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Coningsby's Last Minute

By FRANK FILSON

"Hurt you? Not a bit. You won't feel anything."

The ghastly irony of the words rang through Coningsby's brain. True, he would feel nothing, but it was not the physical pain he feared. It was the instantaneous flight of the soul, the terror of nothingness when the electric current sped through his nerves and strained and stiffened muscles taut against the straps. What did he care for physical pain?

And the crime, the trial, the sentence to death, the long wait in the deathhouse had almost vanished from his mind, so long ago they seemed. It was as if a different man had committed that act of murder on an impulse for which this man, named Coningsby, dragged out the last few minutes of his life.

He had been a business man, not imaginative, not abnormal, an ordinary citizen in every way before the event occurred which was to transform him into a criminal. He had loved Polly sincerely, and had thought her devoted to him. Even now he winced as he remembered the shock of the discovery that she loved another. Then a red mist had risen before his eyes, and he had killed—killed the man whose name he searched for now in vain, for the numbing sense of death was already stealing through him.

And he wondered idly whether man really has an immortal part, destined to survive the tribulations of life and look back on them with memory intact. Could there be heaven, if the

"It didn't hurt you, did it?"

complete memory remained? But, on the other hand, was not memory itself the test of survival?

Then there had been the flight after the murder. He could remember hardly anything of that, either, for it was one long nightmare of railroad journeys. How had he eluded the police who were posted, awaiting him, at every barrier? Oh, yes, the disguise! He had forgotten that, as he seemed to have forgotten everything.

Then had followed the dramatic betrayal by his dentist, Polson. Polson had fitted a gold tooth of a peculiar shape in the upper jaw. It was Polson who discovered him, by one of those coincidences that seem always to lead in wait for the criminal. Polson had betrayed him to the police. It had seemed the acme of irony that he should have to lose his life because of the chance recognition of a man whom he saw only twice a year—and a dentist!

He remembered the trial, with all its abominable publicity. He had hoped to escape with nominal sentence, but he refused his lawyer's suggestion that he should plead the unwritten law. His wife had been present in court. He remembered her cry when the judge finished summing up.

Then the stony faces of the jurymen, who stared at him as they fled out of their box. And the terrible waiting.

"If they're out an hour longer it will mean a disagreement, or, at best, a second-degree verdict," his counsel whispered hopefully.

That was the first time that Coningsby realized the imminence of death. A second-degree verdict? Why, what had people been counting on?

Suddenly he became aware that the faces of the spectators had death in them. There was death in the silence of the court, in the faces of the police, in the averted looks of the jurors as they came ominously back.

"Guilty of murder in the first degree!" Those words rang through his brain. They seemed engraved there indelibly.

"Take it easily!" the prison superintendent was saying. And Coningsby realized that, while these memories had flitted through his brain, he had actually traversed those few paces across the stone flags from his cell into the death chamber.

That was where he had expected his

nerve to fall. The prison superintendent put some sweet-smelling and slightly pungent stuff to his nostrils, but he tried to push it away. He did not want to go to his death drugged.

They were waiting for him, the reporters and all the ghoulish crew. There was the doctor fingering his stethoscope in an embarrassed manner, ready to apply it over his breast after he had ceased to breathe. And the electrician, pretending to be absorbed in his own ghastly preparations for sending down the lever which should force thousands of volts of electricity through his quivering body.

Coningsby looked at the reporters. Their faces, singularly blank, stared impassively into his. He saw a young man moistening his dry lips furtively.

He was already in the chair! He had sat down, still absorbed in his thoughts. Now it was all but over. The chaplain, at his side, would soon begin intoning the burial service. He knew just when the lever would fall. "In the midst of life we are in death!"

No word was spoken, but Coningsby knew that the dreadful drama had already begun. The electrodes were already applied. He felt the straps about him. He gripped the chair with both his hands. He felt his eyeballs throbbing. He heard the droning of the clergyman beside him.

He stared out under the bandages about his eyes. He saw the line of ghastly faces opposite him. The little reporter was wiping his forehead. Somebody pressed down the bandage again, but not before he had seen Polly's face among those of the assembled witnesses.

His blood ran sluggishly and icy needles seemed to prick his veins. Polly had come to see him die! The thought was maddening. His eyes had caught hers and he had seen hers fixed on his with emotion, almost with fear.

He tore the bandage from his eyes and struggled in the chair. He drew in a deep breath. The guards placed their hands on him and forced him down. He knew that the fatal current would not be sent through his body while their hands were about him. And, clinging to them, he strove to raise, while the droning went on behind him.

"In the midst—"

He fought like a madman. The scene dissolved in a red mist like that which had been before his eyes when he committed murder. All the while he saw Polly's face, the horror in her eyes. She started up.

"Of life—"

"Take it easily now. It won't last a moment!"

He cursed the warden. He fought like a man possessed. Polly had risen and was coming toward him.

"We are in death!"

He felt the current course through his body. He ceased to struggle. His last thought was that it was too late.

"It didn't hurt you, did it?"

He was staring into Polson's face. The dentist was standing over him, his forceps in his hand, and, at his side, was Polly.

"You nearly got my finger that last pull," said Polson.

CARE IN NAMING THE BABY

Something "Sweet" May Be Ill-Fitting When the Youngster Grows Up.

Grown-up folk are sensitive about their Christian or given names. More especially so, if the name happens to be a "fancy" one or one of austere plainness.

We know a man whose name is Ell. He hates it.

We know a young couple who called their first-born Job. (They have a rich relative who glories in the same name.)

We know a middle-aged fat woman who writes under the name of Tiny. (Really, can you beat it?)

When you name the baby, remember that the name is going to stick for a lifetime.

Don't call your baby anything "sweet," because your baby will grow up to be a big, rugged man or a regular life-sized woman.

Hypocrites in Society.

It amuses one to see people using the mantle of charity not to cover the destitute, not to hide a good deed, but to conceal a creeping intrusion into the houses of the great and the penitents of fashionable society, which is the only sort of society rich idlers recognize. No doubt many philanthropic movements are aware of those who are in them for the sake of the meetings held in great houses, which give to those who attend a pleasing sense of proximity to fabulous luxury. If people have their hands full of important business which they cannot drop, this ceaseless struggle to stand up and be counted among those present appears small, undignified, unworthy of human beings with work to do and a soul to save that is of more value than many macaroons and cups of tea.—Exchange.

Young Naturalist.

Margaret is a three-year-old, whose parents are fond of bacon and eggs, and Margaret has her share. One day in the country she heard, for the first time, a hen cackle.

"Oh, mamma," she exclaimed, "what does the hen say?"

"Well," her mother smiled, "I suppose she says she has laid an egg."

Margaret did not understand the smile and after a moment's profound thought she came back again.

"And what does she say, mamma," she inquired more seriously than before, "what does she say when she lays bacon?"—Judge.

Laura Jean Libbey's TALKS ON HEART TOPICS

Single Blessedness.

I never wrote for money, I have no wish for fame.

But the thought it was my duty stirred my heart to flame.

I've longed to put my dreams in songs, like the wild bird on the bough.

Just as I felt the soulful song and nature taught me how.

The free bird sings where none can hear, but the silent, sighing trees.

Where it can never touch the ear, but dies upon the breeze.

"Should young girls be encouraged to believe marriage to be the goal toward which their ambitions and hopes should be aimed?" A letter from an earnest, single minister of the gospel came to me on a bright May morning, a year ago, making this inquiry.

The same mail brought me—among more than a hundred others—three letters from widely different points which had a direct bearing upon his query.

One was from a young girl of eighteen, a slave in a sweatshop in New York. She wrote in part: "God bless you for giving me the hope that some day I may meet one who will care for me enough to ask me to marry. It is the one bright jewel of hope that makes my life of toil endurable."

Another wrote: "If I could write for the papers as you do, I would tell girls that they can live very happy lives without so much as a thought wasted on a man and marriage. I am young, single and happy, independent of mere man in the pursuit of what shall give me life contentment and shall continue to remain so. Advise girls against love and matrimony."

The third was apparently written by a shaking hand. The writer confessed to over fifty years, signing herself "A Spinster." She wrote in part: "I have just been reading one of your articles on love and marriage and it has brought tears to my eyes. It is so true—every word of it. When I was a young girl I was told that it showed weakness of character to think of having a beau and that no woman should marry until she was well in her thirties—in short, of an age capable of judging men accurately as to their qualifications for marriage or their fitness. I crushed the natural impulses of youth to encourage the would-be lovers who sought my society and turned my attention to duty. I was praised for this by my kinsfolk, called sensible and independent. I arrived at the age of thirty. The youths who had sighed for me in my youthful days were all wedded, had happy homes, contented wives and joyous children. I realized the truth. Youth time is love's own time and the time for mating. It is a grievous mistake in most cases to delay it. Ten years more passed and still another ten. The theory that single blessedness is a happy existence is all wrong."

That my articles on heart topics should be wise and worthy, I caused letters to young girls, single women just past the first bloom of womanhood and elderly spinsters, mothers and widows, to be sent out asking their experience and views on the subject as to whether or not young girls should be encouraged to believe marriage to be the goal toward which their ambition and hopes should be aimed. In every instance a reply, direct from the heart was received. It was a stupendous but interesting task—reading these letters, separating the wheat from the husks.

Every phase of love has been laid bare before me. The unanimous verdict was that girls should be told that marriage is the probable outcome of their existence, a natural result—when the right man is met, which will be an honorable man, one who holds youth and virtue sacred—in truth, the rose bloom which jewels her existence. It is also held by this vast majority of writers that great good is accomplished in pointing out to unsophisticated young girls where the pitfalls lie in love's paths and the stumbling blocks. There are danger signals to hesitating, weak natures that might love unwisely and too well. To sum up the matter, girls should always connect the thought of marriage with love.

FALLING IN LOVE TOO QUICKLY.

These violent delights have violent ends, and in their triumph die like fire and powder.

Which as they kiss consume. The sweetest honey is loathsome in its own deliciousness, and in the taste confounds the appetite. Therefore, love moderately. Long love doth so; too swift arrives as tardy as too slow.

No one save Shakespeare could aim at and hit a truth more squarely in the words "violent delights have violent ends." Putting it more plainly he meant to say: Loving in haste is a passion which soon burns itself out.

If it has not had time to take root, thus establishing a firm foundation, how can it be expected to flourish and its blossom to last?

Romantic women wonder if it is true that love is born at first sight. While a few cling tenaciously to the belief that those intended for each other recognize that compelling power that seems to draw them together, at the first meeting of the eyes, touch of the hand or sound of the voice, more serious-minded people, who have delved down far deeper than the surface of the subject, as earnestly declare that love is not—never was—born at first sight. Admiration and interest can be awakened and the hope for future meetings.

That is an excellent beginning or foundation for building up the tender sentiment. The next step or, rather, step for nurturing the sweet and tender passion, is companionship—the magic influence of the charm of personality. Next—and of far greater importance than is accredited to it—is allowing the thoughts to dwell constantly on the person one is subtly attracted to.

Tender thoughts woven into beautiful day dreams which beget longings are responsible for the mischief. Thoughts are the sun rays which cause the flower of love to burst forth. The man who gives no thoughts to love in the hours when he is alone and has time to look into his own heart and read the records there of the impressions each call upon a certain divinity has made upon his susceptibility is the man who is never quite sure if he is really in love or not. Therefore he is very careful about being non-committal.

How could he be expected to tell the young woman what the import of his many calls is when he has got nowhere in his calculation or hopes? He is of the class of men who are laggards in loving and who waste a woman's time over a lapse of years to no purpose.

Every plant has an allotted time to grow from its first inception to the bursting forth of its perfect flower. Love, the most beautiful, fragile, yet sturdy plant of the heart, must go through the same process. Some loves never blossom, but die in the bud through endeavoring to force them to bloom too quickly. Men or women may be impetuous by nature, but they err when they pin their faith to the belief that they have actually fallen in love hastily and that it will last.

ANOTHER IN HER PLACE.

They say if our beloved dead, Should seek the old familiar place, Some stranger would be there instead. And they should find no welcoming face. Believe them not. Ah, those who say Our best beloved would find no place Have never hungered every day. Through years and years for one dear face.

They laugh at war who never felt a swordthrust. They sneer at the foolishness of being jealous who never felt its pangs. In the case of lovers who have disagreed, or perhaps, have had a downright quarrel and parted, the girl, at least, wonders, anxiously, if he makes no attempt to be reinstated in her favor, whether or not he has put another in her place.

It is one of the hardest ordeals a girl can face to find her surmise is true. She worries secretly over the thought whether she should go among the friends they were wont to visit together or remain away, escaping the embarrassment of meeting him with a new sweetheart. Her friends counsel her to encourage a new admirer. Nine girls out of ten are too honest to resort to this, believing it to be dishonorable to encourage a man's suit when neither her heart nor her wishes respond.

While a lover is true to her, hope bridges the dark current of fear, but the knowledge beyond all doubting that another has filled her place is a woe that strikes deep into the heart. The girl is indeed a heroine in real life who can school herself to meet a former lover face to face, hold out her hand in greeting and smile that he may think she does not care. When it comes down to cold, hard facts she should not care, realizing that a heart that could be shifted from one woman to another as easily is not worth grieving over, not worth a tear.

No man of principle would subject a former sweetheart to such embarrassment if it were possible to avoid it. The girl who has supplanted her should not feel overtriumphant. She should realize there is a world of truth in the old saw, that "He who can break troth with one girl without even a heart throb of regret can always break with another and yet another."

There is another class of men—and noble are they—who love once and forever. They wed the sweetheart to whom they have given all the affection of their hearts and if she is taken from them they will never put another in the place made sacred by her. They revere womanhood for her sake, but their hallowed memories of the blissful hours that are no more are dearer than any living presence could be.

Whether or not a lonely future is wisest and best is for them to determine. There are hearts which blossom but once and only once. The fear of many a good and loving wife is that were she to pass away another would in time fill her place in her husband's heart and home, eye in the affections of her children.

Such a fear should never be allowed to darken the sunshine of a happily wedded woman's life. That which we dread most never happens. One bride to whom this thought was a terrifying bugaboo wearied of her unloving spouse with the waning of the honeymoon, later divorcing him. A year later she had put another in his place.

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