

The LASH of CIRCUMSTANCE

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SYNOPSIS.

Abner Halliday, a miserly millionaire, found gagged, bound and insensible in his room, his safe rifled and \$40,000 missing. The thread of the story is taken up by his nephew Tom. Living in the same house are other relatives: reckless Bruce Mackay, and pretty Clare Winton, Bruce, who is a bond broker, has been trying to raise \$10,000 to put through a deal and save himself from financial ruin. He has applied to his miserly uncle and to others for the loan but has been refused. Tom sends for William LeDuc, an old-time friend connected with a detective agency. In relating the story Tom reverts to his acquaintance with Mrs. Dace, a wealthy widow, whose business agent is Richard Mackay, a hoodler and political boss. Tom is jealous of Mackay and is deeply in love with Mrs. Dace. Bruce Halliday warns him to shun her as an adventuress.

CHAPTER VI.—(Continued.)

"Last night I happened to be passing this place. I had no intention of spying upon you—I never dishonored you by such acts—but fate ordained that I should be just in time to see you alight with Richard Mackay. The door of the lower entrance remained open for a few seconds after you had entered. I saw your scene with him before you entered the elevator."

"Never in my life had I seen such a change come over a human countenance as swept hers at my words. The color fled in a flash and her cheeks became ashy gray. Into her eyes the instant before so soft there leaped the glitter of a leopardess as she gathers herself for the leap. Tense and seeming to crouch, I saw the leopardess in every outline of her curved body. Then as suddenly she relaxed; the glitter faded and the heat of anger gave way to the coldness of scorn. She stepped backward with a mocking bow.

"You honor me greatly, my dear sir, and I assure you that I shall never forget it. Yesterday you told me that I was an angel exalted above your hope; today I am a fallen thing beneath your contempt. And all because of a miserable occurrence like that! And you would have left me with no opportunity to explain my guiltlessness had I not forced you to grant me that right."

"Your guiltlessness!" I returned as if. "I have charged you with no guilt beyond treachery to me. You told me that no other man made love to you, and I believed you. You had told me that Mackay was merely your financial agent, and I pinned my heart upon your naked word. You have crucified it. Yet I could forgive you were it not for the fact that this man is married and has a family and you are well aware of it. I leave the question of your guiltlessness towards his wife to your own conscience."

Her bosom heaved and her hands tightened. "Listen," she said in a voice hard as steel. "You shall hear me out now, for there are things that you must know. Not that I care for your opinion, and not that I care to retain even your friendship after this, but because it is my duty to myself and to Mr. Mackay, who seems at least to respect me. I had told you much of my affairs, but not everything. Mr. Mackay made certain investments for my husband, and it was that fact principally that brought me back from the Orient. He has been kind enough now that I am alone in the world to protect them for me and give me the benefit of his judgment and experience that I might not have to exist on the charity of friends. That makes it necessary that I should sometimes see him. As to what the world says about me, I do not care the snap of my finger, for it has always maligned me and I do not even take the pains to deny what it may say. As for that 'scene in the hall,' as your highness seems pleased to designate it, I have only to say this. I was taken ill last night at a late luncheon at which he happened to be present with others, and he hurried me home in his car. I was very faint when we arrived here and he supported me with his arm across the walk and into the building. Before the elevator came down I must have lost consciousness for a moment, for when I regained my senses he was holding me in his arms to prevent my falling and bending over me as he asked me what he could do for me. In a moment I had recovered my strength and requested him to release me, which he immediately did. He escorted me as far as my door and left me there at my request after I had assured him that Janet would do all that was necessary for me. Mr. Mackay did no more than any other gentleman would have done under the circumstances."

"The pride of her pose was magnificent and the cold dignity of her tones that of an outraged empress. Never before had she seemed so beautiful, so pure, so womanly. And groping for something, no matter how slight, upon which to once more fasten my faith in her, my jealousy and black suspicions once more fled before her bearing and explanation, and in their place love and belief came surging back. The terrible smothering weight within me was lifted and I could have cried aloud in the blessedness of my relief. I fell upon my knees before her as I brokenly begged her forgiveness; clutching her convulsively by the hand and pleading my heart out that she be merciful. She listened in silence to my appeals until they were exhausted and then told me I must rise.

"I do not know what to say to you," she returned as I stood before her

in abject penitence. "That you have hurt my pride more than it was ever hurt before perhaps you may appreciate. I scarcely know what to think of a love so ready to defame its object and so willing to condemn it unheard. Certainly I could never go through a scene such as this again. If our acquaintance is to continue as before, you must have unquestioning faith in me. Should you ever doubt me again I should despise you."

"I never shall. I have learned my lesson and it will never be forgotten. May I hope to be restored?" I begged humbly. She turned her face away.

"That I cannot say now. I have been hurt and it will take time for the wound to heal. Still, in a measure I am not without appreciation of your feelings, for if I lacked that appreciation I should have commanded you to leave me permanently before this. Neither do I think I blame you as much as some women might. But at least my day has been spoiled and I do not care to leave the house. Also, I wish to be alone. You may call me up in a week if you wish, and I will tell you at the end of that time how I feel about it. I do not now know whether I can bring myself to a total forgiveness or not, and if I find I cannot I shall so inform you. But I am going to try."

I would have given years of my life to have taken her in my arms in a final appeal, and must have made some motion that caused her to fear such an act, for she stepped backward quickly. "Please leave me now. I will send you the keys by a messenger when I have recovered myself sufficiently to make a search for them." I obeyed her instantly, humbly.

"I shall be hopelessly miserable until the week has passed, and can only pray that you be merciful." I implored from the entrance. She nodded her understanding and I closed the door between us upon my second banishment.

I did not receive my keys, however, until the next day. "Janet had mislaid them," said the note, and nothing more.

CHAPTER VII.

I have now come to the period immediately preceding the running of the Derby, and upon the events of that day I must dwell with some particularity for the reason that they form a very important part of this narrative. Mrs. Dace was to go with me. After torturing me by a week of silence and suspense, I had been received back first upon probation, and soon later, more or less unconditionally. It would do no good to go into the details of our readjustment of our former relations. There are some things which may be expressed by cold ink, but you have to see the human countenance with its lightning play of expression, and hear the human voice in all its wondrous inflections in order to form a correct mental picture of certain scenes. But on the whole her restoration of me was both womanly and gracious. I came to her a kneeling and penitent sufferer; she touched me upon the forehead and I arose healed. My spirits revived instantly in the sunshine of her forgiveness and I renewed my worship.

The race was to be the out-of-doors social as well as sporting event of the season. I was an admirer of the beautiful. Next to a beautiful woman, a thoroughbred horse appealed to me as the most perfect of the world's creatures. And although I had never bet upon them, I had kept myself well posted upon their performances through the medium of the press. Bruce, however, was an enthusiast. Coming in contact as he did with many of the more prominent horse owners and turfmen, he generally had a store of more or less reliable inside information as to both the runners and the imps who rode them. Consequently I was not surprised when upon the second day before the great race was to be run he came to me in a state of whispering excitement.

"Say, old man, I have got the best thing that is ever going to happen in this world, and of course I want you to be in on it. I wouldn't trade it for Aladdin's lamp. You know that Eagle Boy horse that we have been watching for the last year? Well, he has developed into a simon pure world beater. I got this on the dead Q. T. from his owner who would break his arm to do me a favor. That horse is smashing all records by moonlight, and even the railbirds haven't got on to it yet. He is going to run away from that bunch like a locomotive leaves a mud turtle. And the odds will be long against him. I am going to plunge, and advise you to do the same. But if you dare breath it I'll poison you."

I was not startled. As a matter of fact for some time past I had had my eyes on this great son of Black Eagle as much the best horse of the lot; therefore the news of his midnight performances merely corroborated my own judgment. I answered in an off-hand manner:

"I rather look to see him win myself. But you know I do not bet and therefore cannot take advantage of the opportunity. But I thank you just the same for the information."

Bruce's countenance fell. "That's

so. You bonded fellows have to be pretty careful of your sporting transactions." He brightened up again and whispered hoarsely in my ear in stage fashion: "However, in this instance you had better take a chance; let some friend put it up for you; say some wise relative, for instance. A hundred or two lost would not damage you much, and a few thousand gained would be ambrosia and nectar." He winked cunningly.

Once more I told him that I could not violate my traditions, and he shrugged his shoulders; and away he went at Eagle Boy speed himself, doubtless hot on the trail of some of his particular cronies to whom he could break the glad tidings. For when Bruce had a chance to do his friends what he thought was a favor he did not let the grass grow under his feet until he had done it. It was one of the traits that lay back of his popularity. Of course I sincerely hoped he would win, but I was always afraid that his recklessness would some day get him into trouble.

The afternoon upon which the race was run will forever remain seared upon my memory. I had been wise enough to put in my order long in advance at a fashionable stable, and as a result my two-wheel outfit was about as neat as could be found anywhere. As I drove up to Mrs. Dace's with the silver-mounted harness glittering in the sun and the cob arching his neck and tapping the boulevard with his polished hoofs as daintily as a dancing girl, I experienced much the same sensations as does a schoolboy on the first day of his long vacation when life as a well nigh endless primrose way stretches before him in a vista glorious to contemplate. I was at the full tide of youth and hope. Charged to the full with health and vitality, desperately in love with and half accepted by one whom I thoroughly believed to be the most beautiful woman in the world, I shook my fist defiantly in the teeth of the grinning specter of my lack of money. And realizing my domination for the day the specter cringed and fled before me.

The great migration of the day was in full movement. Automobiles were whizzing past honking like flights of wild geese. Victorias and traps, drags and tallyhos streamed behind them in an endless procession. It was life teeming and exultant. The world was on parade dressed in its best clothes and with its pockets lined with money, and right royally did it proclaim the fact, its headache of the morrow an unthought-of thing.

Mrs. Dace came down in a creation I had never seen before, but which fairly made me gasp with delight. I shall make no attempt to describe it, but the general impression it gave me was of fleecy clouds in which were blended delicate and changeful rainbow tints that came and flitted like summer shadows. She seemed rather to float than walk, and when I gave her my hand at the curb and she arose from it to the high seat with the lightness of a feather, I could scarcely believe that she was made of warm, firm flesh. The aggressiveness of her beauty challenged nearly every eye that we passed, the men craning their heads for a longer look, the women searching her enviously. In my pride of her and the enthusiasm of the moment I whispered in her ear that she was the most beautiful woman in all the world and that I loved her dearer than my own life. My reward was a smile and a flash of her wonderful eyes.

"I am glad you think so, Tom, even though of course you are wrong. And it is sweet of you to be so devoted to me. I am really very happy to be with you." My fingers tightened about the reins and my teeth clenched. In my heart I swore that she should become mine though the heavens fell.

We turned into the crush where the converging boulevards emptied their streams into the rolling sea of ve-

hicles. Bugle calls vibrated in our ears; college yells shattered the air; the beat of hoofs sounded like the long roll of drums. Through the wide entrance to the club grounds we drove into an arena banked by 30,000 people. Already the racing was on and before us swept a cloud of preliminary racers with the jockeys humped over their necks like so many colored simians. Not far away I saw Clare standing upright on her seat, her face aglow with excitement and her head nodding rapidly as she carried on a running fire of conversation with a cluster of friends. Her eyes fell upon me and she waved her hand with the airy grace of a plume; but as she noticed my companion her smile grew thin and vanished as for a moment she surveyed her with a face that was absolutely expressionless. Mrs. Dace, whose attention had been attracted to my cousin by my waved reply to her salutation, returned Clare's gaze, smiling faintly. Amusement lurked within her eyes like a reflection deep down in unruffled waters.

"My cousin, Miss Winton, of whom I have often spoken," I explained nonchalantly. The one at my side gave her attention to the flying racers.

"An exceedingly pretty girl. You are very fond of each other, I believe," she returned with a slight rising inflection. I hastened to answer.

"In a way, yes. She is a very good and sweet girl and we are the best of friends. But of course that is all." Through the press Bruce came jamming his way, his necktie awry from the scuffle and his face aglow with enthusiasm. He bobbed my companion a hurried bow and then shouted something to me as a surge of the crowd bore him along.

"Last call for prosperity in the betting ring," was all that I could catch of it as, still gesticulating, he was swept away. Mrs. Dace looked after him.

"What did he mean by that?" she demanded. I enlightened her.

"Oh, Bruce has got a straight tip from a horsey friend of his that Eagle Boy is going to win. So I suppose he is now going to back him to his limit. He would as soon sit down and watch the hands of a clock go around as to see a race unless he had a wager on it." The light of interest came into her eyes.

"And you think what?" she queried, searching my face. I meditated.

"To tell the truth I think his horse will win. I know something about the beasts, you know, having been raised on a Kentucky stock farm. The horse is a wonder, sure enough, and Bruce says he has been breaking records by moonlight. Then, too, Pettit, who rides him today, is a fend in the saddle. He can lift a horse off his hoofs and carry him around the track between his knees as a witch rides a broom. If I was to bet on the race Eagle Boy would carry my wealth today."

"And the odds?" she mused.

"They are ten to one against him at present, but they will go down like a falling rocket when the crowd has once had an opportunity of seeing him in motion. He is a Pegasus. He seems to soar rather than run. If they have a horse that can beat him, that horse can catch birds." I was surprised at the warmth of my own enthusiasm.

She opened her purse with a snap and her fingers dived into its depths. Presently she drew forth a \$500 bill and crumpled it into my palm. "Bruce is a shrewd fellow and you are a born horseman. I am going to rely upon your combined judgment. I wish you would go and place this on him for me," was her announcement. Now, I had always considered that to consent to be an agent for a woman in a gaming transaction was rushing in where angels might well fear to tread. I hesitated.

"But of course I do not know which one will win. It is difference of judgment that makes horse racing pos-



Well Placed Among the Leaders, I Saw the Powerful Haunches of Eagle Boy.

sible, you understand," I warned her. She tightened my fingers about the money, thrusting my hand from her imperiously.

"I have said that I am going to rely upon your judgment. At ten to one, should I win, I will have made \$5,000. Do you wish me to go myself? If not, you had best hurry."

For the first time really chilled by doubt and feeling my convictions ooze, I continued to protest. "But he may be pocketed, he may foul another horse, he may be left at the post—anything may happen in the race to make him lose." She looked at me steadily, silently, I thought almost contemptuously, and without more words I pocketed the bill. Through the crush of the betting ring I fought my way, placed my money in the hands of a perspiring man who stood upon a stool and came back to her warm and crumpled. Already the Derby racers had galloped the course in their preliminary warming up and were now chafing before the flag. I gave her the ticket for her wager and resumed my seat in a throbbing hush.

Then came a roar like the crash of surf and a thunderous wave of sound boomed across the field and was echoed back by the distant walls. In a compact bunch and stretching themselves like greyhounds the horses swept past us. For an instant I felt a sensation of giddiness and closed my eyes; then opening them once more riveted them on the field as it circled the course with the speed of hawks. Well placed among the leaders I saw the powerful haunches of Eagle Boy working with the smooth power of pistons as they steadily drove him into the foremost rank. With a roar of hoofs they turned the last curve and came into the stretch, while the sea of humanity rising upon tiptoe burst into full tongue. Mrs. Dace was upon her feet and watching them with parted lips. I sat beside her with parched lips, my knees shaking. Then from out of the bunch a black horse that shone like a polished shoe forged a yard at a bound, and putting a good length between himself and his nearest follower, led the way homeward in a burst of speed that was truly magnificent. Pettit was fairly lifting him from his feet, his whip flicking, stinging him on like a venomous yellow striped wasp. I fiercely clutched my companion's arm. "Eagle Boy wins," I roared in her ear.

Then as in a nightmare I saw the happening of an evil thing. A dozen yards from the wire and when two more leaps would have brought him victory, there came a stumble that sent the great black one crashing to the ground, while over him his nearest rival hurtled as a jumper clears a fence. From the vast crowd there arose first a cry, shrill and explosive, followed by an instant of silence and then a raging tumult. I heard an involuntary exclamation from the lips of the woman at my side and turned to her with the cold perspiration bursting from my forehead. Her lips were tightly compressed and she was gazing fixedly at the fallen horse as he arose with difficulty. The jockey was already limping about and the mob surging upon the track.

"I guess that race is settled for all time," she said quietly as she snapped her pocket-book shut. "I suppose we might as well be going." Her face resumed its placidity, but she turned it away from me. Half dazed by the suddenness of the catastrophe my hand sought hers in a sympathetic squeeze. She did not respond.

I whipped through the crush recklessly in my chagrin and bitterness. Silently cursing my folly I drove her homeward with but a perfunctory attempt at conciliation. Even to that she did not reply, and I decided that I had better remain quiet until she had recovered her equilibrium. I had never seen a woman whom I considered a good loser, and there was that in her demeanor now which warned me to caution. Silence on the part of

the fair sex I had always regarded as ominous, and before her quietness now sat wretchedly.

CHAPTER VIII.

I know of few things more uncomfortable than for a man to pose before the woman he loves in the garb of a sage, and being suddenly unveiled to realize that he stands revealed to her as a naked fool. That I had been asinine enough to air my opinions to her as a self-styled expert upon such an impossible proposition as the winner of a horse race galled me to the marrow. My humiliation was all the more complete for the reason that in this, the first financial transaction in which I had advised her, she had come to grief. No one knew better than I the unforgiveness of my offense. Man may lead woman astray in love and be wept over through the darkness of many a night; he may counsel her out of her hope of a hereafter and yet die with her arms around his neck; he may separate her from the world and still reign as her king, but when he separates her from her pocket-book he becomes a rascal or a clown in her eyes. Just how Mrs. Dace made me know that I had lost caste in her favor was not a thing that could be analyzed, but in some mysterious way she saw to it that I knew it. Perhaps it was by the almost imperceptible arching of her eyebrows when I chanced to express my views upon some matter; perhaps it was in the occult way some women have of making you uncomfortable when they wish you to be so without discernible physical manifestations on their part, and perhaps it was partially due to my own sensitiveness upon the subject. More than likely it was a compound of the three. Be that as it may, I became almost timid in her presence; and knowing that this would never do, grow desperate. I had never believed that a man could retain a woman's love unless he could command her respect as to his mentality, and I, therefore, determined to re-estate myself to my former position at any cost. Clearly the only way I could do this would be to reimburse her for her loss in so delicate a manner that she could neither take offense nor refuse. I pondered over the matter for about ten days and determined to take a plunge, sink or swim. I transferred what money I had in the savings bank to my overdrawn checking account.

I had been watching the steady rise of a certain stock upon the exchange for some months with secret covetousness. It pertained to a vast system of underground railways which were honeycombed the depths beneath the city. The franchise had been secured through political sorceries, and the capital to float the enterprise was being raised by public investment. As steadily as the mercury mounts under a summer sun the stock had advanced point by point from a merely nominal sum until it had reached thirty cent on the dollar. The more I pondered upon the yearly increasing value of such a system as the overhead street became more congested, the more became convinced that public rumo would be verified and that the stock would soon be at par. Without confiding in any one except my broker and binding him to secrecy, I managed a considerable quantity of it and watched its daily rise with a heat that mounted as steadily as my fortunes. A week later I strolled over to see Mrs. Dace.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

His Busy Day.

"The visitor who left just now didn't seem to make a good impression."

"I should say not! His remark were illuminating, but they bored me to death."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; he was introducing a new kind of desk lamp."



In My Heart I Swore That She Should Become Mine.