

BLACK IS WHITE

By GEORGE BARR McCUTCHEON

ILLUSTRATIONS BY RAY WALTERS

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SYNOPSIS.

In the New York home of James Brood, Daves and Riggs, his two old pensioners and comrades, await the coming of Brood's son Frederic to learn the contents of a wireless from Brood, but Frederic, after reading, throws it into the fire and leaves the room without a word. Frederic tells Lydia Desmond, his fiancée, that the message announces his father's marriage and orders the house prepared for an immediate homecoming. Mrs. Desmond, the housekeeper and Lydia's mother, tries to cool Frederic's temper at the impending change. Brood and his bride arrive. She wins Frederic's liking at first meeting. Brood shows dislike and veiled hostility to his son. Lydia and Mrs. Brood meet in the jade-room, where Lydia works as Brood's secretary.

CHAPTER IV—Continued.

Lydia flinched, she knew not why. There was a sting to the words, despite the languidness with which they were uttered.

Risking more than she suspected, she said: "He never considers the cost of a thing, Mrs. Brood, if its beauty appeals to him." Mrs. Brood gave her a quizzical, half-puzzled look. "You have only to look about you for the proof. This one room represents a fortune." The last was spoken hastily.

"How old are you, Miss Desmond?" The question came abruptly.

"I am nineteen."

"You were surprised to find me so young. Will it add to your surprise if I tell you that I am ten years older than you?"

"It doesn't seem credible."

"Are you wondering why I tell you my age?"

"Yes," said Lydia, bluntly.

"In order that you may realize that I am ten years wiser than you, and that you may not again make the mistake of underestimating my intelligence."

The color faded from Lydia's face. She grew cold from head to foot. Involuntarily she moved back a pace.

The next instant, to her unbounded surprise, Mrs. Brood's hands were outstretched in a gesture of appeal, and a quick, wistful smile took the place of the imperious stare.

"There! I am a nasty, horrid thing. Forgive me. Come! Don't be stubborn. Shake hands with me and say that you're sorry I said what I did."

It was a quaint way of putting it, and her voice was so genuinely appealing that Lydia, after a moment's hesitation, extended her hands. Mrs. Brood grasped them in hers and gripped them tightly. "I think I should like to know that you are my friend, Lydia. Has it occurred to you that I am utterly without friends in this great city of yours? I have my husband, that is all."

The girl could no more withstand the electric charm of the woman than she could have fought off the sunshine. She was bewildered, and completely fascinated.

"It's—It's very good of you," she murmured, her own eyes softening as they looked into the deep, velvety ones that would not be denied. Even as she wondered whether she could ever really like this magnetic creature, she felt herself surrendering to the spell of her. "But perhaps you will not like me when you know me better."

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Brood, calmly, almost indifferently, and dismissed the subject. "What an amazing room! One can almost feel the presence of the giant that created it at the wish of the man with the enchanted lamp. As a rule, oriental rooms are abominations, but this—this is not an oriental room after all. It is a part of the East itself—of the real East. I have sat in emperors' houses out there, my dear, and I have slept in the palaces of kings. I have seen just such things as these, and I know that they could not have been transported to this room except by magic. My husband is a magician."

"These came from the palaces of kings, Mrs. Brood," said Lydia enthusiastically. "Kings in the days when kings were real. This rug—"

"I know," interrupted the other. "My husband told me the story. It must have cost him a fortune."

"It was worth a fortune," said Lydia, calculating quaintly as she came into Mrs. Brood's eyes while she was speaking. To Lydia it appeared as if she were trying to fix upon the value of the wonderful carpet.

"A collector has offered him—how much? A hundred thousand dollars, is not that it? Ah, how rich he must be!"

"The collector you refer to—"

"I was referring to my husband," said Mrs. Brood, unabashed. "He is very rich, isn't he?"

Lydia managed to conceal her annoyance. "I think not, as American fortunes are rated."

"It doesn't matter," said the other, carelessly. "I have my own fortune. And it is not my face," she added, with a quick smile. "Now let us look further. I must see all these wonderful things. We will not be missed, and it is still half an hour till tea-time. My husband is now telling his non all there is to be told about me—who and what I am, and how he came to marry me. Not, mind you, how I

came to marry him, but—the other way 'round. It's the way with men past middle age."

Lydia hesitated before speaking. "Mr. Brood does not confide in Frederic. I am afraid they have but little in common. Oh, I shouldn't have said that!"

Mrs. Brood regarded her with narrowing eyes. "He doesn't confide in Frederic?" she repeated, in the form of a question. Her voice seemed lower than before.

"I'm sorry I spoke as I did, Mrs. Brood," said the girl, annoyed at her self.

"Is there a reason why he should dislike his son?" asked the other, regarding her fixedly.

"Of course not," cried poor Lydia. There was a moment of silence.

"Some day, Lydia, you will tell me about Mr. Brood's other wife."

"She died many years ago," said the girl, evasively.

"I know," said Mrs. Brood. "Still I should like to hear more of the woman he could not forget in all those years—until he met me."

She grew silent and preoccupied, a slight frown marking her forehead as she resumed her examination of the room and its contents.

Great lanterns hung suspended beside the shrine, but were now unlighted. On the table at which Brood professed to work stood a huge lamp with a lacelike screen of gold. When lighted a soft, mellow glow oozed through the shade to create a circle of golden brilliance over a radius that extended but little beyond the edge of the table, yet reached to the benign countenance of Buddha close by.

Over all this fairylike splendor reigned the serene, melting influence of the god to whom James Brood was wont to confess himself! The spell of the golden image dominated everything.

In the midst of the magnificence moved the two women, one absurdly out of touch with her surroundings, yet a thing of beauty; the other blending intimately with the warm tones that enveloped her. She was lithe, sinuous with the grace of the most seductive of dancers. Her dark eyes reflected the mysteries of the Orient; her pale, smooth skin shone with the clearness of alabaster; the crimson in her lips was like the fresh stain

of blood; the very fragrance of her person seemed to steal out of the unknown. She was a part of the marvelous setting, a gem among gems.

She had attired herself in a dull Indian red afternoon gown of chiffon. The very fabric seemed to cling to her supple body with the sensuous joy of contact. Even Lydia, who watched her with appraising eyes, experienced a swift unaccountable desire to hold this intoxicating creature close to her own body.

There were two windows in the room, broad openings that ran from near the floor almost to the edge of the canopy. They were so heavily curtained that the light of day failed to penetrate to the interior of the apartment. Mrs. Brood approached one of these windows. Drawing the curtain apart, she let in an ugly gray light from the outside world.

She looked down into a sort of courtyard and garden that might have been transplanted from distant Araby. Uttering an exclamation of wonder, she turned to Lydia.

"Is this New York or am I bewitched?"

"Mr. Brood transformed the old carriage yard into a—I think Mr. Daves calls it a Persian garden. It is rather bleak in winter, Mrs. Brood, but in the summer it is really enchanting. See, across the court on the second floor where the windows are lighted, those are your rooms. It is an enormous house, you'll find. Do you see the little balcony overlooking your windows, and the vines creeping up to it? You can't imagine how sweet it is of

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Eugene Field Loved Children.

It was children whom Field loved best, and he would take all sorts of trouble to make a child happy. His

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a summer night with the moon and stars—

"But how desolate it looks today, with the dead vines and the colorless stones! Ugh!"

She dropped the curtains. The soft warm glow of the room came back and she sighed with relief. "I hate things that are dead," she said.

At the sound of a soft tread and the gentle rustle of draperies, they turned. Ranjab, the Hindu, was crossing the room toward the small door which gave entrance to his closet. He paused for an instant before the image of Buddha, but did not drop to his knees as all devout Buddhists do. Mrs. Brood's hand fell lightly upon Lydia's arm. The man turned toward them a second or two later. His dark, handsome face was hard set and emotionless as he bowed low to the new mistress of the house. The fingers closed tightly on Lydia's arm. Then he smiled upon the girl, a glad smile of devotion. His swarthy face was transfigured. A moment later he unlocked his door and passed into the other room. The key turned in the lock with a slight rasp.

"I do not like that man," said Mrs. Brood. Her voice was low and her eyes were fixed steadily on the closed door.

CHAPTER V.

Husband and Wife.

The ensuing fortnight brought the expected changes in the household. James Brood, to the surprise of not only himself but others, lapsed into a curious state of adolescence. His infatuation was complete. The once dominant influence of the man seemed to sink away from him as the passing days brought up the new problems of life. Where he had lived to command he now was content to serve. His friends, his son, his servants viewed the transformation with wonder, not to say apprehension.

It would not be true to say that the remarkable personality of the man had suffered. He was still the man of steel, but tempered. The rigid broadsword was made over into the fine flexible blade of Toledo. He could be bent but not broken.

It pleased him to submit to Yvonne's commands. Not that they were arduous or peremptory; on the contrary, they were suggestions in which his own comfort and pleasure appeared to be the inspiration. She was too wise to demand, too clever to resort to cajolery. She was a Latin. Diplomacy was hers as a birthright. Complaints, appeals, sulks would have gained nothing from James Brood. Nor would it have occurred to her to employ these methods. From the day she entered the house she was its mistress.

There were no false notions of sentiment to restrain or restrict her in the rearrangement of her household. She went about the matter calmly, sensibly, firmly; even the most prejudiced could not but feel the justice of her decisions. The serene way in which she both achieved and accepted conquest proved one thing above all others: She was born to rule.

To begin with, she miraculously transferred the sleeping quarters of Messrs. Daves and Riggs from the second floor front to the third floor back without arousing the slightest sign of antagonism on the part of the crusty old gentlemen, who had occupied one of the choice rooms in the house with uninterrupted security for a matter of nine or ten years. Mrs. Brood explained the situation to them so graciously, so convincingly, that they even assisted the servants in moving their heterogeneous belongings to the small, remote room on the third floor, and applauded her plan to make a large sitting-room of the chamber they were deserting. It did not occur to them for at least three days that they had been imposed upon, cheated, maltreated, insulted, and then it was too late. The decorators were in the big room on the second floor.

They had been betrayed by the wife of their bosom friend! Is it small cause for wonder, then, that the poor gentlemen were loath to believe their ears. As a result of this new command, they began to speak of Mrs. Brood in the privacy of their own room as "that woman." Of course it was entirely due to her mischievous, malevolent influence that a spineless husband put forth the order that they were to have nothing more to drink while they remained in his house. This command was modified to a slight extent later on. Brood felt sorry for the victims. He loved them and he knew that their pride was injured a great deal more than their appetite. In its modified form, the edict allowed them a small drink in the morning and another at bedtime, but Jones, the butler, held the key to the situation and—the sideboard. And after that they looked upon Mrs. Brood as the common enemy of all three.

The case of Mrs. John Desmond was disposed of in a summary but tactful manner.

"If Mrs. Desmond is willing to remain, James, as housekeeper instead of friend, all well and good," said Mrs. Brood, discussing the matter in the seclusion of her boudoir. "I doubt, however, whether she can descend to that. You have spoiled her, my dear."

He flushed. "I trust you do not mean to imply that—"

"I should like to have Mrs. Desmond as my friend, not as my housekeeper," said his wife simply.

"By jove, and that's just what I should like," he cried.

"There is but one way, you know."

"She must be one or the other, eh?"

"Precisely," she said with firmness.

"In my country, James, the wives of best friends haven't the same moral standing that they appear to have in yours. Oh, don't scowl so! Shall I tell you that I do not mean to reflect on Mrs. Desmond's virtue—or discretion? Far from it. If she is to be my friend, she cannot be your housekeeper. That's the point. Has she any means of her own? Can she—"

"She has a small income, and an annuity which I took out for her soon after her poor husband's death. We were the closest of friends."

"I understand, James. You are very generous and very loyal. I quite understand. Losing her position here, then, will not be a hardship?"

"No," said he soberly.

"I am quite competent, James," she said brightly. "You will not miss her, I am sure."

"Are you laughing at me, darling?"

She gave him one of her searching, unfathomable glances, and then smiled with roguish mirth.

"Isn't it your mission in life to amuse and entertain me?"

"I love you, Yvonne—Good God, how I love you!" he cried abruptly. His eyes burnt with sudden flame of passion as he bent over her. His face quivered; his whole being tingled with the fierce spasm of an uncontrollable desire to crush the warm, adorable body to his breast in the supreme ecstasy of possession.

She surrendered herself to his passionate embrace. A little later, she withdrew herself from his arms, her lips still quivering with the fierceness of his kisses. Her eyes, dark with wonder and perplexity, regarded his transfigured face for a long, tense moment.

"Is this love, James?" she whispered. "Is this the real, true love?"

"What else, in heaven's name, can it be?" he cried. He was sitting upon

the arm of her chair, looking down at the singularly pallid face.

"But should love have the power to frighten one?"

"Frighten, my darling?"

"Oh, it is not you who are frightened," she cried. "You are the man. But I—ah, I am only the woman."

He stared. "What an odd way to put it, dear." Then he drew back, struck by the curious gleam of mockery in her eyes.

"Was it like this twenty-five years ago?" she asked.

He managed to smile. "Are you jealous?"

"Tell me about her."

His face hardened. "Some other time, not now."

"You have never told me her name."

He faced her, his eyes as cold as steel. "I may as well tell you now, Yvonne, that her name is never mentioned in this house."

She seemed to shrink down farther in the chair.

"Why?" she asked, an insistent note in her voice.

"It isn't necessary to explain." He walked away from her to the window, and stood looking out over the bleak little courtyard. Neither spoke for many minutes, and yet he knew that her questioning gaze was upon him and that when he turned to her again she would ask still another question. He tried to think of something to say that would turn her away from this hated subject.

"Isn't it time for you to dress, dear?" The Gunninges live pretty far up north and the going will be bad with Fifth Avenue piled up with snow."

"Doesn't Frederic ever mention his mother's name?" came the question that he feared before it was uttered.

"I am not certain that he knows her name," said he loquaciously. The knuckles of his hands, clenched tightly behind his back, were white. "He has never heard me utter it."

She looked at him darkly. There was something in her eyes that caused him to shift his own steady gaze uncomfortably. He could not have explained what it was, but it gave him a curiously uneasy feeling, as of impending peril. It was not unlike the queer, inexplicable though definite

sensing of danger that more than once he had experienced in the silent, tranquil depths of great forests.

"I wonder what could have happened to make you so bitter toward her," she went on, still watching him through half closed eyes. "Was she unfaithful to you? Was—"

"Good God, Yvonne!" he cried, an angry light jumping into his eyes—the eyes that so recently had been ablaze with love.

"We must never speak of—that again," he said, a queer note of hoarseness in his voice. "Never, do you understand?" He was very much shaken.

"Forgive me," she pleaded, stretching out her hand to him. "I am foolish, but I did not dream that I was being cruel or unkind. Perhaps, dear, it is because I am—jealous."

"There is no one—nothing to be jealous of," he said, passing a hand over his moist brow. Then he drew nearer and took her hand in his. He lounged again on the arm of her chair. She leaned back and sighed contentedly, the smile on her red lips growing sweeter with each breath that she took. He felt the blood warming once more in his veins.

For a long time they sat thus, looking into each other's eyes without speaking. He was trying to fathom the mystery that lurked at the bottom of those smiling wells; she, on the other hand, deluded herself with the idea that she was reading his innermost thoughts.

"I have been considering the advisability of sending Frederic abroad for a year or two," said he at last.

She started. She had been far from right in her reading. "Now? This winter?"

"Yes. He has never been abroad."

"Indeed? And he is half European, too. It seems—forgive me, James. Really, you know, I cannot always keep my thoughts from slipping out. You shouldn't expect it, dear."

"I suppose it is only natural that you should inquire," he said resignedly. "Of my servants," she added pointedly.

He