The MYSTERY of MARY

By Grace Livingston Hill Lutz

AUTHOR of "MARCIA SCHUYLER," "PHOEBE-DEANE" "DAWN OF THE MORNING" ETC.

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She raised her eyes from reading the letter.

"You have all these, and I have nothing." She spread out her hands helplessly. "It must seem strange to you that I am in this situation. It does to me. It is awful."

She put her hands over her eyes and shuddered.

"It is to save you from it all that I have come." He leaned over and spoke tenderly, "Darling!"

"Oh, wait!" She caught her breath as if it hurt her, and put out her hand to stop him. "Wait! You must not say any more until I have told you all about it. Perhaps when I have told you, you will think about me as others do, and I shall have to run from you."

"Can you not trust me?" he reproached her.

"Oh, yes, I can trust you, but you may no longer trust me, and that I cannot bear."

"I promise you solemnly that I will believe every word you say."

"Ah, but you will think I do not know, and that it is your duty to give me into the hands of my enemies."

"That I most solemnly vow I will never do," he said earnestly. "You need not fear to tell me anything. But listen, tell me this one thing: in the eyes of God, is there any reason, physical, mental, or spiritual, why you should not become my wife?"

She looked him clearly in the eyes "None at all."

"Then I am satisfied to take you without hearing your story until afterwards."

"But I am not satisfied. If I am to see distrust come into your eyes, it must be now, not afterwards."

"Then tell it quickly."

He put out his hand and took hers firmly into his own, as if to help her in her story.

CHAPTER X.

"My father died when I was only a young girl. We had not much money, and my mother's older brother took us to his home to live. My mother was his youngest sister, and he loved her more than any one else living. There was another sister, a half-sister, much older than my mother, and she had one son. He was a sulky, handsome boy, with a selfish, cruel nature. He seemed to be happy only when he was tormenting some one. He used to come to Uncle's to visit when I was there, and he delighted in annoying me. He stretched barbed wire where he knew I was going to pass in the dark, to throw me down and tear my clothes. He threw a quantity of burrs in my hair, and once he led me into a hornet's nest. After we went to live at my uncle's, Richard was not there so much. He had displeased my uncle, and he sent him away to school; but at vacation times he came again, and kept the house in discomfort. He seemed always to have a special spite against me. Once he broke a rare Dresden vase that Uncle prized, and told him I had done it.

Mother did not live long after Father died, and after she was gone, I had no one to stand between me and Richard. Sometimes I had to tell my Uncle, but oftener I tried to bear it, because I knew Richard was already a great distress to him.

"At last Richard was expelled from college, and Uncle was so angry with him that he told him he would do nothing more for him. He must go to work. Richard's father and mother had not much money, and there were other children to support. Richard threatened me with all sorts of awful things if I did not coax Uncle to take him back into his good graces again. I told him I would not say a word to Uncle. He was very angry and swore at me. When I tried to leave the room he locked the door and would not let me go until I screamed for help. Then he almost choked me, but when he heard Uncle coming he jumped out of the window. The next day he forged a check in my Uncle's name and tried to throw suspicion on me, but he was discovered, and my uncle disinherited him. Uncle had intended to educate Richard and start him well in life, but now he would have nothing further to do with him. It seemed to work upon my uncle's health, all the disgrace to the family name, although no one ever thought of my uncle in connection with blame. As he paid Richard's debts, it was not known what the boy had done, except by the banker, who was a personal friend.

"We went abroad then, and everywhere Uncle amused himself by putting me under the best music masters, and giving me all possible advantages in languages, literature, and art. Three years ago he died at Carlsbad, and after his death I went back to my music studies, following his wishes in the matter, and staying with a dear old lady in Vienna, who had been kind to us when we were there before.

"As soon as my uncle's death was known at home, Richard wrote the most pathetic letter to me, professing deep contrition, and saying he could never forgive himself for having quarreled with his dear uncle. He had a sad tale of how the business that he had started had failed and left him with debts. If he had only a few hundred dollars, he could go on with it and pay off everything. He said I had inherited all that would have been his if he had done right, and he recognized the justice of it, but begged that I would lend him a small sum until he could get on his feet, when he would repay me.

"I had little faith in his reformation, but felt as if I could not refuse him when I was enjoying what might have been his, so I sent him all the money I had at hand. As I was not yet of age, I could not control all the property, but my allowance was liberal. Richard continued to send me voluminous letters, telling of his changed life, and finally asked me to marry him. I declined emphatically, but he continued to write for money, always ending with a statement of his undying affection. In disgust, I at last offered to send him a certain sum of money regularly if he would stop writing to me on this subject, and finally succeeded in reducing our correspondence to a check account. This has been going on for three years, except that he has been constantly asking for larger sums, and whenever I would say that I could not spare more just then he would begin telling me how much he cared for me, and how hard it was for him to be separated from me. I began to feel desperate about him, and made up my mind that when I received the inheritance I should ask the lawyers to make some arrangement with him by which I should no longer be annoyed.

"It was necessary for me to return to America when I came of age, in order to sign certain papers and take full charge of the property. Richard knew this. He seems to have had some way of finding out everything my Uncle did.

"He wrote telling me of a dear friend of his mother, who was soon to pass through Vienna, and who by some misfortune had been deprived of a position as companion and chaperon to a young girl who was traveling. He said it had occurred to him that perhaps he could serve us both by suggesting to me that she be my traveling companion on the voyage. He knew I would not want to travel alone, and he sent her address and all sorts of credentials, with a message from his mother that she would feel perfectly safe about me if I went in this woman's guardianship.

"I really did need a traveling companion, of course, having failed to get my dear old lady to undertake the voyage, so I thought it could do no



I Found Out That He Was a Physician.

harm. I went to see her, and found her pretty and frail and sad. She made a piteous appeal to me, and though I was not greatly taken with her, I decided she would do as well as any one for a companion.

"She did not bother me during the voyage, but fluttered about and was quite popular on board, especially with a tall, disagreeable man with a cruel jaw and small eyes, who always made me feel as if he would gloat over any one in his power. I found out that he was a physician, a specialist in mental diseases, so Mrs. Chambray told me, and she talked a great deal about his skill and insight into such maladies.

"At New York my cousin Richard met us and literally took possession of us. Without my knowledge, the cruel-looking doctor was included in the party. I did not discover it until we were on the train, bound, as I supposed, for my old home just beyond Buffalo. It was some time since I had been in New York, and I naturally did not notice much which way we were going. The fact was, every plan was anticipated, and I was told that all arrangements had been made. Mrs. Chambray began to treat me like a little child and say: 'You see, we are going to take good care of you, dear, so don't worry about a thing.'

"I had taken the drawing-room compartment, not so much because I had a headache, as I told them, as because I wanted to get away from their society. My cousin's marked devotion became painful to me. Then, too, the attentions and constant watchfulness of the disagreeable doctor became most distasteful.

"We had been sitting on the observation platform, and it was late in the afternoon, when I said I was going to lie down, and the two men got up to go into the smoker. In spite of my protests, Mrs. Chambray insisted upon following me in, to see that I was perfectly comfortable. She fussed around me, covering me up and offering smelling salts and eau de cologne for my head. I let her fuss, thinking that was the quickest way to get rid of her. I closed my eyes, and she said she would go out to the observation platform. I lay still for awhile, thinking about her and how much I wanted to get rid of her. She acted as if she had been engaged to stay with me forever, and it suddenly became very plain to me that I ought to have a talk with her and tell her that I should need her services no longer after this journey was over. It might make a difference to her if she knew it at once, and perhaps now would be as good a time to talk as any, for she was probably alone out on the platform. I got up and made a few little changes in my dress, for it would soon be time to go into the dining-car. Then I went out to the observation platform, but she was not there. The chairs were all empty, so I chose the one next to the railing, away from the car door, and sat down to wait for her, thinking we would soon be back.

"We were going so fast, through a pretty bit of country. It was dusky and restful out there, so I leaned back and closed my eyes. Presently I heard voices approaching, above the rumble of the train, and, peeping around the doorway, I saw Mrs. Chambray, Richard, and the doctor coming from the other car. I kept quiet, hoping they would not come out, and they did not. They settled down near the door, and ordered the porter to put up a table for them to play cards.

"The train began to slow down, and finally came to halt for a longer time on a sidetrack, waiting for another train to pass. I heard Richard ask where I was. Mrs. Chambray said laughingly that I was safely asleep. Then, before I realized it, they began to talk about me. It happened there were no other passengers in the car. Richard asked Mrs. Chambray if she thought I had any suspicion that I was not on the right train, and she said, 'Not the slightest,' and then by degrees there floated to me through the open door the most diabolical plot I had ever heard of. I gathered from it that we were on the way to Philadelphia, would reach there in a little while, and would then proceed to a place near Washington, where the doctor had a private insane asylum, and where I was to be shut up. They were going to administer some drug that would make me unconscious when I was taken off the train. If they could not get me to take it for the headache I had talked about, Mrs. Chambray was to manage to get it into my food or give it to me when asleep. Mrs. Chambray, it seems, had not known the entire plot before leaving Europe, and this was their first chance of telling her. They thought I was safely in my compartment, asleep, and she had gone into the other car to give the signal as soon as she thought she had me where I would not get up again for a while.

"They had arranged every detail. Richard had been using as models the letters I had written him for the last three years, and had constructed a set of love letters from me to him, in perfect imitation of my handwriting. They compared the letters and read snatches of the sentences aloud. The letters referred constantly to our being married as soon as I should return from abroad, and some of them spoke of the money as belonging to us both, and that now it would come to its own without any further trouble.

"They even exhibited a marriage certificate, which, from what they said, must have been made out with our names, and Mrs. Chambray and the doctor signed their names as witnesses. As nearly as I could make out, they were going to use this as evidence that Richard was my husband, that he had the right to administer my estate during the time that I was incapable. They had even arranged that a young woman who was hopelessly insane should take my place when the executors of the estate came to see me, if they took the trouble to do that. As it was some years since either of them had seen me, they could easily have been deceived. And for their help Mrs. Chambray and the doctor were to receive a handsome sum.

"I could scarcely believe my ears at first. It seemed to me that I must be mistaken, that they could not be talking about me. But my name was mentioned again and again, and as each link in the horrible plot was made plain to me, my terror grew so great that I was on the verge of rushing into the car and calling for the conductor and porter to help me. But something held me still, and I heard Richard say that he had just informed the trainmen that I was insane, and that they need not be surprised if I had to be restrained. He had told them that I was comparatively harmless, but he had no doubt that the conductor had whispered it to our fellow-passengers in the car, which explained their prolonged absence in the smoker. Then they all laughed, and it seemed to me that the cover of the bottomless pit was open and that I was falling in.

"I sat still, hardly daring to breathe. Then I began to go over the story bit by bit, and to put together little things that had happened since we landed, and even before I had left Vienna; and I saw that I was caught in a trap. It would be no use to appeal to any one, for no one would believe me. I looked wildly out at the ground and had desperate thoughts of climbing over the rail and jumping from the train. Death would be better than what I should soon have to face. My prosecutors had even told how they had deceived my friends at home by sending telegrams of my mental condition, and of the necessity for put-



Went to the Matron and Told Her.

ting me into an asylum. There would be no hope of appealing to them for help. The only witnesses to my sanity were far away in Vienna, and how could I reach them if I were ard's power?

"I watched the names of the stations as they flew by, but it gradually grew dark, and I could hardly make them out. I thought one looked like the name of a Philadelphia suburb, but I could not be sure.

"I was freezing with horror and with cold, but did not dare to move, lest I attract their attention.

"We began to rush past rows of houses, and I knew we were approaching a city. Then, suddenly, the train slowed down and stopped, with very little warning, as if it intended to halt only a second and then hurry on.

"There was a platform on one side of the train, but we were out beyond the car-shed, for our train was long. I could not climb over the rail to the platform, for I was sitting on the side away from the station, and would have had to pass the car door in order to do so. I should be sure to be seen.

"On the other side were a great many tracks separated by strong picket fences as high as the car platform and close to the trains, and they reached as far as I could see in either direction. I had no time to think, and there was nothing I could do but climb over the rail and get across those tracks and fences somehow.

"My hand were so cold and trembling that I could scarcely hold on to the rail as I jumped over.

"I cannot remember how I got across. Twice I had to cling to a fence while an express train rushed by, and the shock and noise almost stunned me. It was a miracle that I was not killed, but I did not think of that until afterwards. I was conscious only of the train I had left standing by the station. I glanced back once, and I thought I saw Richard come to the door of the car. Then I stumbled on blindly. I don't remember any more until I found myself hurrying along that dark passage under the bridge and saw you just ahead. I was afraid to speak to you, but I did not know what else to do, and you were so good to me—!" Her voice broke in a little sob.

All the time she had been talking he had held her hand firmly. She had forgotten that any one might be watching; he did not care.

The tad girl with the discontented upper lip went to the matron and told her that she thought the man and the woman in the parlor ought to be made to go. She believed the man was trying to coax the girl to do something she didn't want to do. The matron started on a voyage of discovery up the hall and down again, with penetrating glances into the room, but the two did not see her.

"Oh, my poor dear little girl!" breathed the man. "And you have passed through all this awful experience alone! Why did you not tell me about it? I could have helped you. I am a lawyer."

"I thought you would be on your guard at once and watch for evidences of my insanity. I thought perhaps you would believe it true, and would feel it necessary to return me to my friends. I think I should have been tempted to do that, perhaps, if any one had come to me with such a story."

"One could not do that after seeing and talking with you. I never could have believed it. Surely no reputable physician would lend his influence to put you in an asylum, yet I know such things have been done. Your cousin must be a desperate character. I shall not feel safe until you belong to me. I saw two men hanging about Mr. Phillip's house last evening as I went in. They were looking up at the windows and talking about keeping a close watch on some one named Mary. One of the men was tall and slight and handsome, with dark hair and eyes; the other was Irish, and wore a coat too large for him, and rubbers. I went back later in in the evening, and the Irishman was hovering about the house."

The girl looked up with frightened eyes and grasped the arms of her chair excitedly.

"Will you go with me now to a church not far away, where a friend of mine is the pastor, and be married? Then we can defy all the cousins in creation. Can't you trust me?" he pleaded.

"Oh, yes, but—"

"Is it that you do not love me?"

"No," she said, and her eyes drooped shyly. "It seems strange that I dare to say it to you when I have known you so little." She lifted her eyes, full of a wonderful love light, and she was glorified to him, all meanly dressed though she was. The smooth Madonna braids around the shapely head, covered by the soft felt hat, seemed more beautiful to him than all the elaborate head-dresses of modern time.

"Where is the 'but' then, dear? Shall we go now?"

"How can I go in this dress?" She looked down at her shabby shoes, rough black gown, and cheap gloves in dismay, and a soft pink stole into her face.

"You need not. Your own gown is out in the office in my suit-case. I brought it with me, thinking you might need it—hoping you might, I mean;" and he smiled. "I have kept it always near me; partly because I wanted the comfort of it, partly because I was afraid some one else might find it, and desecrate our secret with their common-place wondering."

It was at this moment that the matron of the building stepped up to the absorbed couple, resolved to do her duty. Her lips were pursed to their thinnest, and displeasure was in her face.

The young man arose and asked in a grave tone:

"Excuse me, but can you tell me whether this lady can get a room here to rest for a short time, while I go out and attend to a matter of business?"

The matron noticed his refined face and true eyes, and she accepted with a good grace the ten-dollar bill he handed to her.

"We charge only fifty cents a night for a room," she said, glancing at the humble garments of the man's companion. She thought the girl must be a poor dependent or a country relative.

"That's all right," said the young man. "Just let the change help the good work along."

That made a distinct change in the atmosphere. The matron smiled, and retired to snub the girl with the discontented upper lip. Then she sent the elevator boy to carry the girl's suit-case. As the matron came back to the office, a baggy man with cushioned tires hustled out of the open door into the street, having first cast back a keen, furtive glance that searched every corner of the place.

"Now," said Dunham reassuringly, as the matron disappeared, "you can go up to your room and get ready, and I will look after a few little matters. I called on my friend, the minister, this morning, and I have looked up the legal part of this affair. I can see that everything is all right in a few minutes. Is there anything you would like me to do for you?"

"No," she answered, looking up half frightened; "but I am afraid I ought not to let you do this. You scarcely know me."

"Now, dear, no more of that. We have no time to lose. How long will it take you to get dressed? Will half an hour do? It is getting late."

"Oh, it will not take long." She caught her breath with gladness. Her companion's voice was so strong and comforting, his face so filled with a wonderful love, that she felt dazed with the sudden joy of it all.

The elevator boy appeared in the doorway with the familiar suit-case.

"Don't be afraid, dear heart," whispered the young man, as he attended her to the elevator. "I'll soon be back again, and then, then, we shall be together!"

It was a large front room to which the boy took her. The ten-dollar bill had proven effective. It was not a "fifty-cents-a-night" room. Some one —some guest or kindly patron—had put a small illuminated text upon the wall in a neat frame. It met her eye as she entered—"Rejoice and be glad." Just a common little picture card, it was, with a phrase that has become trite to many, yet it seemed a message to her, and her heart leaped to obey. She went to the window to catch a glimpse of the man who would soon be her husband, but he was not there, and the hurrying people reminded her that she must hasten. Across the street a slouching figure in a baggy coat looked fixedly up and caught her glance. She trembled and drew back out of the sunshine, remembering what Dunham had told her about the Irishman of the night before. With a quick instinct, she drew down the shade, and locked her door.

CHAPTER XI.

The rubbered feet across the way hurried their owner into the cigar-store in front of which he had been standing, and where he had a good view of the Y. W. C. A. Building. He flung down some change and demanded the use of the telephone. Then, with one eye on the opposite doorway, he called up a number and delivered his message.

"Ol've treed me bird. She's in a room all roight at the Y. W. C. A. place, fer I seed her at the winder. She come with a foine gintlemin, but he's gahn now, an' she's loike to stay a spell. You'd best come at once. . . . All roight. Hurry up!" He hung up the telephone receiver and hurried back to his post in front of the big entrance. Meanwhile the bride-elect upstairs, with happy heart and trembling fingers, was putting on her own beautiful garments once more, and arranging the waves of lovely hair in their old accustomed way.

Tyron Dunham's plans were well laid. He first called up his friend the minister and told him to be ready; then a florist not far from the church; then a large department store where he had spent some time that morning. "Is that Mr. Hunter, head of the fur department? Mr. Hunter, this is Mr Dunham. You remember our conversation this morning? Kindly send the coat and hat I selected to the Y. W. C. A. Building at once. Yes, just send them to the office. You remember it was to be C. O. D., and I showed you my certified check this morning. It's all right, is it? How long will it take you to get it there? . . . All right. Have the boy wait if I'm not there. Good-by."

His next move was to order a carriage, and have it stop at the florist's on the way. That done, he consulted his watch. Seventeen minutes of his precious half-hour were gone. With nervous haste he went into a telephone booth and called up his own home on the long-distance.

To his relief, his mother answered. "Is that you, Mother? This is Tryon. Are you all well? That's good. Yes, I'm in Chicago, but will soon be home. Mother, I've something to tell you that may startle you, though there is nothing to make you sad. You have known that there was something on my mind for some time." He paused for the murmur of assent.

He knew how his mother was looking, even though he could not see her —that set look of being ready for anything. He wanted to spare her as much as possible, so he hastened on:

"You remember speaking to me about the ring I wore?"

"Tyron! Are you engaged?" There was a sharp anxiety in the tone as it came through the hundreds of miles of space.

"One better, Mother. I'm just about to be married!"

"My son! What have you done? Don't forget the honorable name you bear!"

"No, Mother, I don't forget. She's fine and beautiful and sweet. You will love her, and our world will fall at her feet!"

"But who is she? You must remember that love is very blind. Tryon, you must come home at once. I shall die if you disgrace us all. Don't do anything to spoil our lives. I know it is something dreadful, or you would not do it in such haste."

"Nothing of the kind, Mother. Can't you trust me? Let me explain. She is alone, and legal circumstances which it would take too long for me to explain over the 'phone have made it desirable for her to have my immediate protection. We are going at once to Edwin Twinell's church, and he will marry us. It is all arranged, but I felt that you ought to be told beforehand. We shall probably take the night express for home. Tell Cornelia that I shall expect congratulations telegraphed to the hotel here inside of two hours."

"But, Tryon, what will our friends think? It is most extraordinary! How can you manage about announcements?"

"Bother the red tape, Mother! What difference does that make? Put it in the society column if you want to."

"But, Tryon, we do not want to be conspicuous!"

"Well, Mother I'm not going to put off my wedding at the last minute for



"And, Mother, Don't Worry."

a matter of some bits of pasteboard. I'll do any reasonable thing to please you, but not that."

"Couldn't you get a chaperon for her, and bring her on to me? Then we could plan the wedding at our leisure."

"Impossible, Mother! In the first place, she never would consent. Really, I cannot talk any more about it. I must go at once, or I shall be late. Tell me you will love her for my sake, until you love her for her own."

"Tryon, you always were unreasonable. Suppose you have the cards engraved at once, and I will telegraph our list to the engraver if you will give me his address. If you prefer, you can get them engraved and sent out from there. That will keep tongues still."

"All right, I'll do it. I'll have the engraver telegraph his address to you within two hours. Have your list ready. And, Mother, don't worry. She's all right. You couldn't have chosen better yourself. Say you will love her, Mother dear."

"Oh, I suppose I'll try," sighed the wires disconsolately; "but I never thought you would be married in such a way. Why, you haven't even told me who she is."

"She's all right, Mother—good family and all. I really must hurry—"

"But what is her name, Tryon?"

"Say, Mother, I really must go. Ask Mrs. Parker Bowman what she thinks of her. Good-by! Cheer up, it'll be all right."

"But, Tryon, her name——"

The receiver was hung up with a click, and Dunham looked at his watch nervously. In two minutes his half-hour would be up, yet he must let Judge Blackwell know. Perhaps he could still catch him at the office. He sometimes stayed down-town late. Dunham rang up the office. The Judge was still there, and in a moment his cheery voice was heard ringing out "Hello!"

"Hello, Judge! Is that you? . . . This is Dunham. . . . Chicago. Yes the business is all done, and I'm ready to come home, but I want to give you a bit of news. Do you remember the young woman who dined with us at Mrs. Bowman's and played the piano so well? . . . Yes, the night I met you . . . Well, you half guessed that night how it was with us, I think. And now she is here, and we are to be married at once, before I return. I am just about to go to the church, but I wanted your blessing first."

"Blessings and congratulations on you both!" came in a hearty voice over the phone. "Tell her she shall be at once taken into the firm as chief consultant on condition that she plays for me whenever I ask her."

A great gladness entered the young man's heart as he again hung up the receiver, at this glimpse into the bright vista of future possibilities. He hurried into the street, forgetful of engravers. The half-hour was up and one minute over.

In the meantime, the girl had slipped into her own garments once more with a relief and joy she could scarcely believe were her own. Had it all been an ugly dream, this life she had been living for the past few months, and was she going back now to rest and peace and real life? Nay, not going back, but going forward.

A knock at the door brought her back to realities again. Her heart throbbed wildly. Had he come back to her already? Or had her enemy found her out at last?

Tryon Dunham hurried up the steps of the Y. W. C. A. building, nearly knocking over a baggy individual in rubbers, who was lurking in the entrance. The young man had seen a boy in uniform, laden with two enormous boxes, run up the steps as he turned the last corner. Hastily writing a few lines on one of his cards and slipping it into the largest box, he sent them both up to the girl's room. Then he sauntered to the door to see if the carriage had come. It was there. He glanced inside to see if his orders about flowers had been fulfilled, and spoke a few words of direction to the driver. Turning back to the door, he found the small, red eyes of the baggy Irishman fixed upon him. Something in the slouch of the figure reminded Dunham strongly now of the man he had noticed the night before, and as he went back into the building he looked the man over well and determined to watch him. As he sat in the office waiting, twice he saw the bleary eyes of the baggy man applied to the glass panes in the front door and as suddenly withdrawn. It irritated him, and finally he strode to the door and asked the man if he were looking for some one.

"Just waitin' fer me sweetheart," whined the man, with a cringing attitude. "She has a room in here, an' I saw her go in a while back."

(Continued.)

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