

The HILLMAN

A Story About an Experiment With Life

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JOHN STRANGEWAY FEELS THE LURE OF LOVELY WOMAN AND IS UNABLE TO BREAK THE SPELL LOUISE HAS WOVEN

Synopsis.—On a trip through the English Cumberland country the breakdown of her automobile forces Louise Maurel, a famous London actress, to spend the night at the farm home of John and Stephen Strangeway. At dinner Louise discovers that the brothers are woman-hating recluses. Next morning she discovers that John, the younger brother, has recently come into a large fortune. In company with him she explores the farm and is disturbed by evidence of his rigid moral principles. He learns she is a friend of the prince of Sayre, a rich and disreputable neighbor. Three months later, unable to shake off the girl's memory, John goes to London.

CHAPTER V.—(Continued.)

"You aren't letting your thoughts dwell upon that woman?"

"I have thought about her sometimes," John answered, almost defiantly. "What's the harm? I'm still here, am I not?"

Stephen crossed the room. From the drawer of the old mahogany sideboard he produced an illustrated paper. He turned back the frontpiece fiercely and held it up.

"Do you see that, John?"

"I've seen it already."

Stephen threw the paper upon the table.

"She's going to act in another of those confounded French plays," he said; "translations with all the wit taken out and all the vulgarity left in."

"We knew nothing of her art," John declared coldly. "We shouldn't understand it, even if we saw her act. Therefore it isn't right for us to judge her. The world has found her a great actress. She is not responsible for the plays she acts in."

Stephen turned away and lit his pipe anew. He smoked for a minute or two furiously. His thick eyebrows came closer and closer together. He seemed to be turning some thought over in his mind.

"John," he asked, "is it this cursed money that is making you restless?"

"I never think of it except when someone comes begging. I promised a thousand pounds to the infirmary today."

"Then what's wrong with you?"

John stretched himself out, a splendid figure of healthy manhood. His cheeks were sun-tanned, his eyes clear and bright.

"The matter? There's nothing on earth the matter with me," he declared.

"It isn't your health I mean. There are other things, as you well know. You do your day's work and you take your pleasure, and you go through both as if your feet were on a treadmill."

"Your fancy, Stephen?"

"God grant it! I've had an unwelcome visitor in your absence."

John turned swiftly around.

"A visitor?" he repeated. "Who was it?"

Stephen glowered at him for a moment.

"It was the prince," he said; "the prince of Seyre, as he calls himself, though he has the right to style himself Master of Raynham. It's only his foreign blood which makes him choose what I regard as the lesser title. Yes,



"You Aren't Letting Your Thoughts Dwell Upon That Woman?"

he called to ask you to shoot and stay at the castle, if you would, from the sixteenth to the twentieth of next month."

"What answer did you give him?"

"I told him that you were your own master. You must send word tomorrow."

"He did not mention the names of any of his other guests, I suppose?"

"He mentioned no names at all."

John was silent for a moment. A bewildering thought had taken hold of him. Supposing she were to be there?

John, watching him, read his

thoughts, and for a moment lost control of himself.

"Were you thinking about that woman?" he asked sternly.

"What woman?"

"The woman whom we sheltered here, the woman whose shameless picture is on the cover of that book."

John swung round on his heel.

"Stop that, Stephen!" he said menacingly.

"Why should I?" the older man retorted. "Take up that paper, if you want to read a sketch of the life of Louise Maurel. See the play she made her name in—'La Gioconda!'"

"What about it?"

Stephen held the paper out to his brother. John read a few lines and dashed it into a corner of the room.

"There's this much about it, John," Stephen continued. "The woman played that part night after night—played it to the life, mind you. She made her reputation in it. That's the woman we unknowingly let sleep beneath this roof! The barn is the place for her and her sort!"

John's clenched fists were held firmly to his sides. His eyes were blazing.

"That's enough, Stephen!" he cried.

"No, it's not enough!" was the fierce reply. "The truth's been burning in my heart long enough. It's better out. You want to find her a guest at Raynham castle, do you?—Raynham castle, where never a decent woman crosses the threshold! If she goes there, she goes—well?"

An anger that was almost paralyzing, a sense of the utter impotence of words, drove John in silence from the room. He left the house by the back door, passed quickly through the orchard, where the tangled moonlight lay upon the ground in strange, fantastic shadows; across the narrow strip of field, a field now of golden stubble; up the hill which looked down upon the farm buildings and the churchyard.

He sat grimly down upon a great bowlder, filled with a hateful sense of unrequited passion, yet with a sheer thankfulness in his heart that he had escaped the miasma of evil thoughts which Stephen's words seemed to have created. The fancy seized him to face these half-veiled suggestions of his brother, so far as they concerned himself and his life during the last few months.

Stephen was right. This woman who had dropped from the clouds for those few brief hours had played strange havoc with John's thoughts and his whole outlook upon life. The coming of harvest, the care of his people, his sports, his cricket, the early days upon the grouse moors, had all suddenly lost their interest for him. Life had become a task. The echo of her half-mocking, half-challenging words was always in his ears.

He sat with his head resting upon his hands, looking steadfastly across the valley below. Almost at his feet lay the little church with its graveyard, the long line of stacks and barns, the laborers' cottages, the bailiff's house, the whole little colony around which his life seemed centered. The summer moonlight lay upon the ground almost like snow. He could see the sheaves of wheat standing up in the most distant of the cornfields. Beyond was the dark gorge toward which he had looked so many nights at this hour.

Across the viaduct there came a blaze of streaming light, a serpentine trail, a faintly heard whistle—the Scottish express on its way southward toward London. His eyes followed it out of sight. He found himself thinking of the passengers who would wake the morning in London. He felt suddenly acutely conscious of his own life. Was there not something plastic in the seclusion which had become a passion with Stephen, had its grip, too, upon him—

his life, a burying of talents?—

to his feet. The half-formed thought of weeks held him now, definite and secure. He knew that this pillage of his to the hilltop, his rapt contemplation of the little panorama which had become so dear to him, was in a sense valedictory.

After all, two more months passed before the end came, and it came then without a moment's warning. It was a little past midday when John drove slowly through the streets of Market Ketton in his high dogcart, exchanging

salutations right and left with the tradespeople, with farmers brought into town by the market, with acquaintances of all sorts and conditions. More than one young woman from the shop windows or the pavements ventured to smile at him, and the few greetings he received from the wives and daughters of his neighbors were as gracious as they could possibly be made. John almost smiled once, in the act of raising his hat, as he realized how completely the whole charm of the world, for him, seemed to lie in one woman's eyes.

At the crossways, where he should have turned to the inn, he paused while a motorcar passed. It contained a woman, who was talking to her host. She was not in the least like Louise, and yet instinctively he knew that she was of the same world. The perfection of her white-serge costume, her

spirit of it to me. In you I see the embodiment of my Therese."

Louise made no movement. Her eyes were fixed upon a certain shadowy corner of the wings. Overwrought as she had seemed, with the emotional excitement of her long speech, there was now a new and curious expression upon her face. She was looking at a tall, hesitating figure that stood just off the stage. She forgot the existence of the famous dramatist who hung upon her words. Her feet no longer trod the dusty boards of the theater. She was almost painfully conscious of the perfume of apple blossom.

"You!" she exclaimed, stretching out her hands. "Why do you not come and speak to me? I am here!"

John came out upon the stage. The French dramatist, with his hands behind his back, made swift mental notes of an interesting situation. He saw the coming of a man who stood like a giant among them, sunburnt, buoyant with health, his eyes bright with the wonder of his unexpected surroundings; a man in whose presence everyone else seemed to represent an effete and pallid type of humanity.

Those first few sentences, spoken in the midst of a curious little crowd of strangers, seemed to John, when he thought of his long waiting, almost pitifully inadequate. Louise, recognizing the difficulty of the situation, swiftly recovered her composure. She was both tactful and gracious.

"Mr. Faraday," she said appealingly, "Mr. Strangeway comes from the country—he is, in fact, the most complete countryman I have ever met in my life. He comes from Cumberland, and he once—well, very nearly saved my life. He knows nothing about theaters, and he hasn't the least idea of the importance of a rehearsal. You won't mind if we put him somewhere out of the way till we have finished, will you?"

"After such an introduction," Faraday said in a tone of resignation, "Mr. Strangeway would be welcome at any time."

"There's a dear man!" Louise exclaimed. "Let me introduce him quickly. Mr. John Strangeway—Mr. Miles Faraday, M. Grallot, Miss Sophy Gerard, my particular little friend. The prince of Seyre you already know, although you may not recognize him trying to balance himself on that absurd stool."

John bowed in various directions, and Faraday, taking him good-naturedly by the arm, led him to a garden seat at the back of the stage.

"There!" he said. "You are one of the most privileged persons in London. You shall hear the finish of our rehearsal. There isn't a press man in London I'd have near the place."

Twenty-four hours away from his silent hills, John looked out with puzzled eyes from his dusty seat among ropes and pulleys and leaning fragments of scenery. What he saw and heard seemed to him, for the most part, a meaningless tangle of gestures and phrases. The men and women in fashionable clothes, moving about before that gloomy space of empty auditorium, looked more like marionettes than creatures of flesh and blood, drawn this way and that at the bidding of the stout, masterful Frenchman, who was continually muttering exclamations and banging the manuscript upon his hand. It seemed like a dream picture, with unreal men and women moving about aimlessly, saying strange words.

Then there came a moment which brought a tingle into his blood, which plunged his senses into hot confusion. He rose to his feet. It was a play which they were rehearsing, of course! It was a damnable thing to see Louise taken into that cold and obviously unreal embrace, but it was only a play. It was part of her work.

John resumed his seat and folded his arms. With the embrace had fallen an imaginary curtain, and the rehearsal was over. They were all crowded together, talking, in the center of the stage. The prince, who had stepped across the footlights, made his way to where John was sitting.

"So you have deserted Cumberland for a time?" he courteously inquired.

"I came up last night," John replied.

"London, at this season of the year," the prince observed, "is scarcely at its best."

John smiled.

"I am afraid," he said, "that I am not critical. It is eight years since I was here last. I have not been out of Cumberland during the whole of that time."

The prince, after a moment's incredulous stare, laughed softly to himself.

"You are a very wonderful person, Mr. Strangeway," he declared. "I have heard of your good fortune. If I can be of any service to you during your stay in town, he added politely, 'please command me.'"

"You are very kind," John replied gratefully.

Louise broke away from the little group and came across toward them.

"Free at last!" she exclaimed. "Now let us go out and have some tea."

CHAPTER VI.

The great French dramatist, dark, pale-faced and corpulent, stood upon the extreme edge of the stage, brandishing his manuscript in his hand. He banged the palm of his left hand with the rolled-up manuscript and looked at them all furiously.

"The only success I care for," he thundered, "is an artistic success!"

"With Miss Maurel playing your leading part, M. Grallot," the actor-manager declared, "not to speak of a company carefully selected to the best of my judgment, I think you may venture to anticipate even that."

The dramatist bowed hurriedly to Louise.

"You recall to me a fact," he said gallantly, "which almost reconciles me to this diabolical travesty of some of my lines. Proceed, then—proceed! I will be as patient as possible."

The stage manager shouted out some directions from his box. A gentleman in faultless morning clothes, who seemed to have been thoroughly enjoying the interlude, suddenly adopted the puppetlike walk of a footman. Other actors, who had been whispering together in the wings, came back to their places. Louise advanced alone, a little languidly, to the front of the stage. At the first sound of her voice M. Grallot, nodding his head vigorously, was soothed.

Her speech was a long one. It appeared that she had been arraigned before a company of her relatives, assembled to comment upon her misdeeds. She wound up with a passionate appeal to her husband, Mr. Miles Faraday, who had made an unexpected appearance. M. Grallot's face, as she concluded, was wreathed in smiles.

"Ah!" he cried. "You have lifted us all up! Now I feel once more the inspiration. Mademoiselle, I kiss your hand," he went on. "It is you who still redeem my play. You bring back the

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They made their way down the little passage and out into the sudden blaze of the sunlit streets. Louise led John to a small car which was waiting in the rear.

"The Carlton," she told the man, as he arranged the rugs. "And now," she added, turning to John, "why have you come to London? How long are you going to stay? What are you going to do? And—most important of all—in what spirit have you come?"

John breathed a little sigh of contentment. "I came to see you," he confessed bluntly.

"Dear me!" she exclaimed, looking at him with a little smile. "How downright you are!"

"The truth—" he began.

"Has to be handled very carefully," she said, interrupting him. "The truth is either beautiful or crude, and the people who meddle with such a wonderful thing need a great deal of tact. You have come to see me, you say. Very well, then, I will be just as frank. I have been hoping that you would come!"

"You can't imagine how good it is to hear you say that," he declared.

"Mind," she went on, "I have been hoping it for more reasons than one. You have come to realize, I hope, that it is your duty to try to see a little more of life than you possibly can, leading a patriarchal existence among your flocks and herds."

They were silent for several moments.

"I thought you would come," Louise said at last; "and I am glad, but even in these first few minutes I want to say something to you. If you wish to really understand the people you meet here and the life they lead, don't be like your brother—too quick to judge. Do not hug your prejudices too tightly. You will come across many problems, many situations which will seem strange to you. Do not make up your mind about anything in a hurry."

"I will remember that," he promised.

"You must remember, though, that I don't expect ever to become a convert. I believe I am a countryman, bred and born. Still, there are some things that I want to understand, if I can, and more than anything else—I want to see you!"

She faced his direct speech this time with more deliberation.

"Tell me exactly why."

"If I could tell you that," he replied simply, "I should be able to answer for myself the riddle which has kept me awake at night for weeks and months, which has puzzled me more than anything else in life has ever done."

"You really have thought of me, then?"

"Didn't you always know that I should?"

"Perhaps," she admitted. "Anyhow, I always felt that we should meet again, that you would come to London. The problem is," she added, smiling, "what to do with you now you are here."

"I haven't come to be a nuisance," he assured her. "I just want a little help from you. I want to understand because it is your world. I want to feel myself nearer to you. I want—"

She gripped his arms suddenly. She knew well enough that she had deliberately provoked his words, but there was a look in her face almost of fear.

"Don't let us be too serious all at once," she begged quickly. "If you have one fault, my dear big friend from the country," she went on, with

"I have a table inside," he told them as they approached. "It is better for conversation. The rest of the place is like a bear garden. I am not sure if they will dance here today, but if they do, they will come also into the restaurant."

"Wise man!" Louise declared. "I, too, hate the babel outside."

"We are faced," said the prince, as he took up the menu, "with our daily problem. What can I order for you?"

"A cup of chocolate," Louise replied.

"And Miss Sophy?"

"Ten, please."

John, too, preferred tea; the prince ordered absinthe.

"A polygot meal, isn't it, Mr. Strangeway?" said Louise, as the order was executed; "not in the least what that wonderful old butler of yours would understand by tea. Sophy, put your hat on straight if you want to make a good impression on Mr. Strangeway. I am hoping that you two will be great friends."

Sophy turned toward John with a little grimace.

"Louise is so tactless!" she said. "I am sure any idea you might have had of liking me will have gone already. Has it, Mr. Strangeway?"

"On the contrary," he replied, a little stiffly, but without hesitation, "I was thinking that Miss Maurel could scarcely have set me a more pleasant task."

The girl looked reproachfully across at her friend.

"You told me he came from the wilds and was quite unsophisticated!" she exclaimed.

"The truth," John assured them, looking with dismay at his little china cup, "comes very easily to us. We are brought up on it in Cumberland."

"Don't chatter too much, child," Louise said benignly. "I want to hear some more of Mr. Strangeway's impressions. This is—well, if not quite a fashionable crowd, yet very nearly so. What do you think of it—the women, for instance?"

"Well, to me," John confessed candidly, "they all look like dolls or manikins. Their dresses and their hats overshadow their faces. They seem all the time to be wanting to show, not themselves, but what they have on."

They all laughed. Even the prince's lips were parted by the flicker of a smile. Sophy leaned across the table with a sigh.

"Louise," she pleaded, "you will lend him to me sometimes, won't you? You won't keep him altogether to yourself? There are such a lot of places to take him to!"

"I was never greedy," Louise remarked, with an air of self-satisfaction. "If you succeed in making a favorable impression upon him, I promise you your share."

"Tell us some more of your impressions, Mr. Strangeway," Sophy begged.

"You want to laugh at me," John protested good-humoredly.

"On the contrary," the prince assured him, as he fitted a cigarette into a long amber tube, "they want to laugh with you. You ought to realize your value as a companion in these days. You are the only person who can see the truth. Eyes and tastes blurred with custom perceive so little. You are quite right when you say that these women are like manikins; that their bodies and faces are lost; but one does not notice it until it is