

THE ROOT OF EVIL

BY
THOMAS DIXON



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CHAPTER XV. The Dance of Death.

A FLUSH of excited pleasure overspread Stuart's face as he led his beautiful hostess to the dining room. Apparently on entering the banquet hall they were stepping outdoors into an enchanted pine forest. The walls were completely hidden by painted scenery representing the mountains of western North Carolina. The room had been transformed into a forest, trees and shrubbery melting imperceptibly into the scenery on the walls and mocking birds were singing in cages hidden high among the boughs of the trees.

"Why, Nan," Stuart gasped, "that's a view of the river hills at home where you and I used to roam."
"Well, if you hadn't recognized it, I should never have forgiven you. Are you pleased with my fantasy?"

"Pleased is not the word for it," he replied quickly. "I'm overwhelmed I never thought you so sentimental."
"Perhaps I'm not; perhaps I've only done this to please a friend. Do you begin to feel at home in this little spot I've brought back by magic tonight from our youth?"

"I'm afraid I'll wake up and find I'm dreaming."
Stuart gazed with increasing astonishment at the magnificently set table. Winding in and out among the solid silver candelabra a tiny stream of crystal water flowed among miniature trees and flowers on its banks. The flowers were all blooming orchids of rarest coloring and weirdly fantastic shapes.

The service was all made for this occasion, silver, cut glass and china. Each piece had stamped or etched on it the coat of arms of his native state, with the motto, "Peace and Plenty."
"And you've done all this in six weeks? It's incredible!"

"The world will say tomorrow morning that I have given this lavish entertainment for vulgar display. In a sense it's true. I am trying to eclipse in splendor anything New York has seen. But I count the fortune it cost well spent to have seen the smile on your face when you looked at that painting of our old hills. I would have given five times as much at any moment the past ten years to have known that you didn't hate me."
"You know it now."

"Yes," she answered tenderly. "You have said so with your lips before, now you mean it. You are your old handsome self tonight."

Apart from the charm of Nan's presence Stuart found the dinner itself a stupid affair, so solemnly stupid that it almost became funny. In all the magnificently dressed crowd he looked in vain for a man or woman of real intellectual distinction. He saw only money, money, money!

In spite of the low murmurs of Nan's beautifully modulated voice in his ears he found his anger slowly rising, not against any one in particular, but against the vulgar ostentation in which these people moved, and the rapid assumption of superiority with which they evidently looked out upon the world.

But whatever might have been lacking in the wit and genius of the guests who sat at Nan's tables, there could be no question about the quality of the dinner set before them.

When the feast ended at 10:30 Nan led the way to the ballroom, where the entertainment by hired dancers, singers and professional entertainers began on an improvised stage.

During this part of the program the women and men of the banquet party who were to appear in the fancy dress ball at 12, including Nan, retired to the rooms above to dress for their parts.

Stuart noted with some astonishment the peculiar somber effects of the ballroom. He had expected a scene of splendor. Instead the impression was distinctly funereal. The lights were dimmed like the interior of a theater during the performance, and the lofty gilded ceilings with their mural decorations seemed to be draped in filmy black crepe.

The professional entertainment began on the little stage amid a universal gabble which made it impossible for anything save pantomime to be intelligible beyond the footlights. Star after star, whose services had cost \$1,000 each for one hour, appeared without commanding the slightest attention.

Stuart turned to the program in his hand and idly read the next number. "A song by an unknown star."

He was wondering what joke the manager was about to perpetrate on the crowd when his ear caught the first sweet notes of Harriet's voice singing the old song he loved so well, the song she had first sung the day he came from the south.

His heart gave a throb of pain. Who could have prepared this humiliation for his little pal? He pushed his way through the throng of chattering fools until he stood alone straight in front of the slender little singer. She saw him at once, smiled and sang as he had never heard her sing. To his further surprise Stuart saw the doctor standing in the shadows at the corner of the stage looking over the gossiping, noisy crowd with a look of anger and horror.

When the last note of the song died away, quivering with a supernatural tenderness and passion, he brushed a tear from his eyes, lifted his hands high above his head and made a mo-



She Sang as He Had Never Heard Her Sing.

tion which said to her, "Tumultuous applause."

She nodded and smiled, and he rushed behind the scenes to ask an explanation.

He grasped both her hands and found them cold and trembling with excitement.

"What on earth does this mean?"

"Simply that I was engaged to sing tonight, and I wanted to surprise you. Didn't you like my song?"

"It lifted me to the gates of heaven, dear."

"Then I don't care whether any one else heard it or not. But I did so much wish that she might have heard it or her husband because they are from the south."

"But I don't understand—your father hates Blvens so."

A big hand was laid on his shoulder, he turned and faced the doctor smiling.

"But I don't hate him, my boy! I've given up such foolishness. We've buried the hatchet. I'm to see him in a few minutes and we are to be good friends."

"Blvens invited you here to discuss a business proposition tonight?" Stuart exclaimed, blankly.

"No, no, no," the doctor answered. "I came with Harriet, of course. Her music teacher placed her on the program. But Mr. Blvens and I have had some correspondence and I'm to see him in a little while and talk things over quite informally, of course, but effectively."

"He has agreed to a conference here?" the young lawyer asked, anxiously.

"Why, of course. His butler has just told me he would see me immediately after the ball begins."

Stuart breathed easier and turned to Harriet.

"You look glorious tonight, little pal! Funny that I never saw you in evening dress before. You look so tall and queenly, so grown, so mature. You're beginning to make me feel old, child. I'm thinking of you as a grown woman next."

"I am twenty-four, you know," she said, simply.

"I have never believed it until tonight. I wouldn't have known you at first but for your voice. I had to rub

my eyes then."
The lights were suddenly turned lower, approaching total darkness. The attendants noiselessly removed the temporary stage and cleared the great room for the dancers.

As the chimes struck the hour of midnight, skeleton heads slowly began to appear peeping from the shadows of the arched ceiling and from every nook and corner of the huge cornice and pillars. Draperies of filmy crepe flowing gently in the breeze were lighted by sulphurous lined electric rays from the balconies. Tiny electric lights blinked in every skeleton's sunken eyes and behind each grinning row of teeth. Suddenly two white figures drew aside the heavy curtains in the archway and the dancers marched into the somber room.

The men were dressed as shrouded skeletons and the women as worms. The men wore light flimsy gray robes on which skillful artists had painted on four sides in deep colors the pictures of human skeletons.

The women wore curious light robes of cotton fiber which were drawn over the entire body and gave to each figure the appearance of a huge caterpillar.

The strange figures began to move slowly across the polished floor to the strains of a ghostlike waltz.

From the corners of the high balconies strange lights flashed, developing in hideous outlines and phosphorescent colors of the skeletons and long, fuzzy, exaggerated lines of the accompanying worms. The effect was thrilling.

Suddenly the music stopped with a crash. Each ghostly couple, skeleton and worm, stood motionless. The silvery note of a trumpet called from the sky. The blinking eyes of the death heads in the ceiling and on the walls faded slowly. The trumpet pealed a second signal—the darkness fled and the great room suddenly blazed with 10,000 electric lights. The orchestra struck the first notes of a thrilling waltz, and presto, in an instant the women appeared in all the splendor of the most gorgeous gowns, their bare arms and necks flashing with priceless jewels, and each man bowed before her in immaculate evening clothes.

From the four corners of the vast room were released thousands of gorgeously tinted butterflies, imported from the tropics for the occasion. As the dancers glided through the dazzling scene these wonderfully colored creatures fluttered about them in myriads, darting and circling in every direction among the flowers and lights until the room seemed a veritable fairyland.

A burst of applause swept the crowd as Nan's radiant figure passed, encircled by the arm of the leader.

Stuart nodded and clapped his hands with enthusiasm.

A more marvelous transformation scene could scarcely be imagined.

When Nan had passed he turned to speak to Harriet, but she had gone. A soft hand was suddenly laid on his arm, and he turned to confront Nan, her eyes flashing with triumph, her cheeks flushed and her lips parted in a tender smile.

"Come, I'm going to honor you by sitting out the next two dances."

When she had seated herself by his side under a bower of roses he was very still for a moment. She looked up with a quizzical expression and said:

"A penny for your thoughts. Am I so very wicked after all?"

"I don't think I have ever seen anything more dazzlingly beautiful than your banquet and ball, except the woman who conceived and executed it. I was just wondering whether your imagination was vivid enough to have dreamed half the splendors of such a life when you turned from the little cottage I built for you."

A look of pain clouded the fair face, and she lifted her jeweled hand.

"Please, Jim, I'd like to forget some things."

"And you haven't forgotten?"

She looked straight into his eyes and answered in even tones:

"No."

Both were silent for a long while, and then they began to talk in low tones of the life they had lived as boy and girl in the old south and forgot the flight of time.

(To Be Continued.)

Before Time.

Nelson said once: "I owe all my success in life to having been always a quarter of an hour before my time." It is a great lesson for those who love to postpone things. Maybe some of you have had the experience that, in case of sickness, a few minutes saved the patient. This shows that even the smallest indisposition should be treated at once. If it is from the stomach or from the intestines, use Triner's American Elixir of Bitter Wine without delay. This remedy is very good in all maladies of the digestive organs, because it cleans them out, strengthening them at the same time. Many attacks of grave diseases have been averted by using this remedy in time. At drug stores, Jos. Triner, 1333-39 So. Ashland Ave., Chicago. Triner's Liniment will always satisfy everybody.

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(Successor to John Bauer)

Local News

From Tuesday's Daily.

Mrs. Wolcott of Weeping Water is in the city today making a short visit at the home of Mrs. M. A. Street.

Attorney C. S. Aldrich of Elmwood was in the city today attending to some matters of business in the county court.

Carl Kunsman was a passenger this morning on No. 15 for Omaha to look after some matters of business for a few hours.

R. R. Nickels of near Murray came in this afternoon from Omaha on No. 24, where he was called to look after business matters.

Attorney C. A. Rawls was a business visitor in the metropolis today, being a passenger on the early Burlington train for that city.

I. W. Teegarden, one of the prominent residents of Weeping Water, came in today to look after some business matters for a time.

Miss Dora Glenn came in this morning from Rock Island, Ill., and will visit here with her parents, T. W. Glenn and wife, for a time.

Mrs. Mary Roberts of Thurman, Iowa, who has been visiting here for a few days with friends, departed this morning for her home.

George N. LaRue of Union was in the city yesterday attending the meeting of the soldiers' relief commission, of which he is a member.

P. A. Meisinger, one of the rustling young farmers of the county, was in the city today attending to some trading with the merchants.

Harry Smith, the hustling farmer from west of the city, was a passenger this morning for Omaha to attend to some matters of business.

Mrs. Mary Owens of Ashland, who was in the city visiting at the home of W. R. Bryan and family, departed yesterday afternoon on No. 23 for her home.

Michael Martin was a passenger on the early Burlington train this morning for South Omaha to attend to some business matters and visit with relatives.

Fred Ebinger was a passenger this morning for Omaha, where he will attend the convention of the hardware dealers, which is meeting there this week.

Mrs. C. H. Peterson and Mrs. Herman Gartlema were passengers this morning for Pacific Junction, where they will visit for a short time with friends.

Joseph Mullen, the democratic war horse from Stove Creek precinct, was in the city yesterday attending the meeting of the soldiers' relief commission.

G. P. Eastwood, the hardware man, was a passenger this morning for Omaha, where he will attend the Hardware Men's convention, which is meeting in that city.

Mr. and Mrs. J. J. Schneider of Cedar Creek were visitors in this city yesterday and called at this office for the purpose of renewing their subscription to this paper.

Mrs. John Wiles and son, John, and Mr. and Mrs. Everett Wiles returned from Malvern, Iowa, yesterday afternoon, where they have been visiting for a few days with Mrs. Wiles' sister, Mrs. Robert Knight.

Ben Beckman and his son-in-law, Louie Rheinacke, drove up this morning from the farm near Murray to look after some business matters for a time.

Joseph Kuntz and wife of Omaha arrived last evening on No. 2 and will visit for a short time at the home of Mrs. Kuntz's parents, Charles Miller and wife, south of this city.

C. C. Tucker and wife of near Murray drove up this morning from their home and were passengers on the early Burlington train for Omaha to attend to business matters for a time.

Harry Henton of Mynard, who has been quite sick for the past two weeks, departed this afternoon for Missouri Valley, Iowa, where he will visit relatives for a short time.

Mrs. Jacob Stenner and her guests, Mr. and Mrs. William Burton, of Bartley, Neb., were passengers this morning for Omaha, where they spent the day taking in the sights.

Mr. and Mrs. Iles, residing south of this city, were attending to the week-end shopping here Saturday, and while here Mrs. Iles called at this office and renewed her subscription to this paper.

Mrs. Ellen Durkee of Ashland, a sister of County Assessor W. R. Bryan, is in the city for a few days visiting her brother and family, while her husband is in Kansas City taking treatment at a hospital there.

Mr. and Mrs. W. R. Gardner and son, Albert, returned from Omaha Sunday evening, where they spent the day with Mr. Gardner's mother, who is 97 years old. She survives all of her nine children with the exception of two sons, W. R. of this city, and Sam of Washington.

Theodore D. Todd of Los Angeles, California, has been making a visit at Stockton, New York, and stopped in this vicinity on his way back to his western home for a week's visit with his cousins, L. C. Todd of Nehawka, L. G. and Miss Jessie Todd of Union and H. G. Todd of Murray and A. L. Todd of Plattsmouth precinct.

Mr. and Mrs. L. C. Todd of Nehawka, Miss Jessie Todd of Union and T. D. Todd of Los Angeles, California, motored to the home of Mr. and Mrs. A. L. Todd, in Plattsmouth precinct, yesterday and spent the day with the Todd family. During the afternoon they motored to this city and did some shopping and attended to some business matters at the court house.

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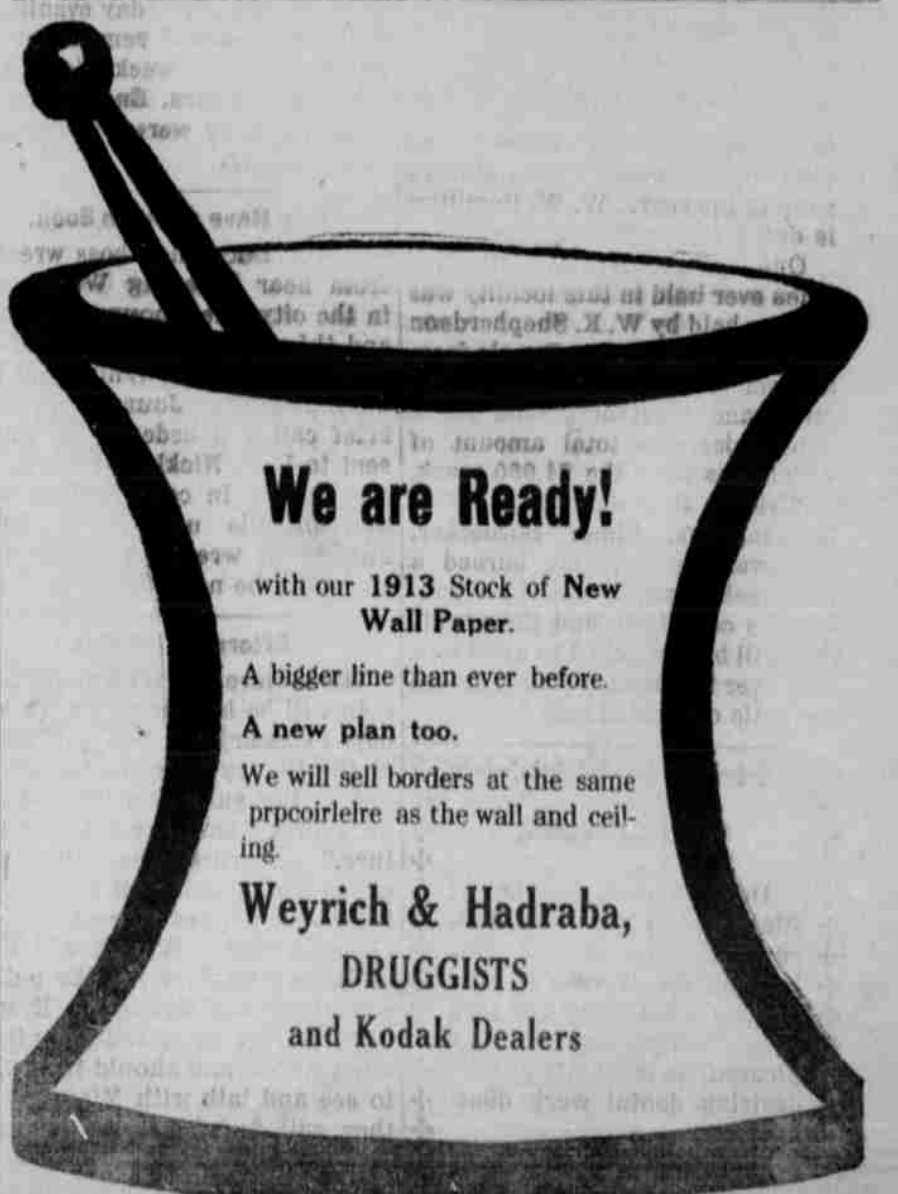
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