

# The THIRD DEGREE

A Narrative of Metropolitan Life

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ILLUSTRATIONS BY RAY WALTERS

### SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I.—Howard Jeffries, banker's son, under the evil influence of Robert Underwood, fellow-student at Yale, leads a life of dissipation, marries the daughter of a gambler who died in prison, and is disowned by his father. Forced to leave college, he tries to get work and fails. His wife, Annie, is straight as a die, and has a heart of gold. A former college chum makes a business proposition to Howard which requires \$2,000 cash, and Howard is broke.

CHAPTER II.—Robert Underwood, who had made love to Annie in his college days and was repulsed, and was once engaged to Howard's stepmother, Alicia, is a welcome visitor at the Jeffries home. Underwood has apartments in the Astoria, an exclusive apartment house. Howard recalls a \$250 loan to Underwood that remains unpaid and decides to ask him for the \$2,000 he needs.

CHAPTER III.—Mrs. Jeffries, Sr., foolishly encourages a dangerous intimacy with Underwood which the latter takes advantage of until he becomes a sort of social highwayman. Discovering his true character, Mrs. Jeffries denies him the house.

CHAPTER IV.—Alicia receives a note from Underwood threatening suicide unless she revokes her sentence of banishment. She decides to go and see him.

CHAPTER V.—Underwood is in desperate financial straits. Merchants for whom he has acted as commissioner in the sale of art treasures demand an accounting. Underwood cannot make good. Howard Jeffries calls at Underwood's apartments in an intoxicated condition.

CHAPTER VI.—He asks Underwood for \$2,000 and is told the latter is in debt up to his eyes. Howard drinks himself into a maudlin condition and finally goes to sleep on a divan. A caller is announced and Underwood draws a screen around the drunken sleeper. Alicia enters.

CHAPTER VII.—She demands from Underwood a promise that he will not take his life, pointing to the disgrace that would attach to herself from having been associated with a suicide. Underwood refuses to promise unless she will renew her patronage. This she refuses to do, and takes her leave. Underwood turns out the lights, places a pistol at his temple, and fires.

### CHAPTER IX.

Fifteen minutes passed without a word being spoken. There was deep silence in the room. It was so quiet that once could have heard a pin drop. Had a disinterested spectator been there to witness it, he would have been at once impressed by the dramatic tableau presented—the dead man on the floor, his white shirt front spattered with blood, the cowering, frightened boy crouching in the chair, the towering figure of the police captain sitting sternly eyeing his hapless prisoner, and at the far end of the room Detective Sergeant Maloney busy sending hurried messages through the telephone.

"What did you do it for?" thundered the captain suddenly.

Howard's tongue clove to his palate. He could scarcely articulate. He was innocent, of course, but there was something in this man's manner which made him fear that he might, after all, have had something to do with the tragedy. Yet he was positive that he was asleep on the bed all the time. The question is, would anybody believe him? He shook his head pathetically.

"I didn't do it. Really, I didn't."

"Shut your mouth! You're lying, and you know you're lying. Wait till the coroner comes. We'll fix you."

Again there was silence, and now began a long, tedious wait, both men retaining the same positions, the captain watching his prisoner as a cat watches a mouse.

Howard's mental anguish was almost unendurable. He thought of his poor wife who must be waiting up for him all this time, wondering what had become of him. She would imagine the worst, and there was no telling what she might do. If only he could get word to her. Perhaps she would be able to explain things. Then he thought of his father. They had quarreled, it was true, but after all it was his own flesh and blood. At such a critical situation as this, one forgets. His father could hardly refuse to come to his assistance. He must get a lawyer, too, to protect his interests. This police captain had no right to detain him like this. He must get word to Annie without delay. Summoning up all his courage, he said boldly:

"You are detaining me here without warrant in law. I know my rights. I am the son of one of the most influential men in the city."

"What's your name?" growled the captain.

"Howard Jeffries."

"Son of Howard Jeffries, the banker?"

Howard nodded.

"Yes."

The captain turned to his sergeant.

"Maloney, this feller says he's the son of Howard Jeffries, the banker."

Maloney leaned over and whispered something in the captain's ear. The captain smiled grimly.

"So you're a bad character, eh? Father turned you out of doors, eh? Where's that girl you ran away with?"

Sharply he added: "You see I know your record."

"I've done nothing I'm ashamed of," replied Howard calmly. "I married the girl. She's waiting my return now. Won't you please let me send her a message?"

The captain eyed Howard suspiciously for a moment, then he turned to his sergeant:

"Maloney, telephone this man's wife. What's the number?"

"Eighty-six Morningside."

Maloney again got busy with the telephone and the wearying wait began once more. The clock soon struck two. For a whole hour he had been subjected to this gruelling process, and still the lynx-eyed captain sat there watching his quarry.

If Capt. Clinton had begun to have any doubts when Howard told him who his father was, Maloney's information immediately put him at his ease. It was all clear to him now. The youth had never been any good. His own father had kicked him out. He was in desperate financial straits. He had come to this man's rooms to make a demand for money. Underwood had refused and there was a quarrel, and he shot him. There was probably a dispute over the woman. Ah, yes, he remembered now. This girl he married was formerly a sweetheart of Underwood's. Jealousy was behind it as well. Besides, wasn't he caught red-handed, with blood on his hands, trying to escape from the apartment? Oh, they had him dead to rights, all right. Any magistrate would hold him on such evidence.

"It's the Toms for him, all right, all right," muttered the captain to himself; "and maybe promotion for me."

Suddenly there was a commotion at the door. The coroner entered, followed by the undertaker. The two men advanced quickly into the room, and took a look at the body. After making a hasty examination, the coroner turned to Capt. Clinton.

"Well, captain, I guess he's dead, all right."

"Yes, and we've got our man, too."

The coroner turned to look at the prisoner.

"Caught him red-handed, eh? Who is he?"

Howard was about to blurt out a reply, when the captain thundered:

"Silence!"

To the coroner, the captain explained:

"He's the scapegrace son of Howard Jeffries, the banker. No good—bad egg. His father turned him out of doors. There is no question about his guilt. Look at his hands. We caught him trying to get away."

The coroner rose. He believed in doing things promptly.

"I congratulate you, captain. Quick work like this ought to do your reputation good. The community owes a debt to the officers of the law if they succeed in apprehending criminals quickly. You've been getting some pretty hard knocks lately, but I guess you know your business."

The captain grinned broadly.

"I guess I do. Don't we, Maloney?"

"Yes, cap," said Maloney, quietly.

The coroner turned to go.

"Well, there's nothing more for me to do here. The man is dead. Let justice take its course." Addressing the undertaker, he said:

"You can remove the body."

The men set about the work immediately. Carrying the corpse into the inner room, they commenced the work of laying it out.

"I suppose," said the coroner, "that you'll take your prisoner immediately to the station house, and before the magistrate to-morrow morning?"

"Not just yet," grinned the captain.

"I want to put a few questions to him first."

The coroner smiled.

"You're going to put him through the 'third degree,' eh? Every one's heard of your star-chamber ordeals. Are they really so dreadful?"

"Nonsense!" laughed the captain.

"We wouldn't harm a baby, would we, Maloney?"

The sergeant quickly indorsed his chief's opinion.

"No, cap."

Turning to go, the coroner said:

"Well, good-night, captain."

"Good-night, Mr. Coroner."

Howard listened to all this like one transfixed. They seemed to be talking about him. They were discussing some frightful ordeal of which he was to be a victim. What was this 'third degree' they were talking about? Now he remembered. He had heard of innocent men being bullied, maltreated, deprived of food and sleep for days, in order to force them to tell what the police were anxious to find out. He had heard of secret assaults, of midnight clubbings, of prisoners being choked and brutally kicked by a gang of ruffianly policemen, in order to force them into some damaging admission. A chill ran down his spine as he realized his utter helplessness. If he could only get word to a lawyer. Just as the coroner was disappearing through the door, he darted forward and laid a hand on his arm.

"Mr. Coroner, won't you listen to me?" he exclaimed.

The coroner started, drew back.

"I cannot interfere," he said coldly.

"Mr. Underwood was a friend of mine," explained Howard. "I came here to borrow money. I fell asleep on that sofa. When I woke up he was dead. I was frightened. I tried to get away. That's the truth, so help me God!"

The coroner looked at him sternly and made no reply. No one could ever reproach him with sympathizing with criminals. Waving his hand a Capt. Clinton, he said:

"Good-night, captain."

"Good-night, Mr. Coroner."

The door slammed and Capt. Clinton, with a twist of his powerful arm,

yanked his prisoner back into his seat. Howard protested.

"You've got no right to treat me like this. You exceed your powers. I demand to be taken before a magistrate at once."

The captain grinned, and pointed to the clock.

"Say, young feller, see what time it is? Two-thirty a. m. Our good magistrates are all comfy in their virtuous beds. We'll have to wait till morning."

"But what's the good of sitting here in this death house?" protested Howard. "Take me to the station if I must go. It's intolerable to sit any longer here."

The captain beckoned to Maloney. "Not so fast, young man. Before we go to the station we want to ask you a few questions. Don't we, Maloney?"

The sergeant came over, and the captain whispered something in his ear. Howard shivered. Suddenly turning to his prisoner, the captain shouted in the stern tone of command:

"Get up!"

Howard did as he was ordered. He felt he must. There was no resisting that powerful brute's tone of authority. Pointing to the other side of the table, the captain went on:

"Stand over there where I can look at you!"

The two men now faced each other, the small table alone separating them. The powerful electroliner overhead cast its light full on Howard's haggard face and on the captain's scowling features. Suddenly Maloney turned off every electric light except the lights in the electroliner, the glare of which was intensified by the surrounding darkness. The rest of the room was in shadow. One saw only these two figures standing vividly out in the strong light—the white-faced prisoner and his stalwart inquisitor. In the dark background stood Policeman Delaney. Close at hand was Maloney taking notes.

"You did it, and you know you did it!" thundered the captain, fixing his eyes on his trembling victim.

"I did not do it," replied Howard slowly and firmly, returning the policeman's stare.

"You're lying!" shouted the captain.

"I'm not lying," replied Howard calmly.

The captain glared at him for a moment and then suddenly tried new tactics.

"Why did you come here?" he demanded.

"I came to borrow money."

"Did you get it?"

"No—he said he couldn't give it to me."

"Then you killed him."

"I did not kill him," replied Howard positively.

Thus the searching examination went on, mercilessly, tirelessly. The same questions, the same answers, the same accusations, the same denials, the same after hour. The captain was

tired, but being a giant in physique, he could stand it. He knew that his victim could not. It was only a question of time when the latter's resistance would be weakened. Then he would stop lying and tell the truth. That's all he wanted—the truth.

"You shot him!"

"I did not."

"You're lying!"

"I'm not lying—it's the truth."

So it went on, hour after hour, relentlessly, pitilessly, while the patient Maloney, in the obscure background, took notes.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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