

The RING and the MAN?

WITH SOME INCIDENTAL RELATION TO THE WOMAN
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SYNOPSIS.

A foolish young tenderfoot becomes fascinated with the bold, artful wife of a drunken prospector in a western mining town. They prepare to elope in a blinding blizzard but are confronted by the maudlin husband. He is shot by the wife, but the chivalrous boy pins a note to the body taking the crime upon himself. In their flight to the railroad station the woman's horse falls exhausted; the young pair, on his own and follows hanging to the strap strap. Seeing he is an impotent, the woman thrusts her own into a snow drift and rides on. Half-frozen he stumbles into the railroad station just as the train bears the woman away. Twenty-five years later, the man, George Gormly, is a multi-millionaire in New York. He meets Eleanor Haldane, a beautiful and wealthy settlement worker, and co-operates with her in her work. Gormly becomes owner of a steamship line and finds himself frustrated in plan and track extension plans by grafting aldermen, backed by the Gotham Traction company. An automobile accident brings the Haldanes to his country for Gormly, who announces that he will be mayor of New York and redeem the city from corruption. The political destruction of the merchant prince produced a tremendous sensation. The whole machinery of the city's detective force is to be used to dig up something damaging to Gormly. The press heretofore unanimously favorable to the merchant candidate, under pressure, divides and the campaign grows warm. A resolution is introduced granting a gratuitous renewal of the traction franchise. Gormly offers ten million dollars for the franchise. Miss Haldane congratulates Gormly on what she terms a new Declaration of Independence, and he makes an unexpected declaration of love. He is shocked by the confirmation of his suspicions that her father is the head and backbone of the notorious traction company which he is attempting to overthrow. Young Haldane discovers his father's connection with the Gotham Traction company, and is incensed. In an interview between Gormly and Haldane the latter practically offers his daughter in marriage as a bribe for Gormly to withdraw. Gormly refuses. In an interview with Gormly Miss Haldane learns of her father's business though Gormly vainly tries to hide it.

CHAPTER XIV.—Continued.

"Stop! You are on oath now, by your honor as a gentleman, by your belief in God, by your faith in woman-kind, by your love for me! I want the truth. Indeed, it is almost unnecessary for you to speak. Your silence, everything, confirms me in that belief. A man who would do what he has done would not hesitate at that. But I must know, and I must have your answer."

"And I can't tell you."
"You can."

"Well, I won't then. I have told you enough. Anything else you must get from other people."
"And so you refused me?" said the girl standing up. "Look at me!" She stretched her hands out and stood boldly, magnificently, defiantly before him. "You refused me! Many men have wooed me; many men have sought me for a wife. I did not love you, I don't love you; but I might have learned. You might have had me. You say I am the dearest desire of your heart. A little silence, a paper torn in two, a momentary forgetfulness, and I should have been yours." She picked the paper up from the table as she spoke and held it before her. "I could tear it up in a moment. Think what you might have had." She stepped slowly around the table and approached him. She came nearer to him. He stared at her fixedly without moving. She was by his side now. She laid her hand upon his shoulder. "Me," she said, "for this, and you refused!"

He nodded. It was the hardest task life had ever laid upon him, this discussion.

"What are you made of?" she cried. "I don't know," gasped the man hoarsely. "I was a fool!"

"Will you take me now?" she interposed swiftly, "and suppress this? If I say that I will marry you tomorrow, will you keep this a secret forever?"

"Great God!" whispered the man, "how you tempt me!"

"Will you do it? Answer!"

"No!" said Gormly faintly at last. "I won't!"

"Why not?"

"For two reasons. I would not be worth your respect for a moment if I did. I could never hope for your love in that case. And I won't have any woman that I have to buy."

"And we have both tried to bribe you, my father and I, and we have both failed."

"You did not try to bribe me, Eleanor. I am sure you did not know what you were doing."

"I did," she said. "I wanted to test you. I wanted to try you. I wanted to see if it was true. I wanted assurance that my father had done this thing. I wanted to measure your manhood by your womanhood. Oh!" she said in a sudden change of mood, "the light has gone out of life for me!"

"My dear child," he began tenderly. She shook her head and sat down once more and once more buried her face in her hands. He ventured to come near to her. He laid his own hand on her head and stroked it gently, murmuring broken words: meaningless, save to her on whose ears they fell indistinctly. At last she lifted her head and looked at him. She caught his hand in both her own.

"You are a great man," she said, "a strong man, a true man, and I am only a poor, wretched woman. I kiss the hand that smites me." Before he could prevent it she suited the action to the word. "Now," she said, "go. You have done all you can. I understand. I believe. Sometimes I think—but won't you go now?"

Without another word Gormly turned and left her.

He found Miss Stewart and young Haldane still in the hall. They stared at him awestruck at the tragedy in his grim face.

"Go to her!" he said as he passed them. "She needs you."

CHAPTER XV.

The Last Council of War.

Summoned by Liffey at Haldane's urgent request, the governing members of the ring met that night at their secret rendezvous. There were present besides the two mentioned, Van Slyke and McDonald, Rutherford, Connell, Habberley, Benson representing the allies, and the mayor. When Haldane arrived, he found the others already assembled.

"Well?" asked Liffey as soon as the other entered the room.

"He's found it out and he's going to do it."

"Found out what and going to do what?" asked Rutherford.

"Gormly has got onto us, Mr. Rutherford," was Liffey's reply. The boss realized instantly that Haldane had failed to postpone the disclosure.

"He's found out the secret history of the Gotham Freight Traction company. He's found out the whole bloom-in' history; where we git our money, how we spend it."

"And who was the traitor that betrayed you?" asked Benson fiercely.

"I'd like to know that same," answered Liffey, his fat jaws clamping together, his "pompador" crest bristling.

"I don't imagine anybody betrayed us," said Rutherford. "We've known all along that the thing was bound to get out sooner or later. If it had



"He's an Adulterer, a Thief, and a Self-Confessed Murderer!"

been later, it wouldn't have made much difference; but now— is he going to publish it?"

"He is," answered Haldane.

"When?" demanded Van Slyke.

"Tomorrow. It will be in every paper in the city except our own."

"Great God!" exclaimed Connell. "If we could only stave it off for just three more days. Gimme three days, and—"

"Did you bid for him?" questioned the chief of police.

Haldane nodded.

"Did you go high enough?" asked Benson.

"I went so high," said the man, "that his refusal covered me with worse shame than the publication will do."

"And it wasn't enough?" queried Rutherford, who had a clearer comprehension of what the offer might have been than the others.

"No."

"So it's coming out tomorrow, is it?"

"Yes."

"Well, I don't know what we can do," said Liffey, "but grin and take it."

"Gents, hear me!" burst out Connell. "I can't throw no light on this situation; I don't see no way of keeping this rot out of the papers unless we

could burn up the plants or close 'em down some way, which I'd like to have the job of doin'. But we ain't beat yet."

"This man that's posin' as an angel of virtue before the people of New York and talkin' reform and so on is an adulterer, a thief, and a self-confessed murderer."

"What!" roared the men present. "You're dreaming! You're mad!"

"I am, am I? Well, you just writ," returned the chief, "and you'll find I'm the sanest man in the whole bunch. You know the other night when you was jammin' through the franchise at the city hall and Gormly made his great play?"

"Yes."

"Well, one of my men—I had a bunch of plain clothes men scattered through the crowd—with his eyes and ears open heard a man say, lookin' at Gormly standin' up on that automobile and givin' the crowd his infernal rot, 'Well, if that ain't a dead ringer for a boy named George Fordyce that I used to know back in Kill Devil Camp in Wyoming twenty-five years ago, I'll eat my hat!' My man sized up the speaker at once. He was a big western man free of speech as he was with his money. His name's Bill Hamilton, and he's a big Montana mine owner. They call him colonel out there. They struck up a friendship right away, had a few drinks together, and my man got enough out of him to get on the trail of the story we been lookin' for without Hamilton in the least suspectin' what he was after. I sent a dozen of the smartest men on the force out to Wyoming to rustle up old inhabitants of Kill Devil Camp, which has long since been blotted off the map. It seems that this Gormly, or Fordyce, or whatever his name is, once run away with a miner's wife, first robbin' him of his pile and shootin' the miner."

The little group of men listened to the chief's startling story in a fever of excitement and surprise, which Connell greatly enjoyed.

"Now, we know that he never came to New York with no woman," he ran on. "We've got his whole history from the day he landed here, every minute of it. We reasoned that the woman must have deserted him, or he her. Naturally she'd make for one of the big cities, especially if she had the money. We believed that she had it; for he had practically none when he landed. He went to work as a clerk

"Never. She's glad enough to be with him alone, I guess."

"Why isn't she witness enough then?" asked the district attorney.

"Well, she's mixed up in it in rather a nasty way. She's afraid she'll suffer if her part of it is made public."

"I can fix that," said Rutherford coolly enough. "A promise of immunity, and—"

"She won't do it," returned the chief. "You can drive these women just so far, and there you stop. Besides, it ain't never goin' to come into court."

"What do you mean?" asked Benson.

"I mean," said Connell emphatically, "that Gormly is goin' to give up the game."

"Give up the game?" repeated Haldane.

"That's what I said. It's goin' to be put up to him as to whether he wants this told or whether he withdraws from the field."

"You might back your 'put up' to him with a warrant for murder, I believe," said the district attorney. "If the evidence is what you say, I'll have charges preferred against him."

"All right," answered the chief. "Mr. Rutherford and I will fix that up. Now, gentlemen, you leave this to me. I am accustomed to deal with criminals, and I'll fix Gormly. I ought to have all the reports in my hands the day after tomorrow."

"Wouldn't it be well to spring it to night?"

"Hardly. Besides it's too late. Not even Gormly himself could keep the stuff out of the papers now."

"I guess now, Mr. Haldane," said Rutherford, as the assembly dissolved and the two found themselves alone together, the others being gone, "that you are rather glad than otherwise that your bribe did not work."

"Yes, I suppose so. I don't know," answered Haldane brokenly. "I had heard some intimations of this, nothing definite. Connell has been very close mouthed. I tried to bluff Gormly with that. I don't know what effect the disclosure is going to have. I don't know how true it is. It seems rather suspicious."

"Connell had better be careful what he does," returned Rutherford. "He'd better be very sure of his facts."

"Why did you leave the handling of the affair to him?"

"Well, he'd make a good scapegoat if anything went wrong," answered Rutherford with cynical indifference.

Now, as it happened, Colonel Bill Hamilton was not so gullible as he looked. After the first exclamation and the first few confidences over the drinks which he gave to the plain clothes man who had so adroitly sought to get his story on that eventful night, Colonel Bill shut up like a clam. The interest of the stranger in the story was suspicious. Colonel Bill knew a great many things that he had not told, and did not intend to tell unless it was necessary. Therefore, he soon got rid of his new friend and went to his room to think it over.

He was morally certain that Gormly and the man whom he had known as a boy as George Fordyce were one and the same. Fortunately he had always liked Fordyce, and he was not disposed to do anything that would injure him.

Of course he had heard, as had everyone else in the United States, of the remarkable campaign of George Gormly for the mayoralty of New York. He had not had a great amount of personal interest in the matter, however. But when he identified Gormly with Fordyce, the affair at once engaged his keenest attention. Since the day he had left Kill Devil Camp, he had never heard one word of either the man or the woman. He had supposed, as everyone else had, that they had perished in the storm, and although their bodies had never been recovered there were plenty of reasons to account for that.

What was he to do? Was he to see Gormly, or Fordyce as he called him, and put him on his guard? Or was he to wait and be governed by circumstances? This was not an easy problem to decide; but Colonel Bill Hamilton finally came to the conclusion that his best game was the waiting one. Besides he liked to play a lone hand, and he felt every confidence that he could do it.

Meanwhile he determined to fortify himself with such evidence as he could secure, and at the proper time, if the story was ferreted out and an attempt was made to make use of it, he would, as he phrased it, "butt into the game!" He set the telegraph to work, therefore, and presently received from his partner in Butte by express a tin box full of very private official documents. Thereafter he amused himself by following the progress of the campaign and doing some highly profitable local investigating on his own account, the result of which filled him with joy and satisfaction.

The demonstration of the alliance between the Gotham Freight Traction company and the Schem society, the publication of the membership of Haldane and his friends in the traction company, the exhibition of its iniquitous processes, came off according to schedule. Such a storm of wrath and indignation rose in the public breast after the disclosure as had never before been equaled in any political campaign in New York.

The stocks of the Gotham Freight Traction company had fallen off terrifically, and every other interest furthered by the syndicate of which Haldane was the head had suffered accordingly. The city was on the verge of a tremendous panic. Unrest, excitement, uncertainty, were in the air. The people had been aroused as never before.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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