. She didn't even hate him. Some girls might have done so after being jilted, but somehow she didn't care. She leaned forward breathlessly as he suddenly raised the light stick which he carried and made another step toward the brink of the precipice.

"Don't!" she cried involuntarily, and she stepped around the pine and held out a protesting hand.

Brierson turned sharply, and his blank gaze met her own—unrecognizing, indifferent.

"I thought I was alone," he said courteously, removing his hat.

"I—I thought you did not see that you were so near the edge of the precipice," she said in a low tone and with burning cheeks.

He felt about with his stick in a clumsy, unseeing manner and dislodged a stone, which went hurtling down the steep incline with an alarming crackle of twigs and earth. He stood in a listening attitude until the echoes had died away, and then he extended one hand with a helpless gesture.

"I am sorry to trouble you, madam, but—I am blind. Will you kindly turn me about into the safe path?"

Something warm came into the girl's heart as he spoke, and her lips quivered painfully. She laid a small hand on his coat sleeve. As she did so the turf crumbled under his feet, and, with a startled cry, he sank away from her over the brink of the precipice.

Strengthening her grasp on his sleeve as his weight pulled her downward, she threw her strong young body on the ground and clutched with her free hand at the tough branches of a stunted cedar.

"Let go!" he said hoarsely. "You are risking your life!"

"I shall not let go," she replied decisively. "Except for your blindness you are a strong man?"

"Yes," he said impatiently, "but you must release me at once, madam! If I have been foolish enough to jeopardize my own life you must not sacrifice yours!"

"If you are strong you can pull yourself up by the aid of this cedar tree. I will bend it down—so—there! Now, draw yourself up, and I will help you on to firm ground."

Five minutes later he lay panting on the ground at her feet. "I am very grateful!" he began eagerly, when her crisp, cool voice stopped the words on his lips.

"I am more than repaid," she said, with cruel emphasis. "I never met a coward before!"

"A—coward!" he stammered, sitting up and turning his sightless eyes toward her.

"A coward!" she repeated firmly. "You see—I know—Rose Abernethy."

"Ah, you have the advantage of me, madam. Your flattering words indicate that you have some knowledge of my affairs."

His face was very red, and his black brows were drawn together in an angry frown.

"I know enough—to form an opinion," said Miss Abernethy coldly. "I will tell you why I believe you to be a coward if you wish."

He smiled grimly.

"You have been good enough to save a very worthless life. Go on."

"You are a coward because you are afraid to let Rose Abernethy know that you are blind. You denied her the right to share your affliction and to let her money make things easier for you. She would gladly have shared her paltry dollars with you."

"You don't understand, whoever you are," he said shortly. "I am a poor man. I had just reached a point where my fortunes depended upon the keenness of every faculty, and this blindness came upon me like a stroke of lightning. I could not ask Rose—beautiful, bright Rose—to play nurse and Lady Bountiful to a miserable blind beggar." He dropped his face in his hands and, forgetful of her presence, groaned bitterly.

"You have forgotten her. She had some rights. You could never have really loved her, Mr. Brierson."

He lifted a ghastly face.

"God knows I did, I do, I always shall, but I could not ask her to wait on indefinitely, and I know her unselfish nature, capable of any sacrifice. She would lose youth and everything that goes to make up her joy in life. I could not—I had not the courage to face her and tell her the truth. You are quite right. I am a coward."

There was a long silence after that, while the sun sank behind a distant range and long, cool shadows fell over the two sitting among the pine needles. The man sat with his hands clasped about his knees, while his countenance settled into that impassive calm with which he had first faced the sunset.

The girl watched him with pitying eyes and trembling lips. Twice she parted them to speak, and each time her voice died away in her pretty white throat.

"And the doctors said?" she asked at last.

"That the sight might return as suddenly as it went or a costly operation might effect a cure. Overstrain has paralyzed the optic nerves," he replied without moving.

Rose sprang to her feet, and for the first time that afternoon her voice rang out clear and sweet:

"It is growing late, Jack. Will you take me back to the camp?"

Brierson was beside her instantly with groping hands.

"Rose, Rose," he cried joyfully, "it is you! It has been you all the time?"

"Yes," she said, withdrawing from his touch with a confusion he could not perceive. "You must let me show you the way, and then—"

"And then"—he echoed breathlessly. "and then—you will not leave me—you will forgive my mental blindness and my cowardice?"

"You do not need me," she ventured wistfully.

"Ah, dear heart, I did not know how much I needed you!" he cried remorsefully. "You will forgive my brutality and show me the way to happiness once more?" He turned appealing, sightless eyes and beseeching hands toward her.

She placed her hand in his. "Come, Jack," she said.

Laughing Gas For Poets.

Sir Humphry Davy was the first to inhale nitrous oxide. His experiment was the result of a report published by a brother chemist that laughing gas, called by him oxide of septon, was the cause and basis of all contagion. Cautious experiments made with the diluted gas produced no ill effects, and Davy proceeded to inhale considerable quantities of the pure gas. Contrary to his expectations, the effects were highly pleasurable. Thrills of pleasure pervaded his body, and his mind was filled with ideas and emotions of the most exalted kind, which, however, were very indistinct when the effect of the gas passed off. It occurred to Sir Humphry Davy that the gas might be useful in promoting poetic inspiration, and he accordingly tried writing verse while under its influence, but the recorded result hardly shows a close connection between the divine afflatus and nitrous oxide. Davy's experiments had the effect of making the inhalation of laughing gas for a time highly fashionable, so that in 1802 a French writer alludes to it as having become a national vice in England.

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ASSESSOR'S NOTICE—(EQUALI- zation of 1908 Assessment). To the Taxpayers of Clatsop County, Oregon: Notice is hereby that the Board of Equalization for Clatsop County, Oregon, will convene at the Clerk's office at the Court House in Astoria on the 19th day of October, 1908, the same being the third Monday in said month and the time fixed by law for the meeting of said Board of Equalization, which will continue its sessions from day to day, exclusive of Sundays and legal holidays, until the examination and correction and equalization of the assessment rolls for said year shall be completed, which said Board will continue in session for one month from said date, unless the labors thereof are sooner completed. Petitions or applications for the reduction of a particular assessment shall be made in writing, verified by the oath to the applicant or his attorney and filed with the Board during the first week it is required by law to be in session, and any petition or application not so made, verified and filed shall not be considered or acted upon by the Board.

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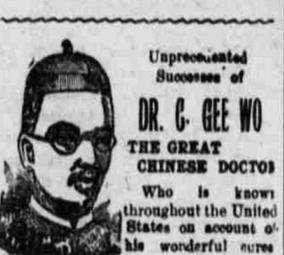
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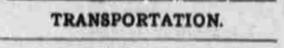
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