

THE OLD WOMAN: By Sir Hal Caine

Outstanding and Moving Study of a Deep Sex Problem by the Noted Author of "The Woman Thou Gavest Me," "The Eternal City," "The Woman Thou Gavest Me," Etc.

PERSONS OF THE STORY
VICTOR STOWELL—A brilliant young advocate, son of Old Judge of the Isle of Man. He is the principal of the law firm of Stowell & Co. and is a great later politician over the secret sin, had ill-fated relations with
BESSIE COLLISTER—A handsome but illiterate girl, who really is Victor's chum.
ALICE GRILL—A beautiful but somewhat weak woman, who is the daughter of the old woman.
BRADLEY GRILL—A handsome but somewhat weak man, who is the son of the old woman.
GENERAL STANLEY—Governor of the Isle of Man.
DAN BALDROMMA—A brutal farmer, stepfather of Bessie, and who tries to get her into a brothel. He thinks God is responsible, as a lawyer to advance his own fortune.

Since the witch-doctor had told her that though Dan might save and marry her, she could do no harm to her own child, she had ceased to think of him. But she had not thought of the harm he might do to her mother. All she saw up since was a girl who had been the victim of a man who had seduced her mother through her.

What fresh tragedy would befall her now?—she thought. She was sitting on the porch of the mill, and she was looking at the old woman who was sitting on the porch of the mill. She was looking at the old woman who was sitting on the porch of the mill.

With a palpitating heart Bessie lifted the latch, pushed the door open and took one step into the kitchen. Her mother, who was still wearing her night cap, was sitting on the three-legged stool in the chollagh, stirring porridge in the oven pot that hung from the ceiling. She had heard the click of the latch and she was looking round.

There was silence for a moment. Bessie tried to speak and could not. The old woman rose on rigid limbs and her hand on the handle of her stick was trembling. "Is it thyself, girl?" she said, in a breathless whisper.

"Mother!" cried Bessie, and she took another step forward. Again there was a moment of silence. With her heart at her lips Bessie saw that her mother's eyes were wandering over her figure. Then the old woman dropped from the old woman's hand to the floor and she stretched out her arms, and her thin hands shook like withered leaves.

"Bella ven! Bella ven!" she cried, in a low voice that was a sob. "It's my own case over again." And then the girl fell into her mother's arms and buried her head in her breast and cried as only a suffering child can cry, helplessly, piteously.

A moment later there was a heavy footstep outside, and the ring of an iron tool thrown down on the street. The old woman raised her face with a look of fear.

"It's thy father," she whispered. Dan Baldromma had risen earlier than usual that morning. For more than a week there had been water enough to his mill wheel for his liking, and suspecting the cause of the shortage, he had put a pick over his shoulder and walked up the glen.

There was a little brook on the top of the brews half a mile nearer to the mountain. It was called Baldromma-beg (the little Baldromma) and its occupants (sub-tenants of Dan Baldromma) were a quiet little tribe—Will Skillicorne, a long, slow-eyed, slow-legged person who was a class-leader among the "Primitives," and his wife, Bridget, a typical little Manxwoman of her class, keen-eyed, quick-tongued, illiterate and superstitious.

Their croft was thirty land, though water in abundance was so near, and to every request that it should be laid on in pipes from the glen, Dan had said, "Let your wife carry it—what else is the woman there for?"

Bridget had carried it for ten years. Then her anger getting the better of her, she put on a pair of her husband's big boots and rolled two great boulders into a neck of the river, with the result that a deep stream of sweet water came flowing down to her house and fields.

This was just what Dan had suspected, and coming upon the new-made dam, he stretched his legs across it, swung his pick and sent the boulders tumbling down the glen, with a torrent of water from Baldromma-beg at the back of them.



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his house half dressed, with his braces hanging behind him. "Come women—leave the man to God," said Will.

"God indeed! The dirt! The ugly black soul! God wouldn't blemish Himself talking to the like." "Thou's done it this time, though, I'm thinking. Thou heard what he said about Hollantide?"

"Chut! Get thee back to bed. What's thou putting thy mouth in for? Who knows where the man himself will be by that time?" With a face like a black cloud after this encounter, Dan threw down his pick on the cobble of the street and went into the kitchen to work off his anger on his wife.

"That's what thou's done for me, ma'am! There's not a woman in the parish that isn't throwing her daughter's bad doings in my face." The kitchen was full of smoke, for the porridge in the ovenpot had been allowed to burn, and it was not until he was standing back to the fire, putting his pipe in the pocket of his open waistcoat, that Dan saw Bessie where she had seated herself, after breaking out of her mother's arms, by the table and in the darkest corner.

He took in the girl's situation at a glance, but after the manner of the man he pretended not to do so. "God bless my soul," he cried. "Back, is she? Well, well! But what did I say, mother? No need to send the Cross Vuscha (the fiery cross) after her, she'll come home. And my goodness the grand woman she's grown! Her caps and fur-lined cloaks and I don't know the what! Just come to put a sight on the mother and the old man, I suppose. No pride at all, at all! I wouldn't trust but there's a grand woman waiting for her at the corner of the road."

"Aisy, man, aisy," said Mrs. Collister, picking up her stick, "don't thou see the girl has walked?" "Walked, has she?" said Dan, raising his thick eyebrows in pretended astonishment. "You don't say! All the way from Castletown? Well, well! So Bessie had to put her hand to her throat to keep back the cry that was bubbling up.

"Aisy, man, aisy with the like," said the old woman. But Dan was for showing no mercy. "Goodness me, the air she gave herself going away! I might as well be open to them. And now they have opened them and shut them, too, I'm thinking. Bessie, crushed and silent, was clutching the end of the table. Dan stepped over to her, laid hold of her left hand, lifted it up, as if looking for her wedding ring, and then flung it away.

"Nothing," he said. "She's got nothing for it neither. I might have followed her to Castletown but I didn't. I'll leave her to it. I thought, 'Maybe she's cleverer than we thought, and she's come home mistress of Baldromma and a thousand good acres besides.' But no, not a ha'porth! And now she has come back to ate us up for the rest of our lives! The fool! The begot! The booby!"

"Dan Collister," said the old woman, "don't thou see the girl is ill?" "Ill, is she?" said Dan. "I wouldn't trust but she is ma'am. So it's worse than I thought, and maybe before long there'll be another mouth to feed." Bessie dropped her head on the table.

"But not in this house, if you please, miss. It happened here once before, and the island would be having a fine laugh at me if it happened again." Once more Dan stepped over to Bessie and touched her arm. "You're like a dead letter, you're come to the wrong address, mistress. It wasn't Dan Baldromma's thatched cottage you were wanting, but the big slate house down the road where the parrots are screaming. I'll trouble you to go there."

"Sakes alive, man," cried the old woman, "thou'rt not for turning the girl!" "I am that, ma'am," said Dan, going over to the door. "No person shall be telling me again that my house is the disgrace of the parish and the talk of the island!" Then, throwing the door wide and rattling the catch on it, he said, "Out of my house, miss! Out of it! Out of it!"

Bessie, who had been sitting motionless, raised her head and rose to go, although scarcely able to take a step forward, when she felt a hand that was trembling like a leaf laid on her shoulder. "Stay thou there, and leave this to me." It was the old woman who had been crouching over the fire on the three-legged stool and had now risen, thrown her stick away as if she had no longer any need of it, and was facing her husband with blazing eyes.

"Thou talks and talks of this house as thine, miss," she said. "What made it thine?" "The law, if you want to know, woman," said Dan. "Then the law is a robber and a thief."

INSURANCE MEN TO MEET
 A big delegation of insurance men from this city will attend the ninth annual convention of the Insurance Federation of Pennsylvania in Harrisburg May 4 and 5. Milo A. Neely will lead the delegates. Among the speakers at the convention will be several Philadelphians, including E. H. Smith, secretary of the convention of the Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce; Frank D. Burdall, president of the Philadelphia Bar; Underwriters' Association; A. H. Howe, director of the Insurance Federation of Pennsylvania; G. S. Dotto and John W. Doerin, officers of the Federation. Senator Pepper is scheduled to speak at a banquet of the delegates to be held the night of May 5.

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