

The Goddess

By CHARLES GODDARD and
GOVERNEUR MORRIS

Novelized from the Photo Play of the same name produced by the
Vitagraph Company

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SIXTH INSTALLMENT

SYNOPSIS.

Professor Stilliter, psychologist, and Gordon Barclay, millionaire, plan to preach to the world the gospel of efficiency through a young and beautiful woman who shall believe that she is a heaven-sent messenger. They kidnap the orphaned little Amesbury girl, playmate of Tommy Steele, and conceal her in a cavern, in care of a woman, to be molded to their plan as she grows up. Fifteen years elapse. Tommy is adopted by Barclay, but loses his helpship and on a hunting trip discovers Celestia. Stilliter takes Celestia to New York. Tommy follows, she gets away from both of them, and her real work begins.

CHAPTER XVII.

"Don't be afraid," said Celestia calmly. "I won't hurt you."
And that was almost the last thing that Freddie's vaguely working mind expected her to say. "She," he thought, "ought to be afraid of me. I am a man; she is a girl. I have a club; she hasn't. I am to take her to Sweetzer, dead or alive. I can crack her head like an egg. So why does she tell me not to be afraid? Why does she say she won't hurt me? Maybe she's got a gun. Maybe she knows something."

All the while her magnificent, compassionate eyes held him spellbound. He heard something fall heavily to the floor. He looked to see what it was. It was his club. He tried to pick it up, but seemed to lack the necessary muscular control.

"What's your name?" asked Celestia.
"Freddie Douglas."
"Do you belong in this house?"
"Yes, ma'am."
"Then we must be friends, because I belong here, too."
"You going to live with us?"
Celestia nodded.
"Honor bright," smiled Celestia.
"Honor bright?" asked Freddie suspiciously.

It was then no longer necessary for Freddie to take sudden action. If Celestia was going to live on in the same house it would be a simple matter at some more propitious moment (when she wasn't looking at a fellow, for instance) to turn her over to Sweetzer.

Nevertheless, it seemed to Freddie that the matter required thought, and he slunk off to think. It required time and luck. He had less good luck at thinking than at anything else.

His proposition was this: Sweetzer had paid a thousand dollars for Celestia and had lost her. He had said to Freddie in effect, "Get her back. There's money in it." How much money was there in it? Suppose there was so much, how could Freddie turn it into more? Probably Mrs. Baxter would also pay money to know what had become of Celestia. Freddie knew that his father needed more money to pay the rent, and the bright spots in his brain began to work.

First he went to Sweetzer.
"Well," said Sweetzer.
"I shouldn't wonder," said Freddie, "if I was going to find her. I got a clue."
"Good."
"How much money is there in it?"
"A dollar."

Freddie simply smiled a sad little smile, turned on his heel and started to walk away.
"Hold on, Freddie; I was kiddin' you."
"You mustn't kid me. It drives me crazy. I shouldn't wonder if I could find her for"—his lips trembled at their own audacity—"fifty."

Sweetzer's face did not even show surprise.
"You take me where she is," he said, "and I'll go the fifty."
A dull spot on Freddie's brain tried to make him say "All right, come along," but a bright spot suddenly intervened and made him say instead: "All right, I find her sure."

Next Freddie went to Mrs. Baxter's home. A taxicab was drawn up at the curb and the front door was ajar. Freddie simply walked into the house. There were voices in the front parlor. Freddie simply stepped to the portieres, which served the front parlor as a door, and stood, listening.

"So help me God, I have told the truth!" Mrs. Baxter was saying, and Freddie judged she was crying.
"So help me Gawd—Mister—Mister—what did you say your name was?"
"Barclay."
"Mr. Barclay, I wouldn't worry if I was you. She came to no harm with me, and I'm as bad as they make 'em."

"Look here," said Tommy. "What would you do in my place?"
"I'd offer big money for news of her. Money acts quicker than lightning."
"Why," said Tommy, "I'd give a thousand dollars just to know that she was safe."

Freddie, the ferret, stepped into the room from between the portieres.
"She's safe!" he said, with fine dramatic instinct.
"Safe!" cried Tommy. "Where is she? You've seen her? Who is this young man?"
"He's called Freddie the Ferret," said Mrs. Baxter, "because he often finds things that other people can't."

But" (she lowered her voice a little "he ain't to be always relied on; he's sort of half-witted.")

But Freddie's bright spots were all on the qui vive for once.

"She was safe when I last seen her," he said, "but I don't know where she is, and I'd have to hunt for her. Didn't you say you'd give something just to know she was safe?"
"I did," said Tommie, "but I don't know she's safe. You find her and take me to her and you shall have a thousand, and more, too."

"You'll get twenty-five from me," exclaimed Mrs. Baxter, "poor as I am."

A bright spot in Freddie's brain made the following calculation: "50 plus \$1,000 plus \$25 equals \$1,075, and more, too." A dull spot was for saying: "Come along, I know where she is." But, as before, a bright spot intervened.

"Where can I find you quick?" said Freddie.

Tommy gave him his card.
"All right," said Freddie, "you'll hear from me soon," and he swung importantly out of the room.

He had a new proposition now. How to take Sweetzer, Mrs. Baxter and Mr. Barclay all to Celestia at the same time, so that he could get all the money. This new proposition required very patient thinking, and he walked on and on without considering in the least where he was going. After a long time he sank down on a bench in Central park and took a nap. Sometimes he dreamed of solutions to difficult problems. But he didn't think this time. He was waked by a hand on his shoulder.

"Why, Freddie, what are you doin' hereabouts?"
"Dunno," said Freddie. "What you doin', O'Gorman?"
"Me? I'm looking for a beautiful young lady in a white dress, with a band of jewels across her forehead."

Freddie laughed aloud.
"Another!" he exclaimed. "What do you get if you find her?"
"I get a good bit, Freddie, and anyone that finds her for me and tells me first gets half of it."

"I can find her," said Freddie.
"You've done queer things. Well, if you do, it's a go. You take me to her and we'll share and share alike."

Then Freddie went down to see if Celestia was still there. She was.

"So Help Me God, I Have Told the Truth!"

He had almost walked his legs off, but he was still game. So he went and fetched Sweetzer and showed Celestia to him through a crack in a door.

"How'll I get her?"
"Tomorrow at ten, Nelly and ma'll be at work; pa's going to a meetin', and I heard her say she'd stay home and do chores."

Not without difficulty Freddie collected the fifty dollars which Sweetzer had promised him. With even more difficulty he wrote a note to Tommy Barclay, to Mrs. Baxter and to O'Gorman.

He wrote: "Be at my house (and he gave an address) at a few minutes before ten o'clock, and I'll take you to her."
Freddie the Ferret.

"P. S.—Bring the money you promised, or I won't."

All Freddie's victims except Sweetzer met in part of Freddie's house at a little before ten o'clock. One glance at O'Gorman was enough for Sweetzer. He knew that he had lost out, and he slunk off, cursing wickedly.

Freddie opened the front door and said: "Walk in."
They walked in. Then he showed them into the parlor, and there was Celestia.

But she wouldn't go away with Tommy, and O'Gorman had no authority to take her away.
"That's up to the professor," he said.
But when Stilliter found that she

was with good people and wouldn't go with Tommy he was contented to let matters rest where they were.

Celestia's real work had begun. Often upon the lips of the elder Douglas, and always in his heart, was the belief that Celestia was divinely inspired and of divine origin.

Mrs. Douglas and Nelly also believed that Celestia had come from heaven. Her effect upon these simple-minded folk was extraordinary.

She looked no longer like a Greek goddess, but like a simple working girl. And yet she remained magically lovely to look at and commanding.

Stilliter, after ten minutes' talk with Mr. and Mrs. Douglas (during a short absence of Celestia), concluded that she could not be in better hands. Indeed, it had been in a similar family that he had intended to place her.

"She says," said Douglas, "that every man jack of us ought to have a real share in the country. That we must treat misery and poverty not as necessary evils, but as epidemics, and stamp 'em out. And I tell you the man who runs that platform will get a heap 'o votes in this district. Nobody ever tries to argue with her. You just listen and believe."

Stilliter reported to Barclay and the other members of the triumvirate. And those who had begun to lose faith in Celestia once more became enthusiastic.

"Don't hurry her any," said Barclay. "Let her doctrines spread from the house she's living in, slowly and naturally, until she has a real following. Then when we do begin to advertise her it will be more effective and cheaper."

"I'm only afraid of one thing," said Stilliter. "She is interested in that boy of yours, Tommy, and when she is with him she seems to shake her mind almost free from the control that I had been establishing over it all these years. I thought that I had made her quite proof against falling in love and all physical temptation. But it seems not."

"Any young man," said Barclay, grimly, "who seems to be making trouble for us will have to be sent away somewhere and kept there."
But Celestia, having begun to make converts, was engrossed in the work and had no longer the leisure, or, indeed, the wish to waste her precious time in philandering with individuals.

When Tommy had finally traced her to the Douglasses he went often to see her, for it was hard for him to be away from her at all. But, as we Americans say, "she did not give him a good run for his money." She appeared calmly fond of him. But she was no longer a complete stranger to the world and its ways. She hardly ever "happened" to be alone when he came to see her, and she seemed always on the point of doing something or other in which he could not take part. He loved her more and more, but he did not flinch from telling her that he thought her schemes for the benefit of mankind were impracticable and foolish.

"Why, Celestia," he said, "I don't deny that you've some mysterious power over people, and that if you keep on as you are going you'll end up by making a great, loud noise in the world. But suppose you do get what you want? Suppose that even in time you do elect a congress, a senate and a president; suppose you do succeed in changing the whole country into a gigantic trust, what of it? Can't you see that you will be hurting the people instead of helping them? Can't you see that the men who run your great trust, my respected father among them, will become the greatest autocrats the world has ever known? Can't you see that you would simply be playing into the hands of capital?"
Celestia simply smiled on him and shook her head.

"I can convince anybody but you," she said. "I can't convince you, and I don't know why."
"That's too easy," said Tommy. "You don't convince anybody by logic or argument. They just naturally believe you. You've got some way of making them believe you. I think you're a sort of witch. I think you are way up in magic. You can't hypnotize the man that truly loves you any more than you could hypnotize the man you truly love. That's a well known law."

Tommy was half in earnest, half joking.
"I don't know what you are talking about," said Celestia, "and it doesn't matter. And now—"

"Please don't send me away," said Tommy. "It's the first time we've been alone in ages, and I've got millions of things to tell you and millions of other things to—well, to look at you."
"Tommy," said Celestia, "you talk more nonsense than anyone in the world. I don't believe you've any brains at all. But if you've really got a million things to say to me, you'll have to say them walking. I'm going to the shop where Nelly works to talk with the girls."

"Can't I wait till you come out and fetch you home?"
CHAPTER XVIII.

Nelly worked on the fifth floor of an old-fashioned firetrap belonging to the Octagon Shirt Manufacturing company. The business was not making a great deal of money and the building was heavily insured. Celestia parted from Tommy in the street.

"Won't there be a row," he asked, "if you interrupt work to make a speech, or can you make yourself heard above the sewing machines and the smell of patchouli? Or do you go from girl to girl and whisper in each one's ear?"
"I have to pay for a chance to speak to them," said Celestia, "ten dollars a minute for ten minutes."



"I'm Afraid of Only One Thing," Said Stilliter. "She Is Interested in That Boy of Yours."

Tommy paced the narrow sidewalk like a sentinel on duty.

A couple of young men entered the building. They passed under a sign which said: "Positively No Smoking." And Tommy was annoyed to observe that both were smoking cigarettes. One threw aside his cigarette, still lit, and the other kept on smoking, and they passed out of sight up the stairs.

"I'll report those two cubs to the manager," he said. "And if he doesn't seem properly interested I'll make things hot for him."

So Tommy entered the premises of the Octagon Shirt company and began to look for the manager. Some people said he was in such and such a place, and others didn't know. But a girl who seemed to be dying of consumption said that Mr. Grady had just stepped up to the fifth floor, where the sewing machines were, with a young lady.

At once Tommy pictured this Grady as greasy and bediamonded and hated him. Also, so strong was his imagination, he imagined that he smelt smoke.

At the opposite end of a long dark room Celestia's lovely earnest face seemed to shine like a light. She was speaking very softly and gently, but every word was distinctly audible even to the farthest pair of ears. It seemed to Tommy that the room contained hundreds of girls and hundreds of sewing machines. As a matter of fact there were almost a hundred of each. Near Celestia stood a dark, stoutheaded man with a pencil over one ear.

"Grady," thought Tommy, and hated him less, for although the man was greasy and did wear something that looked like a diamond in his necktie, there was a kind of reverent expression upon his coarse hard face.

Celestia was just finishing when Tommy entered. She finished, and there was no sound whatever in the room. Then one girl left her place and went slowly toward her; others followed until as many as could be were crowded closely about Celestia and Grady.

As for the man Grady, she had looked into his eyes just once, and he, too, believed. But dark thoughts tormented him. There were upon his conscience, for one had just been born in him, many sins of hard-heartedness, brutality and work. In that building there was not one girl whose life he might not have lightened a little if it had pleased him. It had pleased him to do the reverse. Suddenly he felt moved to take the whole world into his confidence, and to promise amends to those whom he had injured.

"Girls," he said, in a loud, strong voice, "Just one or two words, please. I don't know what the talk we've been listening to has done to you. But it got me. I charged this—I don't know whether to say Lady or whether to say Angel—a big price for the privilege of speaking to you for ten minutes. I want to say, first of all, that it won't cost her a cent. And if she needs money to carry on her good work in this world she can have my pile. But that's not all I've got to say. Be a little patient. Don't crowd her so. If I'm any judge of faces she won't go without letting the last least one of you touch her hand. Girls, I've been a slave-driver so long that I got hardened to the work. If there was ever any kindness in me it seemed to me I had to stamp it out to get results. I've driven you and driven you till you can't call your souls your own. I might have been different and got the work done just the same. But I wasn't. Well, I'm going to be. She said things would get better some time. They're better right this minute. Can't you feel the difference? Can't you feel that I'm sorry for the things I've said to you and done to you? I tell you I'm ashamed. I don't know what keeps me from sinking down through the floor. The hardest things I've got to say comes next. Some of you girls know me for a hard, cold-hearted man. Is there any girl here who can say worse than that of me?"

He paused as if waiting for a reply. Then he went on.
"Well there is one girl here who could say worse than that of me if she would. But she won't. She won't squeal. So I'll have to do the squealing. Molly Bryan! Step forward, please, Molly Bryan. I've something to say to you that I want all your friends and well-wishers to hear."

Very slowly a slender girl with tragic haunted dark eyes came forward.
"Stand alongside of me Molly, and turn so's everybody can see you. Some of 'o," he went on, "have known

Molly a long time. Was there ever a better-hearted friend, or a cheerfuller worker? Look at poor Molly now! She looks as sad as the East river on a winter day. It's no news to any of you or I wouldn't go into it. But Molly's got no big brother, nor no heavy fisted father to look after her. All she had was herself to look after herself and a heart that trusted everybody. And you know as well as I do, as well as she does, what's come over her eyes, that used to be so bright and smiling, to make them look the way they do. Look here—"

He took a much crumpled paper from his breast pocket.

"Girls," he said, "this here is a license for me and Molly to get married. It's four months old now, but it's a perfectly good license; in perfectly good working order. I fooled her with it. That's what I did—"

He turned abruptly to the girl at his side.
"I don't ask you to forgive me now, Molly, not this moment I don't, not till I've made good with you by kind words and thoughtful deeds. But I do ask you to step out with me right now to the office of the nearest magistrate, and—and I'll always be good to you."

Celestia stepped swiftly forward, took the girl's thin pretty face between her two hands and kissed her.
"I know you'll be happy," she said.

After Celestia, many others, some crying with excitement, came forward to kiss Molly and wish her well. And then the manager made Molly take his arm, and he led her the length of the room, looking proud and manly, and out of the door.

From the outskirts of the crowd a from the outskirts of the crowd a very young, sick-looking girl said suddenly in a loud piercing voice:
"I smell smoke. I smell smoke!"

There was a dead silence. And then another voice spoke.
"It's coming through the floor. Look at it! Look at it!"

Tommy, a sudden great dread in his heart, hurried toward Celestia. He had traversed half the length of the room when the girl who had spoken first screamed at the top of her lungs, "Fire! Fire!"

Others took up the cry, and upon the instant pandemonium broke loose. There was no longer any doubt that the building was really on fire. Just how the smoke got into the sewing-machine room you could not see, but there was plenty of it, enough to make Tommy cough and to fill his eyes with tears. Celestia, after a desperate effort to calm the girls, had not moved. It seemed almost as if she was waiting for Tommy to come and get her.

"Come, Celestia," he said, "let's get out of this."
As he spoke a billow of smoke shot up between two planks, and for the first time the crackling of burning wood could be heard.

By this time really horrible things were happening at the pine-bound door. It opened inward. The first girl to reach it had flung herself against it, of course, and tried to make it open outward.

Tommy tried to fight his way to it. He intended to get to it and fight the girls back from it so that it could be opened.

He forced his way to the middle of the crowd, and then he had to give up. It was all he could do to fight his way out again.

The other end of the room was in flames. Through the soles of his shoes Tommy knew that the whole floor was burning on its under side.

A glance at Celestia filled his heart with pity that was almost intolerable. She, too, it seemed, had gone mad with terror. Along the walls of the room were many fire-buckets half full of water. Celestia had caught up one of them and was running toward the struggling mass of humanity around the door. But Celestia had not gone mad. She was excited, but her mind was still capable of putting two and two together.

She hurled the contents of the bucket into the thick of the crowd, and raced off for another. The effect of that sudden hard shower of cold water was extraordinary.

Tommy got to the door at last and dragged it open. That started another stampede that had to be controlled with more water and with more violence. But gradually Tommy at the door and Celestia in the crowd began to bring a little order out of the chaos, and to herd the girls through the doorway like sheep, not too many at a time.

It had been a slow business, and by now the floor was burning clear

through in many places, so that some of the last girls to pass through the door to safety went with burned feet.

"Hurry, Celestia," called Tommy. "We can go now."
She did not answer.

He saw her at a window struggling to open it.

"This way, Celestia! For God's sake, don't jump!"
And he ran to her across the smoking and burning floor. As he reached her a portion of the floor over which he had just passed fell in with a crackling, crashing sound, and through the aperture flame and smoke roared upward as from the crater of a volcano.

Celestia had not succeeded yet in opening the window. As Tommy reached her she staggered and fell into his arms.

He turned with her toward the door, and groaned like a thing that had been hurt to death. Escape that way looked impossible.

Supporting Celestia with one arm he succeeded in opening the window. The crowd in the street below saw them, and a kind of groaning and lamentation arose.

Celestia began to revive.
Tommy had turned his back to the window. Not until the last moment would he let her jump, and then only to escape a more shocking death. Meanwhile his heart beat strongly, and he pressed her closer to his breast as if he thought as they had at best but a few minutes to live he must make her understand how much he loved her.

"Oh," he thought, "if only she could love me, could let me know she loved me before the end."
It seemed to him that he couldn't die, that he mustn't die without her knowing that.

Then a sudden and more practical thought came into his head. If he was to die, he must die trying to save her. Then she would understand. He looked about him wildly, and his eyes fell upon a great roll of black and white-striped material for making shirts. Leaving Celestia leaning against the wall near the open window, he made a dash for the shirting, and unrolled it, dashing over it the contents of a number of the fire buckets that still contained water.

It was his notion to wrap Celestia in the wet stuff, to take her in his arms, and carry her safe to the door, and to that safety which still seemed to exist beyond.

By some strange freak of the fire there was still quite a large area of flooring surrounding Celestia, yet unburned. But between that and the door, to make the crossing, seemed to offer but one chance in a hundred. The one who was carried might live to tell the tale. The one who did the carrying could hardly hope for so much. He would be so badly burned that, although he might be alive when he reached the street, he would not live long thereafter.

It takes many words often to tell of what happens in a few instants of time. From the first cry of fire to the time when Tommy had wrapped Celestia in the wet shirting, and was preparing, you may say, to wade through hell for her, was only a few minutes.

The last girls to leave the sewing machine room had only just reached the street.

"Now for it," thought Tommy, and to Celestia he shouted (he had to shout to make himself heard):
"Don't be afraid, dear. I'm going to get you out of this."

And he gathered her strongly in his arms, pictured out, with swift eyes, what appeared to be the best route through the flames, drew one great,

Her Effect Upon These Simple-Minded Folks Was Extraordinary.

long breath of fresh air, and just then another great piece of flooring fell in, and Tommy saw the narrow hallway beyond the door burst suddenly into a perfect hell of fire.

He was too late by a matter of instants.

If he had not wasted those precious instants in kissing her he might have saved her. The agony of soul that he went through with this realization was frightful. Death by fire seemed almost too good for such a fool.

Then suddenly it seemed as if his mind broke and that he had gone mad, for he began to shout and laugh all at once.

Had he gone mad?
Or hadn't he?
(TO BE CONTINUED)

