

BLACK IS WHITE

BY GEORGE BARR McCUTCHEON

ILLUSTRATIONS BY RAY WALTERS

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SYNOPSIS.

In the New York home of James Brood Dawes 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 changes. Brood and his bride arrive. Brood shows dislike and veiled hostility to his son. Lydia and Mrs. Desmond meet in the judge-room, where Lydia works as Brood's Secretary. The room, dominated by a great gold Buddha, Brood's father-in-law, is furnished in oriental magnificence. Mrs. Brood, after a talk with Lydia, which leaves the latter puzzled, is disturbed by the appearance of Ranjab, the Hindu servant of Brood. Mrs. Brood makes changes in the household and gains her husband's consent to send Mrs. Desmond and Lydia away. She tries to fathom the mystery of Brood's separation from his first wife, and his dislike of his son, but fails.

CHAPTER VI.—Continued.

"It is not unlike all stories of its kind, my dear," she said with an indifference that amazed him. "They are all alike. Why should I ask? No, I do not ask you for your story, James. Sometime you may tell me, but not today. I shouldn't mind hearing it if it were an original tale, but God knows it isn't. It's as old as the Nile. But you may tell me more about your son. Is he like you, or like his mother?"

Brood's lips were compressed. "I can't say that he is like either of us," he said shortly. She raised her eyebrows slightly.

"Ah," she said. "That makes quite a difference. Perhaps, after all, I shall be interested in the story." Her manner was so casual, so serenely matter-of-fact, that he could hardly restrain the sharp exclamation of annoyance that rose to his lips.

He bit his lip and allowed the frank insinuation to go unanswered. He consoled himself with the thought that she must have spoken in jest, without intention. He had the uncomfortable feeling that she would make light of his story, too, when the time came for revelations. A curious doubt took root in his mind: would he ever be able to understand the nature of this woman whom he loved and who appeared to love him so unreservedly? As time went on, the doubt became a conviction. She was utterly beyond comprehension.

The charm and beauty of the new mistress of James Brood's heart and home were to become the talk of the town. Already, in the first month of her reign, she had drawn to the old house the attention not only of the parasites who feed on novelty, but of families that had long since given up Brood as a representative figure in the circle into which he had been born.

The restoration was slow at first, as it naturally would be. The new Mrs. Brood came upon the scene as a strange star appears suddenly in the skies to excite and mystify the unsuspecting world. She seemed to have come from nowhere, and yet like the new planet, she suddenly filled an appointed spot in the firmament.

It cannot be said that she conquered, for that would be to imply design on her part. Possibly she considered the game unworthy of the effort. She regarded herself as superior to all these people, a surviving estimate of themselves that most Europeans enjoy; therefore what was she to gain, saving a certain amount of amusement, by contact with her husband's friends?

In truth, Yvonne Brood despised Americans. She made small pretense of liking them. The rather closely knit circle of Parisian aristocracy which she affected is known to tolerate but not to invite the society of even the best of Americans. She was no larger than her environment. Her views upon and her attitude toward the Americans were not created by her but for her. The fact that James Brood had reached the inner shrine of French self-worship no doubt put him in a class apart from all other Americans, so far as she was concerned. At least it may account for an apparent inconsistency, in that she married him without much hesitation.

Her warmest friend and admirer—one might almost say slave—was Frederic Brood. She had transformed him. He was no longer the silent, moody youth of other days, but an eager, impetuous playmate whose principal object in life was to amuse her. If anyone had tried to convince him that he ever could have regarded Mrs. Desmond's detestation and departure with equanimity he would have protested with all the force at his command. But that would have been a month ago! He saw Lydia and her mother leave without the slightest doubt in his mind that it was all for the best.

The Desmonds took a small apartment just around the corner from Brood's home, in a side street, and in the same block. As a matter of fact, their windows looked down into the courtyard in the rear of Brood's home. Frederic assisted them in putting their new home in order. It was great fun for Lydia and him, this building of

what they pleased to call "a nest." Lydia may have seen the cloud in their sky, but he did not. To him, the world was bright and glad, and without a shadow to mar its new beauty. He was enthusiastic, eager, excited. She fell in with his spirit, but her pleasure was shorn of some of its keenness by the odd notion that it was not to endure.

He even dragged Yvonne around to the little flat, to expatiate upon its coziness with visual proof to support his somewhat exaggerated claims. Her lazy eyes took in the apartment at a glance, and she was done with it.

"It is very charming," she said, with her soft drawl. "Have you no cigarettes, Lydia?"

The girl flushed and looked at Frederic for relief. He promptly produced his own cigarettes. Yvonne lit one and then stretched herself comfortably in the Morris chair in which no woman ever had appeared comfortable before—or since, perhaps.

"You should learn to smoke," she went on.

"Mother wouldn't like me to smoke," said Lydia, rather bluntly.

A faint frown appeared on Frederic's brow, only to disappear with Yvonne's low, infectious laugh.

"And Freddy doesn't like you to smoke, either, al—e?" she said.

"He may have changed his mind recently, Mrs. Brood," said the girl, smiling so frankly that the edge was taken off of a rather direct implication.

"I don't mind women smoking," put in Frederic hastily. "In fact, I rather like it, the way Yvonne does it. It's a very graceful accomplishment."

"But I am too clumsy to—" began Lydia.

"My dear," interrupted the Parisian, carelessly flicking the ash into a jardiniere at her elbow, "it is very difficult to smoke, and clumsy women never should be naughty. If you really feel clumsy, don't, for my sake, ever try to do anything wicked. There is nothing so distressing as an awkward woman trying to be devilish."

"Oh, Lydia couldn't be devilish if she tried," cried Frederic, with a quick glance at the girl's half-averted face.

"Don't say that, Frederic," she cried. "That's as much as to say that I am clumsy and awkward."

"And you are not," said Yvonne decisively. "You are very pretty and graceful and adorable, and I am sure you could be very wicked if you set about to do it."

"Thank you," said Lydia dryly.

"By the way, this window looks almost directly down into our courtyard," said Yvonne abruptly. She was leaning on her elbow, looking out upon the housetops below. "There is my balcony, Freddy. And one can almost look into your father's lair from where I sit."

She drew back from the window suddenly, a passing look of fear in



"By the Way, This Window Looks Almost Directly Down into Our Courtyard."

her eyes. It was gone in a second, however, and would have passed unnoticed but for the fact that Frederic was, as usual, watching her face with rapt interest. He caught the curious transition and involuntarily glanced below.

The heavy curtains in the window of his father's retreat were drawn apart and the dark face of Ranjab the Hindu was plainly distinguishable. He was looking up at the window in which Mrs. Brood was sitting. Although Frederic was far above, he could see the gleaming white of the man's eyes. The curtains fell quickly together and the gaunt brown face was gone.

Questions raced through Frederic's puzzled brain. Out of them grew a queer, almost uncanny feeling that the

Hindu had called to her in the still, mysterious voice of the East, and although no sound had been uttered, she heard as plainly as if he actually had shouted to her across the intervening space.

His father had said, more than once, that the Hindu and the Egyptian possessed the power to be in two distinct places at the same time. James Brood, a sensible man, was a firm believer in magic, and this much Frederic knew of Ranjab—if James Brood needed him, no matter what the hour or the conditions, the man appeared before him as if out of nowhere and in response to no audible summons. He was like the slave of the lamp.

Was there, then, between these two—the beautiful Yvonne and the silent Hindu—a voiceless pact that defied the will or understanding of either?

He had not failed to note a tendency on her part to avoid the Hindu as much as possible. She even confessed to an uncanny dread of the man, but could not explain the feeling. Once she requested her husband to dismiss the faithful fellow. When he demanded the reason, however, she could only reply that she did not like the man and would feel happier if he were sent away. Brood refused, and from that hour her fear of the Hindu increased.

Now she was speaking in a nervous, hurried manner to Lydia, her back toward the window. In the middle of a sentence she abruptly got up from the chair and moved swiftly to the opposite side of the room, where she sat down again, as far as possible from the window. Frederic found himself watching her face with curious interest. All the time she was speaking her eyes were fixed on the window. It was as if she expected something to appear there. There was no mistaking the expression. After studying her face in silence for a few minutes Frederic himself experienced an irresistible impulse to turn toward the window. He half expected to see the Hindu's face there, looking in upon them; a perfectly absurd notion when he remembered that they were at least one hundred feet above the ground.

Presently she arose to go. No, she could not wait for Mrs. Desmond's return.

"It is charming here, Lydia," she said, surveying the little sitting-room with eyes that sought the window again and again in furtive darts.

"Frederic must bring me here often. We shall have cozy times here, we three. It is so convenient, too, for you, my dear. You have only to walk around the corner, and there you are!—at your place of business, as the men would say."

(Lydia was to continue as Brood's amanuensis. He would not listen to any other arrangement.)

"Oh, I do hope you will come, Mrs. Brood," cried the girl, earnestly. "My piano will be here tomorrow, and you shall hear Frederic play. He is really wonderful!"

"You play?" asked Mrs. Brood, regarding him rather fixedly.

Lydia answered for him. "He disappears for hours at a time, and comes home humming fragments from—oh, but I am not supposed to tell! Forgive me, Frederic. Dear me! What have I done?" She was plainly distressed.

"No harm in telling Yvonne," said he, but unhesitatingly. "You see, it's his way—father doesn't like the idea, of my going in for music. He is really very much opposed to it. So I've been sort of stealing a march on him. Going up to a chum's apartment and banging away to my heart's content. It's rather fun, too, doing it on the sly. Of course, if father heard of it he'd—he'd—well, he'd be nasty about it, that's all."

"He will not let you have a piano in the house?"

"I should say not!"

She gave them a queer little smile. "We shall see," she said, and that was all.

"What do you play—what do you like best, Frederic?" inquired Yvonne.

"Oh, those wonderful little Hungarian things most of all, the plaintive little—"

He stopped as she began to hum lightly the strains of one of Ziehrer's jaunty waltzes.

"By Jove, how did you guess? Why, it's my favorite. I love it, Yvonne."

As they descended in the elevator, Frederic, unable to contain himself, burst out rapturously.

"By Jove, Yvonne, it will be fun, coming over here every day or so for a little music, won't it? I can't tell you how happy I shall be."

"It is time you were happy," said she, looking straight ahead, and many days passed before he had an inkling of all that lay behind her remark.

As they entered the house, Jones met them in the hall.

"Mr. Brood telephoned that he will be late, madam. He is at the customs office about the boxes."

"There will be five or six in for tea, Jones. You may serve it in Mr. Brood's study."

A look of surprise flitted across the butler's impassive face. "Yes, madam." For a moment he had doubted his hearing.

"And ask Ranjab to put away Mr. Brood's writing material and reference books."

"I shall attend to it myself, madam. Ranjab went out with Mr. Brood."

"Went out?" exclaimed Yvonne, rigid.

Frederic turned upon the butler in a flash. "You must be mistaken, Jones," he said sharply.

"I think not, sir. They went away together in the automobile. He has not returned."

A long look of wonder and perplex-

ity passed between young Brood and his stepmother.

She laughed suddenly and unaccountably. Without a word she started up the stairs. He followed more slowly, his puzzled eyes fixed on the graceful figure ahead. At the upper landing she stopped. Her hand grasped the railing with rigid intensity.

Ranjab emerged from the shadows at the end of the hall. He bowed very deeply.

"The master's books and papers 'ave been removed, sahibah. The study is in order."

CHAPTER VII.

Ranjab the Hindu.

The two old men, long since relegated to a somewhat self-imposed oblivion, on a certain night discussed, as usual, the affairs of the household in the privacy of their room on the third floor remote, not, however, without first convincing themselves that the shadowy Ranjab was nowhere within range of their croaking undertones.

From the proscribed regions downstairs came the faint sounds of a piano and the intermittent chatter of many voices. Someone was playing "La Paloma."

These new days were not like the old ones. Once they had enjoyed, even commanded, the full freedom of the house. It had been their privilege, their prerogative, to enter into every social undertaking that was planned; in fact, they had come to regard themselves as hosts, or, at the very least, guests of honor on such occasions. They had a joyous way of lifting the responsibility of conversation from everyone else; and, be it said to their credit, there was no subject on which they couldn't talk with decision and fluency, whether they knew anything about it or not.

And nowadays it was different. They were not permitted to appear when guests were in the house. The sumptuous dinners—of which they heard something from the servants—were no longer graced by their presence. They were amazed and not a little irritated to observe, by listening at the head of the stairs, that the unfortunate guests, whoever they were, always seemed to be enjoying themselves. They couldn't, for the life of them, understand how such a condition was possible.

Brood had been working rather steadily at his journal during the past two or three weeks. He had reached a point in the history where his own memory was somewhat vague, and had been obliged to call upon his old comrades to supply the facts. For several nights they had sat with him, going over the scenes connected with their earliest acquaintance—those black days in Calcutta. Lydia had brought over her father's notes and certain transcripts of letters he had written to her mother before their marriage. The four of them were putting those notes and narratives into chronological order. Brood, after three months of married life and frivolity, suddenly had decided to devote himself almost entirely to the completion of the journal.

He denied himself the theater, the opera and kindred features of the passing show, and as he preferred to entertain rather than to be entertained, seldom found it necessary to go into the homes of other people. Yvonne made no protest. She merely pressed Frederic into service as an escort when she desired to go about, and thought nothing of it. Whether this arrangement pleased James Brood time will show. He, too, appeared to think nothing of it.

The lines had returned to the corners of his mouth, however, and the old, hard look to his eyes. And there were times when he spoke harshly to his son, times when he purposely humbled him in the presence of others without apparent reason.

On this particular night, Yvonne had asked a few people in for dinner. They were people whom Brood liked especially well, but who did not appeal to her at all. As a matter of fact, they bored her. She appeared to be happy in pleasing him, however. When she told him that they were coming, he favored her with a dry, rather impersonal smile, and asked, with whimsical good humor, why she chose to punish herself for the sins of his youth. She laid her cheek against his and purred! For a moment he held his breath. Then the fire in his blood leaped into flame. He clasped the slim, adorable body in his strong arms and crushed her against his breast. She kissed him and he was again the fierce, eager, unsated lover. It was one of their wonderful imperishable moments, moments that brought oblivion. Then, as he frequently did of late, he held her off at arm's length and searched her velvety eyes with a gaze that seemed to drag the very secrets out of her soul. She went deathly white and shivered. He took his hands from her shoulders and smiled. She came back into his arms like a dumb thing seeking protection, and continued to tremble as if frightened.

When company was being entertained downstairs Mr. Dawes and Mr. Riggs, with a fidelity to convention that was almost pitiful, invariably donned their evening clothes. They considered themselves remotely connected with the festivities, and, that being the case, the least they could do was to "dress up." Moreover, they dressed with great care and deliberation. There was always the chance that they might be asked to come down, or, what was even more important, Mrs. Brood might happen to encounter them in the upper hall, and in that event it was imperative that she should be made to realize how stupid she had been.

Usually at nine o'clock they strolled into the study and smoked one of Brood's cigars with the gusto of real guests. It was their habit to saunter about the room, inspecting the treasures with critical, appraising eyes, very much as if they had never seen them before. They even handled some of the familiar objects with an air of bewilderment that would have done credit to a Cook's tourist. It was also a habit of theirs to try the doors of a large teakwood cabinet in one corner of the room. The doors always were locked, and they sighed with patient doggedness. Some day, however, Ranjab would forget to lock those doors, and then—

"Joe," Mr. Dawes, after he had tried the doors on this particular occasion, "I made a terrible mistake in letting poor Jim get married again. I'll never forgive myself." He had said this at least a hundred times during the past three months. Sometimes he cried over it, but never until he had found that the cabinet doors were locked.

"I wish Jack Desmond had lived," mused the other, paying no attention to the egotism. "He would have put a stop to this fool marriage."

They sat down and pondered.

"Jim's getting mighty cranky of late," ruminated Dawes, puffing away at his unlighted cigar. "It's a caution the way he snaps Freddy off these days. He—he hates that boy, Joe."

"Sh! Not so loud!"

"Confound you, don't you know a whisper when you hear it?" demanded Dawes, who, in truth, had whispered.

Another potential silence. "Freddy goes about with her a good deal more than he ought to," said Riggs at last. "They're together two-thirds of the



Crushed Her Against His Breast.

time. Why—why, he heels her like a trained dog. Playing the planner morning, noon and night, and out driving, and going to the theater, and—"

"I've a notion to tell Jim he ought to put a stop to it," said the other. "It makes me sick."

"Jim'll do it without being told one of these days, so you keep out of it. Say, have you noticed how peaked Lydia's looking these days? She's not the same girl, Dan, not the same girl. Something's wrong." He shook his head gloomily.

"It's that doggoned woman," announced Dawes explosively, and then looked over his shoulder with apprehension in his blue eyes. A sigh of relief escaped him.

"She's got no business coming in between Lydia and Freddy," said Riggs. "Looks as though she's just set on busting it up. What can she possibly have against poor little Lydia? She's good enough for Freddy. Too good, by hokey! Specially when you stop to think."

Dawes glared at him. "Now don't begin gossiping. You're as bad as an old woman."

"Thinking ain't gossiping, confound you. If I wanted to gossip I'd up and say flatly that Jim Brood knows down in his soul that Freddy is no son of his. He—"

"You've never heard him say so, Joe."

"No, but I can put two and two together. I'm no fool."

"I'd advise you to shut up."

"Oh, you would, would you?" with vast scorn. "I'd like to know who it was that talked to Mrs. Desmond about it. Who put it into her head that Jim doubts—"

"Well, didn't she say I was a lying old busybody!" snapped Danbury triumphantly. "Didn't she call me down, eh? I'd like to know what more you could expect than that. Didn't she make me take back everything I said?"

"She did," said Riggs, with conviction. "And I believe she would have thrashed you if she'd been a man, just as she said she would. And didn't I advise her to do it anyway, on the ground that you're an old woman and—"

"That's got nothing to do with the present case," interrupted Dawes hastily. "What we ought to be thinking about now is how to get rid of this woman that's come in here to wreck our home. She's an interloper. She's a foreigner. She—"

Mr. Dawes leaned a little closer. "I wonder how Mrs. Desmond likes having her over there playing the piano every afternoon with Freddy while Lydia's over here copying things for Jim, and working her poor little head off. Ever stop to think about that?"

"I think about it all the time. And, by thunder, I'm not the only one who

does, either. Jim thinks a good deal and so does Lydia. It's a darned—"

Mr. Riggs happened to look up at that instant. Ranjab was standing in front of him, his arms folded across his breast, in the habitual pose of the Hindu who waits. The man was dressed in the costume of a high-caste Brahmin; the commonplace garments of the Occident had been laid aside, and in their place were the vivid, dazzling colors of Ind, from the bejeweled sandals to the turban which crowned his swarthy brow and gleamed with rubies and sapphires uncounted. Mr. Riggs' mouth remained open as he stared blankly at this ghost of another day. Not since the old days in India had he seen Ranjab in native garb, and even then he was far from being the resplendent creature of tonight, for Ranjab in his home land was a poor man and without distinction.

"Am I awake?" exclaimed Mr. Riggs in such an awful voice that Mr. Dawes gave over staring at the cabinet and favored him with an impatient kick on the ankle.

"I guess that'll wake you up if—"

And then he saw the Hindu. "Ranjab!" oozed from his lips.

Ranjab was smiling, and when he smiled his dark face was a joy to behold. His white teeth gleamed and his sometime unfeeling eyes sparkled with delight. He liked the two old men. They had stood, with Brood between him and grave peril far back in the old days when even the faintest gleam of hope apparently had been blotted out.

"Nicholoh," he cried, magnificently spreading his arms. "I am made glorious! See before you the prince of magic! See! With a swift, deft movement he snatched the half-smoked cigar from the limp fingers of Mr. Riggs and, first holding it before their blinking eyes, tossed it into the air. It disappeared!

"Well, of all the—!" began Mr. Riggs, sitting up very straight. His eyes were following the rapid actions of the Hindu. Unlocking a drawer in the big table, the latter peered into it and then beckoned the old men to his side. There lay the cigar and beside it a much-needed match!

"I don't want to smoke it," said Mr. Riggs, vigorously declining his property. "The darned thing's bewitched." Whereupon Ranjab took it out of the drawer and again threw it into the air. Then he calmly reached above his head and plucked a fresh cigar out of space, obsequiously tendering it to the amazed old man, who accepted it with the sheepish grin of a bedaddled schoolboy.

"You haven't lost any of your old skill," said Mr. Dawes, involuntarily glancing at his own cigar to make sure that he had it firmly gripped in his stubby fingers. "You ought to be in a sideshow, Ranjab."

Ranjab paused, before responding, to extract a couple of billiard balls and a small paper knife from the lapel of Mr. Dawes' coat.

"I am to perform tonight, sahib, for the mistress's guests. It is to be—what you call him? A sideshow? Ranjab is to do his tricks for her, as the dog performs for his master." The smile had disappeared. His face was an impenetrable mask once more. Had their eyes been young and keen, however, they might have caught the flash of anger in his.

"Going to do all the old tricks?" cried Mr. Riggs eagerly. "By George, I'd like to see 'em again, wouldn't you, Dan? I'm glad we've got our good clothes on. Now you see what comes of always being prepared for—"

"Sorry, sahib, but the master has request me to entertain you before the guests come up. Coffee is to be served here."

"That means we'll have to clear out," said Riggs, slowly.

"But see!" cried Ranjab, genuinely sorry for them. He became enthusiastic once more. "See! I shall do them all—and better, too, for you."

For ten minutes he astonished the old men with the mysterious feats of the Indian fakir. They waxed enthu-

siastic. He grinned over the pleasure he was giving them. Suddenly he whipped out a short, thin sword from its scabbard in his sash. The amazing, incomprehensible sword-swallowing act followed.

"You see Ranjab has not forgot," he cried in triumph. "He has not lost the touch of the wizard, ah?"

"You'll lose your gizzard some day, doing that," said Dawes, grimly. "It gives me the shivers."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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INDICATIONS OF AN EARLY SPRING

Great Prosperity Ahead for Western Canada.

The most recent advices from all points in Western Canada report that conditions are apparent for an early spring. Farmers are going over the implements, getting their seeders ready for operation, the plows in shape for extended breaking, and there is a general optimism. A great many new settlers have already arrived, and reports from Canadian Government agents in the United States point to the fact that in a few days there will begin the usual emigration from various of the Central and Western states. From the Eastern states the number of farmers going to Canada will be greater than in any past year.

There has been a fairly large snowfall during the winter, which will greatly aid the precipitation of last fall, which in the opinion of old-timers was in itself sufficient to insure a good crop during the present year.

There will be very little tilled land that will be without a crop this year. The authorities, though, are pleading with the farmers to see only such land as has had careful preparation for rich as is the soil of Western Canada. It is no more fitted to produce good crops uncultivated than is that of any other land anywhere else. There have been accounts of failures in some portions of the agricultural districts of Western Canada, and also reports of small yields in some districts. A good deal of this is accounted for from the fact that notwithstanding the advice of men of experience, there are farmers who will persist in seeding land not properly prepared. This may be done this year, but those who cultivate on reasonable and logical methods will be certain of a paying crop. There is every reason to believe that the high prices of all kinds of grain will continue.

With thousands and thousands of acres of land waiting for the husbandman to bring it forth with a crop, it is no wonder that Western Canada is continuing to prove such an inviting field for the agriculturist.

Seventy million dollars is a conservative estimate of orders which came to Canada as the direct result of the war. Governments of the allies have been placing large orders in Canada and buying huge quantities of supplies for cash.

The total value of exports to Europe from Canada has jumped about 15 per cent since the war started, while in certain lines the increases have been enormous.

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