

MARY MIDTHORNE

BY GEORGE BARR MCCUTCHEON.
Author of "Graustark," "Truxton King," etc.
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CHAPTER XIX—(Continued.)

Her heart rankled. Joan had looked past her during service without so much as the pretence of smile or nod. Mary's sensitive, high strung nature rebelled against this exhibition of intolerance on the part of her old-time friend and playmate. While Eric was squirming in the seat, eager to be off, Mary was resentfully digging up the memory of Joan's first sign of coldness and disfavor, which was followed later on by the cut direct. It all came about after an all night automobile trip, she recalled, when she had taken an up-state trip in company with Jack Payson and a couple of friends from New York. It was of no consequence to the gossip, who told the tale, that Mr. and Mrs. Bates were in the party. What hurt Mary most, even though she was loath to admit it to herself, was the conviction that, next to Eric and Payson, she still loved Joan Bright better than anyone else in the world. Therefore, she was privileged to hate her with particular unreasonableness.

"Where is Eric, my dear?" asked her uncle, peering about in all directions. She could not conceal her nervousness. "I think he hurried out to see Joan Bright. She's back from the south, uncle."

"Indeed, she wasn't expected so soon. Why did she change her plans so hastily?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"Haven't you?"

"No, I haven't seen her," interrupted Mary, answering the perfectly obvious question before it could be uttered.

Mr. Blagden asked rather awkwardly, "Probably came in last night," he vouchsafed. "I daresay Eric is walking home with her. We shan't see him until—Ah, how do you do, Presbrey. Splendid sermon, wasn't it? Good morning, Julia."

She forgot Eric and Adam Carr and the sinking feeling she had experienced on seeing them together not five minutes before. There is something immeasurably selfish in young love.

Jack Payson came striding toward her. Perhaps from a window in the Briscoe house Horace saw them meet and move off together, down the street.

An hour later she said good-by to her lover at the gate and hurried up the walk toward the suddenly attractive portals of "the Giant's Castle." There was a gladness, a brightness in her eyes; a song in her heart. Somehow the world was brighter, the sun was warmer, the buds on the trees were greener than they had ever been before. She tripped up the steps and fairly danced across the porch. There was in her mind a great resolve to do something she had never done before; to put her arms about her uncle's neck and kiss him, not once, but many times.

She paused for a moment just outside the library door, to compose herself. As she stood there, breathing quickly, the curious stillness she had noticed on entering the house became more pronounced. She recalled, with a shudder, having been in a house once where a dead woman was lying up-stairs in the wing sheet. The utter stillness of that well remembered house was not unlike this that now closed in about her, smothering the joy that so lately radiated from her warm, throbbing heart.

Half in fear, she laid her hand on the knob of the library door. A moment passed before she turned it. The sense of impending disaster increased with each second of delay. What had happened? Who in the house was dead?

The door opened quietly, slowly, and she looked into the partially darkened room. No voice called out a welcome to her.

The shade in the big front window was high; that end of the room was flooded with sunlight. Her eyes were slow to take in the details of the picture that lay before her. So immovable, so still were the four figures that made up the tableau that she could think of them only as statues.

First and naturally, her gaze fell upon the square, thick set figure in the window. Adam Carr was standing there, his back to the room, his hands clasped behind him, staring at the porch through the white lace curtains. It was as if he had turned his back upon a particularly horrifying scene.

Eric leaned against the mantelpiece, his chin lowered, his arms folded across his breast—the picture of utter dejection. On the sofa before him sat his uncle and aunt, the former stiffly upright and tense, the latter drooping heavily against him, her hands covering her eyes.

It was all over. Eric had confessed! The blow had fallen.

After what seemed an interminable length of time, her brother lifted his eyes and saw her standing there, stunned, irresolute. He started for a moment with haggard eyes, and then let his arms droop limply to his side. The act was in itself an acknowledgment of potent despair. Then, with a movement of his head, he directed her to attend the stricken pair on the sofa.

As she glided across the room, Adam Carr turned from the window and quickly left the room without so much as a glance at the four persons who were left to play out the drama. With deliberate intent, he banged the library door in closing it. The shock served its purpose. It broke the spell.

With infinite gentleness, Mary drew Mrs. Blagden's stiff, cold hands away from her face and held them close to her own warm, veiled breast. Mrs. Blagden stared blankly, even wonderingly, at the face of the girl. The white, drawn lips moved in a voiceless question.

"They know everything," came in hoarse tones from Eric.

The tears sprang to Mary's eyes. Through the mist that blinded them, they asked the great, important question of him.

"How can I ask them to forgive me?" he groaned, and that was his answer to the question that lay in her eyes. A dead, lifeless voice uttered these words: "Let me be alone with you, Horace. Let me die with your arms about me."

Then it was that Horace relaxed. His strong gaze wavered. A great shudder ran over his frame.

"There is nothing more to be said," he said clearly and mechanically. His lips. His eyes were upon the white face of his nephew. "We know all there is to know. It is all over. The truth at last." His voice rose to a sort of wail. "I—I can't understand why you have allowed us to suffer all these years. When one word from you would have ended our misery, our uncertainty, our—our endless waiting. See! See what it has cost us!"

"God forgive me," groaned Eric, burying his face in the arm that now rested on the mantel.

With an effort Horace struggled to his feet. Slowly he crossed over to the young man's side, towering above the bent, shaking figure. After a moment's hesitation, he laid his hand on Eric's shoulder. His nephew cringed.

"Give me time," he began, but went back to correct himself, revealing the new phase that marked his manner in these days. "Give us time, Eric. It is hard to take all this in at once. We must work it out for ourselves and by ourselves. Just your aunt and I. When the shock has worn off." He was speaking jerkily, brokenly, as if the effort to control himself was trying his every power. "We do not want to be harsh, or unjust, Eric. We shall seek—"

Eric looked up, amazed. "Harsh? Unjust?" he said bitterly. "Why, I've forfeited all claim to—"

"Just my boy," said Mr. Blagden. "Give us time—give us time."

Mary, in the intensity of a great emotion cried out shrilly: "He didn't mean to—no! He didn't mean to kill him, Uncle. You know he didn't mean—"

Mrs. Blagden shook herself free and turned on the girl. There was a wild, intense glare in her eyes.

"He threatened Chetwynd 100 times," she said.

"He threatened Chetwynd 100 times," she hated him! He wanted to kill him!

"My dear, my dear!" pleaded Horace. "Calm yourself. Let us judge this poor boy as God will judge him. Remember, we called him our son but yesterday."

"I cannot—I cannot forgive!" mourned his wife, falling back limply. "Don't touch me—now!" she cried out to the girl, who would have caught her in her arms. Mary shrank back, repulsed.

A full minute passed, fraught with tragic misery. Eric was the first to speak.

"I have told you everything, Adam Carr has supported my story. If you

think he would lie to save me or himself."

"No," said Horace grimly. "Adam Carr would not lie. He hates me too well to lie to me. The truth always hurts worse than a lie, and he knows it. I believe you, Eric. You have never been anything but honest. It isn't that. It's the other thing. The long years we've been allowed to suffer."

"You would have sent me to the gallows if you had known all this five years ago. You were different. You would have had no mercy, no pity in those days."

"You think I've changed? You were not afraid to risk confession today. Is that it?"

"No, no," cried Eric hastily. "I don't mean that. But I was afraid at the time. Afterwards it was too late. I—I but I've said all this before. Why go over it again? I am the confessed slayer of your son, my own cousin. Now I ask to be given a fair trial, a just hearing. That's all."

Mr. Blagden said nothing for a few moments. He was studying the young man's face.

"You came out with the truth because you were sorry for us," he said at last. "Because you wanted to end our suffering and suspense?"

"Yes," said Eric. "I could have gone forever without telling if I had so desired."

"And you were not afraid that some day Adam Carr would betray you? You have never felt that he had a weapon to hold over you and to strike if he saw fit, to suit purposes of his own?"

Eric hesitated. "No, I've never really been afraid of Adam Carr. If I had been afraid of him I should never have come to you with the truth. He did hold it over my head, but—well, here I am, sir. I was not afraid of him."

"It had to do with Mary and John Payson?"

"Yes, I will be frank."

"You told us the truth because you were sorry for us—because—" His voice faltered. "Because you loved us after all and could not let it go on any longer?"

"Yes."

"Conscience had nothing to do with it? The fear of God was not in your heart?"

Eric did not hesitate. "No. My conscience, so far as the death of Chetwynd is concerned is clear. I had no fear of God for God was my witness."

Mr. Blagden again laid his hand on his nephew's shoulder.

"Is it love or pity?" he asked, his voice shaking.

Eric was honest. He looked squarely into his uncle's eyes.

"I don't know, sir. I can't explain. I hate you and Aunt Rena. I do not hate you now. Somehow, I have changed."

"Somehow, we have changed," said Horace, correcting him. "We should not have expected you to love us, when, God forgive me for saying it—when our son did not love us. Do not interrupt. If he had loved us he would not be where he is today. My boy, I will not say to you now that I forgive you. It is not yet in my heart to do so. I must have it all out with myself with God as my counsellor. You took care of God for God was my witness."

Mrs. Blagden had risen, and stood wavering before the two men, on the verge of utter collapse. She put out her hand and touched her husband's arm.

"I want to be alone with you, Horace. Will you come?" she said. "I want to be with you and Aunt Rena. I am around her shoulders. 'We will go, we will go, my dear.'"

"Wait," she said. Then she turned directly to Eric. "Eric, you should not have let your uncle suffer all these years. I hate you now. Somehow, I have changed."

"Come come, my dear," broke in Mr. Blagden, unsteadily. "You were the great sufferer. I—I was going about among men all the time. You sat here alone and—my God! How long the years have been! My dear, my dear! How long we have waited together, you and I."

He broke down completely. With the frail form of his wife clasped tightly to his breast, he lowered his head until his face was buried in the sliken white hair.

Eric's lips moved in a mute appeal; his hands went out toward them and then fell to his sides. With a dry, racking sob in his throat, he turned away, staggering blindly toward the window. Mary came up with him quickly. She slipped her arm about his shoulders and whispered words of comfort and hope.

The shuffling of unsteady, dragging feet drew their visual attention once more to the pair at the other end of the room. Mr. Blagden had started to leave the library; he was making his way toward the door with the bent figure of his wife at his side, his arm about her waist for support. The old man's head was held high and his eyes were set.

Eric sprang forward to assist him, but was waved aside. Humbly the young man walked before them and opened the door for them to pass out into the hall.

(Continued next week.)

MRS. BELMONT WILL HEAD GREAT WOMAN VOTERS' CONVENTION

Mrs. O. H. P. Belmont.

Mrs. O. H. P. Belmont of New York, wealthy suffrage leader and philanthropist, is one of the most interesting of the throng of national figures who will be in San Francisco next month for the great Woman Voters' convention, to be held at the exposition, September 14-16. As general chairman of the conference she is the figure in the immediate foreground.

HAS WAR PROVED DEMOCRACY FAILURE?

H. G. Wells in the New Republic.

The war has shown the weakness of the democratic state. It is no use denying that the central powers were not only better prepared for this war at the outset, but that on the whole, they have met the occasions of the war as they have so far arisen with much more collected intelligence, will power, and energy than has the allies, not even excepting France.

They have succeeded not merely in meeting enormous military requirements better, but in keeping the material side of their national life steadier under greater stresses. It is idle for this writer to pretend to think that the United States would make any better showing in this matter than Great Britain.

The British government has been excellent in argument and admirable in rhetoric, but it has been slack, indolent, and unready in all matters of material organization: it has muddled and wasted national feeling, and it has been manifestly afraid of the press and over sensitive to public clamor. It has shown all the mere demagogues and politicians expected from a body of political lawyers, trained in the arts of making things seem right, wary and prepared to wait and see what the adversary will give, and as incapable of practical foresight, as remote from the business of making real things go right, as enclosed nuns.

The governments of Great Britain and the United States are the best sort of governments that democracy can have. Democracy is bound, if it does not this time then next time or the time after, to be completely overcome and superseded by some form of authoritative state organization.

WHY THE MOON GROWS DARK.

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Many, oh, ever so many years ago, before there was anything grown up; when all the horses were colts and all the dogs puppies, and all the cats little kittens, the stars were very bright and shined as you see them now on a clear night.

They were all very large, however, and so, in order not to crowd one another, they said:

"Let us all get off a long, long distance into the sky, where we will have plenty of room, each one for himself, and not be jostling one another or fussing and moving against each other to make room like children in a trundle bed." So they all moved out and out and out, farther and farther into the sky, until they looked no bigger than candles, just as you see them today.

Now, among the stars there was one called the moon. She was not a very big star at all; indeed, she was one of the very smallest. But, like all very small things, she was very vain and conceited. The moon was very vain over her new coat of bright and shining light, and when she found that, if she moved off far into the sky, she would appear very small to the people on the earth, she said to herself:

"I am so very beautiful that it would be a shame to move so far away that I would appear like a little candle in the sky. I am going to stay down close to the earth, where people can admire me every single night and consider me the most beautiful of all stars. What is the sense of my having all this shining light if not to have people admire me. Move 'way out yonder? Indeed, I'll not!"

And, with that, she went whirling about in the sky, turning round and round like a vain girl, so that people could see and admire her every night of the world.

When the other stars saw what the moon was doing they were very much disgusted with her.

"That vain little piece!" they twinkled one to another. "She ought to have the conceit taken out of her!"

Then Arcturus, a smart old star, got behind a cloud, where he wouldn't be disturbed, and thought a long time—for it was a rainy spell and he could not see.



stay quietly hidden for quite a time—and when he came forth he twinkled to the other stars something about like this:

"Oh! my friends, we will teach that vain little moon a lesson thus. You remember when night was made, there was a lot of darkness left over. I have found that it is all lying now down in the bottom of the Great Dipper. Can we not arrange to paint over the moon with some of it?"

"Indeed, we can," twinkled the stars in the Great Bear. "And I will use my tail for a brush."

"No," twinkled the other stars, "that would be severe a punishment to turn all her vain little light into darkness. Let us agree upon some milder plan."

"Very well," twinkled big Jupiter. "I will suggest this. We will have Great Bear splash the darkness over her face every month. It will take the poor thing a month to wash it off, and then, when she gets it off, Great Bear will splash it over with darkness again."

"Good, good," twinkled all the stars. "And that is why, every month, you see the moon gradually growing darker; it is the Great Bear splashing with his tail over the face of the moon the darkness that was left in the bottom of the Great Dipper. And then, when you see the moon gradually growing brighter again, it is the moon herself slowly washing the darkness off."

And have you ever noticed the scowl on the face of the man in the moon? That is because he hates to have his ugly darkness splashed all over his shining features.

I know the astronomers will tell you that all this isn't so, and that the moon grows dark because she gets her light from the sun, and at times her back is turned toward that great light, but the astronomers don't know; it's because the Great Bear is splashing the darkness over her face with his tail. I know!

TREES.

By Walter Savage Landor.

Oh! Don Pedro, old trees in their living state are the only thing that money can not command. Rivers leave their beds, run into cities and traverse mountains for it; obelisks and arches, palaces and pyramids, amphitheaters and pyramids rise up like exhalations at its bidding; even the free spirit of man, the only thing that can be crouched and cowers in its presence — it passes away and vanishes before venerable trees.

THING THAT MIGHT HAPPEN

Skeptics, However, Will Want Affidavit That Old College Chums Took Only One Drink.

"Well, of all things that live and breathe, if it isn't my old college chum, Bill Edworthy!"

With these few well-chosen words, a tall, well-built young fellow slapped another W. B. Y. F. in the small of his back with such a resounding smack as to almost put his lights out. Even a blind beggar car could see that the young men were old college chums.

"Ding my slats," said Bill Edworthy, the young man who had been struck; "if it isn't Henry Allison, the stroke car of the class of empty-steen. Well, if you aren't a good sight for tangled lamps."

"Why," continued Henry, "it must be 'steen years since I met you at the last alumni dinner. How's things?"

"Fine. Say, do you remember the night when we got lit up and came down with the chickenpox?"

"Sure do. Sort of a stewed chickenpox. Well, I've got about five minutes to spare. Let's drop into this cafe and have just one drink."

So the two college chums who had not met in so many years sidled into Dinkeldorfer's cafe and Hank gave his order and Bill said: "Make it ditto." The bartender did that little thing for them. They had one drink and Bill said good-by to Hank and Hank said good-by to Bill.

Just one little drink, and each went his way.

CURED OF BRIGHT'S DISEASE.

Mrs. A. L. Crawford, Medfield, Mass., writes: "Dodd's Kidney Pills cured me of Bright's Disease, and I am healthy and strong to-day and have been blessed with good health ever since my cure. When the doctors pronounced my case Bright's Disease I was in such a serious condition that they could not do anything for me. I kept getting worse. My limbs from my ankles to my knees swelled and my eyes were so swollen that I couldn't see. As a last hope I thought I would give Dodd's Kidney Pills a trial. I gradually improved and kept on taking them and they cured me thoroughly."

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Sticking to His Prediction.

Two workmen met in the street and stopped to chat about their friends.

"Casey seems to be doing well where he is," remarked one presently.

"He'll not stop long at that job," replied the other with a gloomy shake of the head.

"Why not? He seems to be quite comfortably placed."

"But he'll not stay there a month. I say it, and I've said it ever since he got that job eighteen months ago."

Rewarded.

"John and James went up the hill to fly their kites. John had a new ball of twine. He gave James ten yards for his kite and kept the remainder of the ball for his own use."

"I got the answer," shouted one boy.

"Well, what is it?"

"Johnny got a good mark for being perfect at short division."

Where He Learned.

"Why, Willie, I'm surprised to hear you use such language. You have been playing with those naughty boys again, haven't you?"

"Truly I haven't, mamma. I was just over to Tommy Brown's house playing with the parrot his uncle sent him from Chicago."

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Mrs. Bacon—There! I told you we were 'way behind the times!"

Naturally.

"How was that cave mystery exhibition?"

"Nothing but a hollow mockery."

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YES, FATHER PURSUED THEM

In Fact the Old Gentleman Overtook and Stuck Very Close to the Elopee Pair.

When the conversation turned to the subject of romantic marriages this little anecdote was volunteered by H. H. Asker, a North Dakota politician:

One afternoon Green was standing on the corner looking at the jitneys when he was suddenly confronted by an acquaintance of other years. Soon they were comparing notes and recalling happy hours.

"So you were married ten years ago?" said the acquaintance in response to a statement made by Brown.

"Took place in the church, I suppose, with bridesmaids, flowers, cake and the brass band?"

"No," answered Brown, with a reflective expression, "it was an elopement."

"An elopement, eh?" returned the acquaintance. "Did the girl's father follow you?"

"Yes," answered Brown, with something akin to a sigh, "and he has been with us ever since."

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Prepared to Obey Orders.

"Ticket, sir, please," said an inspector to a gentleman who, as a season-ticketholder for some time, believed his face was so well known that there was no need for him to show his ticket.

"My face is my ticket," replied the gentleman, greatly annoyed.

"Indeed," said the inspector, rolling back his wristband, and displaying a powerful wrist. "My orders are to punch all tickets!"

About all that can be said for Tom Watts is that he saved Mrs. Watts from being an old maid.

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