Satan Sanderson

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ly loved anybody or anything but yourself. You are utterly selfish. You are deliberately lying every hour you live to those who love you. You are playing a part—for your own ends! You were only a good imitation of a good fellow at college. You are a poor imitation of a man of honor now."

Hugh rose to his feet as he answered hotly: "And what are you, I'd like to know? Just because I take my pleasure as I please, while you choose to make a stained glass cherub of yourself, is no reason why I'm not just as good as you! I knew you well enough before you set up for such a pattern. You didn't go in much then for a theological diet. Pshaw!" he went on, snapping his fingers toward the well stocked bookshelves "I wonder how much of all that you really believe! I imagine your friends don't call you 'Satan' now?"

"No," returned Harry quietly, "they don't call me 'Satan' now."

He went back to the safe.

The movement set Hugh instantly to regretting his hasty tongue. If he had only assumed penitence instead of flying into a passion he might have had the money he wanted just as well as not.

"There's no sense in us two quarreling," he said hastily. "We've been friends a long time. I'm sure I didn't intend to when I came in. I suppose you're right about some things, and probably dropping Moreau wouldn't hurt me any. I'm sorry I said all I did. Only—the money seemed such a little thing, and I—I needed it."

Harry stood an instant with his hand on the knob; then instead of closing the door he drew out a little drawer. He lifted a packet of crisp yellow backs and slowly counted out $100. "I'm trying to believe you mean what you say, Hugh," he said.

Hugh's fingers closed eagerly over the crackling notes. "Now, that's white of you after everything I said. You're a good fellow, Harry, after all, and I'll always say so." He pocketed the money with an air of relief and picked up his hat and cane.

Just then from the dusty street came the sound of carriage wheels and the click of the gate latch.

"It's Bishop Ludlow," he said, glancing through the window. "He's coming in. I think I'll slip out the side way. Thanks for the loan, and—I'll think over what you've said."

Avoiding the bishop, Hugh stepped toward the ga[illegible] money was in his pocket. Well, one of these days he would not have to grovel for a paltry $50. He would be his own master and could afford to let Harry Sanderson and everybody else think what they liked.

"So I'm playing a part, am I!" he said to himself. "Why should your holiness trouble yourself over it if I am? Not because you're so careful of the governor's feelings, not by a long shot! It's because you choose to think Jessica Holme is too good for me. That's where the shoe pinches. Perhaps you'd like to play at that game yourself, eh?"

He walked jauntily up the street—toward the door with the little barred window.

"The old man is fond of her. He thinks I mean to settle down and let the moss grow over my ears, and he'll do the proper thing. It'll be a good way to put my head above water and keep it there. It must be soon, though."

Chapter 4

INSIDE the study meanwhile the bishop was greeting Harry Sanderson. He had officiated at his ordination and liked him. His eyes took in the simple order of the room, lingering with a light tinge of disapproval upon the violin case in the corner and with a deeper shade of question upon the i[illegible] on the other's finger, a pigeon [illegible] ruby in a setting curiously tw[illegible] the two initial letters of his name. There came to his mind for an i[illegible] of early prodigalities and [illegible] which he had heard.

"I looked in to tel[illegible] of news," said the bishop. "I've just come from David Stires. He has a letter from Van Lennap, the great eye surgeon of Vienna. He disagrees with the rest of them. Thinks Jessica's case may not be hopeless."

The cloud that Hugh's call had left on Harry's countenance lifted.

"Thank God!" he said. "Will she go to him?"

The bishop looked at him curiously, for the exclamation seemed to hold more than a conventional relief.

"He is to be in America next month. He will come here then to examine and

"Will she go to him?"

perhaps to operate. Poor child! It will be a terrible thing for her if this last hope fails her, too, especially now, when she and Hugh are to make a match of it."

Harry's face was turned away, or the bishop would have seen it suddenly startled. "To make a match of it!" To hide the flush he felt staining his cheek Harry bent to close the safe. A something that had darkled in some obscure depth of his being whose existence he had not guessed was throbbing now to a painful resentment. Jessica was to marry Hugh!

"A handsome fellow—Hugh!" said the bishop. "He seems to have returned with a new heart—a brand plucked from the burning. You had the same alma mater, I think you told me. Your influence has done the boy good, Sanderson!" He laid his hand kindly on the other's shoulder. "The fact that you were in college together makes him look up to you—as the whole parish does," he added.

Harry was setting the combination and did not answer. But through the turmoil in his brain a satiric voice kept repeating:

"No, they don't call me 'Satan' now!"

* * * * * * *

The white house in the aspens was in gala attire. Flowers—great banks of bloom—were massed in the hall, along the stairway and in the window seats, and wreaths of delicate fern trembled on the prim hung chandeliers. Over all breathed the sweet fragrance of jasmine. Musicians sat behind a screen of palms in a corridor, and a long scarlet carpet strip ran down the front steps to the driveway, up which passed bravely dressed folk, arriving in carriages and on foot, to witness the completion of a much hooted romance.

For a fortnight this afternoon's event had been the chat of the town, for David Stires, who today retired from active business, was its magnate, the owner of its finest single estate and of its most important bank. From his scapegrace boyhood Hugh Stires had made himself the subject of uncomfortable discussion. His sudden disappearance after the rumored quarrel with his father and the advent of Jessica Holme had furnished the community sufficient material for gossip. The wedding had capped this gossip with an appropriate climax. Tongues had wagged over its pros and cons, for Hugh's past had induced a wholesome skepticism of his future.

There was an additional element of romance, too, in the situation, for Jessica, who had never yet seen her lover, would see her husband. The great surgeon on whose prognostication she had built so much had arrived and had operated. The experiment had been completely successful, and Jessica's hope of vision had become a sure and certain promise.

The operation over, there had remained many days before the bandages could be removed—before Jessica could be given her first glimpse of the world for nearly three years. Hugh had urged against delay. If he had stringent reasons of his own he was silent concerning them. And Jessica, steeped in the delicious wonder of new and inchoate sensations, had yielded.

So it had come about that the wedding was to be on this hot August afternoon, although it would be yet some time before the eye bandages might be laid aside save in a darkened room. In her girlish, passionate ideality Jessica had offered a sacrifice to her sentiment. She had promised herself that the first form her new sight should behold should be not her lover, but her husband. The idea pleased her sense of romance.

It was a sweltering afternoon, and in the wide east parlor limp handkerchiefs and energetic fans fought vainly against the intolerable heat. There, as the clock struck 6, a hundred pairs of eyes galloped between two centers of interest—the door at which the bride would enter and the raised platform at the other end of the room where, prayer book in hand, in his wide robes and flowing sleeves, Harry Sanderson had just taken his stand. Perhaps more looked at Harry than at the door.

He seemed his usual magnetic self as he stood there, backed by the flowers, his waving brown hair unsmoothed, the ruby ring glowing dull red against the dark leather of the book he held. But Harry Sanderson was far from feeling the grave, alien figure he appeared. In the past weeks he had waged a silent warfare with himself, bitter because repressed. The strange new thing that had sprung up in him he had trampled mercilessly under. From the thought that he loved the promised wife of another a quick, fastidious sense in him recoiled abashed. This painful struggle had been sharpened by his sense of Hugh's utter worthlessness. To that rustling assemblage the man who was to make those solemn promises was David Stires' son, who had had his fling, turned over his new leaf becomingly and was now offering substantial hostages to good repute. To him, Harry Sanderson, he was a flaneur, a marginless gambler in the futures of his father's favor and a woman's heart.

Only a moment Harry stood waiting; then the palm screened musicians began the march, and Hugh took his place, animated and assured, looking the flushed and expectant bridegroom. At the same instant the chattering and hubbub ceased. Jessica, on the arm of the old man, erect, but walking feebly with his cane, was advancing down the roped lane.

Harry's eyes dropped to the opened book, though he knew the office by heart. He spoke the time worn adjuration with clear enunciation, with almost perfunctory distinctness. He did not look at Hugh.

"If any man can show [illegible] why they ma[illegible] If any one [illegible] forever hold his peace." In the pause—the slightest pause—that turned the page he felt an insane prompting to tear off his robes, to proclaim to this roomful of heated, gaping, fan fluttering humanity that he himself, a minister of the gospel, the celebrant of the rite, knew "just cause."

The choking impulse passed. The periods rolled on. The long white glove was slipped from the hand, the ring put on the finger, and the pair whom God and Harry Sanderson had joined together were kneeling on the white satin priedieu with bowed heads under the final invocation. As they knelt choir voices rose.

Then, while the music lingered, the hush of the room broke in a confused murmur, the white ribbon wound ropes were let down, and a voluble wave of congratulators swept over the spot. In a moment more Harry found himself laying off his robes in the next room

The celebrant of the rite knew "just cause."

With a sigh of relief he stepped through the wide French window into the garden. The strain over, he longed for the solitude of his study. But David Stires had asked him to remain for a final word, since bride and groom were to leave on an early evening train; the old man was to accompany them a part of the journey, and "the Stires place" was to be closed for an indefinite period.

It was not long before the sound of gay voices and of carriage wheels came around the corner of the house, for the reception was to be curtailed. One by one he heard the carriages roll down the graveled driveway. A last chime of voices talking together—Harry could distinguish Hugh's voice now—and at length quiet told him the last of the guests were gone.

The east room was empty save for servants who were gathering some of the cut flowers for themselves. He stood aimlessly for a few moments looking about him. A white carnation lay at the foot of the dais, fallen from Jessica's shower bouquet. He picked this up, abstractedly smelled its perfume and drew the stem through his buttonhole. He heard voices in the library, and, opening the door, he entered.

In the room sat old David Stires in his wheel chair opposite his son. He was deadly pale, and his fierce eyes blazed like fire in tinder. And what a Hugh! Not the indolently gay prodigal Harry had known in the past nor the flushed bridegroom of a half hour ago! It was a cringing, a hangdog Hugh, with a slinking dread in the face, a trembling of the hands, a tense expectation in the posture. The thin line across his brow was a livid pallor. His eyes lifted to Harry's for an instant, then returned in a kind of fascination to a slip of paper on the desk, on which his father's forefinger rested, like a nail transfixing an animate infamy.

"We have married Jessica to a common thief!"

"Sanderson," said the old man in a low, hoarse, unnatural voice, "come in and shut the door. God forgive us! We have married Jessica to a common thief! Hugh, my son, my only child, whom I have forgiven beyond all reckoning, has forged my name to a draft for $5,000!"

Chapter 5

FOR a moment there was dead silence in the room. Harry's breath caught in his throat, and the old man's eyes again impaled the hapless son. Hugh threw up his head with an attempt at jauntiness, but with furtive apprehension in every muscle, for he could not solve the look he saw on his father's face, and said:

"You act as if it were a cool million. I'm no worse than a lot who have better luck than I. Suppose I did draw the five thousand. You were going to give me ten for a wedding present. I had to have the money then, and you wouldn't have given it to me. You know that as well as I do. Besides, I was going to take it up myself, and you would never have been the wiser. He promised to hold it. It's a low trick for him to round on me like this. I'll pay him off for it some time. I don't see that it's anybody else's business but ours anyway," he continued with a surly glance at Harry.

Harry had been staring at him, but with a vision turned curiously inward—a vision that seemed to see Hugh standing at a carpeted dais in a flower hung room, while his own voice said out of a lurid shadow, "Will you have this man to be thy wedded husband"—

"Stay, Sanderson," said the old man, then turning to Hugh, "Who advanced you money on this and promised to 'hold it?'"

"Dr. Moreau."

"He profited by it?"

"He got his margin," said Hugh sullenly.

"How much margin did he get?"

"A thousand."

"Where is the rest?" David Stires' voice was like a whip-lash.

Hugh hesitated. "[illegible] still a few hundred[illegible] did not mention th[illegible]"

"I used most of it. I had a few debts."

"Debts of honor, I presume?"

Hugh's sensibility quivered at the fierce, grating irony of the inquiry.

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