

The TRUANT SOUL

by Victor Rousseau

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"WHO'S THERE?"

SYNOPSIS. — Nurses in the Southern hospital at Avonmouth are angered by the insolent treatment accorded them by Dr. John Lancaster, head of the institution, and there is a general feeling of unrest, into which Joan Wentworth, probationary nurse, is drawn. Doctor Lancaster is performing a difficult operation, for which he has won fame. Joan, with other nurses, is in attendance. She is upset, through no fault of her own, and makes a trivial blunder at a critical moment. The patient dies and Doctor Lancaster accuses her of clumsiness. She is suspended, the action meaning the end of her hope of a career as a nurse. Without relatives or friends, and desperate, Joan, urged by her landlady, goes to Doctor Lancaster's office to ask him to overlook her blunder and reinstate her. She overhears a violent altercation between Doctor Lancaster and other men she does not see. Joan is struck by the favorable change in the appearance and demeanor of the doctor, recalling that at times in the hospital he has been gentle and thoughtful and at others supercilious and bullying. He tells her he can do nothing for her at the hospital, but offers her a position in a nursing institution in the country, telling her she can be of "great assistance" to him. A man named Myers demands she tell him what the doctor had said to her. She denies him the information, and he covertly threatens her. At the institution, which is owned by Doctor Lancaster, Joan finds Myers. He tells her he is the secretary. She instinctively dislikes and fears him. The only patient at the institution is a Mrs. Dana, demented but harmless. Joan is vaguely uneasy, feeling that there is some mystery about the place. Doctor Lancaster arrives. Joan accuses him of deceiving her, declaring her intention of leaving. He tells her he is the patient who needs her, saying he wants help in a "big fight," but makes no further explanation. She decides to stay. Evidently Doctor Lancaster is afraid of Myers. Joan discovers that the doctor is a victim of the morphine habit. Joan takes charge of him, helping him to overcome temporarily his craving for the drug. Myers accuses her of "meddling," but she refuses to leave or to give up her care of Lancaster. Mrs. Fraser, the matron, admits all at the institution are afraid of Myers, but will not say why. She begs Joan to "save the doctor." Joan in a measure succeeds in freeing Lancaster from his craving for drugs.

CHAPTER VI—Continued

"It is not what Doctor Lancaster says," answered Joan. "It is what I say. Mrs. Fraser, please give me the storeroom key."

The woman, looking askance at Myers, let her hand slip down toward the bunch at her side.

"The key, please," repeated Joan, and received it. Quickly she locked the door and put the key in the pocket of her uniform.

"Now," she said, "I want you all to understand this situation. I am employed by Doctor Lancaster. I am under orders not to go until the month is ended. I am in charge of him. Until he is responsible for his actions I shall remain in charge, under Doctor Jenkins. Doctor Jenkins, is it your order that Doctor Lancaster is to receive a whole dose of morphine every few hours, of the amount he has been taking?"

"Why, Miss Wentworth, I never ordered that," protested Jenkins. "You see, Miss Wentworth—"

"Until you do," interposed Joan bluntly, "I shall continue the treatment as I learned it in Doctor Lancaster's hospital at Avonmouth. And if the storeroom is opened by anyone but myself I shall take legal action to protect Doctor Lancaster's interests."

"Miss Wentworth!" cried Myers. "You are making a tragedy where none exists. Nobody wants to harm the doctor. We all have one sole thought, to help him. Don't we, doctor?" he continued, addressing Lancaster.

"You are all—very kind to me," Lancaster mumbled.

"There, you see!" said Myers, turning toward Joan again. "There may exist differences of opinion," he continued in a facile manner, "and maybe I've expressed myself too forcibly. But we're all at one in wishing the doctor to get well as quickly as he can."

He was almost fawning now, but Joan remained inflexible. She knew that if she relaxed from the nervous tension that was upholding her she would become hysterical.

The group dispersed. Myers followed the girl out upon the veranda and stood for a long time near the door, watching her as she sat at the farther end, trying to compose herself. At last he came up to her.

"See here, Miss Wentworth," he began impetuously; "I've come to you twice and spoken fairly to you. Maybe you see now that you would have been wiser to have met me in the same spirit. Come, now, are we to work together as friends or not?"

"I have no objection," answered Joan, "but my duty concerns nobody but the doctor."

"You mean you won't co-operate with me in saving him from himself?" He looked at her with sullen challenge in his eyes.

"I do," said Joan.

Myers thrust his hands into his pockets. "Right!" he said. "Three

times is enough. I understand. And that's the last you'll hear from me about it."

He went away, and Joan sat staring out across the darkening hills. How had she managed to fight this blind battle of hers to a successful issue? She did not know; but, whatever the hold might be that Myers had over Lancaster, she felt that Myers himself was in dread of its discovery.

Presently she saw the matron come cautiously out of the house and hurry toward her.

"How did you do it, Miss Wentworth?" she asked in awe. "You did what none of us would have dared to do—not me, nor Doctor Jenkins."

"Why not?" asked Joan. "Mrs. Fraser, of whom are you afraid? And Doctor Lancaster? It is not of that man Myers, whom he could send about his business at any time when he found strength of will. Who is it?"

"O, Miss Wentworth, I don't know," the matron sobbed. "But save the doctor! O, do save the doctor from that man who is trying to kill him!"

Chapter VII

Joan had had supper with Lancaster, and it was night, and once more the fight was raging.

She had sat on the veranda with him, had talked with him, had seen the better soul of the man rise to the surface as he struggled with the morphine devil; then she had given him his half dose again, and, as his strength revived and the agony departed, she had seen the facile, lying spirit enter into him.

He was lying, wrapped in his dressing gown, upon his bed, and she sat at his side, at grips with the devil in him that clamored for its victim's body, that it might possess it entirely, as surely a devil as any spirit of evil, though its shrine was a little glass bottle holding a few drops of fluid.

She was fighting for Lancaster, fighting for the better Lancaster again, and he was writing in torment and pleading with her to go, to leave him to his fate, since the suffering was intolerable and subjection preferable.

There was an hour of hideous battle, but somehow she managed to keep him quiet till midnight. And seated beside him, watching him, Joan came to the conclusion that this was one of those strange cases of double personality of which she had read in medical books. It was impossible to reconcile this Lancaster in any way with the man whom she had seen mo-



"How Did You Do It, Miss Wentworth?" She Asked in Awe.

mentarily at the hospital, and with the tyrant of the operating room. For that man was essentially base and ignoble, and this man was honor and truth, when the morphine fiend retired, baffled for a space, and under that pitiful load of shame she sensed the cleanness of the man's soul and its integrity.

Somehow she held his devil at bay until midnight, and then, with a second victory to his credit, he stretched out his arm for the hypodermic. Then Joan saw the look of contentment come into his face, heard the satisfied sigh—and there was the old Lancaster before her, shifty, furtive and false.

No, not altogether, for something of that victory remained with him, the promise of renewed manhood; the morphine devil was losing its grip. Ground had been won. It should never be ceded. Joan swore that as she watched by the bedside.

"Doctor Lancaster, you have promised me to sleep till six," she said. "Can I trust you?"

"How can you doubt my word, Miss Wentworth?" asked Lancaster, with an affectation of surprise. "Of course you can. You know, I am not a regular user of drugs. I have been overworked, and I took morphine to make me sleep, and somehow it got hold of me. I think I must be unusually susceptible to the drug."

The old lie of the stupid drug devil! But Joan had the storeroom key, and she knew that it would require a hammer or ax to break down the strong door. And she would wake and hear him, and fight again as she had fought that morning.

"Then I am going to bed till six," she said.

"But, Miss Wentworth," he protested, "six hours is an impossibly long

period. Every three hours is my time, and now that I am on half-doses—you remember what Jenkins said this morning. You must go slowly with a confirmed drug-user like myself.

"Stop! Don't listen to me!" he added suddenly. "You can trust me, Miss Wentworth. I'm going to fight this out, and win."

"You are winning," answered Joan, bending over him. "Don't forget that Say 'I am winning' whenever the pain seems uncontrollable and your will seems gone. It won't last long. Doctor Lancaster, you are your own self at this moment, and nothing can harm you. Fight the good fight!"

He caught her hand and carried it to his lips. "Miss Wentworth, you are my good angel!" he cried. "I secured the services of an angel unaware," he added, looking at her with that pathetic humor which went straight to her heart. "I want to win for your sake. But why are you taking so much trouble for a worthless old fellow like me?"

"Don't flatter yourself that it is all for you, Doctor Lancaster. Perhaps I may want to save the most distinguished surgeon in the South."

At her words he started; he stared at her, and then fell back upon the pillow, hiding his face. Joan turned away. Again she had touched some hidden spring of memory; what it was she could not know, but it was evident that she had wounded him to the quick.

Perhaps it was the contrast between the office he held and the man he had become. Perhaps it was the knowledge of his secret bondage which had broken him down at last and driven him back to the institution, and Myers.

"Miss Wentworth, I want you to lock my door and take away the key," he said. "I may have a secret supply somewhere."

"I don't think you have," answered Joan. "You have none in this room, have you?"

"No."

"I believe that. And, anyway, I am going to trust you. That is part of your fight. I am going to trust you till six."

He said good night in a low tone and turned away. Joan went up to her room. She lay down, but did not undress. She was afraid, and she admitted that she was afraid, and nothing but Lancaster's desperate need of her would have kept her an hour longer in the institute. But she was exhausted from the day, and soon she was asleep.

She slept that sleep which brings no recreation for the fabled body or the overwrought mind. All the while she was back with Lancaster in his room below, in spirit. She knew that, as he had said, the drug bondage was only the climax of his difficulties. What had there been that had wrecked the man? Jenkins' hint at stolen funds? Of one thing she was sure: Lancaster, sunken as he was, was incapable of dishonesty. No, she must have placed a wrong construction on Jenkins' words.

And in her sleep her brain went on puzzling over the problem. Only her body was quiescent, and it lay wearily in the bed like some chained captive.

But suddenly the urgent summons of the brain shook from it the trammels of sleep. Joan listened intently, awake upon the instant, as some wild creature of the woods that senses danger. Somebody was coming along the corridor.

The footfalls were so soft and stealthy that she might have thought she was dreaming but for the sense of imminent danger, the knowledge of some malevolent design. The steps stopped and began again, the merest touches of sound against the silence of night, the lightest pattering of bare feet outside the door.

Then the door began to open. There was no moon, and the faint starlight outside only seemed to render darker the obscurity within. Yet, through the darkness Joan knew that a hand lay on the door jamb, and that a figure watched her across the room.

She leaped from her bed. "Who's there?" she called, in tones that seemed to shock the silence.

She could see nothing now, and she dared not turn aside to light her lamp. She knew that the figure was crouching somewhere. She heard the softest breathing, but could not locate it in the room. She felt the atmosphere of evil that surrounded her. She started to cross the room, groping, with arms outstretched. Then she found the intruder and flung herself upon it.

Her left hand closed about a wrist, supple and strong. Her right hand held another hand. They wrestled in the darkness, their bodies tense but motionless, only the hands and wrist muscles at strife. Not a sound came from their lips.

Joan thought it was a woman's hands she held. Her fingers sought the menace in the closed fists. The left hand of the intruder was empty; but in the right was a jagged piece of a broken tumbler that tinkled to the floor.

So a woman is the mystery! Now why is she so bent on revenge?

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

HOW TO KEEP WELL

DR. FREDERICK R. GREEN
Editor of "HEALTH"

(2, 1932, Western Newspaper Union.)

CARING FOR THE AGED

IT WAS long ago recognized that babies need special care. The infant's body is not like the adult body. It requires food and care, both in health and sickness, which are suited to it. So we have, in the medical profession, a group of men who have given special attention to the needs of child life. We have books and pamphlets and articles, telling mothers and nurses how to care for the very young.

At the other extreme of human life are the very old. Their bodies and their ills, like those of the very young, need special care and treatment. This fact has only recently been recognized.

In a recent article in the Virginia Medical Monthly, Dr. Thomas H. Boggs of Baltimore considers some of the special problems of old age. With the increasing length of life, the subject is of greater importance than ever before. In many households today there are aged persons who need special care.

The aged person, like the infant, is frail. Physically and mentally, he lacks the elasticity and quick rebound of the vigorous person of middle life. Old persons are apt to be talkative, fretful, strongly attached to their old views, unable to fix the mind on new subjects. The mind like the body has gotten into ruts through its long years of use. These habits of living, if suddenly broken, may cause serious results. Slight injuries or operation, sudden changes in surroundings, occupation or living conditions have a much more marked effect on the old than on the middle aged.

One of the most important physical difficulties of old age is constipation, due to loss of teeth and, consequently, reduced chewing ability, reduced activity of digestion, poor selection of food and lack of exercise. Properly fitted false teeth, the use of foods containing fiber, such as bran, spinach, lettuce, celery and cabbage, drinking plenty of water and the administration of mild, non-irritating laxatives, such as mineral oil, will be of value in such cases.

Many old persons from habit eat too much. A simple diet of well-cooked foods is best, avoiding fats, fried foods and too much starch.

Heavy exercise is, of course, out of the question. For the old, so long as they are physically able, walking is the best—outdoors in good weather, or the porch or indoors on stormy days.

THE "GOLD CURE" FOR TUBERCULOSIS

CONSUMPTIVES are always hopeful. Persons suffering from other diseases often lose hope early in the fight, and their friends and relatives find great difficulty in encouraging them to make an effort to get well. But the tuberculosis patient almost always expects to get well. Indeed, there seems to be something stimulating about the tuberculosis poison. The mind is not only keen and active; in some cases it is abnormally brilliant. Some of the greatest works of literature have been written by persons far gone with consumption. Keats and Robert Louis Stevenson are two brilliant examples.

The consumptive always expects to be cured, somehow, sometime. This peculiar optimism also makes the consumptive a ready believer in any new treatment. More fake cures and patent medicines for consumption have been sold than for any other disease. In the last twenty-five years innumerable serums, vaccines and drugs have been promoted as tuberculosis cures. Each one lasted for a short time and was forgotten.

The latest is the "gold cure." Gold has always had a magical appeal to the public. Witness the "gold treatment" for alcoholism. Yet gold as a drug has little if any effect on the human body.

Professor Moellgard of Denmark recently announced to the Danish Medical Society that if a solution of a gold salt was introduced into the blood, there was no effect. If the patient was healthy, but if he had tuberculosis, a violent reaction followed. This was presumably due to the releasing of the tubercle germs. Doctor Moellgard said that he had cured two monkeys with this treatment. Several other Danish physicians have tried it with good results. But several deaths following it also occurred.

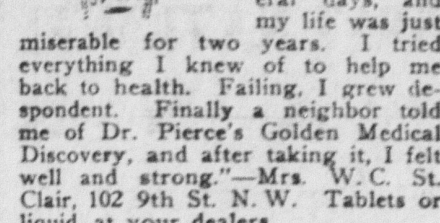
Doctor Moellgard himself is very cautious in his statements and has asked the Medical Research Council of Great Britain to investigate it.

The most that can be said about it, at present, is that it is an entirely new method of the value of which we know nothing. Until greater experience increases our knowledge, it is not a safe or promising treatment.

The more we know about consumption, the less reason we have to expect that any drug will cure it. Tuberculosis is a disease of civilization. The only treatment that offers any hope is rest, good food, fresh air and sunshine.

Your Neighbor Knows

Roanoke, Va.—"I had a severe attack of the 'flu' from which I could not seem to recover. I was without strength or ambition, my stomach went back on me, and what little food I did eat soured. I would have violent sick-headaches that would last several days, and my life was just miserable for two years. I tried everything I knew of to help me back to health. Finally a neighbor told me of Dr. Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery, and after taking it, I felt well and strong."—Mrs. W. C. St. Clair, 102 9th St. N. W. Tablets or liquid, at your dealers.



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"Yes, sir," said the town oracle "they's lots o' folks runnin' fer office hereabouts; some of 'em wuz jes' born to it, an' they run as reg'lar an' as natural as water down hill. That of fellows you seen speakin' is one o' the ol'time runners, but I can't tell fer certain jes' how long he's been a-runnin'; as I've only been here 30 years."

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