

THE BLUE CIRCLE

By Elizabeth Jordan
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VERITY

SYNOPSIS. — Incapacitated, mentally, by shock, as a result of experiences during the World war, Renshaw makes a proposition to David Campbell, wealthy, elderly man of leisure, that for a year he assume responsibility for him (Renshaw)—practically "buy" him. Doctor Stanley, lifelong friend of Campbell's, indorses the proposition, which Campbell, with some natural misgivings, accepts. The arrangement is that the young man becomes an inmate of the Campbell household, with the nominal duty of secretary.

CHAPTER I—Continued

The voice and manner of the visitor were as unresponsive as before. "When do you want to begin?" "Now—this minute."

"Oh! Then you came prepared to stay?" "Yes, sir."

"Very well." Campbell held out his hand. "Now, if you have no deep-rooted objections to tea, we will drink some," he added as he slowly settled back into the big chair. "And I, for one, am ready for it! Buying a man, if you will permit me to say so, is rather an exhausting business."

He rang the bell as he spoke, and the complacent personality of the servant who had admitted Renshaw promptly injected itself into the room.

"Jenks," said his master, "bring tea, and tell Miss Campbell when it is here. And by the way, Jenks— He stopped the man on his way to the door, and turned to Renshaw. "Did you bring any luggage?"

"A bag. It is in the hall." Campbell spoke to the butler: "Take it up to the north room. Mr. Renshaw, who is my new secretary, will use that room—unless, after he has tried it, he prefers another."

Jenks left the room. He had not spoken, and he did not glance at Renshaw; but to the young man every line of his erect figure conveyed an august disapproval. In a few minutes he was back in stately association with a tea-wagon, which he rolled up to the fire. Simultaneously the door from the hall reopened and a girl came in.

She was young, not much more than twenty-two, he decided, at a glance, and very lovely. Her hair and her eyes were darker than his own, but soft and holding an unexpected expression of melancholy. Yet every line of her face and figure showed pride and spirit, and she walked with the gait of a young empress. She came directly to the side of the old man, kissed the top of his head with precision, and turned her unsmiling eyes on the visitor as he was presented.

"Verity, my dear," Campbell was saying, "this is Mr. Renshaw, who is going to look after my correspondence, and see that I get to bed at ten, and rule me generally with a rod of iron. But I warn you, Renshaw, that my granddaughter will hardly tolerate another tyrant in the house. To order me about is her pet privilege."

Renshaw, bowing silently before the girl, met for an instant the direct regard of her proud eyes, and in that instant realized that she did not like him. He accepted the discovery with indifference. The liking or disliking of others was unimportant. But, as he took the cup of tea she poured for him, he unexpectedly met the gaze of another pair of eyes—and the expression of these he could not so casually dismiss from his mind. They were the eyes of Jenks, the butler, and they held a message that was as clear as it was unpleasant—a message of intense and open antagonism.

While Campbell chatted with his granddaughter, tossing an occasional sentence to his new property, John Renshaw stared into the tea he was absentily sipping. In his normal past many human beings liked him and a few had disliked him. But as far as he knew none had repudiated him at the first encounter so warmly and so obviously as Miss Verity Campbell and her butler had just done.

Why had they repudiated him?

Chapter II

Along Comes Verity.

"Mr. Renshaw!" Tea was over and Jenks, again imperturbable, had trundled away the tea-wagon as tenderly as if it held the family's heir. As it was going, Campbell struggled out of his deep chair and, standing with his straight old back to the fire, addressed his new property with suave directness. Renshaw shied like a frightened horse, and none of the three pairs of eyes watching him missed the movement. Campbell experienced a sense of revolt, shot through with irritation against his old friend and physician.

"Confound it, how can this fellow be of any use to me, when he's nervous as a cat!" he reflected. "It's going to be an infernal nuisance to have to consider him as if he were a high-strung prima donna."

But, even as the thought went through his mind, the new secretary had recovered his poise and was on his feet, obviously ready for instructions.

"Probably you would like to go up to your room now," Campbell went on, in the suave voice that was so much younger than his years. "To unpack and rest after your journey. Jenks will show you the way. We dine at eight," he added, the young man

followed the butler, who had stopped at the sound of his name.

When the door closed upon the two, Campbell drew a long breath of relief.

"My dear," he fervently ejaculated, "I am beginning to think it will be almost worth while to have that fellow around for the sake of the frequent rapture of getting rid of him."

Verity's black eyebrows rose a trifle. "Why did you engage him, if you didn't want him?" she asked.

"Stanley wished him on me. The whole episode is an amazing piece of folly, and I am afraid I don't show up in it any better than Stanley and Renshaw," her grandfather confessed, with growing irritation. He described his interview with Renshaw, while Verity's expression, incredulous at first, changed to one of deepening interest and perplexity.

"You don't imagine there is something back of it?" she slowly suggested. "An effort to get into the house and—"

"No, no!" her grandfather testily interrupted. "The last two years of the man's time are fully accounted for. He has been in sanatoriums, poor chap. Besides, Stanley knows all about him."

"I wonder what happened to him?" Verity spoke almost under her breath, her imagination circling among various dark possibilities of which she had heard and read.

The old man shook his head. "I haven't an idea. What I want to know is, what's going to happen to me under this absurd arrangement? I can't imagine why I let myself in for it. For a second or two I thought I saw a way of making him useful, but I don't believe it will work out—"

He broke off. "I suppose the fellow has some magnetism," he ended.

"Not a particle," Verity spoke with conviction. "In fact, it's the other way around. There's something almost repellent in him, something a little—oh, what is the word? Well, something unhuman. He is unusually handsome, of course; there's even a certain nobility about his head and face. And yet, he's like a ghost. Yes, that's what I am trying to get at," she added, with quiet satisfaction. "He looks at us as the dead might look if they came back—as if he had passed through existences and experiences we could never understand and could not even dream of."

"No doubt he has," the old man conceded. "He affects me like a human draft. But we must not let our imaginations run away with us. If he is too depressing, we will get rid of him; I'll ship him off and make him useful somewhere else. He's got to do what I tell him and go where I send him." "And now let's forget the fellow and go on with that book you were reading."

Upstairs, in the chamber to which Campbell had sent him, Renshaw was doing some thinking of his own. His first impression was that it was oddly remote from other rooms. Only one additional door opened from the narrow corridor he had traversed. The second reflection, as Jenks turned a knob and stood back to let him enter his new quarters, was that the room was very large and extremely comfortable. Jenks touched an electric button and the shadowy room flashed into soft light which brought out the details of a mahogany bed in a far corner, facing the door, a high-boy, a low-boy, and a large built-in wardrobe. The room's north wall contained two windows, and through two additional windows, very wide and with built-in cushioned seats, he could look out on the front grounds of Tawno Ker and follow the maple-lined avenue leading to the highway. He was to have plenty of light and air, he reflected with content.

He went to a north window and, glancing out, found this first impression changing. There would be air, without doubt. But numerous oaks and maples crowded close to the house—so close, indeed, that an athlete such as Renshaw had once been could leap from a window into the wide-spreading branches of at least one venerable tree. The trees were rather unexpectedly thick in front, too, he discovered, and he was surprisingly far from the ground. He would be almost among the tree-tops if he leaned far out of the windows on the front side of his room.

Jenks threw open the door of a second room in which could be seen the outline of a shower apparatus and the nickel and porcelain fittings of a bathtub.

"The bathroom is very small, sir," the man apologetically explained, "and there's no window in it. It was made two years ago, out of a big closet. But you will be quite comfortable. And you will always find extra linen in the closet just outside your door, in the corridor. That closet is the mate to this one."

Renshaw returned to the bedroom and its blazing fire. He found that Jenks had lifted the heavy traveling-cases to a small trunk-stand and was unfastening the straps.

"I'll attend to that, thanks," he said with a gesture of dismissal.

"Very well, sir," Jenks turned to go. "Shall I come back at half-past seven and help you dress?"

"No, thanks; I'll get along," Jenks hesitated.

"Excuse me, sir, but Mr. Campbell regards it as a part of my duty to assist any gentleman guests of the house—"

"That's all right, but I'm not a gentleman guest. I'm here to stay, and I prefer to look out for myself. So I won't trouble you."

Renshaw spoke pleasantly, but he was feeling puzzled. Standing by the fireplace with his elbow on the mantel and his detached glance drifting past the man's face, he wondered, without much interest, why the creature was so suddenly friendly. An hour ago he had been furiously resentful of the newcomer's presence. Now he seemed all eagerness and deference.

"Are you planning to have breakfast up here, sir?" he respectfully inquired.

"Good Lord, no!" Renshaw spoke with sudden irritation. Why the devil was the fellow so persistent? Was it merely because he realized that the open betrayal of his antagonism had been unwise? Or was it—the thought stood stolidly at the entrance of the secretary's mind until he finally permitted the unwelcome visitor to enter—was it because Jenks knew that this newcomer was so infernally dependent on others that even at this moment every instinct in him was calling for assistance?

"What's your name?" "Jenks, sir."

"Well, Jenks, there's exactly one thing you can do."

"Yes, sir." The man's tone was eager.

"Get out, please, and be quick about it!" Jenks got out. His surface dignity was unimpaired, but the door closed on his exit with a temperamental snap.

Left alone, Renshaw dropped into the easy-chair before the exuberantly blazing fire, and rested his head against its padded back with a sigh of exhaustion. He was tired—tired to the soul; but from the darkness of that soul the hermit-thrush of hope sent out a solitary note. He had put through the Plan. He had won that little contest of wills with Jenks, and had given no outward sign of the effort it cost him. Now he would rest. Of course he ought to be unpacking, bathing, dressing for dinner. He would do all those things later. His present duty was to relax—to let the atmosphere of the old house sink into him.

How absurd he had been to imagine things about Jenks and Miss Campbell! Jenks was merely a spoiled servant, impersonally resenting any newcomer, and already contriving over his mistake and anxious to make amends.

As to the girl, that lovely girl with the jet-black hair and the proud and perfect mouth, she was afraid that he, Renshaw, was going to be a nuisance. The human beings in Tawno Ker, thrown together as closely as they were—the solitude of the place suddenly impressed him; surely it was miles from any neighbor—those human beings must form a close corporation. It was not to be wondered at that they should resent an intrusion like his.

A small log, blazing on the andirons, parted and dropped with a rattle and a shower of sparks. Renshaw did not hear it. The door opened an inch, and some one peered at him through the crack. He did not hear the sound it made as it opened and closed. He was in a condition of well-being, new-found and vastly comforting—at peace, relaxed, and at last drifting out on the blessed sea of sleep.

He was awakened by the sound of a gong, mellow but extremely penetrating, obviously a dinner or dressing gong designed to be heard throughout the big house. He sat up with a spectacular start and glanced at the clock on the mantel above him. It was half-past seven. He had slept uninterruptedly for more than an hour, an experience still novel enough to be gratifying. He had only thirty minutes in which to unpack, bathe and dress for dinner. As he cast a last glance in the mirror before he went downstairs he was mildly surprised by the agreeable normality of the being who looked back at him. The fellow seemed at least reconciled to life.

Evidently money does not interest the hero. Will he find anything in his job that will attract him?

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Resented Insinuation

Jake Simpson's middle girl, Elsie, the one that's been brought up in the city, came down to Oak Holler the other Sunday to look over her Uncle Eb Simpson's farm and it seems that Eb got real het up over her visit and bundled her right off to town again.

"Eb ain't talkin' none, but somehow the story got out anyhow."

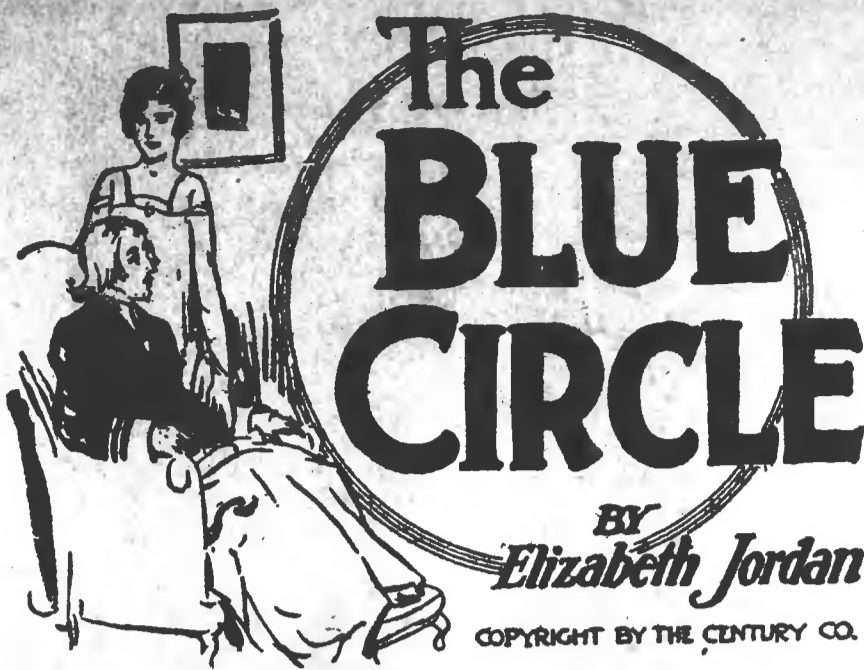
It seems Eb was showin' Elsie the farm critters and such when they come on Eb's yaller cat and her litter of kittens.

"Oh, Uncle Eb, those kittens are all different colors," says Elsie. Eb draws himself up as straight as he can, him havin' the rheumatism, and almost chokes on his chaw of tobacco.

"Well, young lady," he says, "Don't you try to cast no reflections. I'll say this much. Ma and me've tried to bring our cats up right."—Pittsburgh Chronicle-Telegraph.

Another Side of Success

But ottener nothing reaches the success—Boston Herald.



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"ODD NOISES?"

SYNOPSIS. — Incapacitated, mentally, by shock, as a result of experiences during the World war, Renshaw makes a proposition to David Campbell, wealthy, elderly man of leisure, that for a year he assume responsibility for him (Renshaw)—practically "buy" him. Doctor Stanley, lifelong friend of Campbell's, indorses the proposition, which Campbell, with some natural misgivings, accepts. The arrangement is that the young man becomes an inmate of the Campbell household, with the nominal duty of secretary. Renshaw meets Verity, Campbell's granddaughter, and gets the impression that she does not like him. Jenks, the butler, Renshaw also feels, is distinctly hostile. Nevertheless, Renshaw went down to dinner feeling quite normal, for him.

CHAPTER II—Continued

Another reflection followed the first, and was far less agreeable. He wondered if Campbell had told his granddaughter the peculiar relation in which he, Renshaw, had entered the family. That he should give this detail a thought was surprising. That he should have the moment's concern that now followed it was nothing short of amazing. He was actually hoping that the girl did not know, that old Campbell had not told her!

The reflection, though vivid in its little instant of life, perished almost as soon as it was born. What difference did it make what the girl or any one else knew or thought? He turned out the lights, opened his door and strode out into the hall.

Again, as in the corridor downstairs, he caught around a corner the flutter of a disappearing bit of white stuff—a natural enough phenomenon in any house, he reflected, and interesting only because of the impression of flight it conveyed. His attention to the incident was fleeting. Evidently Campbell's servants were a curious lot, and the arrival of a stranger in this isolated house was to them an event out of all proportion to its importance.

He entered the living room at exactly one minute before eight, and as he opened the door felt behind him the figure of Jenks, coming to announce dinner. Campbell and his granddaughter were already in the room, the latter before a grand piano, which Renshaw, in his abstraction, had not observed during his first visit. The girl had been playing or singing, he assumed, though he had heard no music. Now, seated sideways on the piano-stool, she was absentily turning the sheets on the music rack and lending an ear to the monologue of an old lady who sat with Campbell before the fireplace. Her resemblance to him placed her as the old man's sister, but she had entered the world ten or twelve years later. Like Verity, she was in full evening dress. She wore a superb diamond-and-pearl collar; and half a dozen diamond, sapphire and emerald rings pointedly called attention to the enlarged joints of her fingers. Her white hair was as elaborately waved and puffed as if she were going to a ball. As Renshaw went toward her he heard the conclusion of her monologue, delivered on a high-pitched, plaintive key and without the slightest pause:

"Of course you will belittle the matter Davy as you always do but I've told you before and I tell you again that your habit of leaving so many details to the servants will eventually drive us out of house and home as to the way they act some of them didn't get in till after twelve last night though where they could have been is more than I know unless James drove them to town in the service car which Verity has expressly forbidden him to do without permission but they never pay any attention to what one orders anyway so what is the use of giving them orders—"

Old David Campbell raised a thin hand.

"One moment, Kitty," he said good-humoredly. "Let me present my new secretary, Mr. Renshaw. Renshaw, this lady is my sister, Mrs. Pardee, and she's got more troubles than any one you ever met before. She'll tell them all to you, too; you may be sure of that."

He chuckled over his own joke, while Renshaw bowed over the wrinkle that lay in his own.

The voice of Jenks placidly repeated the announcement of dinner, and David Campbell offered his arm to his sister. Renshaw hesitated. Was he expected formally to escort Miss Campbell? Or would she resent such an assumption on his part? She was as proud as the devil, that girl—every line of her and every glance of her eyes proved that. Also, she was really amazingly lovely. Feeling very unsure of himself, he approached her and formally left his arm, on which she readily laid a perfect hand. Together

they walked the length of the long room and, crossing the hall, entered the dining room on its opposite side.

Like the living room, it was large and beautiful. There was spaciousness in all the rooms of the old house, and a beauty of furnishing for which the somewhat confused architecture of the exterior had not prepared one. Four high-backed and carved Florentine chairs waited for their occupants at the round table, whose tall orange candles, aided by the firelight, gave the big room its sole illumination.

Renshaw began to feel very much as if he were in a dream. In the mood in which he had approached Campbell that afternoon he would have agreed to clean out furnaces and work around the grounds. As it was, he stood committed to any task he was offered, however menial. Yet here he was, an intimate part of a charming group, seated at the right of old Mrs. Pardee, and with the beauty of Verity Campbell opposite him on which to feed his eyes. He acknowledged the beauty, but let his eyes drift past it. It was there, but it had no message for him.

Once, looking across the table, he suddenly met Verity's eyes and for an instant held them. There was a momentary dancing light in them—like a flicker of sunshine on the surface of a dark pool. Also, the corners of her mouth quivered in a half smile, which passed even as it came. Mercifully he was spared overhearing the comment Verity made to her grandfather a little later under cover of the continued babble of Mrs. Pardee.

"I think your bondman is going to cheer us up," she murmured.

"Cheer us! That young monument to gloom!" The old man shook his head. "I'm afraid he's going to get horribly on our nerves."

He experienced anew the sensation that this acquisition of his had already too frequently supplied, though their

association was so brief—an emotion of mingled admiration and resentment, unusual and unsettling. To banish it, he turned to Verity.

"Is Madame Hvoeslef having one of her sick headaches?"

"Yes, poor dear." Renshaw pricked up his ears. There was still another member of the family, then, or a guest. Whoever she was, Miss Campbell liked her. The modulations of the girl's voice on the three words she had spoken made that quite clear.

When dinner was over, Campbell led the way back to the living room, with some lingering hint of resentment in the stiff lines of his shoulders, and almost curtly commanded Verity to sing.

Renshaw heard the command with his nearest mental approach to relief. But, at least, it would eliminate the necessity of a general conversation. He dropped into a chair in a corner near the piano, and though he was aware of the unwisdom of his course, let himself sink into the black abyss that always awaited his unguarded moments.

After all, had he done right to come here? Hadn't he, instead, added the capstone to the towering structure of his misery? For he had offered himself, and now it was too late to retreat. He was bought, and committed to God alone knew what enterprise—for both Stanley and Campbell had hinted that his new life, if he entered upon it, might hold more than the routine possibilities.

He pulled himself up in a sudden ascent to the present. Something was happening to him—something as wonderful as that hour of sleep had been. A stream of music had been flowing

past him; and now, as he began to listen, it seemed to lift him and to hurl him on to another world, a world of love and passion and beauty. A girl was singing—and the girl's singing was unlike any he had heard before. What she was singing was Russian folksong, whose atmosphere was like swiftly flowing water.

When she had finished, David Campbell was asleep; but the plaintive voice of Mrs. Pardee broke the moment's stillness:

"I do wish Verity that you'd let some cheerful songs such as that girl sing you and brighten you up from the musical comedies there we be cheerful music in the world that we never hear any—"

Renshaw rose abruptly and went to the piano.

"Thank you very much," he said. "And—good-night."

For an instant her deep eyes met his, their expression as remote as an own.

"Good-night, Mr. Renshaw," she said casually.

Renshaw crossed back to the old lady by the fire.

"I'm slipping off to my room," explained. "If Mr. Campbell should want me—"

"He won't he'll sleep till ten, then James will come in and take to bed how he can sleep so much his age I don't know I myself I average five hours a night last night I lay awake from twelve to five till how I happened to hear those servants come in—"

In some way Renshaw stemmed the verbal tide and made his escape. He approached the door of his room and opened and two persons came of Jenks and a woman. The woman, immaculate in a white gown, white cap, and white apron, but she, not the trim housemaid of old dreams. She was past middle age, inclined to stoutness, and the expression of her plain face was rather dour. "This is Annie, sir, the chambermaid. We've been airing your room and putting in fresh linen—"

Jenks spoke so quickly that Renshaw, who in his abstraction was have passed the pair almost without noticing them, looked at them with closer attention. It then occurred to him that the enterprise of changing the linen in his room hardly called for the efforts of two servants, but he not dwell on the thought. Also, a was contributing her modest share to the verbal report.

"You will always find extra on the shelf of this closet, sir," said primly. "I leave the extra ply for the floor there, because the no place in the bathroom but the rack."

"And—and excuse me, sir, there's another thing."

Jenks was speaking again, Annie, with fitting humility in the presence of her superior, saying little to one side.

"Might I speak frankly, sir?" J was almost humble.

"Of course," Renshaw waited his detached air. The man went limp.

"There's—there's some queer thing going on in the old house, sir. If you hear odd noises during the night, best to pay no attention to them."

Renshaw frowned. "Odd noises" repeated. "What kind of noises?"

"That's all I can say, sir. Am exceeding my duty, sir, in saying much. But it's well meant."

Renshaw nodded, his half-formed interest relaxing under a memory of certain sentences in his interview with Campbell to which he had attributed no great importance at the time.

"All right, Jenks. Thank you, said, and passed on. As he closed door he glanced back. Both Jenks and Annie were standing where he left them, staring after him. In the act, they started down the stair and parted at its end, Jenks ascending the staircase, the woman appearing around a distant corner. The flutter of her skirt as she stirred Renshaw's memory. It twice before today he had had some final whisk of that skirt.

He entered his room, still at frowning. Everything was as it was all reassuringly natural, yet—what the deuce was there? Jenks' manner that got on one's nerves, and made one exaggerate the importance of the simplest thing.

He undressed slowly, but was going to bed he slipped off his gown and, after turning off the light, sat down in the chair before the fire, clasping his hands behind his head, he leaned back and gazed himself. The simple truth was he did not quite dare to go to bed. Under the surface atmosphere of effort and normality that lay over the house, something had been said something intangible. Of course imagination was playing tricks with him. At the back of his head was thought of a mystery at which Stanley and Campbell had hinted which, of course, had to do with warning just received from Jenks.

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Daylight Frightened Flooded workings in a City (Pa.) coal mine gave called Jack his first view sunshine that he had years. At first he returned from the conveyor that force to get him in the view, where he was South for several