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CHARACTERS

Mauricio Crispin, a dancer from the Argentine, age 25 years. La Corusca, Senora Crispin, his Argentine mother, age 42. Agnes, their American guest and dancing pupil, age 22. Mrs. Vincent Widener, a woman journalist, age 35. Period: Present. Place: Providencia, a city on the Pacific coast.

ACT III

SCENE II

"The Wizard Leaves of the Press." Agnes: Yes, Mrs. Widener. Oh, there you are!

Mrs. Widener: Why, Agnes! how glad I am to see you!

Agnes: Now, I declare, I strove my best not to keep you waiting. Won't you come upstairs to my room? I've been packing up, but you—

Mrs. Widener: No, child dear; there's hardly time, for I'm now on my way to keep an immensely important engagement. But come, let the doctor's wife kiss you—won't you, lovie!

Agnes: When did you leave Shadow City? Has father sent you to bring me home?

Mrs. Widener: Now, your father, No, sweetheart, it's not at the representative's request I'm come, but with the purpose to—to acquaint you with certain grave developments in the situation at home, which have—

Agnes: Mrs. Widener, what has happened? Is Godfrey already?

Mrs. Widener: No, no! Now, child, don't lose control of yourself; if you do, I won't tell you anything. You certainly know Dr. Widener is very—oh! very fond of you! And you won't forget—will you, dearest? how he habitually calls you his sovereign cure—his little "Panacea?"

Agnes: But Dr. Widener no longer believes in his ability to save Baby Sunbeam's life!

Mrs. Widener: Agnes, the unaccountable serious change in your brother's condition couldn't be foreseen. But since nature so often indulges in mere caprices, eccentricities—is so given to the performance of miracles—girlie, there possibly still remains a chance that he'll recover. Now, let us drop that subject. You received a letter from your father today?

Agnes: Less than an hour past. Why is it, Mrs. Widener, you and the doctor never write to me?

Mrs. Widener: Listen, Agnes. The representative refused outright to trust us with the name you assumed on coming here; and several times attempted to persuade us you had gone elsewhere for training in la Malaguena. He takes the strictest care no one shall discover your alias from the direction of his letters to you, and invariably posts them himself.

Agnes: Why that's absolutely—But Zirkle, the nurse—Mrs. Widener, at least—

Mrs. Widener: I know. Zirkle later confessed you had spared no pains to impress upon her to remember it, but pleaded her mind was in such disquiet that the name entirely had slipped her memory. Both letters you wrote to me and to the doctor were signed simply "Agnes." Were we to address you a letter bearing your true name in full—child, betray your incognita?

Agnes: Still, father's conduct is so amazingly extraordinary, irrational, almost. Mrs. Widener, what is it you've come to tell me?

Mrs. Widener: I bring you a message from Dr. Widener, my girl. Beyond a doubt, 'twould overtax the courage of a good many women to deliver such a message. They would whimper, dearie, 'twas an extremely painful, solemn and delicate mission that had been thrust upon them. But I shall consider nothing outside of the fact that I'm the wife of a medical practitioner, and this is one of the times when I must merit the dignity of the position. Indeed, I shall speak to you much as—

Agnes: Mrs. Widener, you keep me waiting! Something has happened—dreadful, more dreadful than all else before. I can feel it! Yet you keep me waiting!

Mrs. Widener: How you tremble, you shatter thing! If I could but feel assured you wouldn't give way completely, break into hysterics and bite your lips, horribly, until the blood streams forth—and—

Agnes: Mrs. Widener, I won't! I take oath, I won't! Do but let me; I'll prove I'm strong enough to confront any calamity, endure any woe! Only don't keep me waiting!

Mrs. Widener: Do you know, Agnes, I wonder, that wild, curious, extravagant rumors respecting your father are fluttering from mouth to mouth throughout the length and breadth of Shadow City as thick as a swarm of buzzing locusts? Child, there are the gravest insinuations regarding his haggard appearance, the pain-struck stare of his eyes, the distracted state

of his mind. Agnes: Oh! how I detest the exaggerations and idle imaginings of the vulgar, scandal-mongering multitude! Mrs. Widener, will the sensationalisms, the notoriety never end—oh! never so long as a Whiteside lives?

Mrs. Widener: Ah well, girlie, it now is become your father's habit to remain constantly indoors, inaccessible to everyone except the servants and my husband. He goes out on the street but once a day—regularly, in order to post his letters to you.

Agnes: I shan't let him remain imprisoned like that—Mrs. Widener, in unmoving, stark despair! Has Dr. Widener never tried to induce him to go out?

Mrs. Widener: Of course; even to go away on a trip for his health, but all of no avail. My girl, he's no more inclined to leave Baby Sunbeam than he is to give up that bulky collection of newspaper clippings, which he has preserved on large leaves of cardboard bound together at one end with a gaudy ribbon after the fashion of a book.

Agnes: What! is father still poring over those editorials? No, Mrs. Widener, not really?

Mrs. Widener: I suppose you're familiar with their contents?

Agnes: Why, they all bear on the panic—Mrs. Widener, discuss the question as to the responsibility for its occurrence; and many of them, in their views and conclusions, are as widely apart as the separate communities in which the newspapers were published.

Mrs. Widener: Destroy those clippings, Agnes, as soon as you're in a position to do so! It's your supreme duty to your father—one you alone may venture to perform.

Agnes: My supreme duty? Why is it supreme?

Mrs. Widener: Your father incessantly broods over them, reads those newspaper fragments and reads them again, daily for hour after hour at a stretch. My dear, is it any wonder his mind's become fantastically possessed by a single idea? and he addicted to frequent, startling violent outbursts of passion?

Agnes: Frequent, startling, violent. But, Mrs. Widener, he always has been of an excitable nature.

Mrs. Widener: Dear child! Subject to such paroxysms of fury and raving as he is at present? No! I'm afraid you don't quite grasp my meaning!

Agnes: Paroxysmal fury and raving! What is it like—Mrs. Widener, his fury?

Mrs. Widener: The nurses have seen it often; my husband has once, by means of a stratagem. Your father will ponder certain editorials for a long while, then of a sudden spring from his chair—pardon the comparison—with the fierceness of a wild animal, frightful vehemence distorting his features, racking his frame. I myself have heard his deep, ear-rending roars, such ejaculations as: "Hagan! Hagan! those blasted northerners—they keep blaming me! Oh! the rebellious beast of a Nigger struck me—smirched me with his pitchy fist! Nurse! nurse! yet the southern public—ah! they surely appreciate the justice of my act, my fidelity to my duty to uphold the pride, traditions, supremacy of my race!"

Agnes: They drive father to utter desperation—those newspapers—out of of his head! Oh! wrath of heaven! Yet if I were only at home to soothe him, Mrs. Widener, divert his tortured mind! By tender reassurances I always—

Mrs. Widener: But understand, Agnes, the incentives of his frenzy in this case are altogether different. Then, too, your father would compel you to think continually of the affronts and calumnies perpetrated on him by certain northern newspapers. And frankly, now, wouldn't you yourself be driven nigh crazy?

Agnes: No, no, no! I'd be strong, I tell you—much stronger for father's sake than for my own!

Mrs. Widener: The power of the will, of course, is beyond computation. But think, my dear! you wish to persuade me you could endure indefinitely their persecutions of your father—their withering blaze of pitiless words that burn indelibly into the memory and consume the heart—yes, endure it, and never wince when you were forced—to read: "A prejudiced grand jury failed to indict Congressman Whiteside, but he is guilty beyond all question of the murder of more than two hundred white people; and we say nothing of his Colored victim. Shadow City must realize America must hang her head before the world so long as this malefactor is permitted to remain at liberty and retain, as a representative of the people a seat in the—"

Agnes: That always hurts me—smites and bruises, like a stone hurled at me in public!

Mrs. Widener: Eight! you would be

strong?

Agnes: They're unrelenting! Mrs. Widener, can they help but know?

Mrs. Widener: Pish! tush, lovie! those Yankee bludgeoners are oblivious to your very existence. Praise God! it's one form of suffering which can't reach your little brother!

Agnes: Baby Sunbeam in his infant innocence! Oh! but father still watches over him as devotedly as ever—doesn't he, Mrs. Widener?

Mrs. Widener: Yes; when not reading, Agnes, little less than the whole of his time. My husband often finds him seated at the sick boy's bedside in morose meditation, statuesque immobility, with his eyes distended in glary flame on the child's pallid face, and now and then brimming with tears. At times, your father will leap impulsively to his feet with the piteous outcry: "Father didn't think to hurt you, Baby Sunbeam! How proud you'll be some day to be saved from an insolent leper of a Nigger defilement of the family honor—your inheritance Godfrey, boy! Oh! now you—won't die—will you, little Sunbeam?"

Agnes: My patience! you repeat everything he says!

Mrs. Widener: Well, I won't do so again, my dear. Perhaps 'twould be better not to say anything further?

Agnes: No! Go on, make haste, please, please!

Mrs. Widener: Then, Agnes, child, you insist that I mention that hideous—you insist his, you know—the weapon he carried with him on the evening of the panic, the automatic—!

Agnes: Oh, thunderation! that confounded, deuced pistol! Mrs. Widener, how in the world did you learn even about—that—that, too?

Mrs. Widener: But you? Dear girl, is it possible your father has told you already?

Agnes: Yes, in the letter which ar-

rived today! God save my soul it's fearful, horrible—the reference he makes to—that revolve—revolver!

Mrs. Widener: You grant me a second or two, my dear, to recover my breath! Why, by Hector! I fancied the representative to be extremely secretive! Now, has he actually written to you how he sits alone with the revolver fast clutched in one hand, and contemplates it for long periods? and how my husband several times surprised him? and how he—?

Agnes: No, not that, Mrs. Widener! Nevertheless, it frightens me!

Mrs. Widener: My child, at the doctor's command, Nurse Hagan once obtained and hid the pistol; but later the representative's fierce threats struck into her such bodily terror she was only too eager to blab out its whereabouts.

Agnes: Oh! why does he cling to it?

Mrs. Widener: It appears to fascinate him by its ghastly association with the past. Yet the fascination isn't so weird and strange as are his passages through the forlorn house, from forsaken room to forsaken room, in the day and in the midst of the night, though he even then, ever without fail, carries with him on guard the—ah! now, again—the revolver!

Agnes: Always the pistol—that intolerable pistol! Oh! I say, destruction upon the infamous thing!

Mrs. Widener: You're so unstrung! Now, do, de, lovie, keep your promise not to lose your self-control!

Agnes: But my father! Mrs. Widener, what does it all mean?

Mrs. Widener: My good girl, why did you intimate you already knew? Still, isn't it better you should learn the truth from me than from Hagan, the day nurse; or Zirkle, the night nurse; or the chattering darky servants at home? Now, the doctor isn't

altogether sure of this; but your poor father mutters to himself almost incessantly, and there's only too much ground for fear, Agnes, that he suffers from phantasma delusions—has a settled belief the ghost of black Anthony Hall haunts his house, and is moving heaven and earth with dark bedevilements, striving to conjure your dear brother's spirit from his body into the fires of Gehenna!

Agnes: Mrs. Widener! Mrs. Widener! Mrs. Widener! (Agnes falls across the table, hiding her face between her folded arms.)

Mrs. Widener: I had to tell you! And that's the reason why with that pistol, your father stealthily glides about the house, as though stalking to cover—and at the hazard of his own life—some outlawed intruder of the night!

Agnes: Such horror riding upon horror! overpowering, stunning horror! And father has vowed, vowed if! But, wait! You couldn't be of any service. Mrs. Widener, no, I won't tell you! I won't tell you the disclosure he made to me regarding that execrable—fough—thing!

Mrs. Widener: But consider, Agnes, child! consider how possible it is your father is bereft of his reason—gone sheer insane!

Agnes: Insane! Insane! Mrs. Widener: Yes, Agnes; although Dr. Widener and I are very unwilling to admit your father's become a monomaniac, he certainly experiences delusions and recurrent fits of rankest frenzy! He has given up all attention to business; his big financial interests are going to rapid and inevitable ruin! Consequently—

(Continued Next Week.)

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