

The Truant Soul

By Victor Rousseau

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Chapter XII

Without a sound Lancaster leaped at him.

Joan saw the secretary snatch up the lamp and hold it on high. She heard his screaming, terrified voice above the uproar. He stood like some squat statue illuminating the space above the dark in which Lancaster and Lawson sprawled, clutching at each other like two primeval cave men.

It was grotesque, for it was like a man fighting with himself; and, in fact, it might have been Lancaster fighting with his evil angel. He was no match for Lawson, but at first his pent-up fury, at last unleashed, matched the two equally. Then Lawson flung his adversary from him and struggled to his knees. As Lancaster grasped him and tried to rise he flung him down again. Lancaster's head struck the corner of the iron bedstead. His hands unclenched; he sighed and lay perfectly still. Joan saw the look of malignant rage upon Lawson's face, saw him raise his heel above the face of the unconscious man. He would have ground out Lancaster's life, but that Joan pulled the revolver from her pocket and thrust it into his face for the second time.

Lawson staggered backward, rage and terror depleted upon his features in the light of the swaying oil lamp. At that moment Myers was crouching near her. He set the lamp down. Joan felt a sharp pain in the upper part of her arm. She saw the secretary putting something into his pocket. He dodged the wavering revolver and backed toward the door, pulling Lawson with him.

"I'm going to finish this!" yelled Lawson.

Myers clutched at him and pulled him into the hall. Joan heard Myers' eager whispers, and Lawson's struggles and angry muttering gradually subside.

Then she heard them enter the secretary's room, and, forgetting them instantly, she bent over Lancaster and raised his head upon her knee.

He was breathing heavily. The blow had only stunned him. Joan tried to lift him upon the bed, but he was too heavy for her. As she was attempting to do so, however, the door opened and Mrs. Fraser came in.

"I found a key," she whispered, trembling. "I heard them fighting. Heaven help me, what has that devil done to the doctor?"

"He isn't badly hurt," said Joan. "Help me get him upon the bed."

Mrs. Fraser and Joan succeeded. Lancaster lay there, still unconscious. The matron clung heavily to the bedstead, looking at Joan piteously.

"I know it all now," she muttered. "I should have known before if I'd listened to the Millville gossip. That devil is his brother."

"Yes," said Joan shortly. "What are you going to do, Mrs. Fraser?"

"I'm going to stand by the doctor," the woman answered. "I stood by him year after year when I thought he was possessed by an evil spirit. Wouldn't I stand by him now?"

"Good," said Joan. "And I, too. Tomorrow we'll make short work of those men."

"Heaven save you, you don't know that man, Miss Wentworth," muttered the matron. "He's a devil. He has no pity. And he has a devil ten times worse than himself."

"Myers? Who is he?"

"He was his assistant here. He was tried once, they tell me, for poisoning his sweetheart. He sent her candy—but they couldn't find any poison in her body. It was his master made the analysis, and he lied to get Myers free and have his hold on him. It's all plain to me now, Miss Wentworth."

"If you knew this," said Joan, "you should have told me; you should have told the police, told anyone rather than let him drug Doctor Lancaster day after day."

"I thought it was the doctor who was in league with him," the matron muttered. "Miss Wentworth, I'm timid, I'm easily frightened, but not another day will I keep silent. Tomorrow—"

"Yes, tomorrow," said Joan. "You'd better go to bed now, Mrs. Fraser. I'll guard the doctor with my revolver, and tomorrow we'll end these years of slavery. Doctor Lancaster is a free man. Think of him as a free man. The past is all behind us."

The matron slipped away stealthily to her room. Joan took her seat beside Lancaster, listening to the incoherent mutterings which had begun. Presently his eyes opened. He stared at her for some minutes until recognition came into them.

"Joan!" he whispered, stretching out his hand to hers.

She let him take and hold it, and sat beside him, while he began muttering again. Gradually he began to realize where he was, and to remember.

"It is all true, then, Joan," he said. "He has had his revenge for his fancied wrongs. He has had the best years of my life, and he has beaten me in the end."

"Beaten you?" asked Joan. "You

are not beaten. They are at their wits' ends what to do now, and tomorrow you will send them packing and begin your new life."

"A pitiful hope," he answered. "For he has given me back one thing—my faith in that poor woman upstairs, and, with it, a greater faith in humanity; but he has robbed me of all my hope."

"Why, John?"

"Because I could not have imagined that humanity was so vile. Joan, I am crushed by his revelation. If he entered this room now I feel that his will would dominate mine."

"Those are the words of a sick man," said Joan. "Tomorrow you will adjust yourself. Tomorrow you will be strong. Why, hardly a man on earth could do what you have done with the morphine."

"I suppose I shall carry on my fight," he answered wearily. "But victory will mean nothing to me."

"I shall stand by your side until I have seen you conquer, and until I have seen you happy in your success."

"And then, Joan?"

"Then? Then I shall go somewhere, I suppose."

"Go away? From me? Is it because of Mrs. Dana?"

"Because of her, John."

"But she is nothing to me. She was never anything. Even my monomania of revenge rose out of wounded pride, not love. Surely you will not leave me because I once thought that I loved another?"

"It isn't that, John. But, you see, she has been an integral part of your life all these years. Even though her mind was gone, there was the consciousness of her presence that ate into your brain; she was the mainspring of your existence here. She would have been your wife today, but for that dastard's scheme. She is innocent, she has been deeply wronged, and her life has become bound up with yours indissolubly. You see, John, there is no getting away from that."

"Joan, don't you know she hates me? She thinks that my death will avenge her wrongs and cure her of her troubles. She has tried three times to kill me. In some mysterious

manner she has learned the location of my room. Once she stabbed me in the wrist with a table-knife. Once she got the matron's revolver, but fortunately it was unloaded. I have been planning to send her somewhere where she could be better cared for and where my presence would not be a constant incitation to her."

Joan shook her head. "It is all part of the past," she said. "One can't cancel the past. One must just carry it with one and try to profit by it. You know that, Joan."

"You do not love me, Joan."

She turned her face away; tears that filled her eyes came from the depths of her being. Lancaster took both her hands in his.

"You love me, Joan?"

"Too well to wrong you and myself," she answered. "Too well to let our love build a wall between us. So well that I would rather let the spiritual bond remain, rather than mar it."

He drew her toward him, and she remained with her cheek resting against his, with his arms about her. She could not stir. A strange physical lethargy seemed to hold her limbs, but her will was unshaken.

"Your last word, Joan?" whispered Lancaster.

"No, dear," she answered. "The humorous look that came at such odd moments into Lancaster's eyes flickered there now. "Your very last?" he asked.

"O, don't ask me to deny my resolution," she said.

She released herself and stood beside him. As she did so she had a sensation as if her feet rested on a cushion of air. Her physical weakness was matched by her sense of in-

stability; she longed with all her heart to lean within the arms outstretched toward her; she knew that, if she had given Lancaster life, he could give her the strength of life; he was of her own people, and all that was chivalric and dear in the land she had loved seemed embodied in him. And before her she saw the closing hospital walls of some far distant city; she must exult herself from everything that she had known.

"You little stubborn thing, Joan!" said Lancaster tenderly. "But I shall go on loving you."

"I shall love you, John."

"I shall hear from you sometimes?"

"Yes. And I shall remain in Avonmouth until your battle is won. But there will be no battle. They know that they are beaten. You will never be weak again."

"No," said Lancaster. "But, O Joan, if you had said 'yes' to me it would have been so easy."

With the maternal feeling that is part of every woman's love for the man she loves, she stooped and kissed his forehead.

"You must try to sleep now," she said. "I shall leave the revolver with you, and you shall lock your door."

"I am not afraid of them," he answered. "They can do nothing, Joan. Keep it to assure you of your own safety."

That seemed the better way. There was nothing that the pair could do but Lancaster. If they aimed at anyone it would be she. She saw that, and she went out without speaking to Lancaster again. In the hall she breathed more freely. It was ended now, and she knew that she had done the right thing, the only possible thing. But Lancaster had not surmised the terrific woman's battle which she had fought during those last few minutes.

She stood in the hall for a few moments in uncertainty. She did not mean to sleep, but to lie awake with her door open, resting, and listening for any movements in the house. But, though her brain was awake, she was more tired than she had ever been in her life. She could hardly drag her limbs upstairs, and again she had that sense of walking on air. Under the little burning lamp she stopped again to gather strength to go to her room. The ticking of the clock in the hall below was the only sound in the house. She strained her ears to catch the sound of voices from Myers' room, but she could hear nothing. Yet the men could not be asleep. They must be planning together.

The silence in the ramshackle old building was a ghastly one. It seemed to hide innumerable thoughts, as if those of all who had ever lived within its walls survived, breaking upon her brain in invisible waves. She felt enmeshed in a web, as the dreamer who struggles to wake into free life from the horrors of nightmare. The wind had gone down, and the raindrops dripped rhythmically from the eaves.

Joan had an intense inclination to surrender, to run back into Lancaster's room, cry to him to help her, to let her fight beside him as long as they lived. And the silence, which was becoming more terrific every moment, was unmistakably malevolent.

She reached her room and tried to shake away her fears. She went to the window and leaned out. The night was clearing, and a delicious air blew in from the hills. Not a light was to be seen in Millville or Lancaster. And she wept again, heartbroken. It was all ended, that peace which had begun to inclose her, and all her hopes, and all that love within was bound up so intimately with the idea of love.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

**Genius of Philology
Given Stern Justice**

Curious pleas have sometimes been put forward in support of the reprieve of notorious criminals. One of the strangest was that on behalf of George Ruloff, an American school teacher, who was convicted in 1870 of a series of robberies and murders, his own wife and daughter being among the victims. For cold-blooded cruelty his record would be hard to beat, but Ruloff had his other side.

He was an ardent philologist, and had been engaged for years on the invention of a universal language. No one could attempt to palliate his crimes, but a widely signed petition was presented to the governor of Virginia for his reprieve on the ground that as his invention, if completed, would be of the utmost benefit to mankind it would be criminal folly to execute such a light of learning. The governor thought otherwise and Ruloff was duly hanged.

Copying Nature

Cover a billiard table in a bright red cloth instead of the customary soft green and every billiard hall would be deserted in half an hour. Billiard tables from the beginning were covered with green for the same reason that nature covers her open stretches usually with green, because it is soothing to the eye.

Popular Ensemble Promises to Stay

Combination Mode Continues to Hold Its Own With Spring Fashions.

Another fashion season is at hand, and still the ensemble continues to hold its own. Its prestige has in no wise lessened; rather one might say that it has increased. And it is not difficult to understand its success and popularity, for there are so many different interpretations, each one smart and each one distinctive.

Perhaps the most interesting thing about the latest costumes of the ensemble genre is the combination of materials. Silk is used with wool, leather as put together with silk, knitted fabrics are combined with woven materials, and there is quite as much versatility in the colors and designs as in the texture of the fabrics.

A costume which is a sample of the spring modes is the ensemble, which consists of a frock of plaid or striped silk and a coat of kasha or one of the kindred fabrics. Almost invariably the coat is lined with the same material that fashions the frock.

As an illustration of this mode a most attractive model reverses the usual order of things, for the dress is of natural color kasha, while the coat is of a heavy crepe silk with brown and yellow plaids on a natural tone ground. Kasha lines the coat and adds the warmth which is so often necessary.

Of particular interest is another suit. In this the straight little one-

New Printed Silk in Wrought Iron Design



A distinctively new note in spring fashions is printed silk, deriving its inspiration from wrought iron designs. The charming garment shown was displayed at the fashion show of the National Garment Retail association.

portant point emphasized in the new fashions for early spring.

Not only is the trend toward more subtle colorings evident in frocks of plain fabrics, but printed materials reveal a similar tendency to exploit the delicate tones of rose, pink, blue, lavender and pale green.

Quite lovely are the new frocks of printed chiffon with prim little flower designs or large blurry patterns. These are, as a rule, untrimmed, relying for individuality upon the way the material itself is handled.

Another fashion note which should be kept in mind, for future use if not for immediate purposes, is that cretonne is to be used for the smartest costumes. It is, however, a cretonne glorified almost beyond recognition by stitchery in silk and metal thread and by fine beading.

Dresses, coats, bathing suits with knee-length coats to match, are made of cretonne and the necessary beach umbrella, also of this fabric, is shaped like a Japanese parasol.

Ashes of Roses in New Hats for Spring Wear

More is heard each day of the color which some call ashes of roses. This is a grayish rose shade that always has been liked by the French.

The color is such that it could be nicely developed for the street—that is, in pipings and facings, and touches of that kind. Last spring it will be remembered, Paris modistes brought out the flesh-color facing on the black hat. This new color would fill this need nicely and would be a shade not quite as perishable as the flesh.

Black fallie, gros de Paris, and satin hats are suggested with touches of ashes of roses as a facing, or perhaps in a double cording on the brim edge, or as a piping along the brim edge, and used in conjunction with black cordings of the fabric for a crown side ornament.

In the colors favored especially for spring hats, there are two pinks on the card, the conch shell and the tango, but neither of these is exactly the grayish pink of ashes of roses. These two pinks have been used for entire hats in fallie and bengaline.

Printed Fabrics Are in Spring Fashion Picture

A certain feminine daintiness achieved by the use of filmy chiffon and georgettes, much delicate lace and colors of the pastel tones, is an im-

portant point emphasized in the new fashions for early spring.

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