

WHERE IGNORANCE IS BLISS--?

By MARGARET DELAND.

Author of "John Ward, Preacher."

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SYNOPSIS.

William West has been settled as a clergyman in Mercer for fifteen years, and has taken his plenty as a man of judgment and character.

PART IV.

Her innocent pride gave him a moment of sharp discomfort; curiously enough, what he had to tell her had not connected itself, in his mind, with personal embarrassment.

"Perhaps I am a fool to tell you," he began; "it may make you unhappy, and—"

A startled look came into Amy's eyes; then the color flooded up into her face. She lifted her head with a beautiful impetuous gesture, and stopped him with a word.

"I understand. Don't tell me, I understand." She bit her lip as she spoke, and her eyelids quivered as though the tears had risen suddenly.

"You understand?" he repeated, in a puzzled voice, "do you mean you don't want me to tell you?"

"William," she said, in a low voice, "I do not think a woman has any business with a good man's life in the past; it—"

"Go on and tell me," she said; "I am not afraid to hear anything, nor do I want you to forget anything."

"What! you don't forget anything?" he asked her, with his whimsical smile. She flashed a look of pride at him.

"Ah!" she said, "the things I could not forgive, you could not do!" This made him glow. After all, who would not confess anything, to be met by such confident love as this?

"This happened long ago, Amy; when I was nineteen. I forged a check for five hundred dollars."

"Forged!" her lips fell apart; she sat staring at him. He was holding her hand, lifting it to his lips sometimes, and looking at it as it lay in his. He went on, quietly:

"It was when I was at college; I needed money, and, poor, desperate, wicked, silly young man, I forged Prof. Wilson's name. I don't know what I supposed would become of me when it was found out. And I don't know what would have happened, but Henry Wilson died before the month was out, and so, by some strange chance, it never was discovered. If it had been—well, you and I would not have been here today. Human justice would have intervened before. And I don't know what I looked up with a solemn elation which seemed to put out of his mind."

"I might have gone lower and lower! Who can say? That, of course, was the most horrible part of what I did, the part that now seems to me incompre-

hensible—the broken trust! Well, of course, I made reparation, as I called it, out of the money he left me. I gave away many times the amount I stole; but it was only because I was scared at the risk I had run, and the thought of it harassed me. It was a sort of expedient morality, a sort of bargain with my conscience for peace of mind. Then, about a year afterwards, I met X—.

I heard him preach, and I was charmed. How extraordinarily good and life-giving he was! It seemed to me as if I had come back into the world! Then I repented. Before I had only reformed. That was when I entered the divinity school. But just, Amy, just think of the difference! How life might have gone—yet here I am today, your lover, your husband! Oh! the mercy of God!"

He was deeply moved. He got up and walked the length of the room. Amy sat silently looking down at her hands in her lap. When he came back his eyes were full of peace.

"That is all, dearest; now we will forget it. You know my life as you do your own."

"Forget it?" she repeated, with a sudden, sobbing laugh, that tore at the man's heart.

"Amy! dearest! have I shocked you so? Remember, it was twenty-three years ago; I was only a boy. Let me tell

you how it was: I was madly in love with a woman, at least, it was not love, but I thought it was; she fascinated me, and—"

"Oh, go on, go on!" she interrupted, hoarsely; "as if that mattered!" He tried to take her hand, but she made a pretense of arranging the flowers in her belt; her head was turned a little from him. He leaned forward, with a grave authority to command her attention, took the pansies from her, and held them in his hand.

"Well, I was possessed to marry her. Of course, she would not look at me—a penniless, charity student! But I strained every nerve, to win her. It was the old story. She took my flowers, or theatre tickets, or anything I could give her. Curious the mercenary-ness of the woman did not revolt

me! But I was mad about her. I thought, at least, that if I had money I could give her some jewels she wanted, and perhaps she would accept me. That was how it came about. She took the diamonds, and eloped with a married man two days afterwards."

As he told the story the grossness of it all came over him—the offense of the papers and memoranda before them, that John Paul suddenly burst into the room.

The senior warden's strong, kind face was flushed; he was plainly profoundly disturbed and upset.

"What?" she said, dully, "about the woman? Oh, as if that mattered!" She turned from him sharply, putting the back of her hand against her lips as though to hide their quiver.

"Then she burst out: 'Oh, why did you tell me? Why? Why? Oh, I wish you had not told me!' She shook from head to foot. But it will make no difference. I will not let it make any difference. I am going to marry you. Only—I never knew you."

Those most terrible words, those words with which Love destroys itself, came like a blow between the eyes. He came like a pale between the eyes. She came like a pale between the eyes. She came like a pale between the eyes.

"Dear, I had forgotten it. So little is it a part of my life that I had forgotten it. When I remembered it last night, it was a sense of astonishment, a sense of pity for the mad boy who did it. I had no personal shame—it seemed to me as if I had done it for the first time. I watched with sorrow and indignation. I do not believe that today, more than twenty years afterwards, I have any business to think of it."

"Then why did you tell me?" she said, wearily. "Oh, don't talk about it any more. I am going to forget it. Good-by. I am going upstairs. I have a headache. Good-by."

suddenly absent; and, with a curt good-bye, left her. Somehow or other, he hardly knew how, he got through the day. There was a service in the afternoon, and there were other people's affairs and sorrows to remember; fortunately, there always is duty for our poor human creatures as a refuge from our thoughts! Duties to be done saved William West from desperately going back to see Amy, to explain. For he was guilty of the impulse of "explanation," the bubble with which the weak mind is forever annotating its remarks or its opinions.

Well, the day passed. In spite of a craving to see Amy that was almost agonizing, he held on to his common sense, and left her to herself. His lawyer came in in the evening, bringing some papers in regard to certain property which it was the minister's intention to make over to his wife, and the looking these over, and the business talk, was a relief to him. He began to feel that he had taken Amy's perturbation too seriously; it would be all right, she would see things clearly when the first dismay had passed. He thought, tenderly, that he must not let her feel any regret for having for a moment shown him her pain at what he had told her. Her pain was only part of her exquisite goodness, that goodness which held her remote and lovely, like some pure and luminous star, so far above the sordid meanness and wickedness of common life that she could not understand them; perhaps

even she could not pity him. Only the selfishness which was in all points unshared, and pity—his thought, softened and passionate, fled back to his Master for comfort; yet there was no reproach of Amy in his mind.

It must have been after ten, as he and Mr. Woodhouse sat before the great writing table, with the litter of papers and memoranda before them, that John Paul suddenly burst into the room.

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DELAWARE AND HUDSON RIVER. On Monday, Nov. 23, trains will leave Scranton for Carbondale—6:45, 7:45, 8:45, 9:45, 10:45, 11:45 a. m., 1:45, 2:45, 3:45, 4:45, 5:45, 6:45, 7:45, 8:45, 9:45, 10:45, 11:45 p. m.

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