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THE EAGLE'S SHADOW

By James Branch Cabell



AFTERWARD MR. WOODS SANK DOWN UPON THE BENCH AND BURIED HIS FACE IN HIS HANDS

XXII

WELL!" Mr. Woods observed, lengthening the word somewhat.

In the intimate half-light of the summer-house he loomed prodigiously big. He was gazing downward in careful consideration of three fat tortoise-shell pins and a surprising quantity of gold hair, which was practically all that he could see of Miss Hugonin's person; for that young lady had suddenly become a limp mass of abashed violet ruffles, and had discovered new and irresistible attractions in the mosaics about her feet.

Billy's arms were crossed on his breast, and his right hand caressed his chin meditatively. By and by, "I wonder, now," he reflected aloud, "if you can give any reason—any possible reason—why you shouldn't be locked up in the nearest sanitarium?"

"You needn't be rude, you know," a voice observed from the neighborhood of the ruffles; "because there isn't anything you can do about it."

Mr. Woods ventured a series of inarticulate observations. "But why?" he concluded desperately—"but why, Peggy?—in Heaven's name, what's the meaning of all this?"

She looked up. Billy was aware of two large blue stars; his heart leapt; and then he recalled a pair of gray-green eyes that had regarded him in much the same fashion not long ago, and he groaned.

"I was unfair to you last night," she said; and the ring of her odd, deep voice, and the richness and sweetness of it, moved him to faint longing, to a sick heart-hunger. It was tremulous, too, and very tender. "Yes, I was unutterably unfair, Billy. You asked me to marry you when you thought I was a beggar, and—uncle Fred ought to have left you the money. It was on account of me that he didn't, you know. I really owed it to you. And after the way I talked to you—so long as I had the money—I—and, anyhow, it's very disagreeable and eccentric and horrid of you to object to being rich!" Margaret concluded somewhat incoherently.

She had not thought he would be so stern.

But "Isn't that exactly like her?" Mr. Woods was demanding of his soul. "She thinks she has been unfair to me—to me, whom she doesn't care a button for, mind you—so she hands over a fortune to make up for it, simply because that's the first means that comes to hand! Now, isn't that perfectly unreasonable, and fantastic, and magnificent, and incredible?—in short, isn't that Peggy all over? Why, God bless her, her heart's bigger than a barn-door! Oh, it's no wonder that fellow Kennaston was grinning just now when he sent me to her! He can afford to grin."

Aloud he stated, "You're an angel, Peggy, that's what you are. I've always suspected it, and I'm glad to know it now

for a fact. But in this prosaic world not even angels are allowed to burn up wills for recreation. Why, child, there's no telling what trouble you might have got into!"

Miss Hugonin pouted. "You needn't be such a grandfather," she suggested helpfully.

"But it's a serious business," he insisted. At this point Billy began to object to her pouting as distracting one's mind from the subject under discussion. "It—why, it's—"

"It's what?" she pouted even more rebelliously.

"Crimson," said Mr. Woods, considering—"oh, the very deepest, duskiest crimson such as you can't get in tubes. It's a color was never mixed on any palette. It's—eh? Oh, I beg your pardon."

"I think you ought to," said Margaret primly. Nevertheless, she had brightened considerably.

"Of course," Mr. Woods continued with a fine color, "I can't take the money. That's absurd."

"Is it?" she queried idly. "Now, I wonder how you're going to help yourself?"

"Simplest thing in the world," he assured her. "You see this match, don't you, Peggy? Well, now you're going to give me that paper I see in that bag-thing at your waist, and I'm going to burn it till it's all nice, soft, feathery ashes that can't ever be probated. And then the first will, which is practically the same as the last, will be allowed to stand, and I'll tell your father all about the affair, because he ought to know, and you'll have to settle with those colleges. And in that way," Mr. Woods submitted, "Uncle Fred's last wishes will be carried out just as he expressed them, and there needn't be any trouble. So give me the will, Peggy."

It is curious what a trivial matter love makes of felony.

Margaret's heart sank.

However, "Yes?" said she encouragingly; "and what do you intend doing afterward?"

"I—I shall probably live abroad," said Billy. "Cheaper, you know."

And here (he thought) was an excellent, an undreamed-of opportunity to inform her of his engagement. He had much better tell her now and have done. Mr. Woods opened his mouth, and looked at Margaret, and closed it. Again she was pouting in a fashion that distracted one's mind.

"That would be most unattractive," said Miss Hugonin calmly. "You're very stupid, Billy, to think of living abroad. Billy, I think you're almost as stupid as I am. I've been very stupid, Billy. I thought I liked Mr. Kennaston. I don't, Billy—not that way. I've just told him so. I'm not—I'm not engaged to anybody now, Billy. But wasn't it stupid of me to make such a mistake, Billy?"

That was a very interesting mosaic.

"I don't understand," said Mr. Woods. His voice shook, and his hands lifted a little toward her and trembled.

Poor Billy dared not understand. Her eyes downcast, her foot tapping the floor gently, Margaret was all one blush. She, too, was trembling a little, and she was a little afraid and quite unutterably happy; and outwardly she was very much the tiny lady of Oberon's court, very much the coquette quintessentialized.

It is pitiable that our proud Margaret should come to such a pass. Ah, the men that you have flouted and scorned and bedeviled and mocked at, Margaret—could they see you now, I think the basest of them could not but pity and worship you. This man is bound in honor to another woman; yet a little, and his lips will open—very dry, parched lips they are now—and he will tell you, and your pride will drive you mad, and your heart come near to breaking.

"Don't you understand—oh, you silly Billy!" She was peeping at him meltingly from under her lashes.

"I—I'm imagining vain things," said Mr. Woods. "I—oh, Peggy, Peggy, I think I must be going mad!"

He stared hungrily at the pink, startled face that lifted toward his. Ah, no, no; it could not be possible, this thing he had imagined for a moment. He had misunderstood.

And now, just for a little, thought poor Billy, let my eyes drink in those dear felicities of color and curve, and meet just for a little the splendor of those eyes that have the April in them, and rest just for a little upon that sanguine, close-grained, petulant mouth; and then I will tell her, and then I think that I must die.

"Peggy—" he began in a flattish voice.

"They have evidently gone," said the voice of Mr. Kennaston; "yes, those beautiful, happy young people have foolishly deserted the very prettiest spot in the gardens. Let us sit here, Kathleen."

"But I'm not an eavesdropper," Mr. Woods protested half-angrily.

I fear Margaret was not properly impressed.

"Please, Billy," she pleaded in a shrill whisper, "please let's listen. He's going to propose to her now, and you've no idea how funny he is when he proposes. Oh, don't be so poky, Billy—do let's listen!"

But Mr. Woods had risen with a strange celerity and was about to leave the summer-house.

Margaret pouted. Mrs. Saumarez and Mr. Kennaston were seated not twenty feet from the summer-house, on the bench which Miss Hugonin had just left. And when that unprincipled young woman finally rose to her feet, it must be confessed that it was with a toss of the head and with the reflection that though to listen wasn't honorable, it would at least be very amusing. I grieve to admit it, but with Billy's scruples she hadn't the slightest sympathy.

Then Kennaston cried suddenly: "Why, you're mad, Kathleen! Woods wants to marry *you*! Why, he's heels over head in love with Miss Hugonin!"

Miss Hugonin turned to Mr. Woods with a little intake of the breath.

No, I shall not attempt to tell you what Billy saw in her countenance. Timanthes-like, I drape before it the vines of the summer-house. For a brief space I think we had best betake ourselves outside, leaving Margaret in a very pitiable state of anger, and shame, and humiliation, and heart-break—leaving poor Billy with a heart that ached, seeing the horror of him in her face.

XXIII

MRS. SAUMAREZ laughed bitterly.

"No," she said, "Billy cared for me, you know, a long time ago; and this morning he told me he still cared. Billy doesn't pretend to be a clever man, you see, and so he can afford to practice some of the brute virtues, such as constancy and fidelity."

There was a challenging flame in her eyes, but Kennaston let the stab pass unnoticed.

To do him justice, he was thinking less of himself just now than of how this news would affect Margaret; and his face was very grave and strangely tender, for in his own fashion he loved Margaret.

"It's nasty, very nasty," he said at length, in a voice that was puzzled. "Yet I could have sworn yesterday—" Kennaston paused and laughed lightly. "She was an heiress



HER EYES DOWNCAST, HER FOOT TAPPING THE FLOOR GENTLY

yesterday, and to-day she is nobody. And Mr. Woods, being wealthy, can afford to gratify the virtues you commend so highly, and, with a fidelity that is most edifying, return again to his old love. And she welcomes him—and the Woods millions—with open arms. It is quite affecting, is it not, Kathleen?"

"You needn't be disagreeable," she observed.

"My dear Kathleen, I assure you I am not angry. I am merely a little sorry for human nature. I could have sworn Woods was honest. But rogues all, rogues all, Kathleen! Money rules us in the end; and now the parable is fulfilled, and Love, the prodigal, returns to make merry over the calf of gold. Confess," Mr. Kennaston queried with a smile, "is it not strange an all-wise Creator should have been at pains to fashion this brave world about us for little men and women such as we to lie and pilfer in? Was it worth while, think you, to arch the firmament above our rogueries, and light the ageless stars as candles to display our antics? Let us be frank, Kathleen, and confess that life is but a trivial farce ignobly played in a very stately temple." And Mr. Kennaston laughed again.

"Let us be frank!" Kathleen cried with a little catch in her voice. "Why, it isn't in you to be frank, Felix Kennaston! Your life is nothing but a succession of poses—shallow, foolish poses meant to hoodwink the world and at times yourself. For you do hoodwink yourself, don't you, Felix?" she asked eagerly; and gave him no time to answer. She feared lest his answer might dilapidate the one fortress she had been able to build about his honor.

"And now," she went on quickly, "you're trying to make me think you a devil of a fellow, aren't you? And you're hinting that I've accepted Billy because of his money, aren't you? Well, it is true that I wouldn't marry him if he were poor. But he's very far from being poor. And he cares for me. And I am fond of him. And so I shall marry him and make him as good a wife as I can. So there!"

Mrs. Saumarez faced him with an uneasy defiance. He was smiling oddly.

"I have heard it rumored in many foolish tales and jingling verses," said Mr. Kennaston, after a little, "that a thing called love exists in the world; and I have also heard, Kathleen, that it sometimes enters into the question of marriage. It appears that I was misinformed."

"No," she answered slowly, "there is a thing called love. I think women are none the better for knowing it. To a woman it means to take some man—some utterly commonplace man, perhaps—perhaps only an idle *poseur* such as you are, Felix—and to set him up on a pedestal, and to bow down and worship him; and to protest loudly both to the world and to herself that, in spite of all appearances, her idol really hasn't feet of clay, or that, at any rate, it is the very nicest clay in the world. For a time she deceives herself, Felix. Then the idol topples from the pedestal and is broken, and she sees that it is all clay, Felix—clay through and through—and her heart breaks with it."

Kennaston bowed his head. "It is true," said he; "that is the love of women."

"To a man," she went on dully, "it means to take some woman—the nearest woman who isn't actually deformed—and to make pretty speeches to her and to make her love him. And after a while—" Kathleen shrugged her shoulders drearily. "Why, after a while," said she, "he grows tired and looks for some other woman."

"It is true," said Kennaston, "yes, very true, that some men love in that fashion."

There ensued a silence. It was a long silence, and under the tension of it Kathleen's composure snapped like a cord that has been stretched to the breaking point.

"Yes, yes, yes!" she cried suddenly; "that is how I have loved you and that is how you've loved me, Felix Kennaston! Ah, Billy told me what happened last night! And that—that was why I—" Mrs. Saumarez paused and regarded him curiously. "You don't make a very noble figure just now, do you?" she asked with careful deliberation. "You were ready to sell yourself for Miss Hugonin's money, weren't you? And now you must take her without the money. Poor Felix! ah, you poor, petty liar who've overreached yourself so utterly!" And again Kathleen began to laugh.

"You are wrong," he said with a flush. "It is true that I asked Miss Hugonin to marry me. But she—very wisely, I dare say—declined."

"Ah!" Kathleen said slowly. Then—and it will not do to inquire too closely into her logic—she spoke with considerable sharpness: "She's a conceited little cat! I never in all my life knew a girl to be quite so conceited as she is. Positively, I don't believe she thinks there's a man breathing who's good enough for her!"

Kennaston grinned. "Oh, Kathleen, Kathleen!" he said; "you are simply delicious."

And Mrs. Saumarez colored prettily and tried to look severe and could not, for the simple reason that, while she knew Kennaston to be flippant, and weak, and unstable as water, and generally worthless, yet, for some occult cause, she loved him as tenderly as though he had been a paragon of all the manly virtues. And I dare say that for many of us it is by a very kindly provision of Nature that all women are created capable of doing this illogical thing, and that most of them do it daily.

"It is true," the poet said at length, "that I have played no heroic part. And I don't question, Kathleen, that I am

certain, Felix, that you never cared so much for any one else?"

Mr. Kennaston was quite certain. He proceeded to explain his feelings toward her at some length.

Kathleen listened with downcast eyes, and almost cheated herself into the belief that the man she loved was all that he should be. But at the bottom of her heart she knew he wasn't. I think we may fairly pity her.

Kennaston and Mrs. Saumarez chatted very amicably for some ten minutes. At the end of that period, the 12:45 express bellowing faintly in the distance recalled the fact that the morning mail was in, and thereupon, in the very best of humors, they set out for the house. I grieve to admit it, but Kathleen had utterly forgotten Billy by this, and was no more thinking of him than she was of the Man in the Iron Mask.

She was with Kennaston, you see; and her thoughts, and glances, and lips, and adoration were all given to his pleasing, just as her life would have been if its loss could have saved him from a toothache. He strutted a little, and was a little grateful to her, and—to do him justice—received the tribute she accorded him with perfect satisfaction and equanimity.

XXIV

MARGARET came out of the summer-house. Billy Woods followed her in a very moist state of perturbation.

"Peggy—" said Mr. Woods.

But Miss Hugonin was laughing. Clear as a bird-call she poured forth her rippling mimicry of mirth. They train women well in these matters. To Margaret, just now, her heart seemed dead within her. Her lover was proven unworthy. Her pride was shattered. She had loved this clumsy liar yonder, had given up a fortune for him, dared all for him, had (as the phrase runs) flung herself at his head. The shame of it was a physical sickness, a nausea. But now, in this jumble of miseries, in this breaking-up of the earth and the void heavens that surged about her and would not be mastered, the girl laughed; and her laughter was care-free and half-languid like that of a child who is thinking of something else. Ah, yes, they train women well in these matters.

At length Margaret said, in high, crisp accents, "Pardon me, but I can't help being amused, Mr. Woods, by the way in which hard luck dogs your footsteps. I think Fate must have some grudge against you, Mr. Woods."

"Peggy—" said Mr. Woods.

"Pardon me," she interrupted him, her masculine little chin high in the air, "but I wish you wouldn't call me that. It was well enough when we were boy and girl together, Mr. Woods. But you've developed since—ah, yes, you've developed into such a splendid actor, such a consummate liar, such a clever scoundrel, Mr. Woods, that I scarcely recognize you now."

And there was not a spark of anger in the very darkest corner of Billy's big, brave heart, but only pity—pity all through and through that sent little icy ticklings up and down his spine and turned his breathing to great sobs. For she had turned full face to him, and he could see the look in her eyes.

I think he has never forgotten it. Years after the memory of it would come upon him suddenly and send hot, drenching waves of shame and remorse surging about his body—remorse unutterable that he ever hurt his Peggy so deeply. For they were tragic eyes. Beneath them a twitching mouth smiled bravely, but the mirth of her eyes was monstrous. It was the mirth of a beaten woman, of a woman who has known the last extreme of shame and misery, and has learned to laugh at it. Even now Billy Woods cannot quite forget.

"Peggy," said he brokenly, "ah, dear, dear Peggy, listen to me!"

"Why, have you thought of a plausible lie so soon?" she queried sweetly. "Dear me, Mr. Woods, what is the use of explaining things? It's very simple. You wanted to marry me last night because I was rich; and when I declined the honor you went back to your old love. Oh, it's very simple, Mr. Woods! It's a pity, though— isn't it?—that all your promptness went for nothing. Why, dear me, you actually managed to propose before breakfast, didn't you? I should have thought that such eagerness would have made an impression on Kathleen—oh, a most favorable impression. Too bad it hasn't!"

"Listen!" said Billy; "ah, you're forcing me to talk like a cad, Peggy, but I can't see you suffer—I can't! Kathleen misunderstood what I said to her. I—I didn't mean to propose to her, Peggy. It was a mistake, I tell you. It's you I love—just you. And when I asked you to marry me

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"IT WAS A MISTAKE, I TELL YOU. IT'S YOU I LOVE—JUST YOU"

all you think me. Yet, such as I am, I love you. And such as I am, you love me, and it is I that you are going to marry and not that Woods person."

"He's worth ten of you!" she cried scornfully.

"Twenty of me, perhaps," Mr. Kennaston assented; "but that isn't the question. You don't love him, Kathleen. You are about to marry him for his money. You are about to do what I thought to do yesterday. But you won't, Kathleen. You know that I need you, my dear, and—unreasonably enough, God knows—you love me."

Mrs. Saumarez regarded him intently for a considerable space; and during that space the Eagle warred in her heart with the one foe he can never conquer. Love had a worthless ally; but Love fought staunchly.

By and by, "Yes," she said—and her voice was almost sullen—"I love you. I ought to love Billy, but I don't. I shall ask him to release me from my engagement. And yes, I will marry you if you like."

He raised her hand to his lips. "You are an angel," Mr. Kennaston was pleased to say.

"No," Mrs. Saumarez dissented rather forlornly; "I'm simply a fool. Otherwise, I wouldn't be about to marry you, knowing you, as I do, for what you are—knowing that I haven't one chance in a hundred of any happiness."

"My dear," he said—and his voice was earnest—"you know at least that what there is of good in me is at its best with you."

"Yes, yes!" Kathleen cried quickly. "That is so, isn't it, Felix? And you do care for me, don't you? Felix, are you sure you care for me—quite sure? And are you quite

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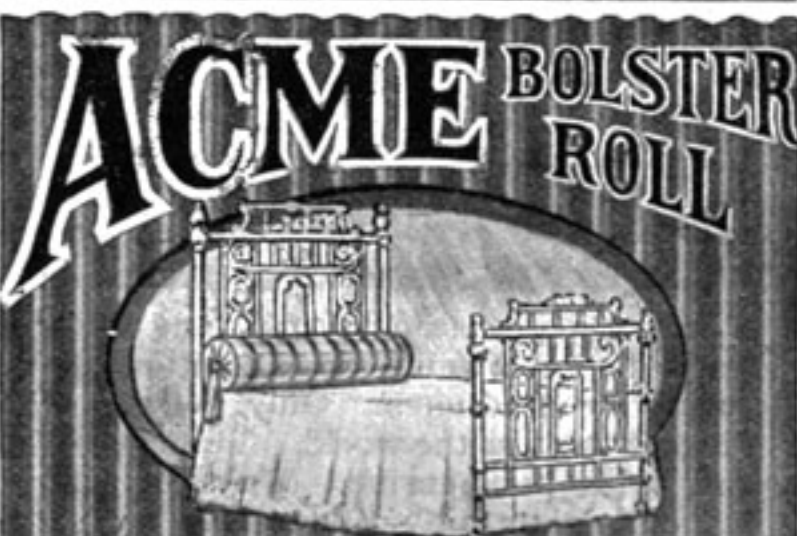
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THE EAGLE'S SHADOW

(Continued from Page 11)

last night—why, I thought the money was mine, Peggy. I'd never have asked you if I hadn't thought that. I—ah, you don't believe me, you don't believe me, Peggy, and I swear I'm telling you the simple truth! Why, I hadn't ever seen that last will, Peggy! It was locked up in that centre place in the desk, you remember. Why—why, you yourself had the keys to it, Peggy. Surely you remember, dear?" And Billy's voice shook and skipped whole octaves as he pleaded with her, for he knew she did not believe him, and he could not endure the horror of her eyes.

But Margaret shook her head; and as aforetime the twitching lips continued to laugh beneath those tragic eyes. Ah, poor little lady of Elfland! poor little Undine with a soul awakened to suffering!

"Clumsy, very clumsy!" she rebuked him. "I see that you are accustomed to prepare your lies in advance, Mr. Woods. As an extemporaneous liar you are very clumsy. Men don't propose by mistake except in farces; and while we are speaking of farces, don't you think it time to drop that one of your not knowing about that last will?"

"The farce!" Billy stammered. "You—why, you saw me when I found it!"

"Ah, yes, I saw you when you pretended to find it. I saw you when you pretended to unlock that centre place. But now, of course, I know it never was locked. I'm very careless about locking things, Mr. Woods. Ah, yes, that gave you a beautiful opportunity, didn't it? So, when you were rummaging through my desk—without my permission, by the way, but that's a detail—you found both wills and concocted your little comedy? That was very clever. Oh, you think you're awfully smooth, don't you, Billy Woods? But if you had been a bit more daring, don't you see, you could have suppressed the last one and taken the money without being encumbered by me? That was rather clumsy of you, wasn't it?" Suave, gentle, sweet as honey was the speech of Margaret as she lifted her face to his, but her eyes were tragedies.

"Ah!" said Billy. "Ah—yes—you think—that." He was very careful in articulating his words, was Billy, and afterward he nodded his head gravely. The universe had, somehow, suffered an airy dissolution like that of Prospero's masque—Selwoode and its gardens, the great globe itself, "the cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces, the solemn temples," were all as vanished wraiths. There was only Peggy left—Peggy with that unimaginable misery in her eyes that he must drive away, somehow. If that was what she thought there was no way for him to prove it wasn't so.

"Why, dear me, Mr. Woods," she retorted carelessly, "what else could I think?"

Here Mr. Woods blundered. "Ah, think what you will, Peggy!" he cried, his big voice cracking and sobbing, and resonant with pain. "Ah, my dear, think what you will, but don't grieve for it, Peggy! Why, if I'm all you say I am, that's no reason you should suffer for it! Ah, don't, don't, Peggy! don't! I can't bear it, dear," he pleaded with her helplessly.

Billy was suffering, too. But her sorrow was the chief of his, and what stung him now to impotent anger was that she must suffer, and he be unable to help her—for, ah, how willingly, how gladly, he would have borne all poor Peggy's woes upon his own broad shoulders!

But, none the less, he had lost an invaluable opportunity to hold his tongue.

"Suffer! I suffer!" she mocked him languidly; and then, like a banjo-string, the tension snapped, and she gave a long, angry gasp, and her wrath flamed.

"Upon my word, you're the most conceited man I ever knew in my life! You think I'm in love with you! With you! Billy Woods, I wouldn't wipe my feet on you if you were the last man left on earth! I hate you, I loathe you, I detest you, I despise you! Do you hear me? I hate you. What do I care if you are a snob, and a cad, and a fortune-hunter, and a forger, and—well, I don't care! Perhaps you haven't ever forged anything yet, but I'm quite sure you would if you ever got an opportunity. You'd be delighted to do it. Yes, you would—you're just the sort of man who revels in crime. I love you! Why, that's the best joke I've

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heard for a long time. I'm only sorry for you, Billy Woods—sorry because Kathleen has thrown you over—sorry, do you understand? Yes, since you're so fond of skinny women, I think it's a great pity she wouldn't have you. Don't talk to me! she is skinny. I guess I know. She's as skinny as a bean-pole. She's skinnier than I ever imagined it possible for anybody—anybody—to be. And she pads and rouges till I think it's disgusting, and not half—not one-half—of her hair belongs to her, and that half is dyed. But, of course, if you like that sort of thing there's no accounting for tastes, and I'm sure I'm very sorry for you, even though personally I don't care for skinny women. I hate 'em! And I hate you, too, Billy Woods!"

She stamped her foot, did Margaret. You must bear with her, for her heart is breaking now, and if she has become a termagant it is because her shamed pride has driven her mad. Bear with her, then, a little longer.

Billy tried to bear with her, for, in part, he understood.

"Peggy," said he very gently, "you're wrong."

"Yes, I dare say!" she snapped at him.

"We won't discuss Kathleen, if you please. But you're wrong about the will. I've told you the whole truth about that, but I don't blame you for not believing me, Peggy—ah, no, not I. There seems to be a curse upon Uncle Fred's money. It brings out the worst of all of us. It has changed even you, Peggy—and not for the better, Peggy. You've become distrustful. You—ah, well, we won't discuss that now. Give me the will, my dear, and I'll burn it before your eyes. That ought to show you, Peggy, that you're wrong." Billy was very white-lipped as he ended, for the Woods temper is a short one.

But she had an arrow left for him. "Give it to you! And do you think I'd trust you with it, Billy Woods?"

"Peggy!—ah, Peggy, I hadn't deserved that. Be just, at least, to me," poor Billy begged of her; which was an absurd thing to ask of an angry woman.

"Yes, I do know what you'd do with it! You'd take it right off, and have it probated, or executed, or whatever it is they do to wills, and turn me straight out in the gutter. That's just what you're longing to do this very moment. Oh, I know, Billy Woods—I know what a temper you've got, and I know you're keeping quiet now simply because you know that's the most exasperating thing you can possibly do. I wouldn't have such a disposition as you've got for the world. You've absolutely no control over your temper—not a bit of it. You're vile, Billy Woods! Oh, I hate you! Yes, you've made me cry, and I suppose you're very proud of yourself. Aren't you proud? Don't stand staring at me like a stuck pig, but answer me when I talk to you. Aren't you proud of making me cry? Aren't you? Ah, don't talk to me—don't talk to me, I tell you. I don't wish to hear a word you've got to say. I hate you. And you sha'n't have the money, that's flat."

"I don't want it," said Billy. "I've been trying to tell you for the last half-hour I don't want it. Why can't you talk like a sensible woman, Peggy?" I am afraid that Mr. Woods, too, was beginning to lose his temper.

"That's right—insult me! It only needed that. You do want the money, and when you say you don't you're lying—lying—lying, do you understand? You all want my money. Oh, dear, dear!" Margaret wailed, and her great voice was shaken to its depths, and its sobbing was the long, hopeless sobbing of a violin, as she flung back her tear-stained face and clenched her little hands tight at her sides; "why can't you let me alone? You're all after my money—you and Mr. Kennaston, and Mr. Jukesbury, and all of you! Why can't you let me alone? Ever since I've had it you've hunted me as if I'd been a wild beast. I haven't had a moment's peace, a moment's rest, a moment's quiet, since Uncle Fred died. They all want my money—everybody wants my money! Oh, Billy, Billy, why can't they let me alone?"

"Peggy—" said he.

But she interrupted him. "Don't talk to me, Billy Woods! Don't you dare talk to me. I told you I didn't wish to hear a word you had to say, didn't I? Yes, you all want my money. And you sha'n't have it. It's mine. Uncle Fred left it to me. It's mine, I tell you. I've got the greatest thing in the world—money! And I'll keep it. Ah, I hate you all—every one of you—but I'll make you cringe to me. I'll make you all cringe, do you hear, because I've got the money you're ready to sell your paltry souls



Professor Huxley said:

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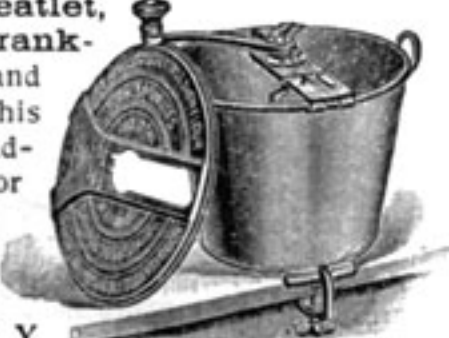
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for! Oh, I'll make you cringe most of all, Billy Woods! I'm rich, do you hear?—rich—rich! Wouldn't you be glad to marry the rich Margaret Hugonin, Billy?—ah, haven't you schemed hard for that? You'd be glad to do it, wouldn't you? You'd give your petty little soul for that, wouldn't you, Billy? Ah, what a cur you are! Well, some day, perhaps, I'll buy you just as I would any other cur. Wouldn't you be glad if I did, Billy? Beg for it, Billy! Beg, sir! Beg!" And Margaret flung back her head again and laughed shrilly, and held up her hand before him as one holds a lump of sugar before a pug-dog.

In Selwoode I can fancy how the Eagle screamed his triumph.

But Billy's face was ashen.

"Before God!" he said between his teeth, "loving you, as I do, I wouldn't marry you now for all the wealth in the world! The money has ruined you—ruined you, Peggy."

For a little she stared at him. By and by, "I dare say it has," she said in a strangely sober tone. "I've been scolding like a fish-wife. I beg your pardon, Mr. Woods—not for what I've said, because I meant every word of it, but I beg your pardon for saying it. Don't come with me, please."

Blindly she turned from him. Her shoulders had the droop of an old woman's. Margaret was wearied now, wearied with the weariness of death.

For a while Mr. Woods stared after the tired little figure that trudged straight onward in the sunlight, stumbling as she went. Then a pained walk swallowed her, and Mr. Woods groaned.

"Oh, Peggy, Peggy!" he said in bottomless compassion; "oh, my poor little Peggy! How changed you are!"

Afterward Mr. Woods sank down upon the bench and buried his face in his hands. He sat there for a long time. I don't believe he thought of anything very clearly. His mind was a turgid chaos of misery; and about him the birds shrilled and quavered and caroled till the air was vibrant with their trilling. One might have thought they choired in honor of the Eagle's triumph, in mockery of poor Billy.

Then Mr. Woods raised his head with a queer, alert look. Surely he had heard a voice—the dearest of all voices.

"Billy!" it wailed; "oh, Billy, Billy!"

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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WHEN "Tom" Taggart, the chairman of the Democratic National Committee, was a very young man he was appointed a deputy sheriff. It was his first office, and he determined to do his duty. The morning after the honor fell he was called to the door before breakfast by a neighbor who excitedly pointed out a man, bareheaded and dressed in old clothes, who was sprinting rapidly down the road.

"Tom," cried the neighbor, "catch him—catch him! He just knocked a man down and half killed him. Nail him 'fore he escapes!"

Tom vaulted over the front gate and started in pursuit. The man was some distance ahead, but Tom was fresh and ran like a deer. At first he gained on the fellow, but it seemed impossible to come up with him. To Tom's frantic cries to halt in the name of the law the man paid not the least heed. Tom felt for his revolver, but remembered that he had left it under his pillow. If he went back after it he would lose sight of the man. It was too early for any one to be abroad; so there was no chance to impress a posse comitatus. On they sped, with the ambitious deputy sheriff about one hundred yards in the rear.

At the end of a mile or two the fellow turned to the right into a cross-road; this manœuvre he repeated four times in succession, and Tom found himself at the end of an hour in the same road in which he had started, but a couple of miles farther down. Here the fleeing criminal made a sudden spurt and left the officer behind. Still Tom struggled desperately on. Finally he met an old friend.

"Say," he gasped with his last breath, "did you see a bareheaded man go by here on the run? He's a murderer, maybe, and I'm after him."

"I ain't seen nobody," replied the friend, "except that Chicago prize-fighter who come down here to train. He goes by here 'bout this time every morning. Runs ten miles 'fore breakfast to improve his wind, they say."



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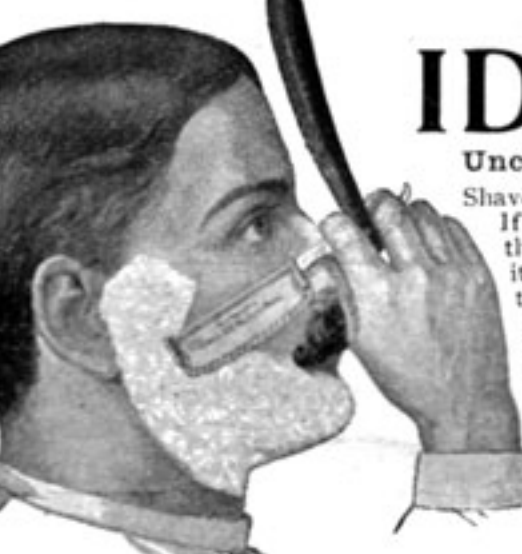
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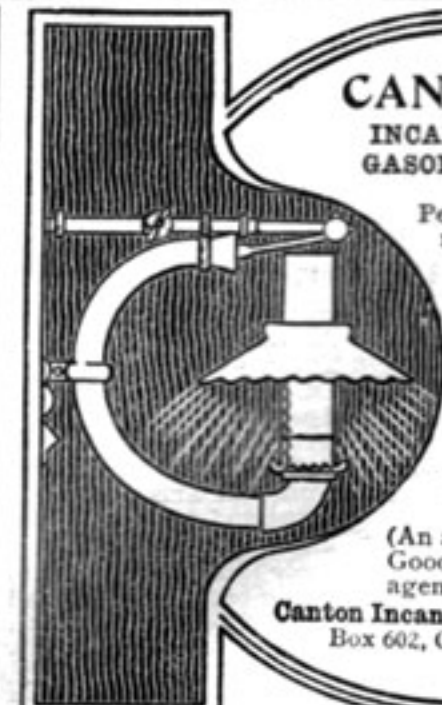
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