

The DARK MIRROR

By LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

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

Illustrated by IRWIN MYERS

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IV. FLIGHT—Continued.

With the cessation of its rumble, came noise of rushing water. Mischance had led her to a spot where the road had been half washed out by the overflow from a mountain stream. The headlights showed an unrelieved stretch of mire which forbade the thought of trying to go on. The only thing to do was to back out—if she could—and, since it would be impossible to turn on the narrow trail, keep on backing till she regained the last fork: on the face of it no easy task, but feasible with care and patience.

Hopefully she restarted the engine and threw the reverse gears. The wheels moved with a sucking noise, at first sluggishly, then worked free and spun briskly. The car held fast where it had stopped. She shut off the ignition and got down to investigate, stepping into mud above her ankles. The sole result of her attempt to back out had been to bog down the wheels nearly to the hubs.

When she had strained the motor for a few more minutes without encouragement, she gave up the hopeless struggle and cried a little into her muddled hands.

The unhappy alternative was hers, to remain in the car till she was found—or she ever was—or to pick her way back through the pitch-dark forest to the first fork in the road, either to wait there to be recaptured by Mario, or else to push on into the valley, or wherever the road might lead, till she came to human habitation.

Either course was dismaying in anticipation. The forest frightened her indescribably. To stop where she was meant perhaps hours of waiting—daylight was still a long time off—in the solitude and silence of the woods, encompassed by she dared not guess what perils from prowling beasts of prey.

And on this reflection, she switched the headlights off, lest their shine attract attention.

She recalled with painful vividness the fear of the forest that had haunted Leonora on the morning of the day of her death.

Of a sudden, in blind, witless panic, she tumbled out of the car and plowed back through the mire to the trail, only to become still more blindly a prey to imaginary terrors when she felt firm ground underfoot, and to blunder insanely on, clawed at by savage, withered hands, tripped and buffeted by malicious limbs, hounded by horrors of the imagination unspeakable.

Within two minutes she was off the trail, thrashing wildly through the undergrowth that choked the woods, hopelessly lost.

V. VALEDICTION.

It was less a woman than an animated scarecrow that broke from a dense thicket and stumbled into the mountain trail in the hot blast of mid-morning.

Her cloak was gone and her slippers as well; bare and bleeding feet and ankles showed through the remnants of what had been silk stockings. Her frock, dripping water from every fold, thanks to a recent misadventure with a brook, was an affair of shreds and tatters caked with splashes of mud and stained with green slime; one sleeve was missing entirely. The bare white arm had been cruelly scratched by thorns. The hair falling round her shoulders was a net of tangles and knots in which leaves and twigs had become entwined. Her face was disfigured with smears of mud in which tears had washed pale channels. Her eyes were red and swollen, her lips puffed, her look was stupid to the point of witlessness.

She panted and at times moaned feebly as she walked—if she could be said to walk, whose progress was a zig-zag thing of yaws and veers like that of a yacht under full sail in a stiff breeze with no hand at the helm.

In a shallow clearing of one side of the trail stood a small shanty of the crudest kind, a crazy structure of undressed logs and rough planks weather-beaten to the shade of slatey gray. It had a door, however, and the door was closed. The girl opened it simply by falling against it. It banged against the wall and swung back into place after admitting her.

The room inside—there was but one—showed evidence of more or less recent occupation: a half-loaf of stale bread on the table, some open tins holding samples of food from which an unpleasant odor exhaled, several empty whisky bottles and one half full, empty cigarette cartons and a vast litter of cigarette stumps. A frying pan on the sheet-iron stove held a rasher of bacon in a pool of congealed grease. There were tumbled blankets on a rickety cot in the corner.

The girl saw none of these things; or if she saw them, they meant nothing to her. As if her strength had only sufficed to sustain her to the shelter of a roof, she dropped to the floor and lay there, panting and sobbing and quaking like a child that had been brutally punished.

Within three minutes a man came running up the trail. He was young, slender and wiry of stature, and wore an aged red sweater with a pair of khaki trousers. His face was of a glowing scarlet shade and dripped with sweat which ran down into his eyes and was at least in part the cause of the monologue of profanity which clogged his labored breathing.

He lumbered on wearily, like one who has run a long distance, ever and anon looking back over shoulder as if he feared pursuit. His right hand held an automatic pistol of heavy caliber, ready for instant use.

At the door of the shanty he paused, shut his lips tight to still the noise of his own breathing, and listened with head bent to one side. Apparently he heard nothing. A look of fear that had clouded his eyes passed, and he grinned an evil, snarling grin as he kicked open the door and went in.

The girl had fallen on the far side of the table, where she was not immediately visible. Unsuspecting of her presence, the man closed the door and lurched to the one unglazed window, where he stopped to spy out anxiously, peering down the trail he had just traveled and listening intently.

But the girl had been roused by his entrance, and first pushing her shoulders up from the floor with her arms, presently laid hold of the edge of the table and pulled herself into a



"Leonora!"

standing position. The table rocked slightly and scraped the floor. A whisky bottle fell on its side.

The man turned like a hunted animal, snarling, saw the woman standing there, in her torn frock, water dripping from her hair and clothing, and screamed with terror like a trapped wolf.

His arm flew up and his pistol spat five shots in less than a second. He fired point blank, at a distance of not more than five feet. Yet when the fifth shot had been fired the girl was still standing, unharmed, staring blankly at him.

Then he went utterly insane with fear. One word—"Leonora!"—was his shrieked valediction to the world. His pistol held a sixth cartridge. He thrust the muzzle between his teeth and pulled the trigger.

As Carnehan fell, Fosdick by the detective Andrews and the man Mario broke into the shanty.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

WHEN IT CAME TRUE.

The day was very still, so still that Priscilla could hear no sound but the unending mutter of surf breaking on the Southampton shore.

She lay on a chaise-longue, indolently watching the sea, just as she had watched it daily from her window, for hours on end, through weeks that ran into months without her heed. Upon her lap rested an open book, upon the book a hand as white as the fair margins of its pages. But it was not more colorless than her face. In her look there was a hint of resignation, of patient weariness.

She had been a long time ill, with an illness which Aunt Esther persisted in calling brain fever, though Dr. Philip Fosdick had for it a name less picturesque.

And for a longer time she had been in a state that was by courtesy termed convalescence; though if she were making any real progress toward complete recovery it was imperceptible to solicitous eyes. On the other hand, there were no signs of retrogression. She remained, in short, quite simply in suspense, as one might hold life not worth the trouble either of living or of relinquishing. The vitality of her body could not yield; neither could it

prevail against the inertia of her spirit. She existed—nothing more.

Fosdick knew this lassitude could not endure forever; the day must dawn that would see her cure complete. Meanwhile he was assiduous in his attention, unflinching in sympathetic understanding and so frequently a guest of the villa that seldom two days passed without seeing his car at his door.

Today he was tapping at her door before Priscilla knew he was in the house. She recognized his knock and had a wan smile of welcome ready for him. Nothing in his manner suggested that the visit was to prove extraordinary as he sat down beside the chaise-longue, his finger tips upon her pulse, and amiably recited the ritual of inquiries concerning her condition.

"A little weary, Philip," she told him in answer to one stereotyped question. "I began to wonder if one ever does recover from some things."

"Such as—?" he smiled.

"Things you've forbidden me to talk about."

Fosdick looked thoughtful. "I don't know," he said in a speculative tone. "Perhaps I've been wrong about that; or perhaps the time has come when we may talk. In fact, I rather think it has—if you feel strong enough."

"Meaning, I presume," she said with a quiet smile, "you've something to tell me."

"Meaning," he laughed, "just that. It was no good our talking till I had. But now . . ." He drew from a pocket a handful of old letters: "The solution of the mystery," he announced—"at last!"

"Don't tease me, Philip."

"I won't, but first I must explain. Has it ever occurred to you to wonder how Andrews and I happened to be with Mario that morning when we found you in the cabin with Carnehan?"

"I've wondered—yes—wondered whether it was true or not. All that time seems so unreal as I recall it, I've wondered often if perhaps it were nothing but another kind of dream, something I thought I lived through while I was actually in bed, delirious."

"No; it was all true enough. But let me tell you . . ." The afternoon you disappeared I had spent out of town, trying to interview an inmate of a home for the aged, up near Pawling—an old, old woman, registered on the records of the institution as Mrs. Leonora O'More."

"Mother O'More!"

"The same. On the clue you gave me of that name Andrews traced her to the home. She refused to talk to him. She refused to talk to me. I tried bribery, but money wouldn't tempt her. She had enough for her small needs, and took a malicious pleasure, I fancy, in watching me struggle with my temper when she wouldn't talk. However, her very tactfulness told me she must have something to tell, and I hoped that you, posing to her as Leonora on the strength of the resemblance, might worm the secret out of her. At all events, we were on the right trail. So I hurried back to town—and found you missing. Mrs. Trowbridge in hysterics, the lock broken on the studio door, the devil to pay all round . . ."

"Meanwhile Andrews had run up to Kingston to hunt for Mario—on the strength of your dream in which you heard him tell Leonora he must hurry to catch his train there. When I got home, between three and four in the morning, after a night of fruitless searching for you, I found a long distance call from Kingston waiting for me. Andrews reported that he had located the camp which Mario had rented for his honeymoon. On the off-chance that he might have been concerned in your disappearance—I couldn't rest, of course, and it was something to do—I jumped into my car and arrived at Kingston about nine o'clock in the morning. Andrews had a road map, with the location of the bungalow clearly marked. We struck immediately back through the hills.

"About five miles from our destination we met Mario afoot. You know what he had to tell us. While we were talking—it took some time to make him understand you weren't Leonora and that we had any right to butt in—Carnehan boiled up the road in a high-powered roadster, making about forty miles an hour on a stiff grade—didn't see us, because we'd stopped just around a bend in the road, until he was almost on top of us. He got his brakes on in time to stop just short of my car, which of course was blocking the road. Andrews and Mario recognized him instantly, and he knew Mario. After an interesting three-cornered pistol fight as I ever care to see again in the role of innocent bystander, Carnehan took cover in the woods. We pursued.

"Unquestionably Carnehan took you for the ghost of Leonora, and was convinced when he failed to hit you once in five shots at close range."

"Yes," Priscilla said, "the last thing before he killed himself he shrieked her name."

"Well," Fosdick resumed, "you were

a physical and mental wreck. I had to wait till you were strong enough to confront Mother O'More and cheat the truth out of her. Before you were out of bed she had a paralytic stroke that put her vocal cords out of commission. She couldn't have talked if she'd wanted to. I did everything that could be done for her, and she clung to life with amazing tenacity in one so aged; but the second stroke came yesterday, and finished her. I had made the manager of the home a personal friend. He telephoned at once, and I ran out to Pawling this morning. Among the old woman's few effects we found these letters."

Fosdick didn't offer to give them to Priscilla. "I'd rather you didn't read them yet," he said. "They're rather affecting letters; I'm afraid they'd upset you. Later, when you're quite strong, some time."

"They were written by your father to your mother. She was Mother O'More's niece. She met your father through posing for him. Their marriage was an affair of sudden impulse. They loved each other devotedly, but they were never, after the first few months, happy. Your mother had a strongly independent spirit. She was out of place in the society of your father's friends, knew it, saw how she handicapped him, and resented it bitterly. She refused absolutely to try to mold herself to his ways of life. They quarreled hideously, I fancy. She wanted to leave him, and he wouldn't listen to it. Remember: they were desperately in love."

"Eventually they left New York on a forlorn hope, planning to establish themselves in some part of the country where they were not known and try to build up a life together. That was a foreordained failure. Your father was miserable away from his home and his friends. At last your mother took her fate in her hands and ran away. She took with her Leonora, leaving you to your father."

"Leonora was my sister!"

"You were born twins in California, several months before your mother ran away. . . . Your father used every possible means to try to find your mother and induce her to return to him, but she eluded him till the end; she died, it would seem, a year or so later, leaving Leonora in the care of her aunt—Mother O'More. These letters were addressed to your mother in her care. It would appear they were never answered."

But Priscilla was no longer listening; and perceiving this, Fosdick paused.

"My sister!" the girl exclaimed after many minutes of thought—"Leonora!"

"That is the explanation of the mystery," Fosdick affirmed. "That a strong psychic affinity exists between twins has long been a scientifically accepted fact. The records of psychic research contain many instances of telepathic and telesthetic communication between twins. No record exists of a case so extraordinary as yours, to my knowledge; still, that is the true explanation."

"But Leonora . . . Did she know about me? I mean, did she dream of me as I dreamed of her? I wonder . . ."

"She did, to some extent at least. She told Mario about it. Of course she knew she had a sister. But she had glimpses of your life in her dreams, now and then, and envied you and resented your happier fortune. So Mario says."

"Mario? Then you have seen him—?"

"Today," Fosdick said, smiling. "In fact, I took him with me to Pawling. We've grown to be great friends this summer. He's an extraordinarily fine fellow. He wants to see you if you think you're strong enough for the interview today."

Priscilla got up suddenly.

"Where is he?"

"Downstairs, waiting in the library—alone."

The girl took two impulsive steps toward the door, turned back with a radiant face, and flung out her hand to Fosdick.

"Oh, Philip, Philip!" she cried, tears of happiness in her eyes, contrition quivering in her voice.

He bowed above her hands, pressing them to his lips.

"There, dear girl!" he said, releasing them. "It's happiness enough for me to think . . . But you're keeping Mario waiting. Do go!"

Fosdick stood with a bended head, watching her cross the threshold to that world where dreams come true.

[THE END.]

She Wanted 'Em Specific. Tillie Clinger says the reason she didn't last long as salesgirl at the jewelry counter was because when a man came in and said he wanted something nice for his baby she asked him if his baby was a boy, a girl or a chicken.—Dallas News.

Do Today's Task Well. The best way to make sure of tomorrow's strength, is to put our whole strength into the task of today.—H. R. Hawala.



If you have a mind to adorn your city by consecrated monuments, first consecrate in yourself the most beautiful monument of gentleness and justice and benevolence.—Epictetus.

SEASONABLE GOOD THINGS. A delicious dumpling to use in chicken soup is prepared as follows:

Dumplings.—Take one cupful of melted chicken fat, two cupfuls of milk, two cupfuls of flour, a pinch of nutmeg and a teaspoonful of salt. Heat the fat and milk; when boiling, add the flour to which has been added the nutmeg and salt, cook until it leaves the bottom of the saucepan; cool and add the eggs out at a time, beating well between. Drop by spoonfuls into the boiling soup.

Honeycomb Pudding.—Take one cupful of molasses, one-half cupful of sugar, one-half cupful of sweet milk, four eggs, one teaspoonful of soda. Mix as usual and bake forty-five minutes in a moderate oven. Sauce: Take one-half cupful of brown sugar, two tablespoonfuls of butter, one tablespoonful of cornstarch, one-half cupful of water; cook until thick; then add one pint of whipping cream.

Emergency Dish.—Put a cupful or more of roast beef through the meat chopper, add a small onion also ground through the chopper. Peel and grind four to six potatoes. Grease with sweet fat a deep granite or earthen baking dish, put in the potatoes, season well, add the meat and onion, cover and cook until nearly done, then uncover to brown. This makes a very appetizing dish and one which uses all bits of cold meat.

Shrimp Wiggle.—Take one can of shrimps, two cupfuls of milk, one-half can of peas, one tablespoonful of flour and seasoning. Make a cream sauce with the flour and milk, add the peas and shrimps cut in pieces. Bake in ramekins, using buttered crumbs to finish the top.

Cherry Salad.—Take a can of white cherries, seed, add thirty marshmallows cut in quarters and one-fourth of a pound of almonds blanched and shredded. For the dressing use the yolks of two eggs, the cherry juice, a little lemon juice, flour and butter to thicken. Cook until smooth. Serve the salad well mixed with the dressing on head lettuce.

He that has character, need have no fear of his condition. Character will draw condition after it.—H. W. Beecher.

NICE DESSERTS. Desserts which are easy to make, good to eat, pretty to look at and not expensive are very popular. Among these you will find some.

Graham Pudding.—Take one cupful of each of molasses and sweet milk, two cupfuls of graham flour, one cupful of slightly chopped raisins, a little salt, two teaspoonfuls of soda dissolved in a little warm water; mix and beat well and steam for two hours. Serve with the following sauce: One well-beaten egg, one cupful of powdered sugar, one cupful of whipped cream, one teaspoonful of vanilla.

Grapenut Pudding.—Pour three and one-fourth cupfuls of boiling water over two cupfuls of grapenuts, then set aside to cool. Beat the yolks of two eggs with three-fourths of a cupful of cinnamon, cloves and nutmeg; then add two cupfuls of nutmeats, one-half cupful of raisins and the same of dates, with a generous pinch of salt. Mix this with the grapenuts and fold in the stiffly-beaten whites. Bake in a moderate oven for 25 minutes or steam one hour. Serve with a lemon sauce or with whipped cream.

Tribby Cream.—Take one-pound box of marshmallows, one can of pineapple, one cupful of whipping cream. Cut the marshmallows into quarters and let them soak in some of the cream and pineapple juice. Cut the pineapple into small bits and drain. Beat the cream and when stiff stir in the drained marshmallows and pineapple, then add chopped walnuts or blanched almonds and cherries. Serve in sherbet cups and garnish the top with a maraschino cherry.

Damson Pudding.—Take one cupful of sugar, one-half cupful of butter, one cupful of flour, one cupful of damson preserves, three eggs, one teaspoonful of soda dissolved in three tablespoonfuls of sour milk. Mix well and bake. Serve with a sauce prepared as follows: One cupful of sugar, one pint of milk, two tablespoonfuls of cornstarch, one teaspoonful of vanilla, the whites of two eggs. Mix and cook all except the eggs for ten minutes, then fold in the beaten whites; flavor with vanilla and serve.

Bread Pudding.—Take one and one-half cupfuls of fine soft bread crumbs, measured lightly; one egg, beaten, one-fourth of a cupful of sugar, one-half teaspoonful of salt, two cupfuls of milk. Beat the sugar and salt into the beaten egg, add the milk and gradually stir into the crumbs. Let stand half an hour, then bake in a dish of hot water.

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On His Dignity. Herbert has no mother, but two aunts, Ida and Nellie, who love him dearly. Their pet name for him is Buddy. Aunt Ida had company one day and invited Aunt Nellie and Herbert to chicken and dumpling dinner.

When seated at the table his Aunt, Nellie asked: "Buddy, do you like dumplings?"

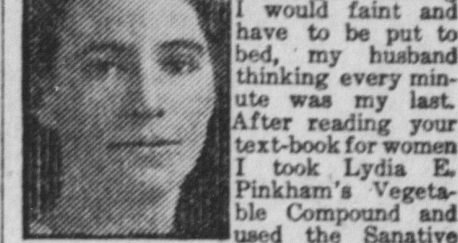
He straightened himself up with an offended air and said: "If you please call me Herbert before company."—Chicago Tribune.

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