

MAN OF THE MASK

By MILDRED CAROLINE GOODRIDGE.

When Robert Crandall and his pretty wife adopted little Dot, an orphan child thrown on the world without a friend or relative, good old Dr. Bross, the minister, told them that a blessing would surely come to them.

Certainly pleasure and happiness did. When the prattling, lovable little tot was five years of age she had become the light and joy of the childless couple. She was odd, but this originality lent a charm to her unusual personality. She would talk to a rose or a toad an hour at a time, interested and fearless, weaving some pleasant idealism about each object.

The Crandalls had a pleasant home, but it had been left to Robert with a heavy mortgage on it. Work had been slack and they were forced to economize. They never grudging the little darling who had crept into their hearts so winningly what she cost them, but they hoped prospects would grow better, so they might calculate on giving her an education as she grew up.

A high stone wall separated the humble Crandall homestead from the grand Thorne mansion next door. Grand as was the spacious palace, however, with its beautiful garden space, it was a mere sepulcher in fact, the home of an afflicted and lonely recluse.

Reuben Thorne was the mystery of Brocton. He was known as "the man with the gray mask." He had come to the village about two years before the present time in a closed carriage and had immured himself in the place he had bought, as if glad to find a remote and safe hiding place.

Thorne lived entirely alone. Once a week a man came from the village to set the place in order. Otherwise

Thorne performed the duties of cook and housekeeper individually. He passed most of his time reading. He never left the walled-in grounds until after dusk. Then he wore a gray silk mask that completely covered his face. Those who met him, even when darkness partially obscured his strangeness of appearance, were startled. Nervous women watched



The Strangely Mated Twain Would Wander Over the Garden.

him as they would a bogey. Children shrank from him. Then the story came out that his face was a mass of disfiguring scars. It was told that in another part of the country, handsome, young, rich, he had loved a beautiful girl. A dark beauty whom he had never encouraged but who was mad after his love, in a fit of jealous rage precipitated a frightful tragedy. She stabbed his poor love to the heart, flung a bottle of corrosive liquid

in his face and then drowned herself. There was pity in the minds of many kind-hearted persons in the village, but Thorne refused any companionship. One evening Mrs. Crandall sent little Dot over to the piazza with a dish of the first strawberries of the season, newly-picked from their own home garden. Mr. Crandall and the masked man had got as far as bowing to one another, but only at a distance. The kind-intentioned Crandall hoped to break down the barrier of reserve with the recluse. He pitied his loneliness and hoped to become neighborly.

A sharp scream caused Mrs. Crandall to rush to the street a minute or two after little Dot had started on her errand.

"Oh, my darling! my darling!" she screamed, as she saw amid a cloud of dust a great touring car and an excited crowd gathering.

"She is safe!" called out a voice suddenly, and the speaker and some others drew back as there emerged from amid the confusion the masked man.

He carried little Dot in his arms. She was white with fright, but smiling up at him murmuring lovingly.

"Oh, you good man—to come just as I was being run over!"

A little lad followed with the dish filled with dust and berries. Then there were explanations. The automobile had borne down unexpectedly, the masked man chanced to be at his garden gate. He shrank from the staring crowd, without a word, placed Dot in the arms of her adopted mother and disappeared, followed by the ardent thanks of Mrs. Crandall.

But there was a great ado the next day. Dot insisted that she must go and see her friend. Young as she was, she recognized a debt of gratitude to the stranger. There was an iron grating door in the wall of the next place abutting on the Crandall grounds. There Dot stationed herself. An hour later Mrs. Crandall was astonished to find the gate open and Dot nowhere in view. Then she discovered her swinging in a hammock

in the next garden, telling stories to the masked man.

That was the beginning of a rare companionship between the lovable little Dot and the lonely world-weary recluse. All through the golden month of June, hour after hour, the strangely mated twain would wander over the garden. To this charming little sprite who was not at all repelled by the mask he wore, the recluse seemed to pour out all the love and sympathy of his nature. The Crandalls had not the heart to deprive Dot of this great pleasure. Besides, he took pains in teaching her to read, he filled her mind with wondrous nature stories. Then one day Dot came home in tears.

"He is going away," she sobbed, "and I shall be so lonely!"

At the barred gate that evening Mr. Thorne met Mr. Crandall and told him that business would call him away for a month to a distant city. He expressed his gratitude for the company of the little child who had brought so much of sunshine into his dreary life.

It was a joyful evening when Dot saw a light once more in the solitary old house. She could scarcely sleep, so anxious was she to regain her old friend. The barred gate was kept locked, however. For fully a week the recluse was not seen about the grounds. At dusk one evening he passed the house. Dot ran out impetuously to greet him.

She returned with a white, frightened face. She was trembling all over. Amid great terror she gasped out:

"Oh, papa! oh mamma! it isn't Mr. Thorne!"

"What is that, my child?" inquired Mrs. Crandall quickly.

No, the clothing was the same, the mask was the same, but oh! she knew: the gruff voice, the touch of the hand. And then suspicion awoke in the mind of her auditors and then investigation.

"A little child shall lead them," and the quick instinct of the precocious Dot's mind did not go astray. It was true—an imposter was personating Mr. Thorne, drawing checks in his name, getting ready to sell the property and decamp.

It was a clever plot of shrewd scoundrels, soon unmasked, the real Thorne rescued from an unhappy imprisonment, and then the old delight of Dot in regaining the afflicted friend whose life was made endurable and even happy through her joyful presence.

That was not all of it. The great burden that oppressed the Crandalls, the mortgage, was lifted, for Mr. Thorne could not do enough to express his gratitude for his delivery from cruel hands. Then, week by week, he was drawn from the old solitude; he became a guest and then a regular visitor at the Crandall home, and finally a permanent member of a happy family circle.

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WHAT HE WAS THINKING OF

Sweet Girl Graduate's Essay on Shakespeare Was Good, but She Couldn't Fry Eggs.

She had looked too sweet for anything, in her white dress and blue ribbons.

She had graduated with the highest honors.

Her essay had been "Shakespeare," and she had refuted all the stories that he drank and abused his wife, and had convinced her audience that he always paid his grocery bills at the end of the week.

Both friends and strangers flocked upon the stage to shake hands and congratulate her, and say it was wonderful. They said it to her, and to her mother and father, and one enthusiastic individual exclaimed to the latter:

"She is a genius, sir!"

"Yes!" was the quiet reply.

"But I tell you she is great!"

"Yes?"

"Finest essay I ever heard!"

"Yes?"

"You don't seem a bit excited over it."

"No!"

"Why, what is the matter with you old man?"

"Oh, I was just thinking of the eggs she tried to fry for breakfast this morning!"

Resented Partisanship.

An old Scot came down from the Highlands to visit his son, a student at Edinburgh university. Together they attended a learned lecture, in the course of which the professor frequently referred to the wonderful part which microbes play on human existence. On their way out the son asked his father how he liked the lecture. "I dinna ken whit mak's him pit sae muckle stress on whit the McRobes hae done," replied the old man. "I've no heard o' them afore, but I ken aye thing—they've never done whit th' McGregors an' th' Macphersons hae accomplished, an' there lives no siccan a glorious clan as th' Campbells in a' th' world!"

Accomplishment Missing.

"Your boy has all sorts of athletic training."

"Yes," replied Farmer Cornstossel.

"But there's one line o' physical culture he has missed. I wish I could send him to some gymnasium where he could learn to swing a scythe without lookin' like he was goin' to cut off both his feet."

Why They Take 'Em.

Skids—We are off to spend a nice quiet holiday in the mountains.

Skittles—Why the gramophone and banjo?

Skids—Oh, they're just to break the darned stillness of the evenings.—Puck.

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HUERTA'S HOUSE IN MEXICO CITY

General Huerta does not live in the presidential castle of Chapultepec, but in this house in the Calle Alfonso Herrera in the City of Mexico. The building is guarded by soldiers and a machine gun on the roof.

Conservation On the Farm

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