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The
Riverman
By STEWART
EDWARD WHITE
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[CONTINUED.]

The only scrap of victory to be snatched from this stricken field was the fact that Carroll insisted on going to meet her lover every afternoon. Though he fretted under the tyranny, Orde could see nothing which could relieve the situation save his own withdrawal. He had already long overstayed his visit. Important affairs connected with his work demanded his attention. He had the comfort of Carroll's love assured.

The morning after he had reached this conclusion he again met Gerald at the gymnasium.

"Orde," said Gerald suddenly, "I'm worried about Carroll. Mother has commenced bothering her again. It wasn't so bad as long as she stuck to daytime, but now she's taken to prowling in a dozen times a night. I hear their voices for an hour or so at a time. I'm afraid it's beginning to wear on Carroll more than you realize."

"Thank you," said Orde briefly and departed.

At his hotel Orde found a telegram. He did not open it until he had reached his own room. It was from home, urging his immediate return for the acceptance of some contracted work.

"To be— with the contracted work!" he muttered savagely and, calling a bellboy, sent an answer very much to that effect.

He was interrupted by a knock on the door.

"Come in!" he called without turning his head.

He heard the door open and shut. After a moment he looked around.

Kendrick Bishop stood watching him.

Orde looked at him curiously and saw that he was suffering from an intense excitement. His frame trembled convulsively; his lips were white; his face went red and pale by turns.

"You've got to let my mother alone," he managed to say finally. "You've brought her to the point of death. You're hounding her to her grave."

Orde thought to catch the echo of quotation in these words.

"What do you want me to do?" asked Orde after a moment of thought.

"Go away," cried Kendrick.

"I cannot do that."

Kendrick's face assumed a livid pallor, and his eyes seemed to turn black with excitement. Trembling in every limb, but without hesitation, he advanced on Orde, drew a short riding whip from beneath his coat and slashed the young man across the face.

Orde looked steadily at the boy. Once again Kendrick hit, raised his arm for the third time, hesitated. His lips writhed, and then, with a sob, he cast the little whip from him and burst from the room.

"Poor youngster!" Orde murmured.

The next day Carroll came to him with hurried, nervous steps, her usually pale cheeks mounting danger signals of flaming red, her eyes swimming.

Orde did not attempt as yet to draw from her the cause of this unusual agitation. A park bench stood between two dense bushes, screened from all directions save one. To this he led her.

"This thing has got to quit," said he grimly.

A carriage rolled near and discharged its single passenger on the pavement.

"It's Gerald!" cried Carroll.

The young man, catching sight of them, picked his way daintily and leisurely toward them.

"I have brought," said he, "a carriage, and I wish you would both do me the favor to accompany me on a short excursion."

The three—Carroll and Orde somewhat bewildered—took their seats. After an interval the carriage drew up opposite a brownstone dwelling. The three were ushered by a discreet and elderly maid into a little square reception room.

"I have brought you here, among other purposes, to hear from me a little brief wisdom drawn from experience and the observation of life," Gerald began, addressing his expectant and curious guests. "That wisdom is briefly this: There comes a time in the affairs of every household when a man must assert himself as the ruler. In all the details he may depend on the woman's judgment, experience and knowledge, but when it comes to the big crises, where life is deflected into one channel or the other, then, unless the man does the deciding, he is lost forever and his happiness and the happiness of those who depend on him. This is abstruse, but I come to the particular application shortly."

"This may be all very true, Gerald," said Orde, "but I fail to see why you have brought us to this strange house to tell us."

To be Continued.]

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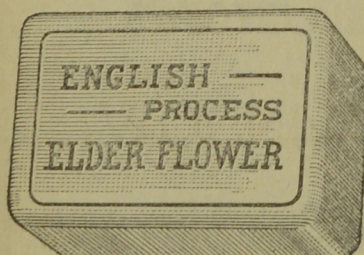
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