

# "THE GOOD BAD GIRL"

—BY—  
WINFRED VAN DUZEN

### Chapter 58

The room was cold and dark when Merle came. Mimi let him in without a word, prepared to accept disappointment; it was only after she had pushed on the lights that she saw Harbeck's bulk looming behind him.

"I persuaded him to come—know you'd want to see him," Merle explained with his smile.

The big man nodded, lumbered toward the telephone and Merle drew her aside. They sat together, whispering.

"He's left word for the District Attorney, Mimi. They're to call him at nine o'clock.

He laid his watch in her lap. It was five minutes of the hour; she followed the hand creeping up to the tangent, jumped when the bell rang. Harbeck spoke briefly, in his soft, restrained voice; she caught words:

"Mori woman . . . Friend of hers, red-raised girl . . . no, she's out! You understand? I'll hold you responsible . . . thank you—thank you . . ."

He turned his remote gaze upon Mimi, whose hand trembled on his arm.

"Why, is that all? Is—is that all, Mr. Harbeck? The police—they won't come now?" She thought, "His power! He is a despot!"

"I'll go away now," she cried. "I'll go away and lose myself somewhere. I'll not trouble you—anyone—"

"And your promise? The year ends in June."

"Oh, you want me to stay? You mean I'm to go on? But you're kind!"

Merle turned back as they were leaving, handed her a newspaper. "They've caught the killer. He's confessed. Get some sleep, little Red-head. I'll come tomorrow."

When the door had closed, she opened the paper under the light, looked at a new likeness of Nita beside one of the geranium girl. There was a caption, "Two Victims of Captured Blackmailer."

Beneath was a copy of a picture snapped on the street. Mimi studied it without surprise, felt that she had been waiting to see it. The varnished sheen of hair that showed even under the turned-down hat-brim and through the blue of ink; the predatory eyes. The yellow faced man! His name beneath, and after it, "Slayer."

That was the longest night that Mimi was ever to remember.

Afterwards things went along much as they had before excepting that she felt older, less open to happiness, less eager for life.

Merle came to see her frequently and his attitude was friendly, affectionate, rather brotherly. Sometimes she wished that he wouldn't come. For their meetings always left her restless, with the familiar aching at her heart. And then she would call herself an ingrate, and weep with remorse.

One Sunday afternoon she had another guest. Alice Hart came, all

gentle interest, and sat with her hand in Mimi's, while she talked of the children and of her wonderful Tom and her no less wonderful brother.

"Merle says that you keep to yourself too much. We've been looking forward to a visit. Perhaps you could come for a few days? You seem rather tired, almost sad. Mimi. Could I help you, dear?"

Mimi struggled to keep back tears. "No, Alice dear. I'm all right; working hard is all. I'd live to visit you and the babies. But I don't know; I don't suppose I'll ever have a chance again."

"Oh yes, dear—oh yes! You'll visit us again!" Alice's quick, gray tone and her smile surprised Mimi; it was as if she had a pleasant, secret understanding of some sort. How wonderful to be happy like that; to be sure of yourself and free. But there were things Alice didn't know. That she probably couldn't comprehend. Harbeck, for instance.

It was May when Merle came to call her good-bye for a time. He was going back to the country; back to the silver river.

"But I'll see you occasionally," he promised. "I'll be in town once in a while. So this is just 'au revoir' really. I'll come for your exhibition, you may be sure!"

"Did you know? White says it's being planned for late spring. Rather an off season, but he doesn't want to wait. Harbeck is delighted, he told me."

"Well, I didn't know. They don't tell me much. I'll miss you. Merle. But if thoughts can help!"

"They can. So long, then!" He kissed her with a brotherly little pat on the shoulder, and was gone.

Chapter 59  
Mimi's exhibition was over, and Winship White was jubilant.

"My word, now! Old Master! Hah! Did you hear what Skinner said about that canvas, 'Adventure'? Toughest critic of the lot, too! And Cornell! Know he bought one? 'The Common Law!' Wanted it for his studio. Hey, what's the matter? What are you crying about? Hey, now—"

The tray, bushy brows scurried up and down and the tilted eyes were puzzled.

"I've—I've got to cry a little. I'm so—so happy, you see—"

"There's a woman for you! Cries because she's happy! Well, you listen to me, child, and don't forget what I've got to say. You're an artist! You're safe now; your future is safe if you keep after it. But keep after it! Right in your hands. The critics like you. Cornell likes you. So do I. Hey, I'm proud of you, girl! Now what are you going to do? Tell me that, now; what are you going to do with yourself?"

"Why, I'm going to paint—to keep after my future," she answered, laughing through the tears. "First I'm going to see Harbeck and then I'm going to rent a cheap place, a little studio somewhere. Perhaps you'll help me if I strike rough spots?"

"It's—why Mr. White, dear, it's past the first of June! My year is up! Do you think he'll be—well, clad, Mr. Harbeck? I'll go and see him now—"

So White shook hands with her, rather solemnly, and for the third time she set out across the Park toward the house in the Eighties.

Once again she was bewildered by the sight of Harbeck in his robe and cap, brooding besides the crouching Buddha, in the shadows of his library. She went toward him boldly, however, helped herself to a seat.

She said, "Did you know that some of my paintings were sold? 'The Com-

mon Law'—did you know Cornell bought it for his studio? Mr. Harbeck now I can repay you! Now I can give you back the money you've spent for me!"

He nodded, sleepily, and she thought "Well, that was easy. Perhaps I didn't understand him. Yet—all he's done—"

Once before he had seemed to read her thought; now he appeared to be answering what was in her mind by a question:

"Have you got over being afraid of me, Mimi?"

"Why—?" she stammered. "Why—'fraid of you? I didn't realize . . . You've been very kind. You've been so very kind—"

His eyes were colorless, with no expression, but the curious smile quivered over his face.

He said, "Have you ever thought that people are as you see them? Because a man is old and fat and rich you look upon him as a Moloch with innocent young working girls disappearing in his maw and he'll be that—to you!"

"People reflect your opinion of them. They give you what you expect. I expected fairness of you. You see you were fair in spite of yourself! You fought against being fair!"

"In sorry now. Dreadfully sorry!"

"You've learned. You'll learn that I wasn't what you thought. Ah—you're wondering why? Because it wasn't your true self that saw me!"

"But that's dreaming true!" she thought. "He dreams true, then, this Mr. Harbeck; Perhaps, I did, too, without understanding it. Perhaps, deep in my heart, I dreamed true and that's what saved me!"

"You have talent," he went on. "White said so, but that was of small importance. I saw your work and I said so. Talent must be served. You were an investment. I have wealth, but I look upon it as a trust. I could found libraries, build museums. I prefer to build genius!"

"White says your future is safe—if you work hard. You owe that to me, a standing debt, to make the most of what is in you!"

"Why did they say he was sinister, some of them?" her thought raced on. "Why, he's only a gentle, lovable, old creature, a little wistful—"

"I must tell you 'good bye' now as a charge, Mimi. I hope you will come here sometimes. One gets lonely, and young people . . ."

He offered his too-small, womanish hand, and she clasped it in both hers. On an impulse she leaned down and pressed a kiss against his cheek.

There were happy days, then; golden, beautiful summer days. Mimi spent a month in Tranquillity, idling through the quiet streets sitting under the elms beside the headstone with their worn lettering, "Peter Marsh" and "Vera Veronica Marsh." Sometimes she whispered to the old stones; whispered and felt sweetly understood.

Then she would walk home, smiling at the brass knockers. They meant nothing to her now; they had lost the trick of symbolism.

She had intended to remain longer with Aunt Kate; there was no reason why she shouldn't have turned the big attic into a studio and worked there through the summer. But she kept thinking of the woodland stretch outside the town; wondering if the tent stood in the clearing. The thought made her restless; brought a faint unhappiness. She decided to return to New York.

To Be Concluded  
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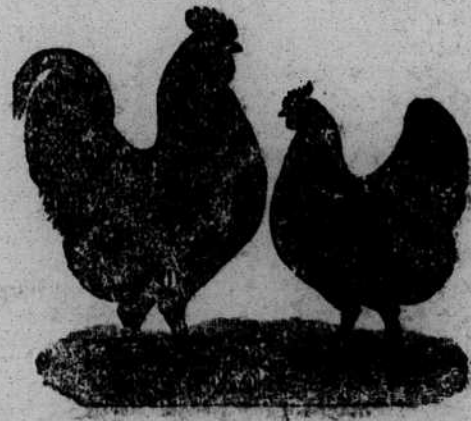
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# BETTER GET BUSY

Only 8 more days are left in which to list property and polls for taxes. With the close of July 8th all the unlisted will be forwarded to the grand jury for investigation.

I will be at Court House to take your returns from 9 A. M. to 5 P. M.

W. R. NEWTON,  
County Tax Supervisor.

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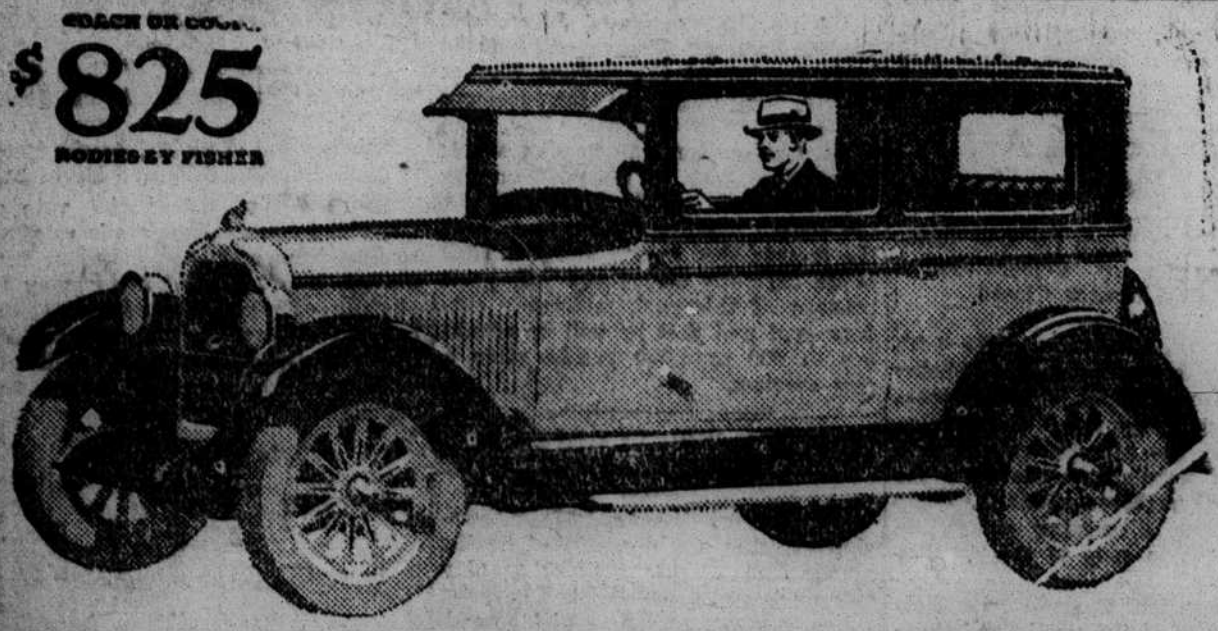
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