

THE BEST MAN

By
Grace Livingston Hill Lutz

Author of "Marcia Schuyler," "Dawn of the Morning,"
"Lo, Michael!" etc.

Philadelphia & London.

J. B. Lippincott Company.

1914.

CHAPTER VI—(Continued.)

Now, the janitor's wife, who occupied an apartment somewhat overcrowded, had surreptitiously borrowed the use of this closet, the work being ordered to hang therein her Sunday gowns, whose front breadth was covered with grease spots, thickly overlaid with French chalk. The French chalk had done its work and removed the grease spots, and now she expected on any flow of the closet, but the imprisoned bridegroom did not know that, and he sat down quite naturally to rest from his unusual exertions, and to reflect on what could be done next. The immediate presence passed rapidly in review.

He could not afford more than 10 minutes to get out of this hole. He ought to be on the way to the church at once. There was no knowing what nonsense Celia might get into her head if he delayed. He had known her since childhood, and she had always scorned him. The hold he had upon her now was like a rope of sand, but only he knew that. If he could but knock that old door down! If he only hadn't hung up his coat in the closet! If the man who built the house only hadn't put such a roof catch on the door! When he got out he would take time to chop it off! If only he had a little more room, and a little more air! It was stifling! Great beads of perspiration went rolling down his forehead, and his wet collar made a cool band about his neck. He wondered if he had another clean collar of that particular style with him. If he only could get out of this accursed place! Where were all the people who had anything to do with this? Would they never come and let him out?

He reflected that he had told the janitor he would occupy the room with his baggage for two or three weeks perhaps, but he expected to go away on a trip this very evening. The janitor would not think it strange if he did not appear. How would it be to stay here and die? Horrible thought!

He jumped up from the floor and began his howlings and wailings, and more, but soon desisted, and sat down to be entertained by a panorama of his past life, which is always unpleasantly in evidence at such times. Fine and clear in the darkness of the closet stood out the nice scheme of devilry by which he had contrived to be at last within reach of a coveted fortune.

Occasionally would come the frantic thought that just through this little mishap of a foolish clothespress catch he might even yet lose it. The frantic and trickery by which he had an heirless in his power did not trouble him so much as the thought of losing her—at least of losing the fortune. He must have that fortune, for he was deep in debt, and—but then he would refuse to think, and get up to batter at his prison door again.

Four hours his prison walls enclosed him, with inky blackness all around save for a faint glimmer of light, which marked the well fitted base of the door as the night outside drew on. He had lighted the gas when he began dressing, for the room had already been filled with shadows, and now, it began to seem as if the light of flickering gas light was the only thing that saved him from losing his mind.

Somewhere from out of the dim shadows a face evolved itself and gazed at him, a haggard face with piercing hollow eyes that seemed to burn upon it. It reproached him with sin he thought long forgotten. He shrank back in horror and the cold perspiration stood upon his forehead, for the eyes were the eyes of the man whose name he had forged upon a note involving trust money 15 years before; and the man, quiet, kindly, unsuspecting creature had suffered the penalty in a prison cell until his death some five years ago.

Sometimes at night in the first years after his crime had been committed, he appeared at odd intervals when he was plotting some particularly shady means of adding to his income, until he had resolved to turn over a new leaf, and actually gave up one or two schemes as being unprofitable, and indulged in, thus acquiring a comforting feeling of being virtuous. But it was long since the face had come. He had settled it in his mind that the forgery was merely a patch of wild oats which he had sown, but which, something to be regretted, but not severely blamed for, and thus forgiving himself he had grown to feel that it was more the world's fault for not giving what he wanted than his own for putting a harmless old man in prison. Of the shame that had killed the old man he knew nothing, nor could have understood. The actual punishment itself was all that appealed to him. He was ever one that had to be taught with the lash, and then only kept straight while it was in sight.

But the face was very near and vivid here in the thick darkness. It was like a cell, this closet, bare, cold, black. The eyes in the gloom seemed to pierce him with the thought: "This is what you made me suffer. It is your turn now. It is your turn now!" Nearer and nearer they came looking into his own, until they saw down into his very soul, his little sinful soul, and so—defiantly, appalled at the littleness and meanness of what they saw.

Then for the first time in his whole selfish life George Hayne knew shame, for the eyes read forth to him all that they had seen, and how it looked to them; and beside the tale they told the eyes were clean of sin and almost glad in spite of suffering wrongfully.

Closer and thicker grew the air of the small closet; fiercer grew the nose and shame and horror of the man incarcerated.

Now, from out the shadows there looked other eyes, eyes that had never haunted him before; eyes of victims to whom he had never cast a thought. Eyes of men and women he had robbed by his artful, gentlemanly craft; eyes of innocent girls whose wrecked lives had contributed to his selfish scheme of living; even the great reproachful eyes of little children who had looked to him for pity and found none. Last, above them all were the eyes of this lovely girl he was to have married. He had always loved Celia Hathaway more than he could have loved anyone or anything else besides himself, and he had eaten into his very being that he never could make her bow to him; not even by torture could he bring her to his knees. Stung by the years of her scorn he had stooped lower and lower in his methods of dealing with her until he had come at last to employ the tools of slow torture to her soul that

he might bring low her pride and put her fortune and her scornful self with in his power. The strength with which she had withheld him until the time of her surrender had turned his selfish love into a hate with contemplations of revenge.

But now her eyes glowed scornfully, wreathed round with bridal white, and seemed to taunt him with his foolish defeat at this the last minute before the final triumph.

"Doubtingly the brandy he had taken had gone to his head. Was he going mad that he could not get away from all these terrible eyes?" He felt sure he was dying when at last the janitor came up to the fourth floor on his rat of inspection, noticed the light flaring from the transom over the door occupied by the stranger, who had said he was going to leave on a trip almost immediately, and went in to investigate. The eyes vanished at his step. The man in the closet lost no time in making his presence known, and the janitor, cautiously, and with great deliberation, made careful investigation of the cause and reason for the disturbance, and finally let him out, after having received a promise of reward, which never materialized.

The stranger flew to the telephone in frantic haste, called up the house of his affianced bride, shouting wildly at the operator for all undue delays, and, when finally he succeeded in getting someone to the phone, it was only to be told that neither Mrs. Hathaway nor her son were there. Were they at the church? "Oh, no," the servant answered, "they came back from the church long ago. There is a wedding in the house and a great many people. They are making so much noise I can't hear. Speak louder, please!"

He shouted and raved at the servant, asking futile questions and demanding information, but the louder he raved the less the servant understood, and finally he hung up the receiver and dashed about the room like an insane creature, tearing off his wilted collar, grabbing at another, jerking on his fine coat, searching vainly for his cuffs, snatching his hat and overcoat, and making off down the stairs, breathless, regardless of the demand of the janitor for the fee of freedom he had been promised.

Down the street he rushed hither and thither blindly in search of some conveyance, found a taxicab at last, and, plunging in, ordered it to go at once to the Hathaway address.

Arrived there, he presented an enviable spectacle to the guests, who were still making merry. His trousers were covered with French chalk, his collar had slipped from its fastenings, and, plunging in, ordered it to go at once to the Hathaway address. Arrived there, he presented an enviable spectacle to the guests, who were still making merry. His trousers were covered with French chalk, his collar had slipped from its fastenings, and, plunging in, ordered it to go at once to the Hathaway address.

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house had been fooled somehow, and she had run away. Perhaps her mother and brother were gone with her. The same threats that had made her bend to him once should follow her wherever she had gone. She would marry him yet, and for a hundred fold. He lifted a shaking hand of exclamation toward the train which by this time was vanishing into the dark opening at the end of the station, where signal lights like red berries festooned the arch against the blackness, and the lights of the train faded and vanished like a forgotten dream.

Then he turned and hobbled slowly back to the gates regardless of the merriment he was arousing in the general train; for he was spent and bruised, and his appearance was anything but dignified. No member of the wedding company had they seen him at this juncture would have recognized in him any resemblance to the handsome gentleman who had played his part in the wedding ceremony, and who would have thought it possible that he could be Celia Hathaway's bridegroom.

Slowly back to the gate he crept, haggard, disheveled, crestfallen; his hair in several isolated locks down-fallen over his forehead, his coat wilted, his clothes smeared with chalk and dust, his overcoat dragging forlornly behind him. He was trying to decide what to do next, and realizing that he had a perpetual thirst, when a hand was laid suddenly upon him and a voice that showed had a familiar twang, said: "You will come with me, sir."

He looked up and there before him in the flesh were the eyes of the man who had haunted him for years, and very eyes grown younger, and filled with more than reproach. They were piercing him with more than reproach. They were piercing him with the keenness of the bullet. They said, as plainly as those eyes in the closet had spoken but a brief hour before: "Your time is over. My time has come. You have sinned. You shall suffer. Come now and meet your reward."

He started back in horror. His hands trembled and his brain reeled. He wished for another cocktail to help him to meet this most extraordinary emergency. Surely, something had happened to his nerves that he was seeing these eyes in reality, and hearing the voice, the old man's voice made young, bidding him to meet with him, and not, of course, he was unnerved with all he had been through. The man had mistaken him for some one—or perhaps it was not a man after all. He glanced quickly around to see if others saw him, and at once became aware that a crowd was collecting about them.

The man with the strange eyes and the familiar voice was dressed in plain clothes, but he seemed to have full assurance that he was a real live man and had a right to demand his grasp. Hayne could not shake away his grasp. There was a determination about it that struck terror to his soul, and he had a weak desire to scream and hide with delirium. The man's hand, must have been unusually strong, and he had lasted so long in its effects. He made a weak effort to speak, but his voice sounded small and frightened. The man took his assurance from him. "What right have you to dictate to me?" but the words did not pierce his throat, for the plainclothes man had opened his coat and disclosed a badge that shone with a sinister light against his eyes.

"I am Norman Brand," answered the voice, "and I want you to tell me what you did to my father. It is time you paid your debt. You were the cause of his humiliation and death. I have the notice of your father's death. I saw the notice of your father's death in the paper and was tracking you for years. I entered the service. Come with me. With a cry of horror George Haynes wrenched away from his captor and volvers were everywhere in brass buttons were stationed behind him, and the crowd closed in about him. Wherever he turned it was to look into the barrel of a gun, and there was no escape in any direction.

They led him away to the patrol wagon, the erstwhile bridegroom, and in place of the immaculate linen he had searched so frantically for in his apartment, they put upon his wrists cuffs of iron. They were to take him to the jail, and the eyes of the old man for company and the haunting likeness of his son's voice filling him with frenzy. The unquenched thirst came upon him, and he begged for brandy and soda, but none came to give him, for he had crossed the great gulf and justice at last had him in her grip.

CHAPTER VII. Meaning the man on the steps of the last car of the Chicago Limited was having his doubts about whether he ought to have boarded that train. He realized that the fat traveller who was hurrying himself after the train had had been only half forger, and he had obeyed it. Perhaps he was following a wrong scent and would lose the reward which he knew was his if he brought the thief of the code-writing, read or alive, to the employer. He was half inclined to jump off the train, but he was too late; but looking down he saw they were already speeding over a network of tracks, and trains were flying by in every direction. By the time they stopped, the train would be too great for him to attempt a jump. It was even now risky, and he was heavy for athletics. He must do it at once if he did it at all.

He stepped ahead tentatively to see if the track on which he was standing was clear, and the great eye of an engine stabbed him in the face, as it bore down upon him. The next instant it swept by, his hot breath fanning his face, and he was shuddering involuntarily. It was not a jump here, but a jump here. Perhaps they would stop or stop, and anyway, should he jump or stay on board?

He sat down on the upper step the better to get the situation in hand. Perhaps in a minute more the way would be clearer to jump off if he decided not to go on. Thus he vacillated. It was rather unlike him not to know his own mind. It seemed as if there must be something here to follow, and yet, perhaps he was mistaken. He had been the first man of the company at the front door after Mr. Holman noticed the paper over his head, and yet, when the absence of the red mark it has been simultaneous with the clicking of the door-latch and he had covered the ground from his seat to the door sooner than anyone else. He could swear he had seen the man get into the cab that stood almost in front of the house. He had lost no time in getting into his own car which was detailed for such an emergency, and in signalling the officer on a motor cycle, and was also ready for a quick call. The carriage had barely turned the corner when they followed, there was no other of the kind in sight either way but that, and he had followed it closely. I must have been right, and yet, when the man got out at the church he was changed, much changed in appearance, so that he had looked twice into the empty carriage to make sure that the man for whom he searched was not there, and he had followed him into the church and seen him married; stood close at hand when he put his bride into a big car, and he had

followed the car to the house where the reception was held; even mingling with the guests and watching until the bride couple left for the train. He had stood in the ally in the shadow, the only one of the guests who had found how the bride was really going away, and again he had followed to a station.

He had walked close enough to the bridegroom in the station to be almost sure that mustache and those heavy eyebrows were false; and yet he could not make it out. How could it be possible that a man who was going to be married in a church full of fashionable people would so dare to flirt with chance as to accept an invitation to a dinner where he might not be able to get away for hours? What would have happened if he had not got there in time to see the bride and groom? Could these two men could be identical? Everything but the likeness and the fact that he had followed the man so closely pointed out the impossibility.

The thick-set man was accustomed to trust his inner impressions thoroughly, and in this case his inner impression was that he must watch this peculiar bridegroom and be sure he was not the right man before he forever got away from him—and yet—and yet, he might be missing the right man by doing it. However, he had come so far, had risked a good deal already in following and in throwing himself on that fast moving train. He would stay a little longer and find out for sure. He would try and get a seat where he could watch him and in an hour he ought to be able to tell if he were really the man who had stolen the code writing. If he could avoid the conductor for a time he would simply profess to have taken the wrong train by mistake and maybe could get put in a room where he could trouble her. He discovered that he was barking up the wrong tree. He would stick to the train for a little yet, inasmuch as there seemed no safe way of getting off at present.

Having decided so much, he gave one last glance toward the twinkling lights of the city hurrying past, and getting up sauntered into the train, keeping a weather eye out for the conductor. He meant to burn no bridges behind him. He was well provided with money for any kind of a trip and indeed books and papers. He knew where to send a telegram that would bring him instant assistance in case of need, and even now he knew the officer on the motorcycle had reported to his employer that he had boarded this train. There was really no immediate cause for him to worry. It was big game he was after and one must take some risks in a case of that sort. Thus he entered the sleeper to make good the impression of his inner senses.

Gordon had never had money so precious, so sweet and beautiful and frail looking, in his arms. He had a feeling that he ought to lay her down, yet there was a longing to draw her closer to himself and shield her from everything that could trouble her.

But she was not his—only a precious trust to be guarded and cared for as vigilantly as the message he carried hidden about his neck; she belonged to another, somewhere, and was a sacred trust until circumstances made it possible for him to return her to her rightful husband. Just what all this might mean to himself, to the woman in his arms, and to the man whom she was to have married, Gordon had not as yet had time to think. It was as if he were watching a moving picture, and suddenly a lot of circumstances had fallen in a heap and become all jumbled up together, the result of his own rash but unsuspecting steps, the way whole families have in many pictures of pictures through a skyscraper from floor to floor carrying furniture and inhabitants with them as they descend.

He had not as yet been able to disentangle himself from the debris and find out what had been his fault and what he ought to do about it. He had held her gently on the couch of the drawing room and opened the little door of the private dressing room. There would be cold water in there. He knew very little about caring for sick people—he had always been well and strong himself—but he knew what was what they used for people who had fainted, he was sure. He would not call in any one to help, unless it was absolutely necessary. He pulled the door of the dressing room shut and went after the water, as he passed the mirror, he started at the curious vision of himself. One false eyebrow had come loose and was hanging over his eye, and his goatee was crooked. Had it been so all the time? He snatched his hand to his forehead and touched the mirror, but the mustache and goatee were more tightly affixed and it was very painful to remove them. He glanced back, and the white, limp look of the girl on the couch frightened him. What she had done to her hair he did not know, but she wore the false hair roughly from him, and stuffing it into his pocket, filled a glass with water and went back to the couch. His chin and his hair were dripping, but he did not notice it, nor know that the mark of the plaster was all about his face. He only knew that she lay there apparently lifeless before him, and he must bring the soul back into those dear eyes. It was a strange, strange how his feeling had grown for the girl whom he had never seen till three hours before.

He held the glass to her lips and tried to make her drink, then poured water on his handkerchief and awkwardly bathed her forehead. Some hair-plipps, soap and a great wealth of golden brown hair fell across his knees as he half knelt beside her. One little hand drooped over the side of the couch and touched his. He started! It seemed so cold and lifeless.

He blamed himself that he had no remedies in his suit case. Why had he never thought to carry something—a simple restorative? Other people might need it though he did not. No man ought to travel without something for the saving of life in an emergency. He might have needed it himself even, in case of a railroad accident or something.

He slipped his arm tenderly under her head and tried to raise it so that she could drink, but the white lips did not move nor attempt to swallow. Then a panic seized him. Suppose she was dying? Not until later, when he had quiet and opportunity for thought, did it occur to him what a terrible responsibility he had dared to take upon himself in letting her people leave her with him; what a fearful position he would have been in if she had really died. At the moment his whole thought was one of anguish at the idea of losing her; anxiety to save her precious life; and not for himself.

Forgetting his own need of quiet and obscurity, he laid her gently back upon the couch again, and rushed from the stateroom out into the aisle of the sleeper. The conductor was just making his rounds and he hurried to him with a white face.

(Continued next week.) Busy. From the New York World. "Come on out and play a game of pool, old man." "Can't do it tonight. I'm going on my vacation tomorrow." "So much better. You don't have to worry about going to work tomorrow." "No, but I've got to sit up all night and write the postal cards I promised to send to people while I'm away. Otherwise I won't have time to do any thing before I get back."

Comedy and Pathos. "A man looks comical when he proposes." "Yes," replied Miss Cayenne. "He's fortunate if he can let it go at that and not look pathetic after he is married."

Not Knocking, of Course. Jinks—What is the limit in this club? Binks—The food.—Judge.

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TOO KEEN ON THEIR SPORT WHERE DEATH LURKS ALWAYS

Anglers Would Have Done Better to Have Read the Other Side of the Notice Board.

The disciples of Isaak Walton had found a perfect stream for the exercise of their art, and they settled themselves for a day's fishing, undeterred by a notice board. The board, which had been painted by an amateur, read "Notice—These grounds is private, and yer can't fish 'ere. These fish ain't the kind to be tempted by worms, and there—"

Here space ran out, and the injunction was left uncompleted. For two hours the anglers sat by the stream, tempting the trout, not with worms, but with the very latest and most expensive bait.

But nothing happened. Then suddenly appeared the owner of the grounds and the author of the notice board.

"Hi, you two! 'Ave yer read that board?"

"Well, yes, we did. But—er— we thought you wouldn't mind, and we couldn't find your house, or we would have—"

"Oh, it don't matter! I on'y thought, seein' yer affishin' there, that you 'adn't read both sides of the board. If you 'ave, of course, go on amusing yourselves!"

A hasty glance at the other side of the board showed that it continued the exhortation begun on the front, as follows: "—ain't no fish."—London Answers.

Like Attracting Like. "Your wife is looking at us with a great deal of fire in her eye." "I guess she saw us smoking."

A woman never fails to boast of her intuition every time she makes a good guess.

Bullets Sing Without Ceasing, and Birds Sometimes, in "No Man's Land" on Battle Front.

But it is a wonderful thing, that strip we call No Man's Land, running from the North sea to Switzerland—500 miles. All the way along the line, day and night, without a moment's cessation, through all these long months, men's eyes have been glaring across that forsaken strip, and lead has been flying to and fro over it. To show yourself means death. But I have heard a lark trilling over it in the early morning as sweetly as any bird ever sung over an English meadow. A lane of death 500 miles long, strewn from end to end with the remains of soldiers. And to either side of it all through those 500 miles, a warren of trenches, dugouts, saps, tunnels, underground passages, inhabited, not by rabbits, but by millions of rats, it is true, and millions of living, busy men, with countless billions of rounds of death-dealing ammunition, and a complex organization as closely ordered and complete as the organization of any city in England.—From a British Officer's Letter in the Forum.

Too Great a Change. "How did you enjoy those two weeks on your farm in the country?" "Not as well as I expected. I suffered from a lack of my accustomed exercise."

"Your accustomed exercise?" "Certainly; dodging delivery wagons, street cars and automobiles, and jumping over holes in the street."

Would Seem So. Madeline—Was Jack's sickness fatal? Kathleen—I guess so, he died.—Orange Peel.

Think of It—
People cut out tea or coffee before retiring when these beverages interfere with sleep. In the morning they drink freely of them, strangely overlooking the fact that at whatever time of day the cup is drunk the drug, caffeine, in tea and coffee is irritating to the nerves.
More and more people are turning to
Instant Postum
the drug-free, nourishing, comforting cereal drink.
"There's a Reason"