



The Man on the Box

By HAROLD MacGRATH
Author of "The Grey Cloak," "The Puppet Crown."

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CHAPTER XVIII.—CONTINUED.

During the music Karloff and Colonel Annesley drifted into the latter's study. What passed between them I gather from bits recently dropped by Warburton.

"Good God, Karloff, what a net you have sprung about me!" said the colonel, despairingly.

"My dear Colonel, you have only to step out of it. It is the eleventh hour; it is not too late." But Karloff watched the colonel eagerly.

"How in God's name can I step out of it?"

"Simply reimburse me for that \$20,000 I advanced to you in good faith, and nothing more need be said." The count's Slavonic eyes were half-lidded.

"To give you back that amount will leave me a beggar, an absolute beggar, without a roof to shelter me. I am too old for service, and besides, I am physically incapacitated. If you should force me, I could not meet my note save by selling the house my child was born in. Have you discounted it?"

"No. Why should I present it at the bank? It does not mature till next Monday, and I am in no need of money."

"What a wretch I am!" Karloff raised his shoulders resignedly.

"My daughter."

"Or my ducats," whimsically quoted the count. "Come, Colonel: do not waste time in useless retrospect. He stumbles who looks back. I have been thinking of your daughter. I love her, deeply, eternally."

"You love her?"

"Yes. I love her because she appeals to all that is young and good in me; because she represents the highest type of womanhood. With her as my wife, why, I should be willing to renounce my country, and your indebtedness would be crossed out of existence with one stroke of the pen."

The colonel's haggard face grew light with sudden hopefulness.

"I have been," the count went on, studying the ash of his cigar, "till this night what the world and my own conscience consider an honorable man. I have never wronged a man or woman personally. What I have done on the order of duty does not agitate my conscience. I am simply a machine. The moral responsibility rests with the czar. When I saw your daughter, I deeply regretted that you were her father."

The colonel grew rigid in his chair. "Do not misunderstand me. Before I saw her, you were but the key to what I desired. As her father the matter took on a personal side. I could not very conscientiously make love to your daughter and at the same time—"

Karloff left the sentence incomplete.

"And Betty?"—in half a whisper.

"Has refused me,"—quietly. "But I have not given her up; no, I have not given her up."

"What do you mean to do?"

Karloff got up and walked about the room. "Make her my wife,"—simply. He stooped and studied the titles of some of the books in the cases. He turned to find that the colonel had risen and was facing him with flaming eyes.

"I demand to know how you intend to accomplish this end," the colonel said. "My daughter shall not be dragged into this trap."

"To-morrow night I shall explain everything; to-night, nothing,"—imperiously.

"Karloff, to-night I stand a ruined and dishonored man. My head, once held so proudly before my fellow-men, is bowed with shame. The country I have fought and bled for I have in part betrayed. But not for my gain, not for my gain. No, no! Thank God that I can say that! Personal greed has not tainted me. Alone, I should have gone severely into some poorhouse and eked out an existence on my half-pay. But this child of mine, whom I love doubly, for her mother's sake and her own,—I would gladly cut off both arms,—I spare her a single pain, to keep her in the luxury which she still believes rightly to be hers. When the fever of passion possessed me, I should have told her. I did not; therein lies my mistake. The mistake which has brought me to this horrible end. Virgins sacrifice their child to save her; I will sacrifice my honor to save mine."

"Force her to wed a man she does not love? No. To-morrow we shall complete this dishonorable bargain. The plans are all fixed but one. Now leave me; I am alone."

"It is my deep regret—"

"There is nothing more to be said."

He withdrew. He went soberly with nothing sneering nor contemptuous in his attitude. Indeed, there was a frown of pity on his face. He recognized that circumstances had dragged down a noble man; that he had tricked him of his honor. He hated his own evil plan! He his shoulders, determined once

more to put it to the touch to win or lose it all.

He found her at the bow-window, staring up at the moon. As I remarked this room was dark, and she did not instantly recognize him.

"I am moon-gazing," she said. "Let me sigh for it with you. Perhaps together we may bring it down." There was something very pleasing in the quality of his tone.

"Ah, it is you, Count? I could not see. But let us not sigh for the moon; it would be useless. Does any one get his own wish-true? Does it not always hang so high, so far away?"

"The music has affected you?"

"As it always does. When I hear a voice like madam's, I grow sad, and a pity for the great world surges over me."

"Pity is the invisible embrace which enfolds all animate things. There is pity for the wretched, for the fool, for the innocent knave, for those who are criminals by their own folly; pity for those who love without reward; pity that embraces . . . even me."

Silence.

"Has it ever occurred to you that there are two beings in each of us; that between these two there is a continual conflict, and that the victor finally prints the victory on the face? For what lines and haggards a man's face but the victory of the evil that is in him? For what makes aged ruddy and smooth of face and clear of eye but the victory of the good that is in him? It is so. I still love you; I still have the courage to ask you to be my wife. Shall there be faces haggard or ruddy, lined or smooth?"

She stepped inside. She did not comprehend all he said, and his face was in the shadow—that is to say, unreadable.

"I am sorry, very, very sorry."

"How easily you say that!"

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"Warburton, what the devil does this mean—a lieutenant of mine peddling soup around a gentleman's table?"

CHAPTER XIX.

"OH, MISTER BUTLER."

Warburton had never lacked that rare and peculiar gift of immediately adapting himself to circumstances. To lie now would be folly, worse than useless. He had addressed this man at his side by his military title. He stood committed. He saw that he must throw himself wholly on the colonel's mercy and his sense of the humorous. He pointed toward the stables and drew the colonel after him; but the colonel held back.

"That rose first; I insist upon having that rose till you have given me a satisfactory account of yourself."

Warburton reluctantly surrendered his treasure. Force of habit is a peculiar one. The colonel had no real authority to demand the rose; but Warburton would no more have thought of disobeying than of running away.

"You will give it back to me?"

"That remains to be seen. Go on; I am ready to follow you. And I do not want any dragging story, either." The colonel spoke impatiently.

Warburton led him into his room and turned on the light. The colonel seated himself on the edge of the cot and lighted a fresh cigar.

"Well, sir, out with it. I am waiting."

Warburton took several turns about the room. "I don't know how the deuce to begin, Colonel. It began with a joke that turned out wrong."

"Indeed?"—sarcastically. "Let me hear about this joke."

M'sieu Zhamès dallied no longer, but plunged boldly into his narrative. Sometimes the colonel stared at him as if he beheld a species of lunatic absolutely new to him, sometimes he laughed silently, sometimes he frowned.

"That's all," said Zhamès; and he stood watching the colonel with dread in his eyes.

"Well, of all the damn fools!"

"Sir?"

"Of all the jackasses!"

Warburton bit his lip angrily. The colonel swung the rose to and fro. "Yes, sir, a damn fool!"

"I dare say that I am, sir. But I have gone too far to back out now. Will you give me back that rose, Colonel?"

"What do you mean by her?"—coldly.

"I love her with all my heart,"—hotly. "I want her for my comrade, my wife, my companion, my partner in all I have to do. I love her, and I don't care a hang who knows it."

"Not so loud, my friend; not so loud."

"Oh, I don't care who hears,"—discouragedly.

"That beats the very devil! You've got me all balled up. Is Betty Annesley a girl of the kind we read about in the papers as eloping with her groom. What earthly chance had you in this guise, I should like to know?"

"I only wanted to be near her; I did not look ahead."

"Well, I should say not! How long were you behind that trellis?"

"A year, so it seemed to me."

"Any lunatics among your ancestors?"

Warburton shook his head, smiling wanly.

"I can't make it out," declared the colonel. "A graduate of West Point, the fop of Troop A, the hero of a hundred ball-rooms, disguised as a hostler and serving soup!"

"Always keep the motive in mind, Colonel; you were young yourself once."

She interpreted this as a plaint of his coming loneliness.

"Here!" she said. She held in her hands two red roses. She thrust one toward him. "That is all I may give you."

For a moment he hesitated. There were thorns, invisible and stinging.

"Take it!"

He accepted it, kissed it gravely, and hid it.

"This is the bitterest moment in my life, and doubly because I love you."

When the portiere fell behind him, she locked her hands, grieving that all she could give him was an ephemeral flower. How many men had turned from her in this wise, even as she began to depend upon them for their friendships! The dark room oppressed her and she stepped out once more into the silver of moonshine. Have you ever beheld a lovely woman fondle a lovely rose? She drew it, pendent on its slender stem, slowly across her lips, her eyes shining mistily with waking dreams. She breathed in the perfume, then cupped the flower in the palm of her hand and pressed it again and again to her lips. A long white arm stretched forward and upward toward the moon, and when it withdrew the hand was empty.

Warburton, hidden behind the vines, waited until she was gone, and then hunted in the grass for the precious flower. On his hands and knees he groped. The dew did not matter. And when at last he found it, not all the treasures of the fabled Ophir would have tempted him to part with it. It would be a souvenir for his later days.

As he rose from his knees he was confronted by a broad-shouldered, elderly man in evening clothes. The end of a cigar burned brightly between his teeth.

"I'll take that flower, young man, if you please."

Warburton's surprise was too great for sudden recovery.

"It is mine, Colonel," he stammered. The colonel flipped away his cigar and caught my butler roughly by the arm.

"SHALL YOU EXPOSE ME?"

The colonel thought of the girl's mother. Yes he had been young once, but not quite so young as this cub of his.

"What chance do you suppose you have against the handsome Russian?"

"She has rejected him,"—thoughtlessly.

"Hat!"—frowning. "So you were eavesdropping?"

"Wait a moment, Colonel. You know that I am very fond of music. I was listening to the music. It had ceased and I was waiting for it to begin again, when I heard voices."

"Why did you not leave then?"

"And be observed? I dared not!"

The colonel chewed the end of his cigar in silence.

"And now may I have that rose, sir?"—quietly.

The colonel observed him warily. He knew that quiet tone. It said that if he refused to give up the rose he would have to fight for it, and probably get licked into the bargain.

"I've a notion you might attempt to take it by force in case I refused."

"I surrendered it peacefully enough, sir."

"So you did. Here." The colonel tossed the flower across the room and Warburton caught it.

"I should like to know, sir, if you are going to expose me. It's no more than I deserve."

The colonel studied the lithographs on the walls. "Your selection?"—with a wave of the hand.

"No, sir. I should like to know what you are going to do. It would relieve my mind. As a matter of fact, I confess that I am growing weary of the mask." Warburton waited.

"You make a very respectable butler, though,"—musingly.

"Shall you expose me, sir?"—persistently.

"No lad. I should not want it to get about that a former officer of mine could possibly make such an ass of himself. You have slept all night in jail, you have groomed horses, you have worn a livery which no gentleman with any self-respect would wear, and all to no purpose whatever. Why, in the name of the infernal regions, didn't you meet her in a formal way? There would have been plenty of opportunities."

Warburton shrugged; so did the colonel, who stood up and shook the wrinkles from his trousers.

"Shall you be long in Washington, sir?" asked Warburton, politely.

"In a hurry to get rid of me, eh?"—with a grim smile. "Well, perhaps in a few days."

"Good night."

The colonel stopped at the threshold, and his face melted suddenly into a warm, humorous smile. He stretched out a hand which Warburton grasped most gratefully. His colonel had been playing with him.

[To Be Continued.]

TALE OF "HANS BRINKER."

Work of Famous Author That Went Begging, But Achieved Success.

The fact that many a popular work has passed through more than one publishing house before finding one courageous enough to issue it is one of the commonplaces of the history of literature. Among the classics of juvenile literature no story has a more cherished place than "Hans Brinker," written by Mrs. Mary Mapes Dodge, whose recent death has deprived the young people of many countries of a sympathetic friend. The Book Buyer gives a little account of the growth of the "Silver Skates."

In the early days of her authorship Mrs. Dodge received a request for a short story from the editor of the Independent. Holland, with its quaint customs and picturesque background, had always fascinated the writer, and she chose that country for the scene of her tale.

Skating was the favorite pastime of her two boys, who liked nothing better than the skating stories told by their mother before the open fire. These two factors decided the motive of the tale.

But "Hans Brinker" rapidly outgrew the limits of the Independent. The publication in a weekly journal was out of the question. So Mrs. Dodge offered the story to a publisher, who refused it. Again she tried. This time the manuscript was returned with the verdict that no Holland story could be popular. Finally the first publisher very reluctantly consented to take the book, and he put it upon the market with great misgivings.

To the publisher's surprise, the book instantly won its popularity, which has in 40 years shown no sign of diminishing. The yearly sales amount to over 3,000 copies in this country. In Great Britain more copies are sold than of any other juvenile book.

It has been translated into Dutch, German, French, Italian and Russian, and like its hero, has won the race. The French Academy presented its author with a prize, but its greatest triumph is the place it holds in the hearts of the young people.

An "Ade" to Digestion.

Among the many attempts to play upon George Ade's surname, the one here given is perhaps, one of the best. A man from northern Wisconsin, who met the humorist some time ago, told him how his writings had made existence more tolerable for him in his lonely country home.

"I was a terrible sufferer from dyspepsia," said he, "but I read that laughing was helpful to the digestive organs, so when I went to the city next time I stepped into a book store and told them I wanted something 'amazin.' They give me some of your books, and after meals I had my ole woman read to me from 'em. And, I say, it don't make no difference how much they criticize your books, you're an aid to digestion, anyway."—Success Magazine.

Assisted.

"Reggie, how did you ever summon courage to propose to Miss Wellalons?"

"I—I didn't propose to her. She—er—just took it for granted!"—Chicago Tribune.

A Specialty.

"Some men," said Uncle Eben, "is not only willin' to confess der faults, but dey goes to de extreme of actin' like dey was proud of 'em."—Washington Star.

Failed in the Chase.

"You do wrong to suspect that man. He always pursued an upright life."

"Then I'm sure he never overtook it."—Baltimore American.

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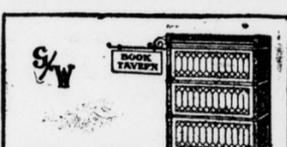
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