

MARY MIDTHORNE

BY
GEORGE BARR McCUTCHEN.
Author of "Graustark," "Truxton King," etc.

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CHAPTER XVII—(Continued.)

Payson turned in surprise. "Chetwynd?"

"Didn't he tell you that Chetwynd is out there, too, in an iron bound chest?"

"Good heaven! What are you talking about?" cried the other, in genuine amazement.

"Never mind," said Eric, grimly. "What else did he say about—about me?"

"That you as much as accused him of being my father," said Payson, with wonderful self-control.

"I didn't put it just that way. I as much as accused you of being his son. There is a difference."

"I ought to kill you."

"Of course, he denied you," said Eric. "Denied me? Oh, I see. You mean he disowned me," said Payson grimly.

"I wonder at your complacency," said the other, surveying him in no little admiration.

"It is not the time for anger," was the calm retort. "There is too much at stake. I have had many lessons in self-restraint. Wall street is a great teacher and a great leveler of personal vanities. I've wanted to kill a good many men since I went there, Midthorne. May I ask what grounds you have for assuming that he is my father?"

"The resemblance," said Eric bluntly. Payson was silent for a minute or two. Involuntarily his gaze sought the mirror that hung on the opposite wall. The room was half dark.

"Good God!" he exclaimed, his eyes suddenly contracting and expanding. He passed a hand over his own face, as if to see whether the movement would be reflected in the looking glass.

"You see?" said Eric gently, a great pity in his heart.

"It's—it's incredible! He spoke of the resemblance, but I had no idea it was so marked. Why—why, I can see his eyes, his nose, his—"

"See here, Jack," broke in Midthorne impulsively. "I'm sorry for all this. I can't tell you how sorry I am. From the bottom of my heart, I hope it can all be cleared up satisfactorily. I hope it is nothing more than a curious freak of nature."

Payson turned on him furiously. "My mother is an honest woman! She couldn't have done the horrible thing you are accusing her of. Only prostitutes descend to—"

He stopped suddenly. Eric had clapped his hands to his eyes, a deep groan breaking through his bloodless lips.

"The other understood. 'I'm sorry, Eric,' he muttered, forgetting his own emotions in contemplation of his companion's sudden pain. 'I forgot—'

Eric cut him off, his pride aflame. "I don't want your pity, or your explanations, or—"

Payson considerably left his side and walked to the window, peering out into the night, giving Midthorne time to recover himself.

After a few minutes Eric spoke. "How does he account for the resemblance?"

"Payson returned to his place on the hearth stone. 'I am willing to discuss these things with you, Midthorne, because you are Mary's brother, and because you have a perfect right to know who and what I am. I'd do just as you are doing if I had a sister and it was you who wanted to marry her. I'd ask questions of you, just as—'

"And I'd tell you to go to the devil!"

"But," went on the other calmly, "if she loved you and you loved her, and I knew you to be an honorable, well-meaning chap as you are, Eric—I'd give her over to you in a moment."

"I dare say," remarked Eric bluntly. Payson chose again to ignore an offensive remark. "But I would ask questions, as I said before," he went on. "They would relate to you and not to the people who brought you into the world. You ask me how Adam accounts for the resemblance. Well, he doesn't attempt to do so. He knew my father well. They were boys and men together. All he will say is that I am like my father, and that my father was Henry Payson, who lies out there in the coffin. That is all I can get out of him. I'll confess there's an air of mystery about it, greater than ever, now that I've looked squarely into your looking glass. My own seems a little less brutal. But he swears on his soul, as he loves me, to know he does not have anything to fear. Curiously, however, he forbids me to question my mother."

"Aha!" ejaculated his listener. "He is right," protested Payson. "How can I go to her with—well, with questions?"

His voice shook with the sudden rush of an emotion that came over him so swiftly that he could not suppress it. He turned his back quickly and clenched his hands in the violent effort to regain control of himself.

"You can't go to her," cried Eric, casting off all reserve. "Not for all the world. Come, come, Jack, buck up! I am the last person in the world to condemn you or any other man. If you can bring yourself to accept an apology from me, I offer it to you here and now, in my own house. What is more, I withdraw my opposition so far as you and Mary are concerned."

Payson had whirled and was staring at him with incredulous eyes.

"I am not fool enough to ask you to overlook the insults I have offered," went on Midthorne rapidly. "You will consider them worse than insults when you learn the truth about the man who—"

With a glad cry, Jack Payson stretched out his hands and grasped Eric's shoulders.

"Nonsense!" he exclaimed, his eyes aglow. "You're hipped about something. Don't you suppose I can see there's something wrong? You're not yourself. That's why I can and do overlook the insults I have offered. We can't help being friends. You don't know how happy I am to hear you say that you won't stand in the way of our marriage. It would have been unpleasant to defy you, but that—"

"Just a moment, Payson," interrupted Eric. "I must tell you that Mary has decided that she can't marry you. We've talked it over."

"What!" gasped the other, dismayed. His jaw dropped. "Impossible! I don't believe it. She loves me. Nothing could change—"

Eric held up his hand, smiling rather wanly as he met the distressed look in the eyes of Mary's lover.

"But I'll see to it that she reconsiders. She does love you. She's doing all this for my sake, and because I have been so selfish as to make it quite impossible for her to do anything else but give you up. Take off your coat, Jack. I'd like to have you stay for dinner with us. But before you accept the invitation, I have something I want to say to you. I have a confession to

make. I'm going to give it to the world tomorrow, but you shall have it first of all."

Back in the little dining room the single maid-of-all-work was laying the table. With the opening and closing of the kitchen door there came subtly into the front part of the house the fragrant aroma of boiling coffee.

"A confession!" demanded Payson, all at sea over the riotous turn his emotions had taken. "What can you have to confess?"

The door of the hall opened suddenly. Mary stood before them, looking from one to the other with dark, questioning eyes. She had heard the last few words of Eric's speech from behind the partly opened door, as she paused there for a final touch to her hair. A dainty, exquisite housewife of pink enveloped her slender figure.

"He has no confession to make," she protested shrilly. "Go away, Jack, please go away. I must talk with him alone."

Both men started forward, actuated by totally different impulses.

"I'll go, Mary, if you ask it of—"

hegan one, with an eloquent tenderness in his voice. He felt rather than understood the gravity of the situation.

"Wait!" remonstrated the other. "It's only fair to Jack, Mary. I've asked him to stay. But it must be settled beforehand, whether he is with me or against me. Please go back to your room, dear, until I've—"

"No," she said firmly, advancing into the room. "Jack, dear, if you love me, go!"

Payson looked from one to the other, in plain distress.

"If he really loves you, he'll stay and hear what I have to say. That will be the test," said Eric.

"Will you go, Jack?" she pleaded, coming up to him and putting her hands on his arms.

"Certainly," he said.

Eric, in dumb wonder, watched him slip into the stormy coat he had discarded the moment before. He offered no further resistance to his departure, but seemed literally to shrink into the background, although, in plain truth, he did not move an inch from the spot on which he stood.

Mary walked to the door with her lover. There he turned and put his strong hands on her shoulders. He made no vulgar display of his love; and it was a great, masterful love. His eyes alone caressed her.

"I'll come tomorrow, Mary. Whatever it is that distresses you—and Eric will crush it out tonight. It's better that you should. Then, dear heart, when I come tomorrow I shall be able to help you. Ask anything of me. I am your slave. Good night. Good night, Eric."

He passed out into the night, gently closing the door behind him. For a moment she stood where he left her, stared dumbly at the closed door. The sound of his footsteps crossing the porch came to her, then the brisk tread on the gravel walk.

She put her arms against the door and heaved against them, burying her face. For a long time she held this rather tragic position. There was no sound in the room. Eric was watching her inertly. The maid of all work dropped a knife on the dining room floor. They did not hear it strike.

At last she raised her face, looking straight at a dove he saw, as if to heaven. After a moment, she turned to her brother.

"You must change your clothes, Eric. Dinner will be ready in a few minutes," she said wearily.

"You've just got to be happy," he cried from the very depths of his tortured soul. "My poor, brave little Mary."

She smiled wanly. "Dear old Eric!"

Hours afterward, they sat before the cheery fireplace, silent and reflective, deep in thought. Her hand lay clasped in his on the arm of the chair he occupied. Their thoughts were their own. She had kissed him when he announced his decision to put no obstacle in the way of John Payson's courtship.

Suddenly there came a tapping at the door, a gentle, measured tapping that rose distinct above the boisterous bedlam of the winds.

A sort of terror took hold of them. The hand clasp tightened, their eyes grew wide with wonder and alarm. They waited, staring into each other's motionless in the chairs, their hearts thumping loudly; waited for the ghostly sound to be repeated. Eric's ears, strangely enough, were strained to catch the sound of a well remembered laugh.

Again the tapping, still gentle but a little more imperative. They turned their faces toward the door. Their eyes were glued to the prim white knob. It turned, and the door was slowly pushed ajar.

A tall figure stood on the threshold, outlined against the blackness beyond. A gaunt, thin figure that waited there for a word of welcome from within.

The picture held for a minute. Then Eric sprang to his feet with a cry, more of relief than surprise.

"Uncle Horace!"

Involuntarily Mary glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece. The thought uppermost in her mind was revealed in that significant act. What was Horace Blagden doing abroad at this time of night? At 9:30, and such a night as this! She started forward impulsively.

"What has happened, Uncle Horace?" she cried. These were the first words she had spoken to him in many weeks.

"May I come in?" asked Horace, rather humbly—for him. He looked thinner, more ascetic than ever before, in the long black raincoat and the white kerchief that protected his throat from the shrill winds. His tall hat seemed to set lower on his head; his thin shoulders were higher; his eyes appeared to have shrunken farther back into their sockets. A dripping umbrella hung suspended from his gloved hand.

He seemed to have aged vastly in the few hours that had passed since Eric's conversation with him in the public square.

The young man sprang forward and grasped his uncle's hand, suddenly aroused to a sense of duty—and compassion. Mr. Blagden stepped inside,

but, responding to the habit of a lifetime, caught himself up in time, and turned to deposit his great hat in the niche outside the door, which he closed gently an instant later.

"Is there anything wrong with Aunt Rena?" demanded Eric. "What brings you out on a night like this?"

"I shan't remove my coat, Mary," said Mr. Blagden, as she took his hat and stood waiting for him to unfasten the cape of his coat. "It is a dreadful night. I thought I should be blown away crossing the common. How warm and cozy you have made it here. 'Pon my word, I had no idea Mrs. Verner's place was so attractive."

"Sit down, Uncle," said Eric, pulling a chair up to the grate. "I—we are glad to see you here," he floundered considerably at a loss for words.

"Thank you," said Horace. "Perhaps it would be better if I removed my coat. An umbrella is of scant service on a night like this, what with the wind blowing and the rain coming from all sides."

Eric relieved him of the coat, while Mary undid the muffler. To their amazement, he wore, instead of the customary frock coat, the familiar old dressing gown they had known since childhood. With one accord, they looked at his feet, which were encased in the ancient carpet slippers that Aunt Rena had made for him a score of years before, once a toasted brown, now a water-soaked black.

"For heaven's sake!" cried Mary against.

Noting their concentrated gaze, he looked down. For a moment he was silent. Then he sat down rather abruptly in the high chair.

"Well, I—I declare!" he murmured, blinking his eyes. "I—I hadn't noticed that—"

They did not wait for him to finish the platonic comment on his own unhappy plight. Mary gave commands, and both set about to provide warm stockings and slippers for him. He submitted to the changes without a protest, and even smiled when she produced a huge pair of gum boots from the hall closet.

"You will catch your death-cold," she said. "How could you think of coming out in those slippers, Uncle Horace? They—"

His smile deepened. "That's just it, my dear," he said. "I didn't think of coming out in them. Dear me, I—"

But, of course, I was in a great hurry. I don't believe I have ever ventured beyond the porch in these slippers before. You are very good, both of you. Very good."

They stood above him, looking down with pity and dressed eyes, both suddenly mute in the presence of what now shaped itself into a tragedy.

Mr. Blagden held out his hands to the fire, shivering as with a chill. Then he allowed his gaze to sweep the warm, lamp-lit room.

"You are very comfortable here, I am sure," he said slowly, as if weighing something in his mind. "Very comfortable and happy in your own little home."

"Yes," said they, without thinking. His shoulders seemed to settle deeper in the chair, his chin sank ever so slightly.

"I—I fear, then, that my mission tonight is—er—ahem!—a rather hopeless one. If you will help me on with those boots, Eric, I will go back to your aunt."

"In heaven's name, Uncle Horace, what has happened?" cried Eric. "What is it?"

Mr. Blagden looked from one to the other before responding. There was something abjectly pathetic in his face. He quipped, and his firm square chin trembled.

"Well, you see," he began, with an effort, "I came over tonight to ask you both to come back to—to—" He got no farther. His voice choked and tears started up in his eyes—eyes that had not felt the smart of tears since boyhood's earliest pangs.

The Midthornes, in that moment's utter crumbling on the part of the great man of Corinth, felt the passing of a life long spirit of antagonism and restraint. It melted and oozed away, leaving the heart empty, and aching, and cleansed of all the things that rankled.

They were young and strong, and their souls were sweet despite the bitter seeds that this gaunt old man had planted in his years of plenty. Now he was come to the end of his journey, and he had reaped, and his bins were empty. He was poor, he had come to beg!

They stood beside him. Their hands fell upon his drooping shoulders, and rested there while the strong current of human sympathy surged from their hearts into the famished soul of this wretched old man.

He looked up, strangely dazed; he could not understand the sensation that was creeping over him. He had never felt anything just like it before in all his life. No one had ever presumed such gentle familiarity, such frank fearlessness. It was sensation.

"Why, Mary," he began, a great question leaping into his wet eyes. He tried himself first, before going on, just to see if he could smile as she was smiling. Then, feeling his lips relax, he could not trust himself to further speech for very fear of saying something that might destroy the sweetness of his discovery.

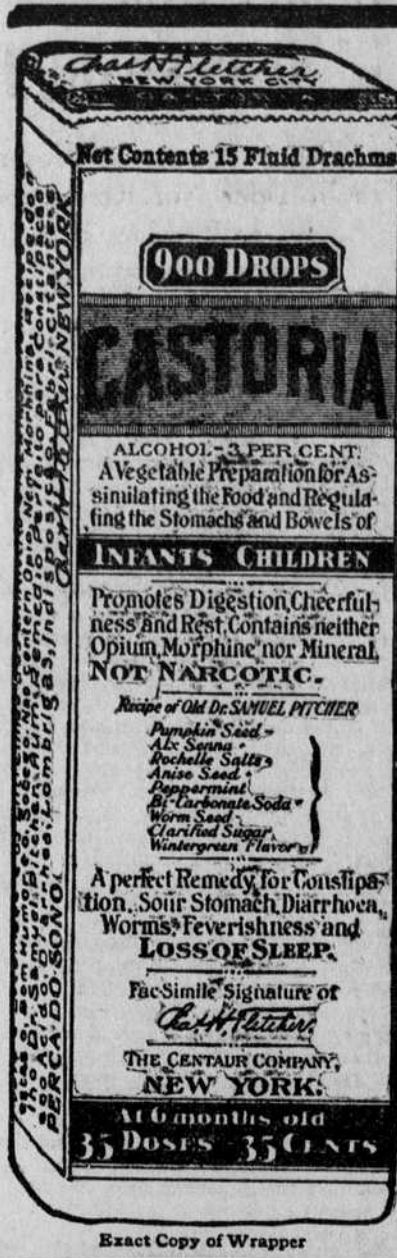
(Continued next week.)

Theory of Women's Compensation.

There are in the United States, broadly speaking, two kinds of compensation laws: One is based on the theory that compensation is a tax laid on industry and, therefore, to be collected and paid out by the state. The other starts with the premise that compensation is a hazard of industry against which the state collects premiums in many states must—insure, and that the duty of the state ceases when it has established a proper supervision of insurance to guarantee payments and of settlements to prevent imposition. Expressive of the first theory are the monopolistic state fund laws of Ohio, Washington, Oregon, Nevada, West Virginia, and Wyoming. In each of these the state collects the premium (tax) and pays the loss (compensation). In each of the other 22 compensation states the insurance of compensation is either permitted or compelled, and competition between from two to four methods of insurance allowed. The striking fact, however, is that while New York belongs to the theory in the latter group, it originally adopted the settlement and payment practice of the tax-theory group. Either it should have excluded commercial insurance, as did Ohio, or it should have recognized and properly supervised the familiar practice of mutual insurance. The amendment of 1915 thus accomplished a harmony in theory. In brief, it strikes from the New York law provisions which never should have been inserted in the commercial insurance compensation law adopted by New York in 1913.

But it was argued, does not this settlement method come from the Dutch law, where commercial insurance is permitted? Yes; but, under the Dutch law, the government has made itself responsible, by becoming in effect the guarantor of every contract. The state expressed its disclaimers liability, and limits its function to supervision of the employers and insurers upon whom rest that liability and the management of an official fund for the employers who prefer that method of insuring their compensation payments.

In Holy Scripture the day is always reckoned from the sunset of the previous evening.



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"Uh, huh," replied Mr. Up-to-date. "Yes, I see, my dear; but why the Sam Hill did you both ride home for your ten cents in the first place?"

"Henry! You—boo hoo—you never give me credit for anything I do!"—Judge.

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Electric Plant in Arctic Circle.

The "farthest north" electric plant is being constructed at Mount Hope, 100 miles north of the arctic circle. There are 400 persons at this place, and the plant is being built by one of the missions.

The darkness at Mount Hope is intense during the long arctic night, and the electric plant will supply power for both light and heat. Engineers at the University of Pennsylvania will design the equipment.

The electricity will be generated by wind power, as the wind at Mount Hope is steady and seldom falls below 20 miles an hour.

Drink Denison's Coffee,

For your health's sake.

The Conductor's Hope.

"I hope," said the car conductor, pensively, after taking the names of the people who saw the lady lose her balance, "that women will vote, and that they'll have a political party of their own and a convention and a platform."

"And then what?"

"And that they'll advocate capital punishment for anybody who gets off the platform backward."

Rain on the Diamonds.

Maude—Do you think Mr. Phan loves you more than he does baseball?

Maude—I really don't know. Last night he told me that my eyes were like diamonds.

Maude—That is a sign of affection.

Maude—Then a little later he said that when I cried it made him feel like a postponed game.—Judge.

A Benevolent Refusal.

"Senator, I wish you would give me a job as your private secretary."

"Oh, my boy," responded the oily senator, "don't get mixed up with the government service. Nothing to it. Ruins a young man. Besides, I have promised that position to my son."—Louisville Courier-Journal.

Not Too Cheap.

"Talk is cheap," said the man who is always quoting proverbs.

"Oh, sure," said the man who was waiting for an opening to make a touch. "Lend me five dollars so I can call my wife up on the phone. She's in Chicago."

Not an Acquaintance.

He—Do you know Poe's "Raven"? She—Why, no. What's the matter with him?—The Club-Fellow.

HIS WELL-CHOSEN RESPONSE

Old Frenchman's Words, in Acknowledging Gift, Were Certainly Short and to the Point.

In a certain country town there lived an old Frenchman named Le Blanc. One night some of his friends gave him a surprise party and presented him with a watch chain. That week the local paper printed an account of the affair, saying that in acknowledgment of the gift Mr. Le Blanc responded in "a few well-chosen words."

Curious to know what the old Frenchman said, someone asked the reporter who was present what those "well-chosen words" were.

"Well, I'll tell you," he answered. "When Charlie finished his presentation speech and held out the chain, the old man—who had been eyeing it greedily all the while—suddenly snatched it from his hand and exclaimed: 'Py chee, dat was a good one!'"—Youth's Companion.

In the Society Islands.

Pigs represent a kind of concrete idea of position among most of the natives of the Society Islands. These animals, in fact, are just as carefully nursed as children. Only male pigs are esteemed, however, and are tied all their lives to a pole under a little roof, while the sows run wild.

"The pigs are carefully fed," writes Doctor Speiser, "but this, their only pleasure, is spoiled by constant and terrific toothache, caused by cruel man, who has a horrible custom of knocking out the upper eyeteeth of the male. The lower teeth, finding nothing to rub against, grow to a surprising size, first upward, then down, until they again reach the jaw, grow on and on, through the cheek, through the jawbone, pushing out a few other teeth on the way. Then they come out of the jaw again and curve a second, sometimes a third, time, if the poor beast lives long enough."

Keen Disappointment.

"Congressman Blowster says he didn't think much of the San Francisco fair."

"I think I know the reason why."

"Well?"

"He hoped to launch a presidential boom while out there, but it failed to materialize."

Tedious Business.

"What is your attitude toward the belligerents in Europe?"

"Oh, the usual attitude."

"And what is that?"

"I'm just waiting for them to quit."

"Umph! You are evidently not rushed for time."

The more money a man has the more he is abused—and the less he cares.

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The guide, philosopher and friend is sometimes merely guyed.

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Their Conversation.

In the days of Henry Clay a Kentucky farmer sent a servant to Lexington with a note for the president of a certain bank. When the man returned he said to his master: "I met Marse Henry Clay in the bank and had a conversation with him."

"Indeed! and on what topic did you and Mr. Clay converse?" inquired the master with interest.

The darky removed his hat and made a sweeping bow. "Says Mr. Clay to me, '... And another very low bow. 'And I the same to Mr. Clay.'—Everybody's Magazine.

Pot and Kettle.

"How ignorant that woman is," said Mrs. Gaussip to her caller. "She and I went to the Zoo the other day and I thought I would laugh outright when she called the giraffe a 'carafe.' The joke of it was, the animal wasn't a giraffe at all, it was a canomile."

Not a Desirable One.

First Grad—Have you found an opening yet, old man?

Second Grad—Yes, I'm in a hole.

Luck Opposed.

"Here's hard luck!"

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing but soft drinks."



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