

THE MOVING FINGER

By HAROLD CARTER.

"No, sir, I won't let you look at my eyes, nor I won't have you round here neither," snarled "Pop" Hendon to young Doctor Gray.

The young physician had only spent three months in Greenville, but that was quite long enough to convince him that "Pop" Hendon was, as the neighbors said, the crankiest old man in Bretton county.

Doctor Gray did not mind the old fellow's moods. Before he had gone blind, five years before, Hendon had been a good neighbor and citizen. Since his blindness he had become morose and suspicious. The worst feature of the situation, so far as the doctor was concerned, was that "Pop" suspected the young man's love for his only child, Alice, and took a malicious pleasure in taunting him about it.

The young fellow was not yet in a position to marry. Alice would have waited for him; but she could not leave her father. She was all he had.

The young doctor had a last interview with his sweetheart that afternoon.

"Dearest, I will wait for you as long as is necessary," she said. "But so long as my father lives we must be just good friends and nothing more. If he were not blind I would leave all and come to you."

Gray understood. He kissed her fondly and went back to his office, resolved to throw himself with all his energy into his work and try to forget, until the time came to claim her.

And so a year passed by. Rarely, when Gray had occasion to pass the house, he would see the old man, implacable as ever, seated upon his porch, spelling out the Braille words with his right forefinger. He seemed conscious of the doctor's presence, and would look up and scowl heavily when Gray went by.

One day Gray had an urgent call on the telephone. It was from Alice.

"Wont' you come up at once?" she begged. "Doctor Clifton is away and father has had a bad accident."

A medical man knows no enmities where his profession is concerned. Half an hour later Gray was at the house and being shown into the old man's sick room.

Hendon had been knocked down by an automobile while trying to cross the street. He had taken malicious delight in running away from his daughter, and had been struck fairly by the machine. He was badly bruised; but, what was worse, the tendons of his right hand had been crushed.

Gray saw at a glance that, while the hand could be made serviceable, Hendon would never again be able to straighten the fingers completely.

"You're the young fellow who used to be sweet on Alice, ain't you?" he snarled. "I thought you'd drop her as soon as you learned there wasn't any money coming with her."

"Let me see that hand, please," answered Gray.

A week later "Pop" Hendon learned

the truth. His hand would be useful for all purposes except one; never again would he be able sufficiently to flex the forefinger so as to feel the raised type with the delicate nerve tissue underneath the first joint.

When the news was broken to him the old man's agony was painful to witness. He lay still without speaking for days together, interspersing these periods of moroseness, however, with outbreaks of maniacal fury. At such times only Gray could restrain him from flinging himself out of the window. Somehow the young doctor seemed to have acquired a certain influence over the morose old man.

It was after one of these maniacal spells that Gray addressed Hendon, who was lying exhausted upon his bed.

"Mr. Hendon," he said, "I may as well tell you that I took the occasion just now to examine your eyes."

Hendon lay on the bed in dogged silence.

"I believe your trouble is nothing but cataract," he continued. "I have been to the doctors who examined you before and seen their records. What they told you was that your case was incurable at present, but might be alleviated later."

"Yes, trying to fool me into spending more money on 'em," snarled "Pop" Hendon.

"No, sir," answered Doctor Gray decisively. "A cataract cannot be operated upon until it has reached a certain stage of hardness, about a year after it begins. You were the victim of your own suspicions. You could have been cured years ago. You can be cured now."

"Will you do it, Doc?" gasped old Hendon, turning his face upon Gray's with a look of wistful hope in his eyes.

Two weeks later "Pop" Hendon, seated in the dining room, waited for the bandage to be lifted. The morose old man had been strangely silent during the period of waiting.

Doctor Gray took off the bandages. "Well, sir?" he demanded.

"Pop" Hendon leaped out of his chair. "I can see!" he screamed, clasping Gray violently by the hands. "Lord, I can see again. Doc, how good the world is!"

With which sentiment the doctor was in entire sympathy, as he drew Alice toward him and kissed her. And "Pop" Hendon beamed on them through his heavy lenses.

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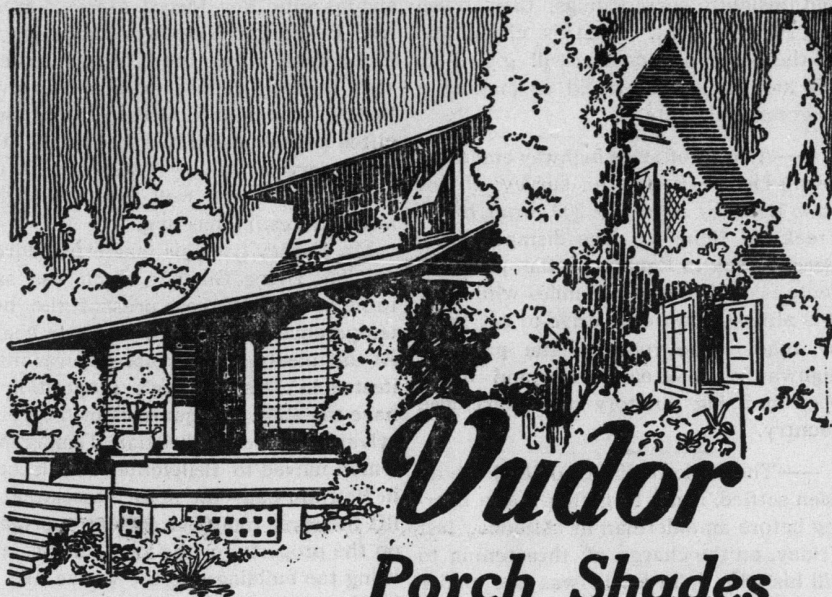
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