

TRAGIC DISAPPEARANCE

BY WILL N. HARBER

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CHAPTER I.

There was a touch of the destroying breath of autumn in the keen wind which swept over Lyndhurst, an old colonial mansion on the Hudson near New York. The big trees on the terraced lawn and in the dense wood behind the house were shedding their green and yellow foliage, and in the extensive garden on the left of the entrance not even a belated flower could be seen in the well-arranged parterres. Here stood a marble statue, there a playing fountain; the entire aspect was cold and cheerless.

Within the mansion quite a different scene presented itself. A footman in livery stood in the vast hall; white-capped, white-aproned maid-servants moved about with soft tread and solicitous mien. Five o'clock tea was being served in the quaint Elizabethan drawing room. A man less than 40 years of age, tall, handsome and with a military bearing, reclined in a quaintly carved easy chair before the glowing wood fire with its old-fashioned brass fender and dragon-shaped andirons. The man's face was full, dark and round; his high, broad brow suggested considerable power of intellect; he wore no beard, and his short thick hair was touched with gray. He had but one questionable feature; an expert physiognomist might have said that it was a pity such a strong face should be marred by a mouth slightly inclined towards weakness. His wife, who sat near him, was a handsome woman; she was perhaps as old as he. Her complexion was clear and good; her teeth were fine and even; between her parted lips they caught the red freight and threw it back broken into tiny gleams. Her hands and feet were small and well shaped, her body possessed an undulating ease of movement that gratified the visual sense of the beholder. Her hair was dark brown, her eyes black and sharp, and these things, with the general contour of her shrewd face, hinted at French extraction.

When the tea was brought in a young lady who had been playing a Beethoven sonata on the grand piano in the large bow-window turned to another girl of about her own age who stood by her ready to depart.

"You really must stop for a cup of tea, Lottie," she said, laying her jeweled hand on the arm of the visitor.

"I am sorry, but I shall miss my train if I stay even a moment longer; as it is I shall have to urge your coachman to drive rapidly."

"Oh, surely you are not going, Miss Dean," protested Maj. Goddard, rising and coming towards them. "We really see so little of you, you know, and when you do honor us it is generally only to the extent of a pop call. I am really going to incite my ward to downright rebellion against you and all the rest of her old school friends."

"That is right, guardian," the pianist smiled as she rose; "you must stand by me. Lottie has such a nice time in the city that she is getting above such a quiet retreat as this."

"Oh, it isn't that," laughed the accused. "Do enjoy it so much here and I am coming to pay you a good visit before long. Really, I am looking forward to it with a great deal of pleasure."

"Well, until then we shall have a truce," cried the major, and he escorted the guest to the door where his carriage was waiting. As he reentered the drawing room the expression of his wife's face riveted his attention. Mrs. Goddard was watching Miss Briscoe, who had left the piano and was pouring the tea at the low brass table in the center of the room. The look she was giving his ward was so full of malignant dislike that the genial face of the major grew grave. He seated himself in the chair he had just left and eyed his wife attentively. Just then Miss Briscoe brought a cup of tea to him.

"You'll find it exactly right, guardian," she said with a smile. "I not only know the number but I now understand the size of the lumps of sugar you want."

"It is always right, Blanche, when you pour it for me." He would have added further pleasantries to this had he not felt the rigid stare of his wife upon him.

"You have nice manners, I must say," Mrs. Goddard suddenly jerked out, "but I presume you were taught in that Fifth Avenue school to serve gentlemen before ladies."

The beautiful girl flushed to her wavy golden hair.

"Oh, do pardon me, Mrs. Goddard, I am so forgetful; guardian looked so tired after his journey to town that—"

"Oh, it doesn't matter in the least," and this retort was emphasized by Mrs. Goddard's rising, pushing past the girl and pouring her own tea. Her face was dark with suppressed rage as she took her cup to a window-seat behind the piano and hastily drank it after the manner of angry individuals.

"Never mind," said Maj. Goddard to Blanche, who, with a look of deepening embarrassment on her face, had taken a seat near him; "never mind, it can't be helped."

"I wouldn't have displeased her for the world, on—on your account, if for nothing else. I do try my best to get on with her, but somehow I never make

the slightest progress in the right direction. I am so awkward."

Their voices were so low that they did not reach the tea-drinker in the bow window, but she seemed to know that she was the subject of the guarded colloquy, for she glared over her cup at them like a sullen, infuriated animal.

"I assure you it is not your fault, dear," went on Goddard. "You see when I told her the other day that all my mining ventures had fallen through and that I have now only this estate and a paltry ten thousand a year to keep it up on, it completely broke her to pieces. She counted on my affairs turning out millions, and I did not know it before, but she had laid a great many plans that must now fall to the ground."

"Plans?" said the girl, in surprise.

"Yes, she had consulted an architect about building a house at Newport and one on Fifth avenue. Oh, it was an awful blow to her! I wish she could put a better face on the matter and not take it so very hard. As far as I am concerned, I had made up my mind that matters were not so bad, after all, but she is ambitious, you see, and I never was. I have grown tired trying to get rich. I would like to rest, but—"

They heard Mrs. Goddard's cup and saucer rattling as she advanced to the tea table. Then she turned to the door suddenly and her heavy silk skirts gave forth a rustling sound as she passed haughtily out into the hall.

"O, I say, Jeanne!" exclaimed her husband, rising and going to the door, but she had gone out on the lawn, and when he came back to the fire he and his ward saw her walking to and fro on the asphalt drive. A moment later she turned and gave an inaudible order to James, the footman, and he came



GODDARD WENT TO THE WINDOW AND BLANCHE FOLLOWED.

out to her shortly with a revolver and a box of cartridges.

Goddard went to the window and Blanche followed.

"She's going to practice shooting," he said. "When she is full of anger she seems to find a vent for it in target practice. Watch her; she certainly has the most wonderful marksmanship of any woman alive."

The major could not help this exhibition of pride in his wife, and he seemed to hold his breath in boyish expectation as Mrs. Goddard took deliberate aim at a white envelope which James had pinned against the trunk of a tree about 50 feet from where she stood.

Five reports followed one another in rapid succession.

"Good! Wonderful!" ejaculated the major, "she hit it four times out of five. I have no idea," and as he said this Goddard's tone lost a part of its enthusiasm, "I have no idea where she acquired her skill. She always laughs mysteriously when I ask her. It was while she lived in the west, however, I am sure. Often she lets slip little allusions to ranch life and hunting on the plains."

Blanche made no response; there was a confidential note in her guardian's voice which strongly appealed to her sympathy. It shocked her sensitive idealistic nature to have him admit that there were pages in his wife's history which even he had not been allowed to read. They saw Mrs. Goddard take the revolver on the grass toward the attendant and turn into the house. A moment later she passed through the hall and went up the stairway to her own apartment.

"There is one thing I can not quite forgive in her, dear Blanche," and the major caught the soft tapering hand of his ward and led her back to the fire. "She married me. She must have been influenced to become my wife by the fortune she knew I possessed. She betrays that in a good many ways. She was ambitious; but persons born with craving desires are not to blame for having them, and so I try to overlook this fault in her. Being a poor milliner, who came in contact with the rich just far enough to want to have means, it must have been a temptation to her to marry a man with money. I don't say that she does not love me, for I really think she does. I should be very miserable if she did not."

"My poor guardian," said Blanche, tenderly. "You deserve so much. You ought to have all things that belong to good men. I have been very unhappy ever since you told me of your financial loss. You said, I think, that my money was safe?"

"Perfectly. I saw to that. I remembered your father's last words of confidence in me and I never have taken the slightest risk with your interests. Your fortune is as secure as if it were in the Bank of England, and the entire amount is earning a good rate of interest."

"But I have no use for so much money," said the girl, almost pleadingly, "and I would be so glad if you would take what you need of it."

The major flushed. "It would be a cowardly thing to do, and it would call forth much criticism; no, your money is yours; your father saw that I was sufficiently repaid for my services, besides, nothing less than your entire fortune would give Jeanne all she craves. She did not sleep a wink last night. I heard her walking constantly from the moment she retired till dawn. I went to her door twice and rapped, but she would not admit me. Sometimes I am afraid," and the major touched his broad forehead significantly.

"Poor guardian!" There was a suggestion of tears in Blanche's eyes and her voice quivered. "If you won't let me help you with my useless money what can I do? Do you fancy this—this trouble has not made me unhappy, too? Your face is my barometer. When it indicates that your spirits are depressed my sky becomes clouded, and then I don't care for anything else. It used to be so while I was at school. Your visit on Friday was the sole event of the week, and I studied hard according to my promise, that I might be worthy of it. I was so proud of you. The girls used to watch for you to drive up and they actually raved over you. They all thought you were so handsome."

But Maj. Goddard was not following her with attention.

"I have been wanting all this week to put a candid question to you, Blanche," he remarked, irrelevantly. "I am a little afraid you will not fully understand my motive, but I do want your opinion—a woman can judge another woman's heart better than a man can, even if he is her husband. I want to know, Blanche, if you think Jeanne cares for me a little bit?"

The girl could not command her suddenly roused emotions; she started and her long lashes fell before his eager, almost breathless stare. It was as if the question had been a shot which reached the very citadel of her most sacred convictions.

"Guardian, you must not—you ought not—" she seemed unable to proceed.

"I know I ought to be ashamed of myself for admitting that I have doubts, but since my loss and her strange reception of the news I can't help feeling as I do. Oh! Blanche, do you think she only married me for the fortune I had?"

"I did not know her then," said Blanche, evasively, her face pale and rigid. "I am too young to read the motives of women older than I am. I only know, if—"

"If what, Blanche?"

"If I had been your wife I should have loved you more in misfortune than ever. Oh, I am so sorry for you! It is breaking my heart." She raised her handkerchief to her eyes and began to cry softly.

Goddard pushed her head back gently till she was forced to look into his eyes.

"Don't do that, little girl," he said, tenderly. "It breaks me all to pieces to see a woman's tears. I wish the old days could somehow come back; those days when I dreamed of a young trusting wife who would love me for myself and draw me away from evil inclinations. You never guessed it, little girl, but—" he seemed to realize that he was going too far, for he broke off short and after a moment's pause he began again: "Never was a man a greater slave to a woman's whims than I am to hers. As much as I love honesty, honor, truth and upright living, I am afraid that woman could make me renounce it all if she wished. To me she is as powerful as opium to its most abject slave. I must do something, Blanche; these thoughts are maddening."

He touched the bell. "Get out my horse," he said to the servant. "I shall take a ride."

He went out to change his dress and his ward sat down before the fire. She heaved a great sigh.

"I wonder if she will desert him," she thought; "it would be just like her, now that she can no longer use him."

CHAPTER II.

Maj. Goddard spent all the next day in the city busy over some legal matters connected with his recent losses. He missed his usual train and was forced to take one an hour later. In consequence of this delay it was dark when he arrived home. The drawing-room was lighted, and through the window he saw Blanche and his private secretary, Mr. Hubert Talley, at the piano, but he did not enter. All day he had been worrying over his wife's recent moroseness, and he did not want to lose a moment before seeing her. He fancied she must be in her own apartment, so he went up stairs to her door. It was closed. He rapped gently, but received no response from within. He rapped again, but with no better result; then he tried the latch and found the door locked. For a moment he stood mastered by thoughts which both contradicted and confirmed each other. Then he remembered that the door was the only outlet from the room to the main stairway, and as there was no light to be seen through the keyhole he half persuaded himself that Jeanne had dressed and gone down.

He turned quickly into his own

apartment across the hall and turned on the electric light. His first thought was that he would change his dress before joining the others, but his impatience to see his wife defeated this idea and he hurried downstairs.

He looked into the library, a large, cozy apartment opposite the drawing-room. A coal fire was burning warm and red in the grate, but the room was empty. Just then the butler, Wilkins, opened the folding doors and a view of the electric-lighted dining-hall in its vast splendor of white cloth, silver and cut-glass met Goddard's roving eye.

"Has Mrs. Goddard come down?" the major asked.

"I did not know she had returned, sir."

"Returned! from where?"

"From the city, sir. She went in this afternoon."

"To the city! at what time?"

"She caught the 1:40 train," it was Blanche's voice behind him, and it contained a note of startled concern. "She said she would go direct to your office and return with you."

"I have not seen her; my God! what can have happened to her?"

Blanche motioned the butler to retire, and he did so, discreetly closing the door.

The major was deathly pale and his hands quivered as with palsy. For a moment he could only stare into the sympathetic eyes of his ward, who like a shapely pillar of consolation stood before him.

"Blanche, do you think—think she has gone?" he asked.

"I can't say, dear, dear guardian. I hope not. Don't give up."

He seemed to have a sudden inspiration.

"Come into my study," he said.

She followed and stood in the dark as he fumbled with the electric light fixture. In a moment the little room was illuminated. He pointed to a big iron safe in the corner, and said, huskily:

"She could not go without means. She saw me put \$5,000 away yesterday. She has always known the combination."

"Oh, she wouldn't dare to take your money!" exclaimed Blanche.

"She knew I had a deposit in the bank," he said; "besides, what is mine is hers. She knows that."

With trembling fingers he turned the combination bolt. In a moment the heavy door was opened. He drew out a strong box from one of the compartments in the safe and raised the lid.

"The money was gone."

"That settles it!" Goddard said this with more calmness than Blanche had expected, but it was the calmness of utter despair. He closed the box almost with scrupulous exactness, then shut and locked the door of the safe. He went back into the library and stood before the fire, his limp hands clasped in front of him.

"Tell me what to do, Blanche," he said, plaintively. "I can't give her up. I simply cannot! I have been under bursting shells and whistling lead as thick as hail and not cared so much as that" (he snapped his fingers), "but I can't face life without her."

A door opened cautiously. Wilkins put in his bald head, fringed with gray locks.

"Shall I serve dinner?" he asked.

"Yes, but I shall not wait," said his master. "I am going back to the city."

Just then there was a ring at the door. Goddard drew himself up and listened, a light of sudden expectation in his eyes.

"Sign here," a boyish voice said to the footman who had opened the door.

"A telegram!" cried the major, and he went to the door and brought it back, tearing it open excitedly.

"Detained in town," he read, triumphantly. "Perhaps you ought to come to the Palace hotel to see me. Will return in the morning. Jeanne."

"Thank God!" he exclaimed, joyously; then his eyes snatched a thought from the depths of his ward's great staring orbs which made him glance towards his study, and he saw the joyous light in his face flicker as if a strong breeze of suspicion had blown upon it. "Ah," he sighed, "but she intended to go, Blanche; she intended to leave me!"

He dropped his hand heavily on the old-fashioned silver bell on the table.

"My overcoat, and the carriage, James," was his husky command.

Blanche linked her tapering fingers over his arm.

"But not before you have eaten your dinner, dear guardian," she pleaded.

"When you get to the city she will have dined and you may be the worse for it."

He waited till James had left the room; then he said:

"I could not eat a bite right now if my life depended on it."

When she had seen him put on his coat and leave the room she ran to the window and watched the carriage drive away at the highest speed of the blooded horses. Then she went into the dining-room, bowing to Mr. Talley, who stood waiting for her. They took their places at the long table, he on one side, she on the other. He was a handsome man of perhaps 27, who wore no beard and had the strong features of a successful actor; his hair was thick, moderately long and of a blackness which went well with his dark eyes.

"Is the major coming in now?" he asked her, deferentially.

"No, he has had to go back to the city, Mr. Talley; it was a telegram, I think."

"Ah!" the young man seemed unable to control his surprise, and then it became evident that he found much in her tell-tale face to confirm his sudden suspicion that all was not going well with his employer.

"I only wished to ask his advice about some correspondence he direct-

ed me to write." And the secretary's words contained a polite suggestion of apology for his inquiry.

The soup was brought on by Sarah. "I beg your pardon, miss, but you have forgotten to take your medicine," she said.

"It doesn't matter," answered Blanche. "Never mind about it."

"But Dr. Fleming told me to be sure to see that you took it before each meal, miss."

"Well, bring it to me, Sarah; you are a good doctor yourself."

Blanche followed the girl into the pantry, and when she had taken the medicine she said: "Mrs. Goddard was detained in town to-night. Maj. Goddard has gone to meet her; she will return to-morrow. If the servants inquire you may explain." Then she went back to the table and she and Talley ate their dinner silently. It was as if he knew something had happened to which he had no right to allude.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

Why Not?

If the ships of other nations in a competition open to all can carry our exports and imports more cheaply than we can ourselves, let them play the role of hod carriers at the wages of hod carriers.

If what we pay to other nations for carrying our freight enables them to buy our products and manufactures, they are welcome to it so long as we have more profitable employment for our capital, brains and industry.—Chicago Times-Herald.

The Wrong Doors.

"The owl met the wolf."

"Mr. Wolf," said the owl, "let me induce you to sell my book."

"Me!" exclaimed the wolf. "What prompted you to think that I would make a good book agent?"

"You knock at so many doors, Mr. Wolf."—Chicago News.

Her Loving Friends.

Maud—Mabel is trying to catch the new minister, isn't she?

Irene—Desperately. She thinks he would have proposed the other evening if he had come prepared, but that he was afraid to undertake it extemporaneously.—Chicago Tribune.

No Sunshine Without a Pig.

"Fa, let's move to the country. I don't want to live in town."

"Why not, Bobby?"

"Well, pa, ma says if we live here till I'm grown up and gray headed she won't lemme keep a pig."

A report from Monterey, Mexico, declares that the miners in Mexico substantiate the claim that the Chinese discovered this continent long before the days of Columbus.

An improved mail service has been installed in Frankfurt, Germany, the tramway company having recently added seven automobile cars and seven trailer cars to the street railway mail service.

A hotel landlord in St. Louis has established curfew regulations in his house. Promptly at 10 o'clock at night the curfew rings, and guests at that time are expected to turn out the lights and go to bed.

In New Zealand there exists a brass band whose members are wholly mounted on bicycles. This band, which is located at Christchurch, consists of ten players, and these not merely ride their bicycles to practice, but fulfill their engagements on the wheel.

The Cunard company has decided on building several steamships which will be expected to wrest from German built vessels the speed championship now held by the latter. Other English lines will probably follow suit in the attempt to outdo the Deutschland.

The London Daily Mail says that the days of the banjo are numbered in England and that that instrument will soon be included in the same category with the mouth organ and the accordion. The zither will probably be the favorite instrument the coming season.

The Boston park board has extended the time within which horseless carriages can be driven in the park system. Automobiles can now be run from 8:30 until 11:30 in the evening. The vehicles must not travel at a higher speed than ten miles an hour in the park.

Professor Levin of Berlin has found among 300 laborers who constantly handle copper eight men whose hair had in consequence obtained a greenish tinge, which no washing would remove. The phenomenon has been known, he says, 250 years, but it takes several years to produce it.

Half size pianos are being made in Germany for the use of children who are learning to play. Doctors declare that much permanent injury is done to the muscles of the fingers by endeavoring to stretch an octave or more, so the new pianos are made with keys half the usual width in order to prevent such injury.

Japan will shortly be the strongest naval power in the far east. Three new warships have lately arrived from England, France and Germany, and the Hatsuse is expected from England. In mere tonnage alone the four new vessels surpass the total tonnage of the 11 Japanese or the 12 Chinese ships that were present at the great sea fight in the Yellow sea.

Germany is rapidly becoming a nation of whisky drinkers, according to the report of Commissioner of Internal Revenue Wilson. More distilled spirits are exported from this country to Germany than to any other foreign country. The Germans, apparently, are partial to Bourbon whisky in preference to rye. For the year ending June 30, 1900, 411,480 gallons of Bourbon and 137,578 gallons of rye whisky were sent.

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