They Love Her—Then Disappear

THE VANISHING MEN

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What Becomes of Her Suitors?

WHO'S WHO IN THE STORY

BRENA SELCROSS, a beautiful recluse, living in England, of American birth, but Greek and Irish blood. An undisclosed mystery envelops her, for two men who have loved her exotic beauty and fascinating personality have strangely vanished. She excites the interest and admiration of

CAPTAIN PETER DE WOLFE, an American aviator, who on demobilization delays home-going to ferret out the enigma. He has attracted the romantic feeling of

MURIEL BENHAM, a handsome, wholesome, typical English girl, once Brena's friend; but now embittered.

COLONEL EVERARD BENHAM, Muriel's brother and a wartime friend of Peter's.

"YOU know nothing of fear," she replied quietly. "You have not lived with fear day in and day out—year after year."

"No, I have not lived with fear at all," he went on, looking straight into her eyes. "I have not lived with it because it is a parasite. I have been wounded, but I learned that five-eighths of the pain was fear. I have been apprehensive of some terrible calamity and the fear was the major part of the calamity. There are men in the world in myriads who fear that they may lose their money. Fear is worse than poverty, Brena. For God's sake, let's not fear."

"I did not say that I had fear," she said. "I only said I had lived with fear."

"The world is a fool about fear," Peter drove on. "It makes cowards, but it is also the mother——"

"Of what?"

"Of murderers," he said.

Brena was silent.

To Peter, as the day came to an end, it became more and more plain that she had indeed decided to go from London. She spoke of it as if it were a flight from some kind of danger. Once she said, "You are much too nice to take any risks, Peter." He had asked her about the risks, but she said, "Among other risks, that of wasting your energies on something which leads nowhere." When they had dined at a little cafe on Jermyn street, she said, "Come home with me. No one sees us go in and out.

"It is like a nest hidden in an old stump. We can talk and then——"

"What?"

"Good-by. Good-night. Good-by."

All the way up Regent street she kept her arm through his as if she feared that suddenly the mortal part of him would melt away, as if this contact might be made so real that it would live on in memory, and sometimes the illusion of this strong forearm warm through its sleeve might return to her.

The apartment, which she had retained without occupancy for some unexplained cause, was on a street of colorless brick houses where three street lamps, spaced with irritating precision, spread their radiance on the front walls in a fan-shaped insolence. It was in a house at the far end of this street—modest quarters for one who appeared to have plenty of money at her command; two flights of carpeted stairs led up to a little landing and her door.

She lit the lamp in the corner while Peter took the key from the hole, and the expanding light showed again the gray and gold room with its chintz curtains and its old English mahogany and the carved desk with its burly maple panels and the hangings woven in Java at the windows. But Peter closed the door gently with his foot because he saw none of the room where the light was dim. Once more, as when he had seen her first, she stood beneath a light which poured down upon her its flood, emphasizing her as if she, of all the universe, had the quality of radiance and life. She had thrown aside her cloak; she stood with an aura of eternal youth about her, a girl who had come out of the ages and would live on without end, the center of all things. She gazed back at Peter from her dark eyes, wondering, waiting for him to move.

He walked toward her slowly, but without hesitation. In his face there was a square look—the look of a fixed will that has come into its own at last.

"Brena, I'm going to break my promise."

"Yes, dear, I understand. I can resist you, Peter. It would be hard, but I could do it. I do want to do it. The promise was for your sake, Peter. Not for mine, alone."

"I've asked you nothing—no questions," he said, putting his hands upon each of her shoulders and holding her at arm's length.

"No, Peter—none."

"Because I did not care," said he.

"No matter what might come?"

"No matter what might come."

He drew her toward him and took a breath of the unperfumed fragrance of Brena Selcross. And then with eager, hungry yearning, expressed only through the restraints of tenderness and profound respect, as if indeed he had some ancient deity in his arms, he kissed her lips; he pressed his cheek into her hair; he touched the back of her neck with his fingers.

"I love you," he said. "Can you understand all I mean by those plain words—I love you?"

"I love you, Peter."

"You must never leave me now."

She sprang back, tearing herself from him as if he had treacherously plunged a knife into her.

"Not that, Peter. Not that! I thought you knew. I thought this was good-by."

Like one in great pain which must be borne in silence, she threw back her head and stood quivering and tense.

"You can't have misunderstood," she said in a breaking voice. "Is this my punishment that you have misunderstood?"

"I want you, Brena—forever. I could have sworn I never would want any one like this."

"Peter, it cannot be."

She seized his hand and, leaning over, pressed her wet cheeks upon his wrist.

"It cannot be, Peter. It happened when I was no more myself—the one you know—than I am Muriel Benham. It happened when I was less than eighteen—seven years ago. I am married."

"Married?" he gasped, putting his other hand lightly upon her cheek. "Where, then, is he? How long ago did he——"

"Go?"

"Yes."

"Three years. I loathed him. I loathed his eternal fright."

"And where is he now?" he asked.

"I do not know."

She shuddered.

"He——"

"Vanished."

Peter was white. Breathing hard, he said, "You—Brena—will tell me everything?"

"It happened when I was less than eighteen — seven years ago. I am married."

"Yes, Peter—before I go. I will tell you everything. It will show you why I am afraid—for you."

* * *

Brena Selcross had been born on American soil.

One of her most vivid memories was that of her father, an austere man, who all his life long had carried about in the great and muscular body with its slow movements and its suggestion of latent giant power a restless soul, ever seeking to find its way hither and thither like a strong giant and of unceasing activity looking for new work.

She could remember dimly that her mother, whose hair never lost the red-gold Celtic glory until she and her second child died together when she was forty-two, had referred with whispered awe to the turbulent career of her husband, Demetrius. There were vague recollections of the mother's pride in the fact that he had risked and lost his career, begun so early in life and so brilliantly in chemical research and in a professorship in Athens; that he had tossed aside all consideration for himself to labor for a constitutional Greece and to risk his life in a conspiracy for freedom.

Mary Vaughn, as her name had been before her marriage, knew something of insurrection herself; she had had the ill fortune to be the daughter of the famous Tom Vaughn, who was forced to flee Ireland with his family after the unsuccessful and forgotten "Secession Plot" of the 50's. Mary, from the time she was a child, sang like a bird. She might have become a famous contralto, for her voice had that same warm, rich quality inherited by her bewitched daughter, but like a bird her true home was upon the open moors with their free spaces and the shadows of the clouds passing over the grass; New York, of adamant and rectangles, was as good for the joy of her voice as it would have been for that of a wild nightingale. She never spoke harshly of that "terrible Babylon," however, without adding, "but 'twas there I met your father, Brena, and I'll speak no ill of it."

So, with some of her sparkling self dimmed, she gave all her expression of loyalty to her husband; her flight upon gauzy, unsubstantial wings was always a circle about his head, as if she were a brilliant moth hovering about the top of a grim mountain which always quivered, threatening volcanic disasters. Something had died within her when they took her from the moors and the open places, and that which was left was an Irish beauty and a bottomless well of affection for her man and her Brena.

"It is from her that I have a legacy," said Brena. "It is a storehouse of unspent passion and tenderness. And it is still mine—to do with as I please."

She did not go on to say that those to whom it would be opened might enter to be destroyed.

Brena could not recall the details of her mother's accounts of the part her father had played in the disturbed period of Greece. There were vague impressions of a secret organization under the "Council of Twelve" to which he had sworn devotion, of a problem of honor which he had decided by following a course of conduct that had brought down upon him the penalty of assassination. A sharply defined portrait of this young patriot, a member of the Salamis Deputation of 1862 informing King Otho, the last of the Bavarian alien monarchs, that the throne of Greece was vacant, remained in Brena's mind. She confessed to a thrill of pride that upon an occasion, historic and momentous, her father, then only twenty-eight, had been present in a major role. This had been the top moment of his life; those whom he had aided turned upon him. The strength of a powerful secret organization, gradually falling into unscrupulous hands after its true functions were over, had been turned against him. His name became a traditional center of oaths of vengeance; with knife wounds upon his great arms and thighs and an unremoved bullet in his shoulder, he came to America. He was a man who had lived one life, and expected the world to recognize him as an important being. It saw him only a silent, learned man, inventing a thousand ambitions and frog them choosing no fixed purpose, disregarding money in a land where money, for the time, was the fetich; careless of poverty but humiliated periodically by debt; discoursing upon biological chemistry years before the scientific world had the imagination to listen—a giant, with dark haunting eyes, long Homeric hair and beard, always brushed back as if it were eternally facing a hurricane, and a voice and presence as mysteriously impressive as that of some Elijah. Even Brena remembered his affection for her, profound as it was, as being like the affection of some god of mythology directed down upon a beautiful but mortal child.

Between the frivolous sunlight of her mother and the magnificent shadow of her father, Brena grew, acquiring from one a whimsical humor and from the other a calm of high cliffs and of a Parthenon.

According to Brena's own phrase, she "had no childhood and all childhood." She had none because her father, after a month or two of concentrated application of his mind upon studies of similarities in the architecture of ancient Mexico and prehistoric Greece, would find the butcher, landlord and grocer at his door, and then as if awakened he would take his little family and board the train for some minor university, where he would teach himself out of debt and into a period of bitterness of heart because neither his learning nor his important place in history were given recognition. With a great sigh from his expansive chest, he would move on again in pursuit of some inquiry, some research, some new application of his heroic, impractical head. In consequence, the little girl, red of cheeks, with spindling legs and great wondering brown eyes, never stayed long enough anywhere for acquaintance with children and for play. Tutored by her mother and by the booming, terrifying voice of Demetrius Selcross when he, as he said, could spare time for it, she learned a taste for books and consumed them, according to her own story, "like a hungry little pig regardless of the wisdom of a diet and eating all that was within reach." The books served to give her a fake veneer of experience and maturity.

This outer covering was fake because it failed to represent the truth that Brena had reached sixteen, with physical attributes which made men turn as she passed, but without any consciousness of having approached womanhood. Without contacts with childhood, ever on the move, living in hotels, in boarding houses, in suburban cottages, ever dependent upon one rickety patched old trunk and her two parents, she had acquired the habits of childlike dependence. Like a child she found that life was shaped without intervention of her own. She allowed herself to be dragged along with her mixed load of conceptions drawn from a helter-skelter reading. Among other conceptions was that eternal fiction of the gallant and perfect fairy story prince whose bride she would one day be. To be a bride meant little more in terms of real life than to become an angel.

To be continued tomorrow

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$25 $29.50 $10 $16.50 $9.65 $8.75 $25

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Amazing New Spring Frocks, $25
A maker's newest models. Styles for young women in sizes up to 36. Styles for women in sizes up to 46. Street shades and new light shades; almond green, pearl gray, French blue, geranium red. Embroidered, beaded, lace trimmed. Afternoon and informal evening gowns.

Ones and Twos of Lovely Frocks $25, $27.50, $38.50
Samples and advance Spring models. Beautiful Canton crepes in light and dark colors and Poiret twill street frocks.

Unusual Dresses, $15, $16.50, $18.75
At $15, lovely lace frocks for occasions, also Canton crepes, embroidered Poiret twills and twill-back velveteens.
At $16.50, new wool crepe combinations with figured crepe bodices; sample taffeta afternoon dresses and Canton crepe dresses in light and dark colors. Tricolette dresses for larger women come in sizes 40 to 46.
Taffeta dance frocks at $16.50 will delight young girls.
At $18.75, smart new Poiret twill street dresses with silk or bright-color braiding; ones and twos of fine Canton crepe models a third to half less; taffeta dance frocks in light and brilliant colorings.
(Down Stairs Store, Market)

Amazingly Low-Priced Dresses $3.85, $8.75, $9.65
At $3.85, more than fifteen styles in serge, sizes 16 to 36; in wool velour and in corduroy, sizes up to 44. Embroidered or braid trimmed.
At $8.75, combinations of wool velour and novelty tricolettes, Poiret twills and wool sponge frocks in tailored and sports models.
At $9.65, new Spring taffeta frocks, sizes 14 to 36; street frocks of Poiret twill and fine wool crepe dresses.

Many Coats Get New Low Prices
Exceptional Coats at $10
A special purchase combined with identical coats from our own stocks that were just double this price. Good-looking velours with throw scarf collars. Nice polo coats in brown and blue mixtures. All silk lined throughout. Amazing for only $10!

Sports Coats, $15 and $25
At $15, good plaid-back herringbone sports models in reindeer and brown.
At $25, novelty tweed sports coats with collars of badger, silk lined; also a few odds and ends of tan polo coats, some showing signs of handling.

Coats With Furs, $29.50 and $38.50
At $29.50, bolivias with nutria collars and ornamental side-closings.
At $38.50, bolivias in various draped and embroidered styles, with collars of nutria, taupe wolf, skunk-dyed opossum, Scotch mole and wolf. Sizes 16 to 42 in the group.

The Fine Fur-Trimmed Coats in the Salon Are Now $55 to $125

$5 Hats Adorably Springlike

Saucily small, most of them, but plenty of wider brimmed ones, too, for those who prefer them.
Many all-black ones. And that interesting new soft green called almond. And blue in the easy-to-wear shades which lighten up the eyes and freshen the color in one's cheeks. And browns. And the soft cocoas and tans which melt in most becomingly with certain types of coloring.
Silk hats; what most people are asking for at this season because they are always "good." Novelty hair and straw cloth hats. Shirred, embroidered, gayly beaded and ornamented. Some of them trimmed with row upon row of softly draped folds of lustrous silk crepe.
A whole roomful of them, just waiting to hurry off on happy New Year jaunts. All just $5.
(Down Stairs Store, Market)

Women's Silk Umbrellas With Matching Cases, $3.85
Considerably less than the regular price for such umbrellas because of a specially advantageous purchase. Amber-colored or white bakelite tips and ferrules and easy-to-carry ring or leather loop handles. Covers are clear, smooth woven silk and tape edged. Black, navy, garnet, purple and green.
(Down Stairs Store, Market)

Sale of Children's Fur Sets at Half, 85c to $10
Fluffy sets of matching muff and scarf marked down to half price because the assortments are somewhat broken. All are well made and truly named, and little vacationers will be delighted to shop for them.

Natural coney sets	85c to $1.25
Silver coney sets	$5
Blue coney sets	$8.25
Combed Thibet sets	$4.50 to $6.25
Opossum sets	$5 to $8.25
Squirrel lock sets	$6.25 to $8.25
Gray fox sets	$10
Separate muffs in these furs	85c to $6.25

(Down Stairs Store, Market)

Less Than Half for Elastic Garter Ribbon at 30c Yard
Fresh, snappy elastic garter ribbon at less than half its usual price! A man turned over to us all he had at a special price concession, making this unusually low figure possible. All sorts of pretty combination colorings and the always wanted plain black.
(Down Stairs Store, Central)

Women's Drop-Stitch Cotton Stockings, 50c
Made of closely woven black mercerized cotton in drop-stitch effect. They come from a noted manufacturer and firsts of the same style sell for just twice as much. Sizes 8½ to 10.
(Down Stairs Store, Central)

Women's Silk-and-Cotton Stockings, 85c
Brown heather mixtures in unusual drop-stitch effect. Soft and closely woven, so they are very worth while buying at this low price. Tiny flaws make them seconds, but the price is lowered a full half accordingly. Sizes 8½ to 10.
(Down Stairs Store, Central)

Trimly Smart Street Shoes for Women, $5
Shoes with style—style with service—service with comfort—comfort with continued good looks. Shoes shaped to fit the foot in action and in repose. Well made, too, of good materials, so they will long retain their original shapeliness.
One-strap pumps in patent leather, tan and black calf, with welted soles, Cuban heels and rubber top lifts; ornamental stitching.
Oxfords in black or tan calf with Cuban or military heels and welted soles.

Women's Cloth-Topped Button Boots, $6.50
Dressy shoes for Winter street wear. They have cloth tops, kid vamps, welted soles and comfortable military heels with rubber top lifts attached.
(Down Stairs Store, Chestnut)

Girls' Fur-Collared Coats, $16.50
All were originally several dollars more, but have been specially priced because sizes were broken. Big collars of beaver-dyed coney give them a luxurious look and they have effective sleeve and pocket treatments. Tan and brown heavy coatings with full length or sleeve and shoulder lining. Sizes 15 and 17 years.
(Down Stairs Store, Market)

Blue Taffeta Party Frocks, $6.75
Two pretty styles of crisp taffeta frocks for holiday festivities. Trimmed with silk flower embroidery or tinsel braiding. Sizes 8 to 12 years.
(Down Stairs Store, Market)

Handbags, Third to Half Less, 25c to $3
Rubbed or marked from handling.
Included in the lot are children's bags of velvet, silk and leather and women's bags in a wide variety of styles and shapes and in leather, silk, velvet and duvetyn.
(Down Stairs Store, Central Aisle)

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