THE DELUGE

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CHAPTER XIII.—Continued.

I had been at his house once before; I knew he occupied the left side—the whole of the second floor, so shut off that it not only had a separate entrance, but also could not be reached by those in the right side of the house without descending to the entrance hall and ascending the left stairway.

"Just take my card to his private secretary, to Mr. Rathburn," said I. "Mr. Langdon has doubtless left a message for me."

The butler hesitated, yielded, showed me into the reception room off the entrance hall. I waited a few seconds, then adventured the stairway to the left, up which he had disappeared. I entered the small salon in which Langdon had received me on my other visit. From the direction of an open door, I heard his voice—he was saying: "I am not at home. There's no message."

And still I did not realize that it was I he was avoiding!

"It's no use now, Langdon," I called cheerfully. "Beg pardon for seeming to intrude. I misunderstood—or didn't hear where the servant said I was to wait. However, no harm done. So long! I'm off." But I made no move toward the door by which I had entered; instead, I advanced a few feet nearer the door from which his voice had come.

After a brief—a very brief—pause, there came in Langdon's voice—laughing, not a trace of annoyance: "I might have known! Come in, Matt!"

IX.

LANGDON AT HOME.

I entered, with an amused glance at the butler, who was giving over his heavy countenance to a delightful exhibition of disgust and discomfiture. It was Langdon's sitting room. He had had the carved antique oak interior of a room in an old French palace torn out and transported to New York and set up for him. I had made a study of that sort of thing, and at Dawn Hill had done something toward realizing my own ideas of the splendid. But a glance showed me that I was far surpassed. What I had done seemed in comparison like the composition of a school boy beside an essay by Goldsmith or Hazlitt.

And in the midst of this quiet splendor sat, or rather lounged, Langdon, reading the newspapers. He was dressed in a dark blue velvet house suit with facings and cords of blue silk a shade or so lighter than the suit. I had always thought him handsome; he looked now like a god. He was smoking a cigarette in an oriental holder nearly a foot long; but the air of the room, so perfect was the ventilation, instead of being scented with tobacco, had the odor of some fresh, clean, slightly saline perfume.

I think what was in my mind must have shown in my face, must have subtly flattered him, for, when I looked at him, he was giving me a look of genuine friendly kindliness. "This is—perfect, Langdon," said I. And I think I'm a judge."

"Glad you like it," said he, trying to dissemble his satisfaction in so strongly impressing me.

"You must take me through your house sometime," I went on. "I'm going to build soon. Not—don't be afraid I'll imitate. I'm too vain for that. But I want suggestions. I'm not ashamed to go to school to a master—to anybody, for that matter."

"Why do you build?" said he. "A town house is a nuisance. If I could induce my wife to take the children to the country to live, I'd dispose of this."

"That's it—the wife," said I.

"But you have no wife. At least—"

"No," I replied with a laugh. "Not yet. But I'm going to have."

Suddenly my mind reverted to my business. How do you account for the steadiness of textile, Langdon?" I asked, flourishing to the carved wainscot room and trying to put those surroundings out of my mind.

"I don't account for it," was his languid, uninterested reply.

"Any of your people under the market?"

"It isn't to my interest to have it supported, is it?" he replied.

"I know that," I admitted. "But why doesn't it drop?"

"Those letters of yours may have overeducated the public in confidence," suggested he. "Your followers have the habit of believing implicitly whatever you say."

"Yes, but I haven't written a line about textile for nearly a month now," I protested so piteously that vanity fairly purring with pleasure.

"That's the only request I can give," said he.

"You are sure none of your people is supporting the stock?" I asked, as a form and not for information; for I thought I knew they were—I trusted him to have seen to that.

"I'd like to get my holdings back," said he. "I can't buy until its down. And I know none of my people would dare support it."

He inspected the coal of his cigarette, lifting his eyebrows at it. Presently he said: "And she?"

"I don't know how she feels about it—as I told you," I replied coldly. In spite of myself, my eyes shifted and my cheek became hot. "By the way, Langdon, what's the name of your architect?"

"Wilders and Macey," said he. "They're fairly satisfactory, if you tell them exactly what you want and watch 'em all the time. They're perfectly conventional and so can't distinguish between originality that's artistic and originality that's only bizarre. They're like most people—they keep to the beaten track and fight tooth and nail against being drawn out of it and against those who do so out of it."

"I'll have a talk with Macey this very day," said I.

"Oh, you're in a hurry!" He laughed. "And you haven't asked her. You remind me of that Greek philosopher who was in love with Lais. They asked him: 'But does she love you?' And he said: 'One does not inquire of the fish one likes whether it likes one.'"

I flushed. "You'll pardon me, Langdon," said I, "but I don't like that. It isn't my attitude at all toward—the right sort of women."

He looked half-quizzical, half-apologetic. "Ah, to be sure," said he. "I forgot you weren't a married man."

And so I left him, with a look in his eyes that came back to me long afterward when I realized the full meaning of that apparently almost commonplace interview.

The same day I began to plunge on textile, watching the market closely, that I might go more slowly should there be signs of a dangerous break—for no more than Langdon did I want a sudden panicky slump. The price held steady, however, but I, fool that I was, certain the fall must come, plunged on, digging the pit for my own destruction deeper and deeper.

"AND IN THE MIDST OF THIS QUIET SPLENDOR SAT, OR RATHER, LOUNGED, LANGDON."

"Well, then, the price must break," said I. "It won't be many days before the public begins to realize that there isn't anybody under textile."

"No sharp break!" he said carelessly. "No panic!"

"There's to that," replied I, with not a shadow of a notion of the subtlety behind his warning.

"I hope it will break soon," he then said, adding in his friendliest voice with what I now know was malignant treachery: "You owe it to me to bring it down." That meant that he wished me to increase my already far too heavy and dangerous line of shorts.

"Just then a voice—a woman's voice—came from the salon. "May I come in? Do I interrupt?" it said, and its tone struck me as having in it something of plaintive appeal.

"Excuse me a minute Blacklock," said he, rising with what was for him haste.

But he was too late. The woman entered, searching the room with a piercing, suspicious gaze. At once I saw, behind that look, a jealousy that pounced on every subject that came into its view, and studied it with a hope that feared and a fear that hoped. When her eyes had toured the room, they paused upon him, seemed to be saying: "You're baffled me again, but I'm not discouraged. I shall catch you yet."

"Well, my dear?" said Langdon, whom she seemed faintly to amuse. "It's only Mr. Blacklock. Mr. Blacklock, my wife."

I bowed; she looked coldly at me, and her slight nod was more than a hint that she wished to be left alone with her husband.

I said to him: "Well, I'll be off. Thank you for—"

"One moment," he interrupted. Then to his wife: "Anything special?"

She flushed. "No—nothing special. I just came to see you. But if I am disturbing you—as usual——"

"Not at all," said he. "When Blacklock and I have finished, I'll come to you. It won't be longer than an hour—or so."

When we were seated again, Langdon, after a few reflective puffs at his cigarette, said: "So you're about to marry?"

"I hope so," said I. "But as I haven't asked her yet, I can't be sure." For obvious reasons I wasn't so enamored of the idea of matrimony as I had been a few moments before.

"I trust you're making a sensible marriage," said he. "If the part that may be glamour should by chance rub clean away, there ought to be some thing to make one feel he wasn't wholly an ass."

"Very sensible," I replied with emphasis. "I want the woman. I need her."

X.

TWO "PILLARS OF SOCIETY."

I was neither seeing nor hearing from the Ellerslys, father or son, but as I knew why, I was not disquieted. I had made them temporarily easy in their finances just before that dinner, and they, being fatuous, incurable optimists, were probably imagining they would never need me again. I did not disturb them until Monson and I had got my education so well under way that even I, always severe in self-criticism and now merciless, was compelled to admit to myself a distinct change for the better.

When my education seemed far enough advanced, I sent for Sam. He, after his footless fashion, didn't bother to acknowledge my note. His margin account with me was at the moment straight; I turned to his father. I had my cashier send him a formal, typewritten letter signed Blacklock & Co., informing him that his account was overdrawn and that we "would be obliged if he would give the matter his immediate attention." The note must have reached him the following morning, but he did not come until, after waiting three days, "we" sent him a sharp demand for a check for the balance due us.

A pleasing, aristocratic-looking figure he made as he entered my office, with his air of the man whose hands have never known the stains of toil, with his manner of having always received deferential treatment. There was no pretense in my curt greeting, my tone of "despatch your business, sir, and be gone," for I was both busy and much irritated against him. "I guess you want to see our cashier," said I, after giving him a hasty, absent-minded hand-shake. "My boy out there will take you to him."

The old do-nothing's face lost its confident, condescending expression. His lip quivered, and I think there were tears in his bad, dim, gray-green eyes. I suppose he thought his a profoundly pathetic case; no doubt he hadn't the remotest conception what he really was—and no doubt, also, there are many who would honestly take his view. As if the fact that he was born with all possible advantages did not make him and his plight inexcusable.

"No, my dear Blacklock," said he, cringing now as easily as he had condescended—how to cringe and how to condescend are taught at the same school, the one he had gone to all his life. "It is you I want to talk with. And, first, I owe you my apologies. I know you'll make allowances for one who was never trained to business methods. I've always been like a child in those matters."

"You frighten me," said I. "The last 'gentleman' who came throwing me off my guard with that plea was shrewd enough to get away with a very large sum of my hard-earned money. Besides"—and I was laughing, though not too good-naturedly—"I've noticed that you 'gentlemen' become vague about business only when the balance is against you. When it's in your favor, you manage to get your minds on business long enough to collect to the last fraction of a cent."

He heartily echoed my laugh. "I only wish I were clever," said he. "However, I've come to ask your indulgence. I'd have been here before, but those who owe me have been putting me off. And they're of the sort of people whom it's impossible to press."

"I'd like to accommodate you further," said I, shedding the last little hint as a cliff sheds rain, "but your account has been in an unsatisfactory state for nearly a month now."

"I'm sure you'll give me a few days longer," was his easy reply, as if we were discussing a trifle. "By the way, you haven't been to see us yet. Only this morning my wife was wondering when you'd come. You quite captivated her, Blacklock. Can't you dine with us to-morrow night—Sunday—at eight? We're having in a few people I think you'd like to meet."

"Glad to come," said I, wishing to be rid of him, now that my point was gained. "We'll let the account stand open for the present—I rather think your stocks are going up. Give my regards to—the ladies, please, especially to Miss Anita."

He winced, but thanked me graciously; gave me his soft, nine hand to shake and departed, as eager to be off as I to be rid of him. "Sunday next—at eight," were his last words. "Don't fail us"—that in the tone of a king addressing some obscure person whom he had commanded to court. It may be that old Ellersly was wholly unconscious of his superciliousness, fancied he was treating me as if I were almost an equal; but I suspect he rather accentuated his natural manner, with the idea of impressing upon me that in our deal he was giving at least as much as I.

My petty and inevitable success with that helpless creature added amazingly, ludicrously, to that dangerous elation which, as I can now see, had been growing in me ever since the day Roebuck yielded so readily to my demands as to National coal. The whole trouble with me was that up to that time I had won all my victories by the plainest kind of straightaway hard work. I was imagining myself victor in contests of wit against wit, when, in fact, no one with any especial equipment of brains had ever opposed me; all the really strong men had been helping me because they found me useful. But for my self-hypnotism in the case of Roebuck, I find no excuse whatever for myself.

He sent for me and told me what share in National coal they had decided to give me for my Manasquale mines. "Langdon and Melville," said he, "think me too liberal; far too liberal, my boy. But I insisted—in you case I felt we could afford to be generous as well as just." All this with an air that was a combination of the pastor and the parent.

I can't even offer the excuse of not having seen that he was a hypocrite. I felt his hypocrisy at once, and my first impulse was to jump for my breastworks. But instantly my vanity got behind me, held me in the open, pushed me on toward him. If you will notice, almost all "confidence" games rely for success chiefly upon enlisting a man's vanity to play the traitor to his judgment. So, instead of reading his liberality as plain proof of intended treachery, I read it as plain proof of my own greatness, and of the fear it had inspired in old Roebuck. Laugh with me if you like, but before you laugh at me, think carefully—those of you who have ever put yourselves to the test on the field of action—think carefully whether you have never found that your head decoration which you thought a crown was in reality the peaked and belled cap of the fool.

(To be Continued.)

Wisdom.

"That man is so wise he can talk by the hour."

"Yes," answered Miss Cayenne "but he isn't wise enough to keep still five minutes."—Washington Star.

A Nice Place.

First Girl (in an intelligence office)—D'ye think that lady will be easy to get along wid?

Second Girl—'Tis, she's a regular fool.—N. Y. Weekly.

Illinois State News

Recent Happenings of Interest in the Various Cities and Towns.

FOUND BY SISTER'S DREAM.

Relatives Strangely Reunited After Long Separation.

Fairfield.—A strange dream has been the means of uniting three sisters with a long lost brother, mourned as dead for nearly 25 years.

The death of their parents, 25 years ago, left Cora, Dora, Nora, and William Dawson homeless. The brother was sent to an orphan asylum at Chicago and the sisters were placed in homes of sympathizers. Years passed and all trace was lost of the boy, who had been adopted into a family at Rockford, Ill.

A few weeks ago Miss Dora Dawson, who was adopted into the family of Daniel Henderson of this city, had a vision in which she beheld her brother William dressed in a uniform and drilling as a soldier. She communicated with the war department at Washington and officials there located him in company E, Third United States artillery, at Seattle, Wash.

The brother, overjoyed to learn of his sisters, asked for a leave of absence and the four have been holding a reunion at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Henderson in this city.

DATES FIXED IN DAVIS CASE.

Arguments on Motion to Quash Indictment Feb. 18.

Danville.—Will J. Davis, manager of the ill-fated Iroquois theater, will be arraigned before Circuit Judge Ere Kimbrough Feb. 18, when the court will decide whether he will entertain a motion to quash the indictment. In case he refuses the trial will be set for March 4. The court had heard arguments by Joseph B. Mann of this city, representing the defense, and J. M. Barbour of State's Attorney Healy's office concerning the time for holding the trial. Mr. Barbour said the case had been turned over to him by State's Attorney Healy and he had secured State's Attorney J. W. Kessler and George T. Buckingham of Danville to assist in the prosecution. He said he had a strong case against Davis and feels confident of securing his conviction.

New Penitentiary Commissioner.

Macomb.—Van L. Hampton, recently appointed commissioner for the penitentiary at Joliet, was born in the city where he now resides. He received a common school education and at an early age embarked in the newspaper business at Colchester, Ill., purchasing the newspaper there in 1887 and continuing there until 1894, when he purchased the Bystander,

Van L. Hampton.

which he still owns. He early took an active part in politics and has always been a stalwart Republican. He served a few months last year as secretary of the board of arbitration while C. J. Doyle was managing the senatorial campaign for ex-Gov. Yates.

Teacher Indicted For Whipping Boy.

Urbana.—The Champaign county grand jury concluded its work and returned 20 indictments altogether. Among the number were true bills against Prof. Sherman Case and Miss Agnis Kelly, teachers of the Tolono schools, who are charged with assault and battery upon a pupil. This case when tried will attract half the population of Tolono here.

Churches Fight for Bill.

Bloomington.—Concerted action by the churches of Bloomington resulted in the forwarding of many telegrams and letters to Congressman John A. Sterling of the district asking him to vote for the Littlefield bill now being pushed by the Antisaloon league of Illinois and which prevents shipment of liquor to temperance districts.

Build Ice Plant at Litchfield.

Litchfield.—It is stated that this city is soon to have an ice plant, the erection of which will cost $20,000. H. W. Bartling & Co. are the promoters. The capacity of the plant will be 8 tons each eight hours.

Virginia Teacher Goes to Paris.

Virginia.—Miss Florence Eisele, who has been engaged as supervisor of music in the public schools here, has been released by the board to take a similar position at an increased salary at Paris, this state.

CLUB IDEA IS POPULAR.

Benefits Expected to Accrue from Meeting of Farmers.

Auburn.—The meeting held here for the purpose of organizing a township farmers' debating club was a most enthusiastic one. Present were business men, school teachers, members of the Auburn Domestic Science association, pupils in the public school and old and young farmers from near the city.

B. P. Workman called the meeting to order and Joseph F. Smith of Auburn and E. C. Foster of Springfield were chosen chairman and secretary, respectively. The meeting then order, the election of the first board of officers was called for and resulted as follows: President, Fred W. Ladage; first vice president, Prof. A. N. Bailey; second vice president, M. L. Gordon; secretary and treasurer, Mrs. Henry Dawson; assistant secretary and treasurer, Miss Brooks.

Following the election of officers, E. C. Pruitt, county superintendent of schools, addressed the meeting on the benefits to be derived from a farmers' debating club. Mr. Pruitt takes the schools' point of view in discussing farm subjects and he thinks the idea of township clubs one of the best recently suggested.

JURIST'S ASSAILANT IS CRAZY.

Asylum for Man Who Tried to Kill Judge Cutting.

Chicago.—Fred Elerbrock, who on December 21 attempted to kill Judge Cutting by firing at the jurist as he was entering the criminal court building, was declared to be of unsound mind and committed to the insane asylum by Judge Pinckney. Judge Cutting was on the stand and told of the attack made on him by Elerbrock. Dr. Harold N. Moyer said the defendant was demented. It was shown that Elerbrock was in the habit of defacing the American flag and mailing them to judges. Judge Kavanagh and Judge Kohlsaat are said to have received mutilated flags, accompanied by letters signed by Elerbrock.

Elerbrock took the stand and said he just wanted to wound Judge Cutting so he could get him into court and show how corrupt court officials are. "I fired the shot," he said, "but did not want to kill him."

Hurt in Wreck.

Minonk.—One man was seriously injured and six other men and two women badly shaken up when an Illinois Central freight train running 20 miles an hour crashed into an accommodation freight train at Kankakee Junction, near here. The caboose was telescoped and the nine passengers in it had to be taken out through a window. Frank Kalkwolf of Flanagan, Ill., was the only one seriously hurt.

Plan to Protect Game.

Carlinville.—The game wardens of Madison and St. Clair counties, L. A. Richardson of Marine and Messrs. Miller and Wagner of Belleville, are being provided with a fast-running, bullet-proof river boat, equipped with an eight horsepower gasoline engine that will be manned by an expert river man, to be used in patrolling the river from Alton to Carondelet during the duck shooting season.

Galesburg Hears Gypsy Smith.

Galesburg.—Gypsy Smith opened his revival services in Central Congregational church, and he illustrated with striking instances of conversion in Chicago, such as that of a young man who confessed to robbing his father, and of a mother who became reconciled to the marriage of her daughter, who years ago wedded against the mother's will.

Clinton, Ill., Minister Indicted.

Bloomington.—The federal grand jury has returned an indictment against Dr. A. E. Campbell, of Clinton, alleging that he mailed an objectionable letter to Mrs. Maud Bonnell, a member of the Presbyterian church choir there, which resulted in her resignation from that organization. Dr. Campbell protests his innocence.

Killed by Gas Explosion.

Springfield.—Thomas Edwards, proprietor of an elevator at Harvel, Ill., was killed by the explosion of a private acetylene gas plant in his home. His head was blown off.

Pioneer Farmer Dies at Pana.

Pana.—Lyman Wilcox, aged 94 years, the oldest resident in Christian county, died. He was a native of New York, an old soldier, and wealthy farmer.

Diphtheria Rages in Two Towns.

Pana.—Diphtheria is becoming alarming at Owoneco and Buckeye. Schools all have been closed and the state board of health will visit the city to take action looking to the confinement of the disease.

Fever Rages at Tower Hill.

Pana.—The epidemic of scarlet fever has reached Tower Hill and a great many cases are reported. The schools have been closed and every means is being used to curtail the ravages of the disease.