

The GIRL WHO HAD NO GOD

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CHAPTER I.

Hilary Kingston had been shot. Old Hilary had been a familiar figure in the village of Woffingham for years. The eccentricity of his gray derby hat, his beetling gray brows, his always fresh gray gloves, his erect, rather heavy old figure, singled him out from the mass of commuters that thronged the city trains. The gray derby was a part of old Hilary. Except on those rare occasions when he attended service at Saint Jude's he was never seen without it.

He lived on the hill above the village, with his daughter—had lived there for ten years. The hall was beautiful, but old Hilary received no visitors, returned no advances. Visitors thought this curious. The villagers, prosperous business men with smart wives, shrugged their shoulders. The man's house was his own. If he found that he could do without the town, the town could get along without him.

There was no mystery about the hall, and little curiosity. Cars going to the country club passed under the brick wall of its Italian garden. Their occupants sometimes caught a glimpse of Elinor Kingston there, reading in a rose arbor, yandering among her peonies and iris in the spring, or cutting sprays of phlox in midsummer.

The men thought her rather lovely; the women, odd, with her blond hair and dark eyes. The assistant rector of Saint Jude's, newly come to the village, met her face to face on one of his long country walks, a month or so before old Hilary's death, and could not forget her.

He led the conversation to her that night at a dinner.

"An exquisite face," he described her, "but sad, almost tragically sad."

"Blond?" The lady on his right was a Mrs. Bryant. In honor of the new assistant rector, who came of fine family and was a distinct acquisition to the village, she wore the Bryant pear-shaped pearl. She spoke rather curtly. "I should not call her exquisite—but you probably met Elinor Kingston. Her sadness is a pose, I believe; she has everything she wants."

The assistant rector was young, but very wise. So he spoke no more of Elinor until the women had left the table. Then he ventured again.

"Don't join the army of those of us who worship from afar," advised the youth who had moved up beside him. "She's the loveliest thing in this part of the country. But, except our sainted rector, no one ever gets to put a foot on the place. It's exclusiveness to the nth power, and then some. There's a lot of talk, of course, or used to be. Old Kingston brings his servants from New York, and except an elderly housekeeper, none of them speak English. They used to say around here that he was a refugee, but that's all rot. He's a stingy old dotard, afraid some handsome youth like myself will captivate the girl. That's all there is to it."

The assistant rector, whose name was Ward, smiled perfunctorily. Instead of the gleaming table, spread with flowers and candles, with the gray colors of cordials and liqueurs, he was seeing a girl standing at the turn of a country road and gazing down into the valley and the distant village with somber eyes.

Faith, hope and charity, and the greatest of these is faith. Faith in ourselves, faith in those around us, and that sublimest faith of all which trusts in something beyond. To all men is given such faith at the beginning of life, and some keep it to the end. But here and there is one who has lost it, who cannot turn his eyes up and say "Lord, Lord." Old Hilary had not kept the faith.

Years ago he had not been evil. He had gone from philosophy into unbelief, that route which all must travel. But, unlike the many, he had not come back.

He had started with socialism, but socialism must be founded on the Christ, and him he scorned. So from socialism he had drifted to anarchy. To rob the rich and give to the poor, at first. Later on, to rob the rich, to incite seditions, to arm the rebellious—oh, it was comprehensive enough, vastly wicked with that most terrible lawlessness of all, that believes itself law.

To pit his wits against the world and win—that had been old Hilary's creed. "For the oppressed" had been at first the slogan of the band he gathered around him. "Against the oppressor" it became later on. Vastly different the two. Most of human charity and kindness lay crushed down and trampled underfoot during old Hilary's progress from Christ to Antichrist.

The band had been gathered with much care. Respectability, order, decorum—these spelled safety to old Hilary's astute mind. Most of them were younger sons of English landed families, with a sprinkling of other nationalities. Young Huff was an Australian, for instance, the son of a wealthy sheep-owner. Boroday the Russian—implicated in the bomb-throwing that destroyed the minister of war—was a nobleman. Old Hilary had got him out of Siberia during

those early days when he righted what, to his crooked mind, were wrongs.

There were twelve in the band at the beginning, and for five years there were no changes. Then came the kidnapping and holding for ransom of Mackintosh the banker in Iowa, and the unexpected calling out of the state militia. The band had hidden Mackintosh in a deserted mine and three of the band went down in the shooting that followed his discovery. In the looting of Tiffany's vaults, which has never been published, a Frenchman named Dupres was killed; and only recently a tire had burst after the holding up of the car of the governor of Delaware, and their car, overturning, had crushed Jerrold, the mechanic of the band and old Hilary's chauffeur. One way and another, there were only five left: Talbot and Lethbridge the

weight of depression over them all."

Elinor was at her father's right, simply dressed. The dinners were always a trial to her. She was palpitatingly anxious that the papers before old Hilary be in order and accurate. They were her work. The deeper significance of the meeting she was not so much ignorant of as profoundly indifferent to. If her father, a thing, it took on order, became a thing.

There were present Talbot and Lethbridge, the Englishman; Boroday, whose rescue from Siberia had made him old Hilary's henchman; and young Huff. Huff was the mechanic. He had been trained in the Bleriot works; airplanes to wireless, automobiles to automatic pistols, he knew them—all makes, all grades. If old Hilary was the brains, Huff was the hands of the band.

He sat beside Elinor, and watched her with worshipping eyes. Perhaps it was as well that old Hilary was intent on his food and on the business in hand.

The routine of the annual dinner seldom varied. Five of them then, that last dinner around the table, in evening clothes, well set up, spare, three of them young, all temperate, honorable about women—as polished, as harmless in appearance, as death-dealing, as the gleaming projectile of a twelve-inch gun!

First old Hilary went over the books. It might have been the board meeting of some respectable bank. He stood at his end of the table, and the light from the chandelier fell full on him.

"I have to report, gentlemen," he would say, "a fairly successful year." This is where it differed from a bank. The association had had no bad years. "While our expenses have been heavy, returns have been correspondingly so." And so on, careful lines of figures, outlays and returns, to the end. For old Hilary was secretary and treasurer as well as president.

This time, when he had reached the end of what was to be his last report, he paused and cleared his throat.

"Unfortunately, that is not all, gentlemen. Nothing can we call our own but death." And it is my sad duty to report, this last year, the loss of three of our number. A calamitous year, gentlemen."

He might have been a trustee, lamenting the loss of valued supporters to a hospital!

Afterward, in the library, with Elinor embroidering by the fire, they cashed in. They dealt only in cash. Securities were dangerous. Once or twice Boroday had successfully negotiated with a fence in Paris, but always under old Hilary's protest.

The routine never varied. Elinor unlocked the door to a winding staircase, which led to a basement room where the steel vault stood in its cement walls. The five went down, returning shortly with the cash-boxes. The money was divided on the library table. It went by percentages. Hilary drew 20 that last year, each of the others 10—a total of 60 per cent. The 40 per cent remaining was divided, or sent as a whole, according to the sense of the meeting. Berlin got it all one year, for instance, to Boroday's disgust. Russia generally received a large proportion. The Chinese revolution; the defense of Berkhardt, who killed Ecker the pork-packer; a shipment of guns and ammunition to Central America—thus it went.

Although they preferred only money, now and then the loot included jewels. By common consent, such gems, stripped of their settings, were put aside for Elinor. They meant nothing to her. Had anyone told her that for several years her share had been greater in actual value than all the money that had fallen to her father she would not have believed it.

Four days or so after the annual meeting, the rector of Saint Jude's was always asked to dinner. And although the reverend gentleman would under normal circumstances have been fishing in Canada, he never went until this function was over. For old Hilary, detesting his creed, respected the man. A certain percentage, then, of old Hilary's share went over the library table, after the dinner, to the rector.

"Use it where it will do the most good," he would say.

"The church, organ—"

"Not a cent to the church organ. Buy the youngsters a playground, or—build a lying-in ward in the hospital."

Elinor's mother had died in childhood. The last check had been unusually generous. The rector, who had been smoking one of old Hilary's choice cigars, put it down and faced his host resolutely. It took courage.

"Mr. Kingston," he said, "the church needs men like you. Why be a Christian in the spirit and—avoid the letter?"

"Tut." Old Hilary rose and looked down at him. "I am like all gamblers. This annual check to your poor is the sop I throw to luck. That's all, sir."

And his tone closed the discussion. The word "gambler" worried the rector. He thought over it on his way down the hill to the rectory. But his poor were very poor. He cashed the check the next day.

Elinor was in the library that sunny August day when they brought old Hilary to her. She had never seen death before, except on the streets of Mexico, and for a good many years he had been all she had—since her last governess, in fact, had been discovered secreting the rosary and had been word-scourged from the house in tears. She fainted, and wrinkled Henriette laid her on a couch.

Boroday, the Russian, had brought the body home, and now he stood, looking down at Elinor and striking his English coat.

"He expected it, Henriette," he said. "He thought it would come sooner, in the Parker matter. I wonder—"

He glanced through the open door to the billiard room, where old Hilary's body lay on the table. He was blinded, was Boroday, to wonder many things—whether, after all, old Hilary's dauntless spirit had gone out like a lamp or if—

This white and carved thing in the next room, with stiffening hands and the gray derby at its feet, surely there was no mystery about it. This was not old Hilary: that was all. But where, then, was old Hilary? The Russian, who had been raised within the pale and on an ancient faith, and who had how lost his best friend, felt all the bitterness of his unbelief.

Elinor stirred.

"He will have to be buried," said Henriette. "The news has gone through the town. The assistant rector

of the church has telephoned, and is on his way here now. What am I to do?"

"Let them bury him as they will," said Boroday. "What does it matter? He would himself have seen the humor of it."

Hilary Kingston had been shot during the daylight robbery of the Agrarian bank messenger. He was shot as an innocent bystander, and was referred to by the press as philanthropist and martyr. So much for years of caution and the annual gift to Saint Jude's.

As a matter of fact, the Agrarian affair was calamitous in several ways. It bore too close a resemblance to a St. Louis matter of several years back, in which Boroday had come under suspicion.

On a Tuesday morning, the cash being more than the bank cared to have about, two hundred and ten thousand dollars was sent to the clearing house. Two clerks from the bank accompanied the messenger, who went by taxicab.

There are two direct routes to the clearing house: one along one of the great avenues, the other through the newspaper district. Here, at ten-thirty in the morning, things are rather quiet, and except for vans delivering rolls of paper, there is little traffic.

The taxicab went by this latter route. Opposite the Record office, where the presses stood, silent monsters waiting to leap, old Hilary Kingston was standing, kidgloved and wearing the gray derby hat he affected. As the taxicab bore down toward him he halted it.

"Taxi!" he called.

The taxicab slowed down. Old Hilary, seeing it occupied, waved it off with his stick. But it had come to a full stop. There was an alleyway beside the Record building, and now three men ran out from there, and thrust revolvers through the open windows of the cab. After that it was hot work.

Marshall of the bank went back with a bullet through his lung. The bank messenger fired pointblank, and missed his target; but old Hilary, gray derby and all, went down where he stood, twenty feet away. The uninjured clerk had an automatic gun, and swept a circle with it over the bag which lay at his feet. There was no getting inside that ring of death. The bandits retreated, firing as they ran, and climbed into an automobile up the street. When the reporters in the Record office awakened to the fact that there was a story under their windows, the street was clear. Only old Hilary lay dead on the pavement, with a bullet in his head.

The chauffeur of the taxicab drove madly to the hospital with Marshall, who was dying, and then to police quarters, where he gave himself up. He was released, of course. His name was Walte. Huff. He was slow to be a new man, but sober and industrious, one of the best drivers in the employ of the taxicab company. It was also shown that Hilary Kingston had hailed him; Huff explained his stopping. Mr. Kingston was a regular patron; he had meant to tell him that in five minutes he would come back and pick him up.

Huff was under surveillance for three days. His conduct was impeccable.

CHAPTER III.

It was, after all, the assistant rector of Saint Jude's who came up the hill that hot August day. The news of



To Pit His Wite Against the World and Win—That Had Been Old Hilary's Creed.



"Let Them Bury Him as They Will," Said Boroday.

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