

DRAGONS DRIVE YOU

By EDWIN BALMER

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CHAPTER IX—Continued

"You? . . . What more do you want, Mr. O'Mara? And at this time in the evening?"

"It had to be tonight," said Cathal. "What had to be tonight?"

"Is she—has she retired, Mrs. Glenneith?"

"Yes."

Then he heard her voice from above. "I've not, Mother. Tell him I'm coming down."

"No!" her mother said; and to Cathal: "Please, please go away."

"I want to speak to him, Mother," and she went past her mother and out. "I've asked him to go away."

"I ask him not to."

"I can't have him with you in my house," her mother said.

"We needn't go in. I'd rather not; it's cooler out here," Agnes said. "I need to talk to him. Then I'll come in."

"Both of you come in," her mother invited unwillingly.

Agnes turned. "We'll go through the house," she yielded, "and out the other side."

Cathal followed her, thus, through the house; and there was the water before them. They went to the edge of the sand, and were alone with the lake and Deneb. Over the water, heat-lightning was flashing almost incessantly, and giving them strange, garish glimpses of each other and the shore. The distant thunder became constant.

"Why did you come tonight?" Agnes asked Cathal.

"Now," said Cathal, "I don't know. A while ago, I thought I did. I deceived myself I might do something for you. Of course it was for myself, solely, I came—and wouldn't go away."

"I'm glad you came. There was no one here I could talk to."

His pulses leaped at that.

"I'm leaving tomorrow with Mother," Agnes said.

"Where to?"

"New York; Father's getting us the first sailing for France. It's true I'm all through in the court?"

"That's true," Cathal said. "Can't you believe it?"

"And—she'll be cleared?"

"Cleared," said Cathal, "by tomorrow night, I think. I put her on tomorrow morning; we ought to reach our arguments by noon. By night it'll be over. She'll be cleared."

Agnes caught her breath. He heard it. "By me?" she gasped in her breath's expiration.

"By you," said Cathal. "You turned the case. She, tomorrow, and I—we haven't got to win it; we simply have not to lose it now. We'll do that."

"I know you will."

"And now," he said, "you don't want us to."

"It's not that—quite." Agnes gazed up at him, and the lightning lit their faces. "I want her free. I'm sure I want her not killed, not electrocuted or even jailed for life. But I don't want her paid."

"Payment of the insurance to her is not to be avoided when she's cleared," Cathal said, their faces in the dark, but the images remained on their retinas. "And out of it comes my fee. How much, have you heard?"

"Half," said Agnes.

"And thinking that," said Cathal, "you went on for her—and for me. Half I'm to have, I'm told. The opinion has even been put in print. Well, it's not half, nor near it; but it'll be a big fee—if she's cleared."

"For she'll have the money. I'll take a good part of it from her; and some of that I'll keep; but more I'll pass over to the wife that first married him—and his daughter. Nobody knows it but you."

"Thank you," she said, "for telling me."

"Will it make the night easier for you? You've done no wrong. Let no one tell you that you've done wrong." The darkness was between them again. "Myrtle Lorrie shot in self-defense, and hardly knowing—for the indignity she'd endured—that she did it. For weeks he'd tormented and beaten her because she could not bear him love—as he'd known love, before he cast off her that loved him, and thought he could buy it from another. That day, he'd found out about Bert, and he was worse than ever before; so his wife grabbed his gun to scare him, but he came at her, and she pulled and pulled the trigger. She'll tell it on the stand tomorrow; by night she'll be free. Twelve men, having heard her, and you, will say she shall be punished no further. They take the responsibility; not you."

"I take it too. I came tonight to say that to you. I didn't plan to tell you about my fee; but I did."

"I'm glad you did."

"The lightning's brighter. I suppose that means it's nearer. Yes; there's the thunder." He waited for it to rumble away. "I thought today I'd see

you forever as you were on the witness-stand; and then I thought it would be as you were when I held you for a moment. Did you know, for a moment I held you?"

"Yes."

"Do you suppose after this,—when it lightnings,—I can see your face? All my life, when it lightnings? It's my last time to see you. I came tonight while it was still somewhere within—within my right. . . . God bless that lightning! You're still looking up at me. I'll always see you so! Have you heard what I've said—through the thunder?"

"I've heard."

"I've lived in this world near to thirty years; and nothing ever happened to me like that when I lifted my phone and heard your voice; and you asked me to come where you were. From then, I've been counting the times I might be near you. I'd go to you to review your evidence; twice I could do that. And then the trial—twice more I'd be with you. And now my times are spent; there's nothing of you left for me in all the future. Thirty years more or longer I may live in this world answering my phone, going to them that call me; but I'll never find again the like of you. We'll be in the world, both of us, but I may never again speak to you or see your face."

"That needn't be true."

"Do you mean that?"

"Yes."

"Oh, God, let me see you! Where's the lightning?"

"No," said Agnes, and lowered her head. "I must go in."

"No," he forbade, and seized her wrist. "How much did you mean?"

How firmly yet gently he held her! Not like Jeb, not like Rod; not like any other man who ever had touched her.

She quivered in the first cool gust of the breaking storm. "I've got to go in."

Indeed, for moments they had been calling her; her mother and the servants: "Agnes! Agnes! . . . Miss Agnes! Miss Glenneith!"

"Let them call," said Cathal fiercely. "Do you care?"

"No! I've taken your word on right and wrong against Jeb and my father and mother. Maybe I'll be thirty years



Over the Water, Heat-Lightning Was Flashing Almost Incessantly.

In the world too. Can you never come to any one, Mr. O'Mara, unless she calls you?"

"Oh, God!" said Cathal, and let her go.

"Agnes! Agnes!" her mother was calling; and the rain was coming down.

In great drenching drops it struck. Cathal whipped off his coat to cover her; but they were wet through before they gained the shelter of the house.

"Are you mad, Agnes? Mad?" demanded her mother.

"I guess so," Agnes told her.

"Never as upon this night had Agnes needed her room for sanctuary. After he had gone, discussion of him with any one or the presence of any one—even of her mother—was unbearable.

She shut herself in her room, and strangely for her, she locked her door. She lay upon her bed, undressed. She had stripped off her wet dress which his coat had covered, but she had made no move beyond that.

She thought how little alien upon her his coat had felt. You could not bear upon you any garment of a person who offended you. How far from offense had been the cover of his coat which the rain had made to cling upon her!

Cathal, when she gave his coat back, had put it on; and he wore it wet as he drove through the storm to the city.

The lightning continued to crash as the heat from the prairies broke in the blinding sheets of rain which made cascades of the streets, but Cathal got through and scarcely considered how Winnie was waiting for him. Throughout that day, as from the first of the trial, she had sat in court; and tonight she had no doubt of the great trouble that dwelt within him.

His mother, assailed by the heat of the day, lay in the grateful dark of her room; and his sister too, when midnight once more had made remote the thunder, had dropped to sleep.

"Cathal," she called, when at last he entered, "where were ye?"

"North."

"North, seeking her, Cathal?"

"Yes."

"It's wet ye are!" Winnie's thin hand had found his coat-sleeve and moved up to his shoulder. "Did she give ye no shelter?"

"Shelter?" said Cathal.

He seized Winnie's hand gently and put her off; and for once she misunderstood him. "She didn't have ye in! Thank God for that, Cathal! . . . Any other—any other, Cathal; 'twould have been the cruel ruin of ye."

CHAPTER X

Agnes and her mother—and Rogna—left Chicago for New York on the Century the next day. It was Saturday, and throughout the morning, Myrtle Lorrie was on the witness-stand; the noon papers were full of her defense of herself.

Bee and Davis went to the railroad station, but Jeb did not appear. The ignominious testimony in regard to him, which Agnes had given on the previous day, had been printed fully not only in Friday's late editions, but was prominent in the morning papers.

"You got complete coverage, darling," Bee assured Agnes. Bee was the only one able to assume any levity over it. "Not only in the news but in the chatty little social columns. Some one has commented that if there is an absolute zero in ways to announce a broken engagement, possibly you hit on it."

At Albany next morning, Agnes read, at last, that the jury late in the evening had acquitted Myrtle Lorrie on the fourth ballot.

They called—Agnes and her mother, Beatrice Glenneith and Rogna, their maid—on Wednesday, Bob and several friends seeing them off. The three days in New York with her husband had proved even more difficult for Tricie than she had anticipated. They stayed at the same hotel, of course; they preserved, outwardly, all appearances.

Tricie mentioned "Cash" but once; and then not even by the name of "Cash." Tricie asked—and this was not until Tuesday: "Bob, is she in town?"

"No," Bob told his wife. "Not since before you came." For he had sent her away on Saturday.

Cash had not wanted to go without him; but he had told her she must. No; he wouldn't like it, he assured her; but they both must do it. Thus he would keep his conscience clear; such temporary abstinence was enough for virtue in these days.

Prosperity, power, and impunity! They strutted on the ship, with their wives or the women whom they preferred to their wives—these men of America new to the millions which they believed and they boasted they had "made."

There was no escape, on the ship, from those people; and none, that summer, in Paris; for Americans, as never before, possessed the city.

Beatrice Glenneith had never intended to linger in Paris. She fled to a little quiet village of the Hautes Pyrenees; and she and Agnes settled, at last, in a tiny inn a few kilometers from the border of Spain, where no man was in the least like Bob—and the noon sunlight shone sharp and warm, but always there was a breeze down from Maladetta or the snowy summits of Mt. Perdu.

There, week after week, mother and daughter waited.

Waited for what?

For human nature to change? For years to reroll themselves? For the world to fit its ways again, as once happily it had, to the complete fulfillment of an individual's decent desires?

Tricie did not deal with such matters through her mind; her emotions always controlled her. She wanted what she had had—her husband's desire and devotion, which she had done nothing to lose.

If she had "done" anything which deservedly would have alienated him, she might have seen the "justice" of what had occurred; but she had not.

Day and night, Tricie relived her married life in review.

A letter arrived, once a week regularly, from the husband; and always, on the day one came, Tricie answered it.

Bee wrote her mother and her sister once a week, but alternately; and she always assumed that they shared her letters, as indeed they did.

She had moved her household to Mackinac Island for July and August. Davis had been with her most of July, but in August he came up only for week-ends. Jeb had appeared several times in his big boat, and always had stopped. She—and Davis—had gone up with Jeb, and several more people, into Superior for a week.

Agnes lowered the letter and lay back in her gaily painted chair gazing toward Maladetta but regarding, really, her own life on the Illinois shore four thousand miles away.

Plainly she saw herself and them all in perspective; her home and the city below it, and the long level sweep of the lake.

Back and forth upon it, Jeb journeyed in his splendid luxurious ship, picking up people, dining them, winning them, setting them at little tables for bridge or to dancing on the deck while the ship sailed; when it stopped, swimming and diving. Jeb paying for it all, never tired of it until he returned to Chicago to make more money, and more and more.

She might be with him; but she had no wish to be.

Here was no one, but her mother, whom she well knew. Here were hours with the sun, and the wind from the mountain passes; with the tinkle of bells of cattle on the hillside; the herder's whistle, and sometimes his song. . . . But Agnes did not dream of Jeb's big new boat.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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