DRAGONS DRIVE YOU

By EDWIN BALMER

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CHAPTER VII

—13—

Rodney Braddon returned to Chicago from Rochester early on Sunday morning just eight days before the date set, on the calendar of the criminal courts, for the trial of Myrtle Lorrie for murder of her husband. Rod was ignorant of that date, and his arrival was without reference to the trial. He had come back to see his brother—and Agnes—before leaving for Germany. He had remained at Rochester much longer than he had planned.

He had been almost happy there. That is, he had found more to absorb him, to interest and excite him in his work, than ever he had before. Happiness for Rod did not depend upon sensual satisfactions; he consciously sought none of them, except music, sometimes. His sole excitement was in his work and study, which occupied him hour after hour; then he would go off on long, swinging walks alone. He kept his spare, splendid body in vigorous condition with swimming, when near water, or with tennis.

Rod played, in fact, to tire himself out, when he needed it to beat down the longings within him — and his loneliness.

Sometimes he could ward off the spells by exhaustion; at other times, they surprised him unprepared. Rod would come "home" to his dreary hotel room bringing with him new medical reports upon which he expected to pass the evening, and he would never return on the light, but sit miserably and uselessly idle in the dark.

He missed his brother. To be sure, when they had been in the same city, days passed without Rodney's seeing Jud; but he was there, and on such occasions, Rod could go to him instead of seeking his own lonely room. And recently, he had been able to go, with Jud or alone, to the Gleneiths'. But now that was lost.

Rod had made friends among the doctors at Rochester. Not many friends, to be sure, for Rod was no mixer; but he had found a few congenial men whom he liked and respected, and whose lives served the same purposes as his—understanding of disease. But he could not feel like seeking them when his spirit dropped low. They were too like himself. His brother—and Agnes—were utterly different.

He had expected—and half feared, half hoped it—that he would have destroyed his power to retain Agnes in his day-dreams. Losing her, he had supposed he must lose the delight of his dream of her; but this had proved not so. When his loneliness assailed him, and he sat in the dark, he longed for her—her. Separate as he had kept himself from her, he had never been so close to another girl. Now she was his brother's, he believed. So he must imagine her his own no longer! But it had been futile to forbid this to himself. And here he was again in Chicago. . . .

Rod had not wired his brother; and so, while dressing as the train entered the city, he weighed probabilities of Jud's whereabouts.

It was a warm, steamy June morning — so it was probable that Jud would be up early for a long day on the water.

Having no rooms in Chicago, Rod checked his bag at the station and phoned his brother's apartment. Nobody answered, so Rod took a taxi and told the driver to hurry to the harbor.

His brother's familiar boat was not in sight, but when Rod inquired, a boy in a launch said yes, Mr. Braddon's yacht was at anchor. That was it, there.

Rod stared at a new motor-cruiser three or four times as large as the boat he had known. It looked ninety feet long, with graceful clipper bow and a line of brass-bound portholes to cabins, and with gleaming salons above-deck.

The boy ran Rod out to it; and on the quarterdeck stood Jud. He was bareheaded and wearing flannels without a coat.

No guests were in sight, and Rod was glad of that, though he was sure that guests must be on the way or were to be picked up at some port or pier. Jud never planned a Sunday on the water without a party.

Rodney hailed: "Jud! Hello!" And his brother saw who was in the launch. He stood stock still with surprise; and then Rod saw him laugh and run to the boat step, and he caught Rod's hand and hauled his brother aboard.

"Rod!" said Jeb—and Rod felt his brother's arm tighten about his shoulders. "Like the skiff, old skate?"

Rodney obediently glanced about. "It looks great, Jud. I didn't know it was yours."

"Good Lord," said Jeb, "it was in all the papers. Why's he waiting?" Jeb looked at the launch. "Forget to pay him?"

"I paid him," said Rod, "but told him to wait."

Jeb laughed again in his warming way. "You would. Did you wonder if I wanted you to stay?—Hey, you!" he called to the boy. "Come closer! Catch!" And Jeb chucked a gold-piece which the boy caught, calling out loud thanks.

"All through." Jeb dismissed him. "Now, old top, are you going to stay?"

"I'd like to, Jud."

Anchor was up; and they were moving, with deceptive smoothness, out of the harbor on a limpid, lazy lake.

The brothers sat down to breakfast opposite each other at the gay little table at the forward end of the dining-salon. Rod had learned that the guests for the day would be picked up at the Gleneiths'.

In the shining, perfectly appointed galley, Imio was cooking, but a steward, new to Jud's staff, was serving the table.

For the first time the splendor and extravagance of Jeb's establishment wrung a remark from his brother.

"Doesn't this all cost a heap, Jud?"

"I'll tell you the truth, Rod," Jeb confided. "Expense doesn't make any difference to me any more. Money doesn't mean anything. I can make whatever amount I want. That's an absolute fact. A lot of men are past that point, Rod. The city—the country—civilization's in a new era. We've got the production problem completely licked. . . ."

It was after breakfast when Rodney asked at last: "How is Agnes?"

"She's all right," his brother returned.

"When are you marrying her, Jud?"

"When that damn trial's over. That was the rottenest piece of luck for me. We were all set, Rod; we went to that building to look over an apartment, when Agnes opened that damned door, and—"

Rodney, listening, sat still with difficulty; he held himself quiet by gripping tight the arms of his chair so as not to betray, too clearly, the tumult within him. He had had no idea, until just now, that Agnes was not his brother's. . . .

Ten people came aboard the boat when it lay off the shore opposite the Gleneiths': Agnes and her mother and Beatrice and Davis and another young married couple whom Rod had never met. The others were paired, also; but they were not married: two girls whom Rodney vaguely remembered, and two boys, whose names he knew.

They were pleasant, casual, unimpressionable young people before whom Rodney felt odd and old and awkward. They looked him over, and their eyes traveled to his brother, making comparison; but what they said to Rodney was carefully polite.

They made no real difference to Rod. Agnes was near him; and if he had not known that his brother must have failed to establish possession of her, now he would have discerned it—though she plainly was supposed to be paired with Jud.

She was in white, with a bit of blue slashed in the cool silk which clung to her as the boat made a breeze; and she cast off her hat and let the sun burn her till Rodney drew her back under the shade of the canvas over the forward deck. They remained there while the others stayed nowhere; and after a while, Rodney and Agnes were alone far forward.

He did not talk much to her. What had he to say? He sat in a striped canvas chair close to hers, and felt engulfed in a content which could not continue, he knew, but which was complete for the moment.

She looked at him and smiled, not at him but with him, in his content; and always, when they would lose

She Looked at Him and Smiled.

something if their eyes lingered on each other, she looked away over the water; and as never, never before, Rodney longed to keep her close to him forever.

She wasn't Jud's yet, whatever the papers, whatever Jud himself, had said. Might she some time in some way be his?

Rodney faced the breeze which was blowing her dress against her slight body. The appeal of her loveliness, the allure of her beautiful body, was only an adjunct to that quality of hers which had caught him long ago and would never release him.

He had never had to explain himself to Agnes; and she, without speaking of it, had stood between him and the world of others. How he needed her! How much more than did Jud! How he could work, what enormous research he could accomplish, if she were his wife to hold in his arms, when he dropped his task; if she would share with him the evening and hours of night, and meet, for him, the world by day.

Now he had talked to her of his work at Rochester, and of himself, as he had to no one else, not even to Jud.

"Rod," she said at last, after one of their long silences, "I've something to decide. Help me. It's about the trial. They say that what will happen to Myrtle Lorrie will depend on me. I can free her—or convict her. Do you believe that?"

"I don't know," said Rod. "But Jud thinks so."

He saw her color quickly deepen under her sunburn. "So Jeb's told you."

"Yes; he told me, Agnes."

"What, especially?"

"That you took, from the first, the side of the defense. He—"

"What, Rod?"

"Can't understand it."

"Yes, he can, Rod. That's the trouble."

"That he understands it?"

"He knows I'm going to do what I am bound to do, because I believe"—

They Discussed Agnes' Coming Ordeal.

She stopped and caught her breath before she said it—"Martin O'Mara."

"O'Mara," said Rod. "The lawyer you called."

"Yes," said Agnes. "I'll tell you about him. He—"

Rodney, attending, tried to keep his mind on what she said; but his feelings made it utterly impossible. Fled far from him was his hour of false content. A new despair seized him.

He knew now that madly he had imagined that perhaps—perhaps—it had been some relic of memory of what he had done and said to her before he had gone away, which had interposed itself between her and Jud's completer possession of her.

But it was not that; it was something which had to do with that lawyer whom Jud had damned aloud—O'Mara.

CHAPTER VIII

The Monday of the trial dawned hot. The sun rose yellow and dazzling out of a lake that lay like a pool to the horizon; the faintest of breezes moved from off this endless mirror. At Agnes's wide-open windows the frail net of curtains barely quivered.

Ordinarily the sun, striking into her room, did not awaken her; but this morning she had seen the last stars fade and the first fingers of day grope over the edge of the waters.

The robins and the wrens chirped at the light; a wood thrush awoke, and gay little song sparrows.

After a while Agnes' mother came in, and for a short time they discussed Agnes' coming ordeal. Then Mrs. Gleneith left.

Today, Myrtle Lorrie must go on trial for her life, for the murder of her husband; and soon Agnes Gleneith must go on the witness-stand for her. No, not for Myrtle. There was no point in being dishonest with yourself. She was taking the side of the defense because of Cathal Martin O'Mara, who had come to the house again on Saturday morning—the day before yesterday—to go over her testimony once more.

Mr. Nordell and another attorney for the state had conferred with her twice; and she was subpoenaed as a witness for the state as well as for the defense.

But Jeb had said to her: "Nordell told me, Glen, you seemed to belong to the defense, body and soul. That's the impression he got. Are you crazy?"

"I'm going to tell only what I saw and heard," she had replied to him.

"But how are you going to tell it? Nordell knows; and he's not fool enough to call you for his witness. You'd never be his. If he put you on the stand, you'd go over to your shyster friend O'Mara. So he'll let O'Mara put you on the stand—and then the state can get after you. Be O'Mara's witness, and see where you land! Good Lord, Glen, what's got into you?"

What was this which was in her, and which, by its recurrent excitements made sleep impossible and unthinkable after the dawn of this day?

There was no use in disguising this to herself; when she should go on the witness-stand, she would declare by her implications, if she were forbidden to state it in words, that Myrtle Lorrie had killed justifiably.

Had she?

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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Venetian Life

On returning from Venice, where he had been consul for four years, William Dean Howells met a Boston publisher, with whom he frequently played shuffleboard or strolled the liner's decks.

One day Howells remarked that he was bringing over a manuscript on Venetian life.

Jokingly the publisher remarked that his firm would bring it out. Without a moment's hesitation the manuscript was turned over to him. . . It was published in 1866 under the title of "Venetian Life."

It may well be said that this was the start of Howells' successful literary career.

The Mind Meter

By LOWELL HENDERSON

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Jumbled Sentence True-False Test

In this test there are eight mixed-up sentences, which are either true or false. First, rearrange the sentence to read properly, and secondly, underline the letter T if the sentence expresses a true fact, or underline the letter F if the fact expressed is false.

1. native zebra a Africa the of is T—F.
2. Instruments famous his Stradivarius wind was for T—F.
3. was States the one Maine Thirteen of Original T—F.
4. southeastern situated Africa coast Madagascar of the off is T—F.
5. cotton was Whitney invented Eli the by gin T—F.
6. Newcastle center famous exporting is coal a T—F.
7. Boilermakers team the football called Purdue's is T—F.
8. York's wealthy Bowery live the New in T—F.

Answers

1. The zebra is a native of Africa. T.
2. Stradivarius was famous for his wind instruments F.
3. Maine was one of the Thirteen Original States F.
4. Madagascar is situated off the southeastern coast of Africa T.
5. The cotton gin was invented by Eli Whitney T.
6. Newcastle is a famous coal exporting center T.
7. Purdue's football team is called the Boilermakers T.
8. New York's wealthy live in the Bowery F.

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