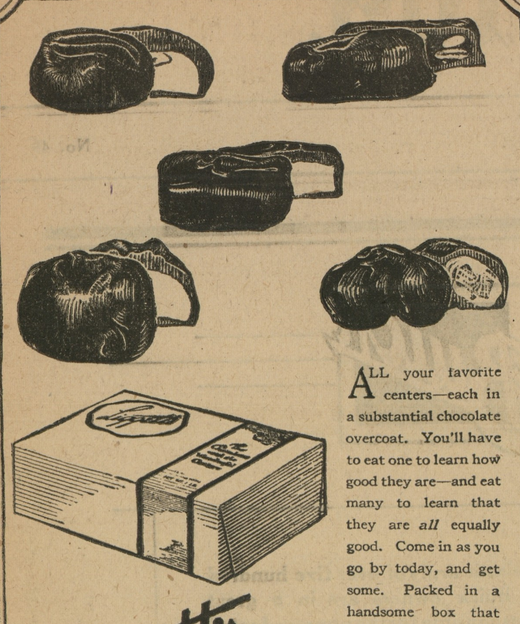

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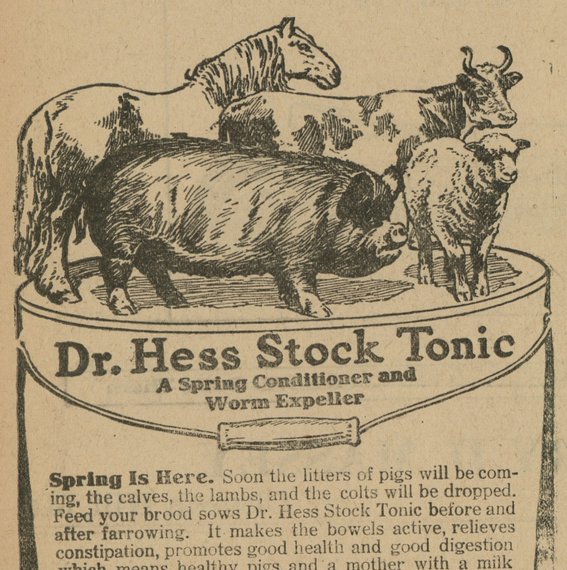

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# The Light in the Darkness

By A. W. PEACH

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Doris Lane could gather little from the kind eyes of the physician who removed the bandages, and her hopes rose. From the moment of the explosion in the chemical laboratory in which she had been employed, during the long days of suffering in the hospital, she did not dare to ask if she would be left with a badly scarred face. The question seemed, for the time being, vain and foolish in her situation, but now that life was assured, she began to wonder if for all her days she was to meet the pitying, questioning look that the unmaimed give the maimed.

"Doctor, how do I look?" she asked, smiling as bravely as she could.

The gray-headed surgeon smiled in answer, and said in his grave, kind way: "Well, little girl, I think you have a pair of the finest brown eyes I have ever seen, and your hair—"

"But I didn't mean that," she said hurriedly.

"I know, but your question put me in the old-enough-to-ask class; so I wanted to tell you." He looked at her gently. "There is just one bad scar, the others will fade, I am sure. You might bring Miss Lane a mirror," he said to the waiting nurse.

She was weak with suffering, and her mind was tortured with questions of the future, for her training had been limited and the simple matter of a livelihood was no small item now. So when she saw in the truthful glass the livid scar that raced its ugly line across her forehead, and the blotches below where the flying acid had touched, she moaned in anguish.

"Hello, By-way!"

The pleasant voice cut through her darkness, and she opened her tear-filled eyes to see standing above her the attending physician, known to her as "Doctor Walter." During the month that her eyes had been bandaged, he had been to her merely a pleasant voice and gentle fingers. Now she saw

Now She Saw He Was Tall.

he was tall, tanned as if from much time spent out of doors, gray-eyed and dark-haired. His mild fun in calling her "By-way" instead of "Lane" had pleased her in her childish weakness; now, however, she turned to the pillow.

His voice was gentle, for he seemed to understand. "Look here, you must not feel that way—"

"No, but if you—were—to—go through life—this way—pitied—by everybody," she returned brokenly. "Besides, I— She paused. "Besides what?" he urged in the same gentle fashion.

She shook her head and waved him aside. The sight of his strong, pleasant manhood, the sound of his voice, for some reason or other, made her misery all the more bitter—just why she did not know.

She did not guess the purpose in the nurse's friendly questioning that evening, but because there was no one in the world to whom she could confide some of her anxiety, she told the nurse what she refused to tell Doctor Walter. And the nurse did not tell her of that purpose, nor offer any suggestion as to how the mutilated girl might solve the problem she was facing.

The next morning, Doctor Walter stopped again. "Miss Lane, I have come to make you a formal offer of a position as my secretary; I want you to look after my office; are you willing?"

She lifted her scarred face. "So that was why the nurse asked me so many questions!" She turned away. "Even you pity me."

"No, I am sincere. I really need some one, and you have had experience with drugs," he said patiently.

The quiet reproof in his voice was enough. "Forgive me, I hardly know what I am saying. Yes, if I can serve you, I want to."

"All right," he said, cheerfully. "We'll consider the matter settled."

So it came about that after a week she found herself in charge of the doctor's pleasant office.

From the day she had seen her blue-scarred face she had not looked into a mirror. She combed her hair by arranging a small mirror in such a way that her face was not revealed. The pitying glances of the patients, who came in was all the mirror she needed. Keener, too, was Walter's gentleness, and the way his eyes would rest upon her in moments when she guessed he did not realize that she knew he was looking at her. Everything seemed to combine to make life more and more dismal as she looked down the slope of the years.

Worst of all, and unguessed, she found herself being drawn more and more to the tall, handsome physician. His personality seemed to the weakened and worried girl a shelter within which there was kindliness and peace.

The full force of the situation did not strike her until one momentous day, when a girl came into the office, lovely with the loveliness that is always suggestive of June time and roses. She was welcomed with manifest pleasure by Walter, and the stricken girl in her simple gray and white dress felt the world sink about her.

"I must be brave," she said to herself. I must. He just pities me, and I must not trouble him."

Two weeks went by. The Junetide girl came and went with Walter; and his interest in her presence was evident.

Then came the day that bore with it a change of destiny.

The Junetide girl, her face flushed with joy, hurried from the office, and Walter, following with as much pleasure shining on his, went with her.

Doris watched them go, and guessing what had taken place between them, felt the room about her grow gray as with dusk. From her world the last sunshine went. Through the darkness came a suggestion. She trembled. To go through life alone—an object of pity when she was so hungry for love, for beauty and happiness and youth—it was too much.

The afternoon waned. The din of the great city ebbed into the low monotone suggestive of tides that have spent their force, drawing outward to the sea. She sat in silence, then quietly she went to the cabinet in which he kept the drugs with which he stocked his case. She knew every compartment. From a bottle she shook out with a steady hand three tablets—morphine—enough to send her into the long and restful sleep which would carry her beyond suffering, beyond pity, beyond heartache.

Taking them, and shivering only slightly in the act, she turned to the couch and lay down. "I am sorry dear, for the trouble and bother I shall cause you, but I am weary beyond weariness."

* * * * * * *

Out of the darkness came a voice, insistent, firm and thrilling, with a meaning that broke into her consciousness. She opened her eyes, feeling strangely rested and at peace.

The lights were soft and shaded in the office. Kneeling beside her, his face strained with anxious question, was Walter.

"Doris, Doris, what have you been trying to do?" The grief in his voice woke her to full consciousness. Sanity came. With a low cry she sprang up to find herself caught in his arms and held tight.

"Don't pity me!" she begged breathlessly.

His voice indicated that he had found himself. "I don't pity you." He drew her closer to him. "I love you. How blind you have been! Haven't you seen?"

"Seen? You love me—me?" she questioned in a whisper.

"Listen, you stay in my arms until I am through. I do love you—have from the time I saw you in the ward, but you have given me no sign—wrapped in your own thought; is that it?"

"But look at me!"

His mellow laugh relieved the tension. "So that is it! Foolish girl, I am not one of those who love a face. I love the spirit behind those brown eyes of yours—a troubled spirit now. Let me bring it peace. May I? Just say 'Yes!'"

She clung to him. Speech was beyond her for the moment. After a struggle she whispered: "And I have loved you from the moment you looked at me and spoke to me, but I did not dream—"

"The dream begins now, my dear, to come true." His lips brushed her warm and quivering ones. "Let's close the office. Then we'll go for a long spin under the stars. We—"

She remembered. Horror filled her eyes. "But I took morphine! Why did—"

"No," he said gently; "I was worried about you, and was fearful myself. I had filled that bottle with harmless sugar pills. Little girl, I have watched you and kept ward over you. I did not intend to lose you—waiting in hopes that you would take some interest in me."

The music in her heart died at the shock of her recollection. At his last words it started up softly the music that links eternity to eternity.

"You love me—even my hideous face!" she said again, as if the news were too good to be true.

He turned in his authoritative physician's way, and going to the corridor, returned with a mirror. "You sensitive soul, you ought to know those scars have faded out!"

She took the mirror, wondering, a last wonder surging in her heart. All those long weeks she had kept her vow never to look upon her marred face. She took the mirror, his eyes tender upon her. One glance was enough. The blue, vivid scars were gone. Memories of them would remain, but his love would heal even them with the balm that is the surest healing of all woes of earth—the balm of a great love.


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