

The Dark Mirror

by Louis Joseph Vance

Author of "The False Faces," "The Lone Wolf," Etc.

Illustrated by IRWIN MYERS

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CHAPTER EIGHT

The Day of Grace.

I. TEMPTATION.

"Dead . . . she is dead . . . Leonora is dead . . ."

The words, barely audible, hardly more than moans, breathed from the lips of the woman lying in hypnosis. Fosdick, sitting by her side, on the edge of the couch, bending over her, coned her face intently. The long lashes were fluttering, tears welled from under lowered lids, the lips writhed with grief. She moaned again, an inarticulate pure note of woe passing speech, and shuddered in her trance.

He captured her two wrists as her hands twitched up, groping as one's hands will who walks in darkness, and imprisoned them gently in the clasp of one of his own. The other he pressed again upon her forehead.

"Priscilla!" he called in an even but urgent voice—"come out of it! Forget your vision. See nothing . . . Do you hear me?"

The anguish of the face of the sleeper grew transiently more acute, then faded as he repeated the unanswered question: "Do you hear me?" This time the girl responded dully: "Yes."

"You understand what I am saying?"

"Yes, Philip."

"You are to see nothing more . . . Do you see anything now?"

There was a slight pause; then the sleeper stated without emotion: "I see nothing now."

"Good. Now you will sleep, you will sleep quietly, without dreaming, for thirty minutes. Then you will wake up rested, refreshed, calm, rational. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Philip."

"Repeat what you are going to do."

In a toneless voice Priscilla replied: "I am going to sleep quietly, without dreaming, for thirty minutes. Then I am going to wake up rested, refreshed, calm, rational."

"Do so," Fosdick commanded with firmness.

She made no response more than a profound sigh. The stamp of sorrow upon those exquisite features had already been modified; their expression now grew placid. The agitated, gusty breathing passed into the steady, slow and deep respiration of natural slumber.

Fosdick sighed in relief; but his countenance continued grave with care, the brows knotted, the lips compressed, the eyes harboring a look of pain.

What was his duty?

It was in his power to renew in Priscilla the condition of hypnotic susceptibility long enough to erase by suggestion all waking memory of her vision. By so doing he might spare her much suffering, much distress; the pity and horror of that lonely death, and the mystery of it, would not prey upon her sensitive and susceptible nature. And, believing Leonora still to be living happily with the man Mario, her husband, Priscilla might in time grow reconciled, school herself to renunciation, forget, and ultimately rebuild her life upon the foundation of a saner, surer love.

But if Priscilla were permitted to come back to herself with full knowledge of what she had seen in her trance; believing Leonora dead, what would the effect be upon her life?

She would be sad, she would mourn, it would be long before her days would be undarkened by shadows of dread and distrust.

But she would not dream, there would be no more journeys of the spirit through the hollowness of night and space in futile search for that affinity which had gone out of life.

Against this the consideration warred that, no longer needing to reckon with the claims of Leonora, Priscilla would less readily disembarrass herself from the toils of an insane and impossible infatuation.

With Mario free, no reason existed why she should scruple to give him all her love . . .

Dared one risk perpetuation of that passion?

II. THE LINK.

Fosdick pressed a call button on his desk and put the telephone receiver to his ear. His assistant responded promptly. Fosdick asked:

"Is there anybody waiting to see me?"

"Mr. Andrews. I told him you couldn't possibly see him today. He said he'd wait till the cows came home."

Fosdick instructed: "Send Andrews in."

When Andrews came in, a folding screen shut off the couch and its occu-

pany from the rest of the room; Fosdick was behind his desk, amiable, keen, composed.

"Well, Andrews?"

"G'daft'noon, doc. Just blew in from up state—Dutchess county," he announced. "The party you're interested in—"

"Mother O'More?"

"Yeah; she's up there in a private institution for the aged. Bought her way in 'bout ten years ago. Seems she gets an annuity from some insurance company, enough to pay for her board and keep. Must be a sick insurance company; the old dame's a hunderd-nanight if she's a day and ain't so much as thinkin' of kickin' out."

"Did you see her to talk to?"

Mr. Andrews corrected gravely: "I seen her to talk to her, but that's as far's I got."

"Is her mind clear? I mean, do you think she remembers—?"

"Remembers? Say, that old lady remembers more'n you and me'll ever forget. Her mind's as clear's consummy soup in a French table de hote."

"Won't she talk? Why?"

"Cussedness," Mr. Andrews opined—"or else she's been paid to keep her trap shut. I got a hunch she bought that annuity with hush money."

"Will anything make her talk, do you think?"

"Jack might."

"Jack who?"

"No, not Jack anybody—just Jack—coin, yunno—money."

"Oh!" Fosdick's smile swiftly faded into a look of thoughtfulness. "Presume I'd better see her myself."

"Would, if I was you. She hasn't got no use for me at all—spots me for a detective at sight and spits like a mad cat every time I opens my mouth."

"Where do you say she is?"

"Place near Pawling—there's the address," Mr. Andrews gave Fosdick a slip of paper. "Visitors' hours every afternoon, three to five."

"I'll see her tomorrow," Fosdick said. "Meanwhile, you can be working on another lead. There's reason to believe the girl I'm looking for—this Leonora—is or has been for several days living up in the Catskills, in a private camp, probably rented, somewhere back of Kingston. Her husband came down to New York today, according to my information and belief, and is returning tonight."

"I'll run up there tonight, be on the job first thing tomorrow."

III. AFTERMATH.

Mr. Andrews took himself off. Fosdick glanced at his watch, turned to the screen, folded and set it aside.

Priscilla had not yet moved, but by every sign the subconscious monitor was reminding her that the half hour had elapsed. Her breathing was less regular, the silken lashes were restless upon her cheeks. While Fosdick watched they lifted, disclosing confused eyes.

Recognizing him, she smiled uncertainly. Fosdick uttered her name in a reassuring voice, took her hands and helped her to a sitting position.

"How do you feel now?" he asked her.

"I don't know," she said in a low, puzzled tone. All right, I guess, but . . . You—you hypnotized me, Philip?"

"Yes, Cilla."

"Was it difficult?"

"On the contrary, you proved one of the most willing subjects I've ever had—went off like a shot, practically at the first suggestion."

He filled a glass of water from the silver pitcher on his desk; but when he took it to her she was on her feet, her eyes desperate.

"Philip!" she cried gustily—"she is dead—Leonora—!"

"I know; that is, I know you think so; you told me."

She did not answer, she was heedless of the meaning of his words; but as if instinctively feeling it intolerable that another's eyes should pry into her grief, brushed aside the glass of water, and with a stricken face stumbled past him into a wide and deeply recessed window.

For several minutes she stood there, her back to Fosdick, looking out blindly, slender shoulders shaken with silent sobs, a hand with a handkerchief dabbing at her eyes.

A wise physician, Fosdick offered no phrases of false comfort.

That the storm of her emotions spent itself swiftly, that it was not long before she was able to talk calmly, was no revelation of heartlessness, but largely the work of the suggestion implanted in her while she was in hypnosis.

"The pity of it," she said after a little time: "oh, Philip! the pity of it! She was so happy—and now she is dead."

"Perhaps."

Priscilla swung sharply round. "Why do you say that? I know—I saw her—I saw her lying drowned in a pool—"

"I know, you told me."

"But how could I? She was startled out of her sorrow. 'I haven't had time, I've only just remembered—'"

"You told me while in the hypnotic trance. I questioned you and you told me all you knew, everything you experienced. You were talking almost continuously until I threw you into normal sleep. So I heard about your vision."

"Strange!" she said in a stare of wonder—"strange I should recall nothing of that."

"Not so strange; your speech was something purely automatic; once started, it went on, just as your heart went on beating and your lungs inhaling and exhaling air, while your attention was absorbed in other matters. It's like the automatic writing that people produce, believing themselves under the influence of disembodied

spirits. Not necessarily even under the hypnotic influence; their attention is elsewhere, they may be talking or reading on utterly immaterial subjects, while their hand, without their knowledge, writes and goes on writing—just so you went on talking."

"I don't understand. It's—it's incomprehensible. Not that I doubt what you say. I must have told you what I saw, there in the forest . . ."

Her eyes filled again, tears ran down her cheeks. She averted her face. "Oh, the pity of it!" she repeated. "Just when life seemed about to compensate her for all she had never had . . ."

"Don't let go like this, Cilla. Remember, nothing is certain."

"No—you are wrong. I saw her, I know."

"You think so."

"Why do you persist in saying that? Have my dreams ever proved groundless?"

"We don't know, yet; perhaps some of them were. But this wasn't one of what you call your dreams; it was a vision, possibly a hallucination, in hypnotic trance. It may have been a true phenomenon of telesthetic communication; assuming that Leonora was really dead, your spirit may have found some means, by some extraordinary effort, to surmount the obstacles, whose very nature is unknown to us, that stand between the living and the dead, prohibiting communication . . . But we don't know."

He argued earnestly, with intention, seeing he had already engaged her interest to such extent that she was forgetting to grieve.

"On the other hand, we do know it's easy to fool ourselves. Remember, you have gone about all day fretted by a feeling that something was wrong with Leonora, some danger threatened her happiness. You passed into the hypnotic trance already prepared to see the worst. You saw it. But the question remains unanswered, and for the time being unanswered: Did you see truly, or did you see a fantasy conjured up by your own imagination influenced by fear?"

"If I could only think that, Philip—!"

"Why not try?"

But he was arguing against his own conviction; his argument lacked con-

clusion. He stopped, reading darkly his shrewd, narrow, rat-like face, reading the threat and triumph in those small, black, close-set eyes, surmising that without a public scene there could be no escaping the interview he demanded.

She shrugged, and in silence led on out to the sidewalk. Her car was waiting across the way. Seeing her, the chauffeur pulled round to the curb.

Mr. Chilvers slipped a gallant hand under her arm to help her in, but before he could follow Priscilla pulled the door to. Immediately his manner changed. Scarlet with anger, he laid a hand on the ledge of the window.

"What's the big idea?" he demanded. "You ought to know better than to think you can gyp me without a struggle."

"There will be no struggle," Priscilla replied quietly, talking from the window. "You see, for reasons of my own, day before yesterday, I chose to let you think me somebody who I am not. These reasons no longer exist. I let you believe I was Leonora," Priscilla explained coldly, "because I wanted to shield her—"

"Oh, no doubt, no doubt!"

"But my motive doesn't matter. Leonora died yesterday. So there's no more need of my pretending. One moment, please!" She forestalled a threatened interruption. "Listen to me! I am not Leonora. My name is Priscilla Maine. I have lived all my life in New York, in the Park Avenue house which belonged to my father. Should we ever meet again, don't presume on the acquaintance I have permitted you to claim but which is now closed. And before you threaten me again, let me advise you to find out the truth about Priscilla Maine."

She put her finger on the telephone button.

"Let go of the door, please," she said, looking calmly into his infuriated eyes. "Will you oblige me? Or shall I send my chauffeur to ask the policeman over there to step this way for a moment?"

Mr. Chilvers opened his mouth, but shut it without speech. A second attempt was more successful.

"If you think you can put it over on me like this—!"

But Priscilla was already speaking into the telephone:

"All right, Arthur; to the studio, please."

The car swept forward so suddenly that Mr. Chilvers was almost dragged off his feet before he remembered to loose his hold.

Satisfied that she had seen the last of him—he would hardly find a second opportunity to annoy her that day, or neglect to make the inquiries she had advised and tomorrow would see her well beyond his reach in Southampton—she sank back in her seat and once more delivered up body and mind and soul to melancholy.

At the mouth of the alley she dismissed the car. "Mrs. Trowbridge will use you for the rest of the afternoon," she told Arthur. "I'll call a taxi to take me home when I'm ready."

Her business in the studio proved more exacting and fatiguing than she had anticipated. Weary to start with, she worked steadily, heedless of the passage of time. It was something past six, when pausing to survey the result of her labors, she discovered there was little more to do. At once she realized her weariness like a dragging weight, and felt that it would be utterly impossible to continue before she had rested for a little.

The invitation of the divan proved too tempting. She lay down, sighing. Sleep possessed her without any warning, without an instant's grace . . .

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

"Scot Free."

To get off scot free is to escape without payment of tax. Scot was a tribute or tax levied upon all subjects according to their ability to pay; lot means the allotment or portion allotted to you, so that to pay scot and lot is to pay the ordinary taxes and also the personal tax allotted to you. If you succeed in evading the tax you get off scot free.

incident served merely to remind her that she had neglected to tell Fosdick about the fellow, his effrontery, the insolence of his ill-veiled threats.

Now the bitterest melancholy oppressed her, a desolation indescribable; the vision of the pool was constant in her imagination, obscuring even material objects that passed under her regard; the sense of loss, a living anguish from which there was no escape.

Only in sleep did she find surcease; then there was oblivion of a sort in a sleep heavy and hot and thick, in which she lay inert like something submerged in a tepid, black, viscous fluid, from which she emerged with throbbing head and sluggish pulses, unrested, enervated, despondent.

Fosdick called up about mid-morning, and hearing her report on the effect of the drug, told her to discontinue it, promising to bring a substitute when he called in the evening.

She promised to be at home to him alone.

Later her maid summoned her to the telephone a second time. Mr. Chilvers was on the wire. "Tell him I've left town for the summer," Priscilla said, too depressed to feel annoyed by his persistence.

But when she was leaving Altman's in the afternoon after an hour or two of perfunctory shopping, Mr. Chilvers waylaid her in the carriage entrance.

The Kitchen Cabinet

There is no other happiness in the world except that of a soul content with its own condition. This is the way to carry heaven about with you.—Alphonse de Sarasin.

MORE THINGS TO EAT.

Rabbits are emergency dishes which are liked by almost everybody and make a hot dish which may be prepared in a short time.



Mexican Rabbit.—Melt one tablespoonful of butter; in it cook one green pepper cut

in squares. When softened a little add one pound of common cheese, cut in small bits, and stir constantly until melted; add two-thirds of a cupful of fresh or canned corn, one-half teaspoonful of salt, one-half teaspoonful of paprika, two eggs well beaten and two-thirds of a cupful of tomato. Stir and cook until smooth and well blended, and when thoroughly hot, serve on rounds of toast, toasted on one side. Serve the rabbit on the untoasted side.

Cream of Corn Soup.—Cook one-half of an onion finely minced in four tablespoonfuls of butter until brown. Add four tablespoonfuls of flour, two cupfuls of milk after the flour has been well blended, two teaspoonfuls of salt, one-fourth of a teaspoonful of pepper and one or two bouillon cubes, provided they are not ninety-nine per cent salt; if so, add no salt until after the cubes are added. Add experience with bouillon cubes should make us wise. Cook until the mixture thickens and add one pint of sweet corn put through a colander. Let the whole boil up once and serve with croûtons.

Green Cheese.—Take two ounces of fresh parsley, one ounce of fresh water cress, one ounce of celery. Dry the parsley before the fire until crisp so that it can be crumbled, but not until it has lost its color. Chop the cress and celery, add the crumbled parsley and mix with four ounces of fresh green cheese. Season with cayenne and salt, and put through a colander. Form into small cheeses to pass with the salad.

Another cheese mixture which is a great favorite is cream cheese mixed with a cupful or two of grated American, seasoned with salt and cayenne, adding cream to make the mixture into a smooth roll or into small pats. Decorate with sliced, stuffed olives.

All you have really to do is to keep your back as straight as you can, and not to think about what is on it; above all not to boast of what is on it. The real meaning of virtue is in that straightness of the back.—Ruskin.

MISCELLANEOUS HELPS.

Before putting the beans into the pot to bake, grease the top well down inside and an inch or two on the outside. The pot will wash much easier.—Citron or orange or lemon peel may be prepared easily by soaking a few minutes in hot water, then put through the meat grinder.

When baking apples fill the centers with broken bits of walnuts and a spoonful of strained honey.

A long-handled corn popper is a fine toaster or broiler. Use in the furnace and broil chops or steak or make a piece of toast.

Gilt frames may be cleaned with oil of turpentine. Rub on with a cloth after dusting well.

Celery salt may be prepared at home. Grind through the finest knife in the meat grinder two ounces of celery seed, add ten times the bulk of salt, stir and mix well and put into a bottle.

A dark blue cover made of denim or gingham is good to slip over the ironing board to save it when pressing suits or dark clothing.

A child's small sadiron is most useful in ironing baby's dresses.

Very pretty and dainty baby shoes may be made from old glove tops. Take the long white kid gloves, have the wrists perfectly clean and press out carefully with a warm iron to remove all wrinkles. Cut the soles and sides in one piece, making the soles wide enough in front to come up over the toes. Put a seam in the back and gather the fullness where the sides do not meet. Line with soft silk; eyelets may be put in or they may be worked by hand. Trim with a shirring or bind the tops, lace with ribbon and the shoes are ready.

Cooked dried apricots, cottage cheese and mayonnaise makes a most delicious salad.

Keep lemons for several weeks by putting them in a fruit jar and sealing them tightly.

When warming over roast meat place in the oven with slices of bacon over the top. Bake until the bacon is crisp.

For eclairs shape the paste four and one-half inches long and one inch wide. Bake, split at the side and fill with coffee, vanilla chocolate or whipped cream filling.

For Bavarian puffs brush the puffs just before taking from the oven with beaten egg and sprinkle with chopped nuts.

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A man is "just as young as ever" until he begins to puff on the third flight of stairs.

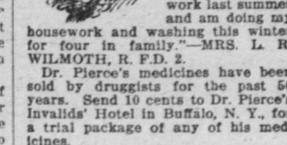
Hands rough? Mystic Cream, that's the stuff. Ask your druggist for it.—Adv.

What has become of the old-fashioned man who got on his knees to propose?

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