The TURMOIL

A NOVEL

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"MONSIEUR BEAUCAIRE"
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SYNOPSIS.

—8—

Sheridan's attempt to make a business man of his son Bibbs by starting him in the machine shop ends in Bibbs going to a sanitarium, a nervous wreck. On his return Bibbs finds himself an inconsiderable and unconsidered figure in the "New House" of the Sheridans. The Vertrees, old town family next door and impoverished, call on the Sheridans, newly-rich and Mary afterward puts into words her parents' unspoken wish that she marry one of the Sheridan boys. Mary frankly encourages Jim Sheridan's attentions. Jim tells Mary Bibbs is not a lunatic—"just queer." He proposes to Mary, who half accepts him. Sheridan tells Bibbs he must go back to the machine shop as soon as he is strong enough, in spite of Bibbs' plea to be allowed to write. Edith, Bibbs' sister, and Sibyl, Roscoe Sheridan's wife, quarrel over Bobby Lamhorn: Sibyl goes to Mary for help to keep Lamhorn from marrying Edith, and Mary leaves her in the room alone. Bibbs has to break to his father the news of Jim's sudden death. All the rest of the family helpless in their grief, Bibbs becomes temporary master of the house. At the funeral he meets Mary and rides home with her. Bibbs purposely interrupts a tete-a-tete between Edith and Lamhorn. He tells Edith that he overheard Lamhorn making love to Roscoe's wife.

Bibbs Sheridan, the physical weakling, the "queer one," and Mary Vertrees, the aristocrat, the husband-hunter, get acquainted while hearing organ music. They exchange spiritual messages on the wings of melody. Do you think this acquaintance will awaken in their breasts a mutual recognition of love's first symptoms?

CHAPTER XIV—Continued.

"No," he returned, gravely. "I'm not thinking at all; I'm only making vocal sounds. I seem to be the subject of what little meaning they possess, and I'd like to change it, but I don't know how to manage it."

"You needn't change the subject on my account, Mr. Sheridan," she said. "Not even if you really talked about yourself." She turned her face toward him as she spoke, and Bibbs caught his breath; he was pathetically amazed by the look she gave him. It was a glowing look, warmly friendly and understanding, and, what almost shocked him, it was an eagerly interested look. Bibbs was not accustomed to anything like that.

"I—you—I—I'm—" he stammered, and the faint color in his cheeks grew almost vivid.

She was still looking at him, and she saw the strange radiance that came into his face. There was something about him, too, that explained how "queer" many people might think him; but he did not seem "queer" to Mary Vertrees; he seemed the most quaintly natural person she had ever met.

He waited, and became coherent. "You say something now," he said. "I don't even belong in the chorus, and here I am, trying to sing the funny man's solo! You—"

"No," she interrupted. "I'd rather play your accompaniment."

"I'll stop and listen to it, then."

"Perhaps—" she began, but after pausing thoughtfully she made a gesture with her muff, indicating a large brick church which they were approaching. "Do you see that church, Mr. Sheridan?"

"I suppose I could," he answered in simple truthfulness, looking at her. "But I don't want to. I have a feeling it's where you're going, and where I'll be sent back."

She shook her head in cheery negation. "Not unless you want to be. Would you like to come with me?"

"Why—why—yes," he said. "Anywhere!" And again it was apparent that he spoke in simple truthfulness.

"Then come—if you care for organ music. The organist is an old friend of mine, and sometimes he plays for me. He's a dear old man. That's he, waiting in the doorway. He looks like Beethoven, doesn't he? I think he knows that, perhaps, and enjoys it a little. I hope so."

"Yes," said Bibbs, as they reached the church steps. "I think Beethoven would like it, too. It must be pleasant to look like other people."

"I haven't kept you?" Mary said to the organist. "This is Mr. Sheridan, Doctor Kraft. He has come to listen with me."

The organist looked bluntly surprised. "Iss that so?" he exclaimed. "He iss musician himself, of course."

"No," said Bibbs, as the three entered the church together. "I—I played the—I tried to play—" Fortunately he checked himself; he had been about to offer the information that he had failed to master the jews' harp in his boyhood. "No, I'm not a musician," he contented himself with saying.

"What?" Doctor Kraft's surprise increased. "Young man, you are fortunate! I play for Miss Vertrees; she comes always alone. You are the first. You are the first one ever!"

They had reached the head of the central aisle, and as the organist finished speaking Bibbs stopped short, turning to look at Mary Vertrees in a dazed way that was not of her perceiving; for, though she stopped as he did, her gaze followed the organist, who was walking away from them toward the front of the church, shaking his white Beethovian mane roguishly.

"It's false pretenses on my part," Bibbs said. "You mean to be kind to the sick, but I'm not an invalid any more. I'm so well I'm going back to work in a few days. I'd better leave before he begins to play, hadn't I?"

"No," said Mary, beginning to walk forward. "Not unless you don't like great music."

He followed her to a seat about halfway up the aisle while Doctor Kraft ascended to the organ. "This afternoon some Handel!" he turned to shout.

Mary nodded. "Will you like that?" she asked Bibbs.

"I don't know. I never heard any except 'Largo.' I don't know anything about music. I don't even know how to pretend I do. If I knew enough to pretend, I would."

"No," said Mary, looking at him and smiling faintly, "you wouldn't."

She turned away as a great sound began to swim and tremble in the air; the huge empty space of the church filled with it, and the two people listening filled with it; the universe seemed to fill and thrill with it. The two sat intensely still, the great sound all round about them, while the church grew dusky, and only the organist's lamp made a tiny star of light. His white head moved from side to side beneath it rhythmically, or lunged and recovered with the fierceness of a duelist thrusting, but he was magnificently the master of his giant, and it sang to his magic as he bade it.

Bibbs was swept away upon that mighty singing. Such a thing was wholly unknown to him; there had been no music in his meager life. Unlike the tale, it was the Princess Bedrulbudour who had brought him to the enchanted cave, and that—for Bibbs—was what made its magic dazing. It seemed to him a long, long time since he had been walking home drearily from Doctor Gurney's office; it seemed to him that he had set out upon a happy journey since then, and that he had reached another planet, where Mary Vertrees and he sat alone together, listening to a vast choiring of invisible soldiers and holy angels. There were armies of voices about them, singing praise and thanksgiving; and yet they were alone. It was incredible that the walls of the church were not the boundaries of the universe, to remain so forever; incredible that there was a smoky street just yonder, where housemaids were bringing in evening papers from front steps and where children were taking their last spins on roller skates before being haled indoors for dinner.

He had a curious sense of communication with his new friend. He knew it could not be so, and yet he felt as if

"Young Man, You Are Fortunate."

all the time he spoke to her, saying: "You hear this strain? You hear that strain? You know the dream that these sounds bring to me?" And it seemed to him as though she answered continually: "I hear! I hear that strain, and I hear the new one that you are hearing now. I know the dream that these sounds bring to you. Yes, yes, I hear it all! We hear—together!"

And though the church grew so dim that all was mysterious shadow except the vague planes of the windows and the organist's light, with the white head moving beneath it, Bibbs had no consciousness that the girl sitting beside him had grown shadowy; he seemed to see her as plainly as ever in the darkness, though he did not look at her. And all the mighty chanting of the organ's multitudinous voices that afternoon seemed to Bibbs to be chorusing of her and interpreting her, singing her thoughts and singing for him the world of humble gratitude that was in his heart because she was so kind to him. It all meant Mary.

But when she asked him what it meant, on their homeward way, he was silent. They had come a few paces from the church without speaking, walking slowly.

"I'll tell you what it meant to me," she said, as he did not immediately reply. "Almost any music of Handel's always means one thing above all others to me: Courage! That's it. It makes cowardice or whining seem so infinitesimal—it makes most things in our hustling little lives seem infinitesimal."

"Yes," he said. "It seems odd, doesn't it, that people downtown are hurrying to trains and hanging to straps in trolley cars, weltering every way to get home and feed and sleep so they can get downtown tomorrow. And yet there isn't anything down there worth getting to. They're like servants drudging to keep the house going, and believing the drudgery itself is the great thing. They make so much noise and fuss and dirt they forget that the house was meant to live in. The housework has to be done, but the people who do it have been so overpaid that they're confused and worship the housework. They're overpaid, and yet, poor things! they haven't anything that a chicken can't have. Of course, when the world gets to paying its wages sensibly that will be different."

"Do you mean 'communism'?" she asked, and she made their slow pace a little slower—they had only three blocks to go.

"Whatever the word is, I only mean that things don't look very sensible now—especially to a man that wants to keep out of 'em and can't! 'Communism?' Well, at least any 'decent sport' would say it's fair for all the strong runners to start from the same mark and give the weak ones a fair distance ahead, so that all can run something like even on the stretch. And wouldn't it be pleasant, really, if they could all cross the winning line together? Who really enjoys beating anybody—if he sees the beaten man's face? The only way we can enjoy getting ahead of other people nowadays is by forgetting what the other people feel. And that," he added, "is nothing of what the music meant to me. You see, if I keep talking about what it didn't mean I can keep from telling you what it did mean."

"Didn't it mean courage to you, too—a little?" she asked. "Triumph and praise were in it, and somehow those things mean courage to me."

"Yes, they were all there," Bibbs said. "I don't know the name of what he played, but I shouldn't think it would matter much. The man that makes the music must leave it to you and what it can mean to you, and the name he puts to it can't make much difference—except to himself and people very much like him, I suppose."

"I suppose that's true, though I'd never thought of it like that."

"I imagine music must make feelings and paint pictures in the minds of the people who hear it," Bibbs went on, musingly, "according to their own natures as much as according to the music itself."

The musician might compose something and play it, wanting you to think of the Holy Grail, and some people who heard it would think of a prayer meeting, and some would think of how good they were themselves, and a boy might think of himself at the head of a solemn procession, carrying a banner and riding a white horse. And then, if these were some jubilant passages in the music, he'd think of a circus."

They had reached her gate, and she set her hand upon it, but did not open it. Bibbs felt that this was almost the kindest of her kindnesses—not to be prompt in leaving him.

"After all," she said, "you didn't tell me whether you liked it."

"No. I didn't need to."

"No, that's true, and I didn't need to ask. I knew. But you said you were trying to keep from telling me what it did mean."

"I can't keep from telling it any longer," he said. "The music meant to me—it meant the kindness of—of you."

"Kindness? How?"

"You thought I was a sort of lonely tramp—and sick—"

"No," she said, decidedly. "I thought perhaps you'd like to hear Doctor Kraft play. And you did."

"It's curious; sometimes it seemed to me that it was you who were playing"

Mary laughed. "I? I strum! Piano. A little Chopin—Grieg—Chaminade. You wouldn't listen!"

Bibbs drew a deep breath. "I'm frightened again," he said, in an unsteady voice. "I'm afraid you'll think I'm pushing, but—" He paused, and the words sank to a murmur.

"Oh, if you want me to play for you!" she said. "Yes, gladly. It will be merely absurd after what you heard this afternoon. I play like a hundred thousand other girls, and I like it. I'm glad when anyone's willing to listen, and if you—" She stopped, checked by a sudden recollection, and laughed ruefully. "But my piano won't be here after tonight. I—I'm sending it away tomorrow. I'm afraid that if you'd like me to play to you you'd have to come this evening."

"You'll let me?" he cried.

"Certainly, if you care to."

"If I could play—" he said, wistfully, "if I could play like that old man in the church I could thank you."

"Ah, but you haven't heard me play. I know you liked this afternoon, but—"

"Yes," said Bibbs. "It was the greatest happiness I've ever known."

It was too dark to see his face, but his voice held such plain honesty, and he spoke with such complete unconsciousness of saying anything especially significant, that she knew it was the truth. For a moment she was nonplused, then she opened the gate and went in. "You'll come after dinner, then?"

"Yes," he said, not moving. "Would you mind if I stood here until time to come in?"

She had reached the steps, and at that she turned, offering him the response of laughter and a gay gesture of her muff toward the lighted windows of the new house, as though bidding him to run home to his dinner.

That night, Bibbs sat writing in his notebook:

Music can come into a blank life and fill it. Everything that is beautiful is music, if you can listen.

There is no gracefulness like that of a graceful woman at a grand piano. There is a swimming loveliness of line that seems to merge with the running of the sound, and you seem, as you watch her, to see that you are hearing and to hear what you are seeing.

There are women who make you think of pine woods coming down to a sparkling sea. The air about such a woman is bracing, and when she is near you, you feel strong and ambitious; you forget that the world doesn't like you. You think that perhaps you are a great fellow, after all. Then you come away and feel like a boy who has fallen in love with his Sunday school teacher. You'll be whipped for it—and ought to be.

There are women who make you think of Diana, crowned with the moon. But they do not have the "Greek profile." I do not believe Helen of Troy had a "Greek profile;" they would not have fought about her if her nose had been quite that long. The Greek nose is not the adorable nose. The adorable nose is about an eighth of an inch shorter.

Much of the music of Wagner, it appears, is not suitable to the piano. Wagner was a composer who could interpret into music such things as the primitive impulses of humanity—he could have made a machine shop into music. But not if he had to work in it. Wagner was always dealing in immensities—a machine shop would have put a majestic lump in so grand a gizzard as that.

There is a mystery about pianos, it seems. Sometimes they have to be "sent away." That is how some people speak of the penitentiary. "Sent away" is a euphuism for "sent to prison." But pianos are not sent to prison, and they are not sent to the tuner—the tuner is sent to them. Why are pianos "sent away"—and where?

Sometimes a glorious day shines into the most ordinary and useless life. Happiness and beauty come caroling out of the air into the gloomy house of that life as if some stray angel just happened to perch on the roof-tree, resting and singing. And the night after such a day is lustrous and splendid with the memory of it. Music and beauty and kindness—those are the three greatest things God can give us. To bring them all in one day to one who expected nothing—ah! the heart that received them should be as humble as it is thankful. But it is hard to be humble when one is so rich with new memories. It is impossible to be humble after a day of glory.

Yes—the adorable nose is more than an eighth of an inch shorter than the Greek nose. It is a full quarter of an inch shorter.

There are women who will be kinder to a sick tramp than to a conquering hero. But the sick tramp had better remember that's what he is. Take care, take care! Humble's the word!

CHAPTER XV.

That "mystery about pianos" which troubled Bibbs had been a mystery to Mr. Vertrees, and it was being explained to him at about the time Bibbs scribbled the reference to it in his notes. Mary had gone upstairs upon Bibbs' departure at ten o'clock, and Mr. and Mrs. Vertrees sat until after midnight in the library talking.

"She needn't to have done that about her piano," vapored Mr. Vertrees. "We could have managed somehow without it. At least she ought to have consulted me, and if she insisted I could have arranged the details with the—the dealer."

"She thought that it might be—annoying for you," Mrs. Vertrees explained. "Really, she planned for you not to know about it until they had removed—until after tomorrow, that is, but I decided to—to mention it. You see, she didn't even tell me about it until this morning. She has another idea, too, I'm afraid. It's—it's—"

"Well?" he urged, as she found it difficult to go on.

"Her other idea is—that is, it was—I think it can be avoided, of course—it was about her furs."

"No!" he exclaimed, quickly. "I won't have it! You must see to that. I'd rather not talk to her about it, but you mustn't let her."

"I'll try not," his wife promised. "She seems to be troubled about the—the coal matter and—about Tilly. Of course the piano will take care of some things like those for a while and—"

"I don't like it. I gave her the piano to play on, not to—"

"You mustn't be distressed about it in one way," she said, comfortingly. "She arranged with the—with the purchaser that the men will come for it about half after five in the afternoon. The days are so short now it's really quite winter."

"Oh, yes," he agreed, moodily. "So far as that goes I don't suppose our neighbors are paying much attention just now, though I hear Sheridan was back in his office early the morning after the funeral."

Mrs. Vertrees made a little sound of commiseration. "I don't believe that was because he wasn't suffering, though. Mary told me he seemed

"She Needn't to Have Done That About the Piano."

wrapped up in his son's succeeding. He isn't vulgar in his boasting, I understand; he doesn't talk a great deal about his—his actual money. No, his bragging usually seemed to be about his family and the greatness of this city."

"'Greatness of this city'!" Mr. Vertrees echoed, with dull bitterness. "It's nothing but a coal hole. Of course Sheridan says it's 'great.'"

Mrs. Vertrees seemed unaware of this outburst. "I believe," she began, timidly, "he doesn't boast of—that is, I understand he has never seemed so interested in the—the other one."

Her husband's face was dark, but at that a heavier shadow fell upon it; he looked more haggard than before. "'The other one,'" he repeated, averting his eyes. "You mean—you mean the third son—the one that was here this evening?"

"Yes, the—the youngest," she returned, her voice so feeble it was almost a whisper.

And then neither of them spoke for several minutes. Nor did either look at the other during that silence.

At last Mr. Vertrees contrived to cough, but not convincingly. "What—ah—what was it Mary said about him this afternoon? I didn't ah—happen to catch it."

"She—she didn't say much. All she said was this: 'He's the most wistful creature I've ever known.'"

"Well?"

"That was all. He is wistful-looking; and so fragile. If I hadn't known about him I'd have thought he had quite an interesting face."

"If you 'hadn't known about him'? Known what?"

"Oh, nothing, of course," she said, hurriedly. "Nothing definite, that is. Mary said decidedly, long ago, that he's not at all insane, as we thought at first. It's only—well, of course it is odd, their attitude about him. I suppose it's some nervous trouble that makes him—perhaps a little queer at times, so that he can't apply himself to anything—or perhaps does odd things. But, after all, of course, we only have an impression about it. We don't know—that is, positively, I—" She paused, then went on: "I didn't know just how to ask—that is—I didn't mention it to Mary. I didn't—I—" The poor lady floundered pitifully, concluding with a mumble. "So soon after—after the—the shock."

"I don't think I've caught more than a glimpse of him," said Mr. Vertrees. "I wouldn't know him if I saw him, but your impression of him is—" He broke off suddenly, springing to his feet in agitation. "I can't imagine her—oh no!" he gasped. And he began to pace the floor. "A half-witted epileptic!"

"No, no!" she cried. "He may be all right. We—"

"Oh, it's horrible! I can't—" He threw himself back into his chair again, sweeping his hands across his face, then letting them fall limply at his sides.

Mrs. Vertrees was tremulous. "You musn't give way so," she said, inspired for once almost to direct discourse. "Whatever Mary might think of doing, it wouldn't be on her own account; it would be on ours. But if we should—should consider it, that wouldn't be on our own account. It isn't because we think of ourselves."

"Oh God, no!" he groaned. "Not for us! We can go to the poorhouse, but Mary can't be a stenographer!"

Sighing, Mrs. Vertrees resumed her obliqueness. "Of course," she murmured, "it all seems very premature, speculating about such things, but I had a queer sort of feeling that she seemed quite interested in this—" She had almost said "in this one," but checked herself. "In this young man. It's natural, of course; she is always so strong and well, and he is—he seems to be, that is—rather appealing to the—the sympathies."

"Yes!" he agreed, bitterly. "Precisely. The sympathies!"

"Perhaps," she faltered—"perhaps you might feel easier if I could have a little talk with someone?"

"With whom?"

"I had thought of—not going about it too brusquely, of course, but perhaps just waiting for his name to be mentioned, if I happened to be talking with somebody that knew the family—and then I might find a chance to say that I was sorry to hear he'd been ill so much, and— Something of that kind perhaps?"

"You don't know anybody that knows the family."

"Yes. That is—well, in a way, of course, one of the family. That Mrs. Roscoe Sheridan is not a—that is, she's rather a pleasant-faced little woman, I think, and of course rather ordinary. I think she is interested about—that is, of course, she'd be anxious to be more intimate with Mary, naturally. She's always looking over here from her house; she was looking out of the window this afternoon when Mary went out, I noticed—though I don't think Mary saw her. I'm sure she wouldn't think it out of place to—to be frank about matters. She called the other day, and Mary must rather like her—she said that evening that the call had done her good. Don't you think it might be wise?"

"Wise? I don't know. I feel that the whole matter is impossible."

"Yes, so do I," she returned, promptly. "It isn't really a thing we should be considering seriously, of course. Still—"

"I should say not! But possibly—"

Thus they skirmished up and down the field, but before they turned the lights out and went upstairs it was thoroughly understood between them that Mrs. Vertrees should seek the earliest opportunity to obtain definite information from Sibyl Sheridan concerning the mental and physical status of Bibbs. And if he were subject to attacks of lunacy, the unhappy pair decided to prevent the sacrifice they supposed their daughter intended to make of herself. Altogether, if there were spiteful ghosts in the old house that night, eavesdropping upon the woeful comedy, they must have died anew of laughter!

CHAPTER XVI.

Mrs. Vertrees' opportunity occurred the very next afternoon. Darkness had fallen, the piano movers had come. They had carried the piano down the front steps, and Mrs. Vertrees was standing in the open doorway behind them, preparing to withdraw, when she heard a sharp exclamation; and Mrs. Roscoe Sheridan, bareheaded, emerged from the shadow into the light of the doorway.

"Good gracious!" she cried. "It did give me a fright!"

"It's Mrs. Sheridan, isn't it?" Mrs. Vertrees was perplexed by this informal appearance, but she reflected that it might be proverbial. "Won't you come in?"

"No. Oh no, thank you!" Sibyl panted, pressing her hand to her side. "You don't know what a fright you've given me! And it was nothing but your piano!" She laughed shrilly. "I just glanced out of the window, a minute or so ago, and saw your door wide open and black figures of men against the light, carrying something heavy. And I thought I'd seen your daughter start for a drive with Bibbs Sheridan in a car about three o'clock—and—They aren't back yet, are they?"

"No. Good heavens!"

"And the only thing I could think of was that something must have happened to them, and I just dashed over—and it was only your piano!" She broke into laughter again. "I suppose you're just sending it somewhere to be repaired, aren't you?"

"It's—it's being taken downtown," said Mrs. Vertrees. "Won't you come in? Id really—"

"Thank you, but I must be running back. My husband usually gets home about this time, and I make a little point of it always to be there."

"That's very sweet." Mrs. Vertrees descended the steps and walked toward the street with Sibyl.

"I'm afraid Miss Vertrees will miss her piano," said Sibyl, watching the instrument disappear into the big van at the curb. "She plays wonderfully, Mrs. Kittersby tells me."

"Yes, she plays very well. Mr. Sheridan came last evening to hear her play because she had arranged with the—that is, it was to be removed this afternoon. He seems almost well again."

"Yes." Sibyl nodded. "His father's going to try to start him to work."

"He seems very delicate," said Mrs. Vertrees. "I shouldn't think he would be able to stand a great deal, either physically or—" She paused and then added, glowing with the sense of her own adroitness—"or mentally."

"Oh, mentally Bibbs is all right," said Sibyl, in an odd voice.

"But has he always been?" The question came with anxious eagerness.

"Certainly. He had a long siege of nervous dyspepsia, but he's over it."

"And you think—"

"Bibbs is all right. You needn't wor—" Sibyl choked, and pressed her handkerchief to her mouth. "Good night, Mrs. Vertrees," she said, hurriedly.

Will Sybil help along the match between Bibbs and Mary in order to link up the Sheridan family with the aristocrats? Or will she set about to poison Old Man Sheridan's mind against the girl?

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Bananas can be ripened in a room kept at 110 degrees.