



The Man on the Box

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

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CHAPTER XXII.—CONTINUED.

"She knew! That was why she asked me all these questions; that is why she exacted those promises! Mrs. Chadwick knew and dared not tell me! And I trusted you as a friend, as a gentleman, as a man of honor!" Her laughter rang out wildly. "And for these favors you bring dishonor! Shame! Shame! Your wife? Have you thought well of what you are about to do?"

"So well," he declared, "that I shall proceed to the end, to the very end. How beautiful she was! And a mad desire urged him to spring to her, crush her in his arms, and force upon her lips a thousand mad kisses!"

"Have you weighed well the consequences?"

"Upon love's most delicate scales." "Have you calculated what manner of woman I am?"—with subdued fierceness.

"To me you are the woman of all women."

"Do you think that I am a faint-hearted girl? You are making a mistake. I am a woman with a woman's mind, and a thousand years would not alter my utter contempt of you. Force me to marry you, and as there is a God above us to witness, every



DROPPED IT INTO THE FIRE.

moment of suffering you now inflict upon me and mine, I shall give back a day, a long, bitter, galling day. Do you think that it will be wise to call me countless?" Her scorn was superb. "I am waiting for your answer. Will you be my wife, or shall I be forced to make my villainy definitive?"

"Permit me to take upon these shoulders the burden of answering that question," said a voice from the window.

Warburton, dressed in his stable clothes and leggings, hatless and drenched with rain, stepped into the room from the veranda and quickly crossed the intervening space. Before any one of the tragic group could recover from the surprise caused by his unexpected appearance, he had picked up the packet of plans and had dropped it into the fire. Then he leaned with his back against the mantel and faced them, or rather Karloff, of whom he was not quite sure.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SOMETHING ABOUT HEROES.

From Warburton's dramatic entrance upon the scene to Karloff's first movement, scarce a minute has passed, though to the girl and her father an eternity seemed to come and go. Karloff was a brave man. Upon the instant of his recovery he sprang toward Warburton, silently and with premeditation: he must regain some fragment of those plans. He would not, could not, suffer total defeat before his girl's eyes; his blood rebelled against the thought. He expected the room to strike him, but James simply caught him by the arms and thrust him back.

"No, Count; no, no; they shall burn the veriest crisp!"

"Stand aside, lackey!" cried Karloff, sob of rage strangling him. Again he rushed upon Warburton, his lencned hand uplifted. Warburton did not even raise his hands this time. As they stood, their faces within a hand's span of each other, the one smiling coldly, the other in the attitude of striking a blow. Karloff's hand fell unexpectedly, but not on the man in front of him. "Good God, no! A gentleman does not strike a lackey! Stand aside, stand aside!"

"They shall burn, Count,"—quietly; they shall burn, because I am physically the stronger." Warburton turned sickly and with the toe of his boot lifted the glowing packet and renewed its flames. "I never realized till tonight that I loved my country half so well. Lackey? Yes, for the present."

He had not looked at the girl. "Ah!" Karloff cried, intelligence glinting in his face. "You are no lackey!"—subduing his voice.

"Who are you? I demand to know!" "First and foremost, I am a citizen of the United States; I have been a soldier besides. It was my common right to destroy these plans, which indirectly menaced my country's safety. These,"—pointing to the banknotes, "are yours, I believe. Nothing further requires your presence here."

"Yes, yes; I remember now! Fool that I have been!" Karloff struck his forehead in helpless rage. "I never observed you closely till now. I recall. The secret service: Europe, New York, Washington; you have known it all along. Spy!"

"That is an epithet which easily rebounds. Spy? Why, yes; I do for my country what you do for yours."

"The name, the name! I can not recollect the name! The beard is gone, but that does not matter,"—excitedly.

Warburton breathed easier. While he did not want the girl to know who he was just then, he was glad that Karloff's memory had taken his thought away from the grate and its valuable but rapidly disappearing fuel.

"Father! Father, what is it?" cried the girl, her voice keyed to agony. "Father!"

The two men turned about. Annesley had fainted in his chair. Both Warburton and Karloff mechanically started forward to offer aid, but she repelled their approach.

"Do not come near me; you have done enough. Father, dear!" She slapped the colonel's wrists and unloosed his collar.

The antagonists, forgetting their own battle, stood silently watching hers. Warburton's mind was first to clear and without a moment's hesitation he darted from the room and immediately returned with a glass of water. He held it out to the girl. Their glances clashed; a thousand mute, angry questions in her eyes, a thousand mute, humble answers in his. She accepted the glass, and her hand trembled as she dipped her fingers into the cool depths and flicked the drops into the unconscious man's face.

Meanwhile Karloff stood with folded arms, staring melancholically into the grate, where his dreams had disappeared in smoke.

By and by the colonel sighed and opened his eyes. For a time he did not know where he was, and his gaze wandered mistily from face to face. Then recollection came back to him, recollection bristling with thorns. He struggled to his feet and faced Warburton. The girl put her arms around him to steady him, but he gently disengaged himself.

"Are you from the secret service, sir? If so, I am ready to accompany you wherever you say. I, who have left my blood on many a battle-ground, was about to commit a treasonable act. Allow me first to straighten up my affairs, then you may do with me as you please. I am guilty of a crime; I have the courage to pay the penalty."

His calm was extraordinary, and even Karloff looked at him with a sparkle of admiration.

As a plummet plunges into the sea, so the girl's look plunged into Warburton's soul; and had he been an officer of the law, he knew that he would have utterly disregarded his duty.

"I am not a secret service man, sir," he replied unevenly. "If I were,"—pointing to the grate, "your plans would not have fed the fire."

"Who are you, then, and what do you in my house in this guise?"—proudly.

"I am your head stable-man—for the present. It was all by chance. I came into this room yesterday to get a book on veterinary surgery. I accidentally saw a plan. I have been a soldier. I knew that such a thing had no rightful place in this house. . . . I was coming across the lawn, when I looked into the window. . . . It is not for me to judge you, sir. My duty lay in destroying those plans before they harmed any one."

"No, it is not for you to judge me," said the colonel. "I have gambled away my daughter's fortune. To keep her in ignorance of the fact and to return to her the amount I had wrongfully used, I consented to sell to Russia the coast fortification plans of my country, such as I could draw from memory. No, it is not for you to judge me; only God has the right to do that."

"I am only a groom," said Warburton, simply. "What I have heard I shall forget."

Ah, had he but looked at the girl's face then!

A change came over Karloff's countenance; his shoulders drooped; the melancholy fire died out of his face and eyes. With an air of resignation and a clear sense of the proportion of things, he reached out and took up the note upon which Annesley had scrawled his signature.

Warburton, always alert, seized the count's wrist. He saw the name of a bank and the sum of five figures.

"What is this?" he demanded.

"It is mine," replied the count, haughtily.

Warburton released him.

"He speaks truly," said the colonel. "It is his."

"The hour of madness is past," the Russian began, slowly and musically. The tone was musing. He seemed oblivious of his surroundings and that three pairs of curious eyes were leveled in his direction. He studied the note, creased it, drew it through his fingers, smoothed it and caressed it. "And I should have done exactly as I threatened. There is, then, a Providence which watches jealously over the innocent? And I was a skeptic!"

Two hundred thousand dollars,—picking up the packet of banknotes and balancing it on his hand. "Well it is a sum large enough to tempt any man. How the plans and schemes of men crumble to the touch! Ambition is but the pursuit of mirages. . . ."

Mademoiselle, you will never know what the ignominy of this moment has cost me—nor how well I love you. I come of a race of men who pursue their heart's desire through fire and water. Obstacles are nothing; the end is everything. In Europe I should have won, in honor or in dishonor. But this American people, I do not quite understand them; and that is why I have played the villain to no purpose."

He paused, and a sad, bitter smile played over his face.

"Mademoiselle," he continued, "henceforth, wherever I may go, your face and the sound of your voice shall abide with me. I do not ask you to forget, but I ask you to forgive."

Again he paused.

She uttered no sound.

"Well, one does not forget nor forgive these things in so short a time. And, after all, it was your father's folly. Fate threw him across my path at a critical moment—but I had reckoned without you. Your father is a brave man, for he has the courage to offer himself to the law; I have the courage to give you up. I, too, am a soldier; I recognize the value of retreat."

To Warburton he said: "A groom, a hostler, to upset such plans as these! I do not know who you are, sir, nor how to account for your timely and peculiar appearance. But I fully recognize the falseness of your presence here. Eh, well, this is what comes of race prejudice, the senseless battle which has always been and always will be waged between the noble and the peasant. Had I observed you at the proper time, our positions might relatively have been changed. Useless retrospection!"

To Annesley; "Sir, we are equally culpable. Here is this note of yours. I might, as a small contribution toward righting the comparative wrong which I have done you, I might cast it into the fire. But between gentlemen, situated as we are, the act would be as useless as it would be impossible. I might destroy the note, but you would refuse to accept such generosity at my hands,—which is well."

"What you say is perfectly true." The colonel drew his daughter closer to him.

"So," went on the count, putting the note in his pocket, "tomorrow I shall have my ducats."

"My bank will discount the note," said the colonel, with a proud look; "my indebtedness shall be paid in full."

"As I have not the slightest doubt, Mademoiselle, fortune ignores you but temporarily; misfortune has brushed only the hem of your garment, as it were. Do not let the fear of poverty alarm you,"—lightly. "I prophesy a great public future for you. And when you play that Largo of Handel's, to a breathless audience, who knows that I may not be hidden behind the curtain of some stall, drinking in the heavenly sound made by that loving bow? . . . Romance enters every human being's life; like love, and hate, it is primitive. But to every book fate writes finis."

He thrust the bank notes carelessly into his coat pocket, and walked slowly toward the hallway. At the threshold he stopped and looked back. The girl could not resist the magnetism of his dark eyes. She was momentarily fascinated, and her heart beat painfully.

"If only I might go with the memory of your forgiveness," he said.

"I forgive you."

"Thank you." Then Karloff resolutely proceeded; the portiere fell behind him. Shortly after she heard the sound of closing doors, the rattle of a carriage and then all became still. Thus the handsome barbarian passed from the scene.

The colonel resumed his chair, his arm propped on a knee and his head bowed in his hand. Quickly the girl fell to her knees, hid her face on his breast, and regardless of the groom's presence, silently wept.

"My poor child!" faltered the colonel. "God could not have intended to give you so wretched a father. Poverty and dishonor, poverty and dishonor; I who love you so well have brought you these!"

Warburton, biting his trembling lips, tiptoed cautiously to the window, opened it and stepped outside. He raised his fevered face gratefully to the icy rain. A great and noble plan had come to him.

As Mrs. Chadwick said, love is magnificent only when it gives all without question.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A FINE LOVER.

Karloff remained in seclusion till the following Tuesday; after that day he was seen no more in Washington. From time to time some news of him filters through the diplomatic circles of half a dozen capitals to Washington. The latest I heard of him, he was at Port Arthur. It was evident that Russia valued his personal address too highly to exile him because of his failure in Washington. Had he threatened or gone about noisily, we should all have forgotten him completely. As it is, the memory of him to-day is as vivid as his actual presence. Thus, I give him what dramatists call an agreeable exit.

I was in the Baltimore and Potomac station the morning after that unforgettable night at Senator Blank's house. I had gone there to see about the departure of night trains, preparatory to making a flying trip to New York, and was leaving the station when a gloved hand touched me on the arm. The hand belonged to Mrs. Chadwick. She was dressed in the conventional traveling gray, and but for the dark lines under her eyes she would have made a picture for any man to admire. She looked tired, very tired, as women look who have not slept well.

"Good morning, Mr. Orator," she said, saluting me with a smile.

"You are going away?" I asked, shaking her hand cordially.

"Way, way away! I am leaving for Nice, where I intend to spend the winter. I had intended to remain in Washington till the holidays; but I plead guilty to a roving disposition, and I frequently change my mind."

"Woman's most charming prerogative," said I gallantly.

What a mask the human countenance is! How little I dreamed that I was jesting with a woman whose heart was breaking, and numbed with a terrible pain!

Her maid came up to announce that everything was ready for her reception in the state-room, and that the train was about to draw out of the station. Mrs. Chadwick and I bade each other good-by. Two years passed before I saw her again.

At eleven o'clock I returned to my rooms to pack a case and have the thing off my mind. Tramping restlessly up and down before my bachelor apartment house I discerned M'sieu Zhamas. His face was pale and troubled, but the angle of his jaw told me that he had determined upon something or other.

"Ha!" I said rationally. He wore a decently respectable suit of ready-made clothes: "Lost your job and want me to give you a recommendation?"

"I want a few words with you, Chuck, and no fooling. Don't say that you can't spare the time. You've simply got to."

"With whom am I to talk, James, the groom, or Warburton, the gentleman?"

"You are to talk with the man whose sister you are to marry."

I became curious, naturally. "No police affair?"

"No, it's not the police. I can very well go to a lawyer, but I desire absolute secrecy. Let us go up to your rooms at once."

I led the way. I was beginning to desire to know what all this meant.

[To Be Continued.]

An Eminent Citizen.

The colonel was getting ready to start a land boom in a certain district in North Dakota and one day he drove over to the town of Oakes to enlist the services of a citizen. At a grocery, where he halted to get his bearings, he said to the man behind the counter:

"Can you tell me the name of the leading man of your town?"

"Oh, yes," was the ready reply. "His name is Bates."

"He's at the top, is he?"

"Clear to the top."

"And what he says goes?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then I may take it that people have confidence in him?"

"Um! Does Mr. Bates hold any public office?" continued the colonel.

"No, sir, not exactly a public office, but you can set it down that he's an eminent citizen just the same. In fact, he's the only one we've got."

"What is his business?"

"Why, he carries the mail between the depot and the postoffice."—Baltimore Sun.

Hogging the Dog.

Cummings Martin of Rochester, Vt., had a serious impediment in his speech and had much difficulty in getting his vocal organs into a condition to say anything without first going through such facial contortions as to cause amusement among the lookers on. When a boy he had a dog that he prized highly, and which, like Cummings, was always ready for fun. This dog was his inseparable companion about the farm. Captain Eb Martin, the father of Cummings, was a thrifty farmer, who felt a laudable pride in his fine horses, cattle, and hogs and other products of his farm. One day he discovered Cummings, the dog and a fine porker in suspicious juxtaposition, amid furious yellings, barkings, and squealing; and the farmer roared out: "Cummings! Cummings! Stop hogging that hog!" And Cummings yelled back: "I a-a-ain't d-d-dog-doggin' t-t-the h-ho-hog. I'm h-ho-hog-hoggin' t-t-the d-d-dog."

Blowed Up.

The late Bishop Eastburn, of Massachusetts, was a man of very imposing appearance, and when robed in his big sleeved canonicals gave the impression of sailing under full canvass. In the pulpit he had a habit of drawing himself up at intervals, with chest raised and head thrown back, which gave him a very pompous air. A little boy of Newburyport, not fully inwired to long sermons, and wearying under his heavy periods, mildly suggested to his mother that he would like to "cut the rest of it," but she tried to beguile him with the assurance that the good man was just ready to stop, when he eagerly replied: "Oh, no, mamma, he isn't, 'cause he's just blowed hisself up again."—Boston Herald.

She Said It All.

"You men make me tired!" exclaimed the wife from across the table.

"What is the matter now, dear?" said the husband, raising his eyes from his paper for a moment.

"Why, you men are all the time abusing women for talking!"

No response from behind the paper. "Why, you men around election time do nothing else but talk!"

No response from behind the paper. "Talk! Why, the men do nothing else but talk. Talk in the house, talk in the street, talk in the shop!"

No response from behind the paper. "And we poor women get the credit for it. That's the way of the world. Say! Why don't you say something?"—Yonker's Statesman.

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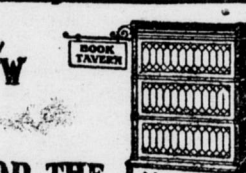
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