

# MARY MIDTHORNE

BY  
GEORGE BARR McCUTCHEN.

Author of "Graustark," "Truxton King," etc.  
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## CHAPTER XII—(Continued).

"Not at all. I think they have weathered that very nicely."  
"I am amazed. For years you have—"  
"It is my opinion, Presbrey, that if they are going to be saved they will have to do the greater part of the work themselves."  
"But surely, with God's help at their—"  
"Adam Carr said something to me once that made a lasting impression. I believe he is right. He said: 'God knows a bad boy as well as a good one. You don't have to tell Him about it morning, noon and night. It isn't gossip—it's gossip. It ain't proper to gossip with the Almighty.'"

"My dear sir, I don't see the relevancy. Carr is a scuffer. Surely you are not coming to his way of thinking. It is unbelievable."  
"Nevertheless, my dear friend, it has occurred to me that if God knows the bad boy, He's equally discerning with respect to the good boy."  
"I am quite confident, and always have been, that Eric is a good boy, Mr. Blagden," said Mr. Presbrey stiffly. Mr. Blagden felt the sting in this subtle, far off criticism.

"Understand me, please, I do not regret the methods we have pursued in showing him the right path. We've done all we could. Presbrey. He will keep to that path if he so desires. If he concludes to wander away from it, I don't believe God or man is going to stop him. It's the thing in here that will keep him straight. God made the strong and he made the weak. They go the way which is easiest. The strong go up, the weak go down. We can't guide them beyond a certain point. They cast us off. The strong don't need us and the weak despise us."

Mr. Presbrey left in a state of great depression. He had suffered what he was tempted to consider a personal loss. A pillar in his temple was wobbling. It was the most impeccable pillar, at that, if the metaphor may be allowed. If Horace Blagden bent ever so slightly, it was extremely doubtful if he, as God's artisan, could hope to restore that pillar to its former strength and usefulness. If Horace saw fit to bend, the whole of the perfect edifice must needs sag with him. Small pillars always are forced to lean in the direction in which they are pushed by the larger ones, and sometimes they tumble in the process.

That was the trouble with the church, the world over, said Mr. Presbrey. Too many monoliths.  
And, I am sorry to say, Mr. Presbrey felt that he himself had been very much put upon by Mr. Blagden in the matter of the little Midthornes. Somehow, he always had suspected himself of being a sort of catspaw. Now he was quite sure of it. Remorse for their treatment of the children seemed to have seized upon the Blagdens. Unless he was mistaken in Mr. Blagden, that gentleman, in chastising himself, was now coolly shifting a rather considerable burden so that it might appear to rest on other shoulders. In so many words, so to speak, Horace had given him to understand that his prayers would be wasted, that they might just as well be dispensed with. It was rather hard to hear one's earnest prayers cataloged as gossip.

Mr. Presbrey's heart was sore as he strode up the garden path leading to his own doorway. His wife noted the faint flush in his cheeks as he entered the sitting room.  
"Have they had any news of Chetwynd?" she asked.

"My dear," said her husband, sitting down rather heavily, and quite ignoring her question, "I have come to the sorrowful conclusion that it is retribution after all. God can and will punish those who make use of His offices to further their own ends."  
She was startled. "Retribution?"

"Mr. Blagden is paying, I firmly believe, for his un-Christian like treatment of his sister's children. Yes, it is retribution," said he, staring at the floor.  
"I've always said the time would come," said she, her lips tightening. Her husband had not said it in so many words, but she was shrewd enough to see that his visit had not been a pleasant one. "They are such dear children. And look at Chetwynd! Goodness me! That was as near to blasphemy as she ever ventured."  
Her husband's face brightened. "If it were not for the fact that Chetwynd as we did over Eric and Mary, we—well, who knows?"

"We couldn't have saved that boy with all the prayers in Christendom," she announced flatly.  
"Oh, my dear. You forget what—"  
"I don't forget anything. God Himself couldn't save a Blagden if he didn't want to be saved."

"Sh! My dear, that is positively sacrilegious. It is profane. I am sorry to hear—"  
"Do you know what I'd do, Arthur, if I were in your place?" she interrupted rudely. "I'd have a sermon on this very thing. There is a moral to be taught, an example to be set. I wouldn't be afraid of Horace Blagden."  
"I am not afraid of Mr. Blagden," said her husband testily. "I should not take unfair advantage of him, however. He is in trouble. He needs my private ministrations, not public contumely. No, my dear, I shall go to him tomorrow and the day after. Even such as Horace Blagden can be of contrite heart."

"You might include Rena Blagden," said Mrs. Presbrey. "By the way, what did Horace say to you?"

"Sh!" said Mr. Presbrey, with a quick glance in the direction of the dining room. "Don't speak so loudly. Maggie is setting the table."  
"She never repeats anything she hears here, Arthur. Besides, why should we care so long as she is truthful? I have the utmost confidence in Maggie Green. I don't believe that woman ever uttered a falsehood in her life. Oh, that reminds me. She saw Chetwynd on the way to the station that very evening, and spoke to him."

"Eric," said Mary, a few days before he went up to Cambridge. "Why are you so hateful to Joan? You haven't been near her in weeks, and you seem to avoid her everywhere we go."  
"Has she said anything to you about it?" he asked, uncomfortably. He was very unhappy over Joan. The pain that his resolve had brought upon him was almost more than he could bear. His heart ached for her. The hour of bliss had been so short, and she would not understand why it had ended. There were moments when he called himself a brute instead of a martyr.

"She is hurt, Eric, terribly hurt. Honestly, she doesn't seem like the same girl of late. Haven't you noticed that she doesn't come here any more?"

"I am so busy examining for my exam—"  
"Rubbish!" blazed Mary. "You don't

have to cram. You're just plain disagreeable, that's all. She has been so nice to me about Miss Sinnox's—and about everything else, too. Why are you so mean to her?"  
"I must go up to say goodbye to her," he said, shifting his gaze suddenly.

"And what's worse, I don't understand you. We used to go out on Stone Wall every day or two. They were jolly times for me. But now—now, you won't go near the dear old place with me. You never get any farther than Uncle Jabe's, and I'm tired of feeding the squirrels, if you must know it. We must get over being children some time, Eric. We can't always feed squirrels and listen to ghost stories. Now, you're going away next week, and I shan't see you till Christmas time. Won't you just try to be nice and agreeable for awhile? Be nice to Joan, for my sake."

To her astonishment, he turned abruptly and almost ran away from her. She heard the sob that broke through his drawn lips after his back was turned, and she saw the convulsive movement of his shoulders. Then she cried out in wonder and dismay, her dear little heart instantly filled with love and pity, but he did not turn back. Her warm, adorable face went very pale and the tears sprang to the lovely eyes.

The long expected letter from Adam Carr came that same afternoon. Greatly agitated, Eric refrained from opening it at the house, or in the presence of others, but hurried off to the seclusion of the woods above the town. Here he had spent many hours during the past few weeks, alone with his meditations. The broad green meadows stretched out below the borders of the forest, sinking gently toward the rocky coast to the north of Todville on the Point. Here at the edge of the woodland the shade was most inviting on the hot summer days, cooled by the breezes from the sea, and moist with the breath of ferns and flowers. The blazing sun of midday never penetrated this sheltered area, nor were its rays intense enough to shrivel the bright green grass that carpeted the sunken meadows.

Eagerly he devoured the news from his strange adviser and accomplice. Adam wrote from New Orleans, where he had gone, in connection with a matter quite foreign to the Blagden affair. He was writing, however, to the president of the bank to inform him that the defaulter had sailed for a port at present unknown to him, but "time would tell." There was a grim, relentless humor in his reference to Chetwynd's whereabouts. Of course (he went on), Eric had kept himself informed as to the earlier features of the investigation and the chase. He must have seen in the newspapers that a young man, quite readily recognized by the authorities, as well as himself, that she knew absolutely nothing of young Blagden. She was particularly eager to have it known that she had not been "keen about him" at any time. Indeed, she averred, in a language of her own, Chetwynd had never fired and she had chuckled him weeks before the smashup. She admitted that he had spent a neat bit of money on her, but that it wasn't a marker to what other girls were getting. In fact, it really wasn't much more than pin money, as the wind was blowing in other quarters. Miss De Vinne, with an asperity that did not go very well with her scornful attitude, gave it as her belief that Chetwynd had taken up with a girl named Blanche Something or other, she couldn't recall her last name, which wasn't her own, anyway.

Adam went on to say that he had made it a point to ferret out Miss Blanche Something or other. He found her on the road with a big burlesque show, making Philadelphia and Boston as side steps from Broadway. Her conduct, it seemed that she was about to go no farther away from New York than these two cities, and she was to play in no one-night stands. She had a very small salary, but diamond pin money. It was not difficult for her to prove that she knew nothing of young Blagden's whereabouts. He certainly was not "trailing her."

In the concluding paragraph of this unsatisfying letter, Adam very briefly expressed the hope that Eric's first year in Harvard would be a splendid one. Rather grimly he suggested that the "first year is always the hardest to get through, no matter what you're undertaking. After that, it's easy."

Proceeding, he urged him to allow no outside influences to worry him, but to devote all his time and energies to the work ahead. Then he signed himself, "Your staunch friend until death, Adam Carr," underlining the words "until death."

It was Adam's way of convincing his friend that his secret was safe.

Eric reread the letter several times, conscious of a primal disappointment that gradually gave way before a sense of security in view of the really subtle wording of the epistle. Adam told him everything, and yet to the casual observer there was nothing to be seen between the lines. Of one thing Eric could be sure—the man meant to keep up the travesty of hounding Horace Blagden's son until he tired of the sport, after which it would be a simple matter to end it all by producing evidence of his quarry's death in some obscure corner of the world.

The young man folded the sheets and was restoring them to the envelope when his attention was attracted by a sound near at hand—a sound of someone stealthily moving in the fern banks beyond the tree against which he leaned his back. He whirled and partially rose to his feet, a vast sense of alarm assailing him.

Not 20 feet away stood Joan Bright, her gaze full upon him. Something in her eyes told him that she had been standing there for some time, shy and nervous as to whether she should accost him or flee the place in confusion. He came to his feet in an instant, paling and flushing by turns. Her serious dark eyes wavered and the lids were lowered for a second; then she met his gaze resolutely.

"I saw you from the road, Eric," she said simply. He was struck by the hurt, appealing look in her eyes. It shamed him. "What have I done, Eric? What has happened to—"  
She flushed piteously and could not go on.

He sprang forward, clasping the hands that were raised as if to ward him off.

"Oh, Joan," he cried, casting his resolve to the winds. "I haven't changed, I swear. I haven't. I love you, 1,000 times more than I ever did. I—I would die for you. It breaks my heart to have you feel as you do—"

She broke in plaintively: "What have I done, Eric?"

"You? What have you done?" The tears were swimming in his eyes. She withdrew one of her hands, but only

to lay it tenderly against his cheek. "You ought to hate me, Joan. I've been a beast to treat you as I have. But I couldn't do otherwise. I had to do it. I can't let you go on loving me."

She drew away from him, as if he had struck her face. Her eyes grew wide with pain and wonder.  
"You—you mean, Eric, you don't want me for your sweetheart any longer?" she said, scarcely above a whisper. That piteous look was more than he could bear.

"I love you—Oh, how I love you," he cried. "I shouldn't have said that to you. I—I don't know what I am saying. I do want you. I shall always want you. I shall always want you. Don't cry, Joan—please don't! I'll get down on my knees and beg you to forgive me."  
She came up to him swiftly, her eyes gleaming through the tears of vanquished shame, her lips tremulous with a smile of perplexity. Her hands, both of them, were pressed to his lips, cutting short the sentence.

"I don't understand you, Eric. How queer you are. Don't you know, don't you know that I want you to be—to be what what you said you'd be. My sweetheart. Oh, Eric, I've been so miserable. Something has happened. You must tell me."  
He kissed her fingers hungrily. Then he clasped her slim, yielding body in his strong arms and kissed her lips again and again. Her arm went up about his neck and everything was forgotten.

Slowly he came to his senses. He held her away from him, still panting from the fervor of his wild, uncontrolled passion.

"Listen, Joan," he began dully, at a loss for words. "I—I ought not to hold you to your promise. You don't know—"

She gave him a ravishing smile. Surely, in all the world, there was no one so lovely as Joan Bright in that wonderful moment.

"I don't see how you can help yourself," she cried. "I shall hold you to yours. How can you say such a thing to me after—after this?"

Suddenly her eyes grew dark with doubt and misgiving. Something in his white, drawn face smote out the light in her eyes.

"What is it, Eric? Tell me," she said.  
He shook his head, dumb with despair.

"Sit down here with me, dear," she went on. "I don't care what it is, it can't change my feeling toward you. Nothing can do that."

They sank to the soft, green turf, his arm about her shoulders, his back against the tree. She waited a long time for him to speak, but he never opened his mouth as if he were holding her breath.

"You—you said we were sweethearts, Eric," she breathed. "I believed you. Didn't you mean it?"

Unconsciously he gripped her hand so tightly that it must have hurt her, yet she did not seem to feel the pain.

He was at the point of blurting out the whole devastating truth. His honest soul saw no other way out of it. It was right and just that she should know, that she should understand why he had behaved so strangely toward her.

Then he remembered his compact with Adam Carr. He recalled his friend's cold, almost soulless admonition: "Don't let this little accident of yours alter a single purpose or hope you may now cherish. Go on, just as if it hadn't happened. It wasn't the strength of your arm that did it, but the weakness of that blamed railing." Eric never to forget that speech. Part of it was like Adam Carr, part of it reminded him not a little of Mr. Presbrey incongruous as it may appear.

"Of course, I meant it," he cried, his hands going fast and aglow with the rebound of blood. "I'm going to give you up, Joan. I'm not afraid any longer. Something happened not long ago—I can't tell you what it was—that made it look as though I couldn't go on being the same. It almost killed me. Something that made it appear wrong for me to go on, something that made what's the use going on with anything, if I can't have you to think of, to look up to, to wait for and to work for? You're everything, Joan, everything, and always will be."

He smiled guiltily. The look in his eyes passed in a second, however, and he had something to do with it," he said, with an involuntarily glance toward the sea.

"Why should it make any difference to us?" she asked quickly. "You are not to blame for the awful things he did."

"I know," he admitted uncomfortably.

"Was it because you thought I—or father, for that matter—would let that alter our opinion of you?"

She went wearily, stroking her hand, to the end of the matter. "No, no, no, Eric. Father thinks you are the finest boy he knows. He never approved of Chetwynd. You couldn't possibly be the—the same as he."

(Continued next week.)

**Mexicans Call Us Meddlers.**  
Casper Whitney, in the Outlook.

The better class Mexican looks upon us as blundering meddlers, who, through inexcusable ignorance of his people, have helped mess his country by dangling the fetish of self-government before the eyes of the illiterate, and, by our weakened front, have encouraged the gringos to arm themselves and encouraged the lawless among them to sweep over the country drunk with newfound power and the lust for desecration.

This man says we ought to take a hand in restoring order to his country; so do the native traders, the real workers, and almost every one. Indeed, outside the armies and without a chance at looting, but none carries us in his heart. There is not real friendliness for us in any class, despite the smooth Mexican orators who go to Washington, virtuous and aggrieved, to pour their fervid tales of patriotism and constitutionalism into the open ears of state.

It is merely fine phrasing; they set the constitution aside in Mexico whenever it is found expedient for personal ends to do so. Little more patriotism exists than affection for or truth about Americans. Mexico has developed patriots—great ones: Hidalgo, Morelos, Guerrero, Juarez, Porfirio Diaz; but the breed seems to have dwindled sadly. The orator reminds that declaims and agitates and pliers.

There are, of course, still patriots, a number of them, who fight with the ideal of the highest ever before them; but they are lost among the great number that see in the present disturbance only personal opportunity for advancement or loot, or revenge.

From *Harvard and Yale.*  
Speaking of Harvard aristocracy and Yale democracy:  
I come from good old Boston.

The home of the bean and the cod, Where the "Cads" sit on their thrones And the Lowells speak only to God—wrote the Rev. Mr. Samuel C. Bushnell, of Boston, and sent the lines on to his friend, Dean Jones of the academic department of Yale, who replied:

Here's to the town of New Haven, The home of the Truth and the Light, Where the Good like to come and dwell, In the very same tones That he uses with Hadley and Dwight.

Australia's population is now estimated at 5,000,000.

**A Saving.**  
"I see you're laying out a tennis court in your yard. I didn't know you played the game."

"I don't, but you see I won't have to mow that part of the lawn after I take the turf off."

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"Your name, please, miss."  
"Iona Carr."  
"Oh, you do? What make?"

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"Made any plans for the summer?"  
"Yes; I'm going somewhere with the wife."

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"Was she self-possessed when you proposed?"  
"Yes; and—er—she still is!"—Answers.

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The Way of It.  
"Are Bell and Barbara blood relations?"  
"Oh, no. It is purely platonic grouch they have for each other!"—Puck.

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A bad back makes a day's work twice as hard. Backache usually comes from weak kidneys, and if headaches, dizziness or urinary disorders are added, don't wait—get help before the kidney disease takes a grip—before dropsy, gravel or Bright's disease sets in. Doan's Kidney Pills have brought new life and new strength to thousands of working men and women. Used and recommended the world over.

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**Unexpected Chicken.**  
A stranger, arriving in a small town, hailed a passing resident and inquired:  
"Can you direct me to a place where they take boarders?"  
"Hemmandhaws keeps 'em," the man replied.  
"Is that a pretty good place?"  
"Fair to middlin'."  
"Have chicken very often for dinner?"  
"Reg'lar and unexpected."  
"What do you mean by regular and unexpected?"  
"They have chicken reg'lar every Sunday."  
"I see—"  
"And they also have it when an automobile unexpectedly kills one in the road."—Judge.

**Of Far More Importance.**  
Pat and a friend were reading an account of a shipwreck, in which they were greatly interested.  
"Pat," said his friend, "in case of a shipwreck, presence of mind is worth everything else."  
"Principle of mind," ye say," replied Pat earnestly. "Faith, and I don't agree wid ye. In toime of shipwreck, absence of body is of far more importance than principle of mind."—National Monthly.

**Time's Changes.**  
"You know when I was living here some years ago," remarked the man who had just dropped in, "you had a little boy about six years old whom you thought the brightest boy in the world."  
"Yes, I remember," was the reply; "but he's been through college since then."  
Development in Morocco has been generally stopped because of the war in Europe.

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**Talented.**  
"Wasn't your wife something of an elocutionist before she married you?" asked the man who had just returned from an extended stay abroad.  
"She is yet," answered the other, sadly, thinking of her oratorical efforts on the occasions when he had come home late from the club.

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A really busy man never knows how much he weighs.

**Vocal Carpenters.**  
Hazel—What is that scraping noise out front?  
Dawn—Must be the chorus girls filing off the stage.  
Many a man has sense enough to get a good wife, but hasn't sense enough to know it.

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