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The Lash of Circumstance- BY -
Harry Irving Greene

Author of "Yosonde of the Wilderness"

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Plainly there was out one thing I could do. I must renounce her unqualifiedly, even though it well-nigh killed me, for I could never share her with anybody—as well might a man be asked to cut his heart in twain. I must not even see her again, for I dared not trust myself in her presence. What I might do if I should meet her alone I did not know. Whether I would violently denounce her for her faithlessness, break down miserably as I was now doing, or commit some other scene, I could only conjecture. But, in any case, matters would not be mended. The injury was irreparable. I must cast her out of my life and pursue my way in wretchedness and silence. I returned to my rooms.

Uncle Abner was already putting away somewhere, and I threw myself into a chair in what was nearly a physical collapse. I felt shrunken and hollow as though my vitals had been drawn from my body and I had fallen into myself. I was incapable of thinking logically, and the weight that oppressed me was stifling. Before me life stretched away as a void, hopeless and destitute of light and through which I must drift miserably until it merged into eternity.

I must have sat in a half stupor for a long time, for as the tinkle of the telephone bell sounded in my deadened ears like a death rattle I got upon my feet and saw that it was nearly ten o'clock. Mechanically I picked up the receiver and asked what was wanted. Over the wire there came to me a voice which at first set every nerve to tingling and then turned me sick and faint in the reaction. For it was the voice of Mrs. Dace, soft, musical, and filled with the cheerfulness of the morning, as she inquired for me. In tones that sounded far away to my own ears I told her it was I who spoke.

"I did not recognize your 'hello,'" she went on briskly. "Your voice does not sound at all natural this morning. I am afraid you dissipated last night. Anyway, it is such a lovely morning that I have been thinking perhaps you might wish to call and take me to church and afterwards for a little stroll along the boulevard. I have thought of lots of things over night that I wish to tell you. And when we come back, if you care to give me still more of your time, we will take luncheon here in my apartments. Will you come?"

My head swam, and I leaned against the wall for support. The day previous an invitation such as this would have brought me from a sick bed to her on crutches, but now I shuddered as though a toad had been dropped down my spine. That she whom I had adored, defended against the world, and given my heart, could be so vilely treacherous! And now, with the sweetness of an angel, she would lure me to her that she might resume her play of cat and mouse! Yes, Clara had been right. In stealth and cruelty she was all leopardess. And she would even have the scene of the next act in the sanctuary of the blessed disciple of love and truth!

Softly, full of music as a bell, I heard her voice calling to me and asking why I did not reply to her, and driven to immediate action my mind suddenly changed. I would go and see her. I would look upon her once more and then coldly tell her that our relations must at once cease. I would go no further, would give her no satisfaction at all, but making my forgotten keys the excuse for responding to her call, would claim them and bid farewell to her forever. In that way I would end the whole miserable business. Commanding my voice by an effort, I answered that I would come at once, and hung up the receiver without waiting for her to address me further. I went to the mirror and looked into it. My lips were tense and colorless, my eyes bloodshot, and I seemed to have grown pounds thinner and years older overnight. Once more I bathed my face in cold water and set out for the Arcadia.

She opened the door at the first sound of the bell, and royally beautiful in her cool morning gown, stood smiling before me. At first she seemed about to approach me even closer, but as her eyes sought my face she drew back and her smile vanished as the sunshine behind a driving cloud. "Hill?" she inquired, quick solicitude in her tones. I shook my head as I stepped within.

She closed the door behind me. "Oh, you men, you dissipate so," she said, with an attempt at bantering. "But I am really surprised at you. Tom, I had thought your morals almost too immaculate. However, a walk in the outer air will do you good. We will omit the church if you don't care to go inside. I only used that as a subterfuge to get you to come, you know. Can you forgive such deceit in me?" I looked at her helplessly, marveling at her duplicity. The shadow of a frown came to her brow.

"Why don't you say something? You only stand there and stare at me so unpleasantly," she went on, with a trace of impatience. Thoroughly sick at heart I addressed her as I changed my mind again into the determination to confront her with her heartlessness.

"Mrs. Dace, I have come to tell you that I cannot see you any more. That you made a fool of me for some purpose of your own it is of course not necessary that I should inform you. That you have wounded me greatly and caused me much suffering you may not know; but if it is any satisfaction for you to have that knowledge I now confess it to you. I do not think that I have anything more to say to you except to ask for the keys I inadvertently left here and bid you good-bye."

Her eyes opened wide and she stood staring blankly into my face. "I don't understand—what have I done?—you look so strange—" she stammered. I did not answer.

Her mouth straightened a bit, and a chill came into her voice. "But I insist upon knowing. You have suddenly charged me with very unpleasant things and I have the right to demand an explanation in justice to myself. That right being given me, I may or may not wish to avail myself of my privilege to make a reply. But having had that opportunity you need not fear that I shall ask anything further of you. Still, I feel that there must be some mistake. You must explain yourself."

I turned my face from her as I answered bitterly:

"Had any one in the world told me what I now know I should have struck him down. When rumors came to my ears I always shut them out because of my faith in you. But what my own eyes see I cannot doubt. I had grown to trust you implicitly, and you yourself moulded and cemented my faith by your protestations. That I loved you better than my own life I have told you and I think convinced you. You have paid me back with heartless treachery."

"I demand that you tell me instantly why you say these things, sir," she cried, the hot crimson flaring in her cheeks. With the cold deliberation with which a gladiator might dispatch his crippled enemy I returned to the attack.

"Last night I happened to be passing this place. I had no intention of spying upon you—I never dishonored you by such acts—but fate ordained that I should be just in time to see you alight with Richard Mackay. The door of the lower entrance remained open for a few seconds after you had entered. I saw your scene with him before you entered the elevator."

Never in my life had I seen such a change come over a human countenance as swept hers at my words. The color fled in a flash, and her cheeks became ashy gray. Into her eyes, the instant before so soft, there leaped the glitter of a leopardess as she gathers herself for the leap. Tense and seeming to crouch, I saw the leopardess in every outline of her curved body. Then as suddenly she relaxed; the glitter faded and the heat of anger gave way to the coldness of scorn. She stepped backward with a mocking bow.

"You honor me greatly, my dear sir, and I assure you that I shall never forget it. Yesterday you told me that I was an angel exalted above your hope; to-day I am a fallen thing beneath your contempt. And all because of a miserable occurrence like that! And you would have left me with no opportunity to explain my guiltlessness had I not forced you to grant me that right!"

(To Be Continued.)

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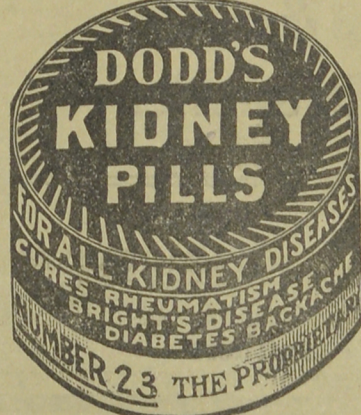
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There seems to be almost no limit to the size of fruit and flowers that plant-breeders can produce. They have doubled or trebled the size of some of the common vegetables, and many of the flowers that fill the florists' shops, but in no case, perhaps, have they accomplished more remarkable results than in that of the chrysanthemum. By removing all the flower-buds except the terminal they have produced the large globular heads with which we are all familiar. A French amateur succeeded in winning a prize for the largest chrysanthemum, with a flower that measured more than 64 inches in circumference. That is many times the size of the original flowerhead. What will happen when the same methods are applied to tomatoes, cherries and other fruits and vegetables?—Horticulture.

Reading to Workmen

In a Toronto cigar factory where nearly all of the thirty-five cigar makers are Cubans, a curious custom is observed—that of having a man read aloud all day long to the workers. He reads the daily newspapers in the mornings and usually a novel in the afternoon. The firm pays his salary and is glad to do it for it makes the men contented and does not interfere with their work which goes on quite as well when their thoughts are miles away from it. In Cuba nearly all the cigar factories employ readers.

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Out of 85 samples of maple sugar examined in the laboratory of the Inland Revenue, only 43 were the genuine article. The other samples were adulterated with other sweetening materials. Out of 128 samples of maple syrup, only 86 were pure.

Seldom has a man broken more Statutes, acts or by-laws by a single act than Bernard Wright of Saskatoon, who shot a duck on Sunday. He broke the Sunday law in that he was shooting on Sunday, he broke the city by-law, in that he discharged a firearm inside the city limits, he broke the game act, in that he was shooting out of season, and he broke another section of the same act, in that he shot game without a license. His duck might have cost him \$102.75, but he got off with \$12.75, and a warning.

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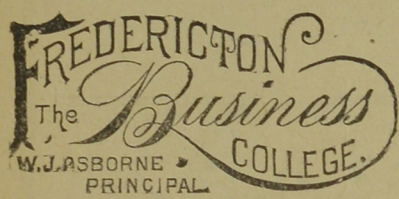
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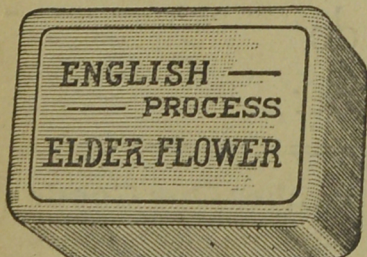
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