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DRAWN BY JAMES PRESTON

The Clew of the Silver Spoons—By Robert Barr

THE CURTIS PUBLISHING COMPANY, PHILADELPHIA

THE EAGLE'S SHADOW

By James Branch Cabell

XII

BILLY'S back was turned to the door as Margaret entered. He was staring at a picture beside the mantel—a portrait of Frederick R. Woods—and his eyes, when he wheeled about, were wistful.

Then, on a sudden, they lighted up as if they had caught fire from hers, and his adoration flaunted crimson banners in his cheeks, and his heart, I dare say, was a great blaze of happiness. He loved her, you see; when she entered a room it really made a difference to this absurd young man. He saw a great many lights, for instance, and heard music. And, accordingly, he laughed now in a very contented fashion.

"I wasn't burglarizing," said he—"that is, not exactly. I ought to have asked your permission, I suppose, before coming here, but I couldn't find you, and—and it was rather important. You see," Mr. Woods continued, pointing to the great carved desk, "I happened to speak of this desk to the Colonel to-night. We—we were speaking of Uncle Fred's death, and I found out, quite by accident, that it hadn't been searched since then—that is, not thoroughly. There are secret drawers, you see; one here," and he touched the spring that threw it open, "and the other on this side. There is—there is nothing of importance in them; only receipted bills and such. The other drawer is inside that centre compartment, which is locked. The Colonel wouldn't come. He said it was all foolishness, and that he had a book he wanted to read. So he sent me after what he called my mare's nest. It isn't, you see—no, not quite, not quite," Mr. Woods murmured with an odd smile, and then laughed and added lamely: "I—I suppose I'm the only person who knew about it."

Mr. Woods' manner was a thought strange. He stammered a little in speaking; he laughed unnecessarily, and Margaret could see that his hands trembled. Taking him all in all, you would have sworn he was repressing some vital emotion. But he did not seem unhappy—no, not exactly unhappy. He was with Margaret, you see.

"Oh, you beauty!" his meditations ran.

He had some excuse. In the soft, rosy twilight of the room—the study at Selwoode is paneled in very dark oak, and the doors and windows are screened with crimson hangings—her parti-colored red-and-yellow gown might have been a scrap of afterglow left over from an unusually fine sunset. In a word, Miss Hugonin was a very quaint and colorful and delectable figure as she came a little farther into the room. Her eyes shone like blue stars and her hair shone—there must be pounds of it, Billy thought—and her very shoulders, plump, flawless, ineffable, shone with the glow of an errant cloud-tatter that is just past the track of dawn and is, therefore, neither pink nor white, but manages somehow to combine the best points of both colors.



HIS SHOULDERS HAD A PATHETIC DROOP,
A LISTLESSNESS

"Ah, indeed?" said Miss Hugonin. Her tone imparted a surprising degree of chilliness to this simple remark.

"No," she went on, very formally; "this is not a private room; you owe me no apology for being here. Indeed, I am rather obliged to you, Mr. Woods, for none of us knew of these secret drawers. Here is the key to the central compartment, if you will be kind enough to point out the other one. Dear, dear!" Margaret concluded languidly, "all this is quite like a third-rate melodrama. I haven't the least doubt you will discover a will in there in your favor, and be reinstated as the long-lost heir and all that sort of thing. How tiresome that will be for me, though."

She was in a mood to be cruel to-night. She held out the keys to him in a disinterested fashion, and dropped them daintily into his outstretched palm, just as she might have given a coin to an unusually grimy mendicant. But the tips of her fingers grazed his hand.

That did the mischief. Her least touch was enough to set every nerve in his body a-tingle.

"Peggy!" he said hoarsely, as the keys jangled to the floor. Then Mr. Woods drew a little nearer to her and said, "Peggy, Peggy!" in a voice that trembled curiously, and appeared to have no intention of saying anything further.

Indeed, words would have seemed mere tautology to any one who could have seen his eyes. Margaret looked into them for a minute, and her own eyes fell before their blaze, and her heart—very foolishly—stood still for a breathing-space. Subsequently she recalled the fact that he was a fortune-hunter, and that she despised him, and also observed—to her surprise and indignation—that he was holding her hand and had apparently been doing so for some time. You may believe it that she withdrew that pink-and-white trifle angrily enough.

"Pray don't be absurd, Mr. Woods," said she.

Billy caught up the word. "Absurd!" he echoed; "yes, that describes what I've been pretty well, doesn't it, Peggy? I was absurd when I let you send me to the rightabout, four years ago. I realized that to-day the moment I saw you. I should have held on like the very grimmest death; I should have bullied you into marrying me, if necessary, and in spite of fifty Anstruthers. Oh, yes, I know that now. But I was only a boy then, Peggy, and so I let a boy's pride come between us. I know now there isn't any question of pride where you are concerned—not any question of pride, nor of any silly misunderstandings, nor of any uncle's wishes, nor of anything but just you, Peggy. It's just you that I care for now—just you."

"Ah!" Margaret cried, with a swift intake of the breath that was almost a sob. He had dared, after all; oh, it was shameless, sordid! And yet (she thought dimly), how dear that little quiver in his voice had been were it unplanned!—and how she could have loved this big, eager boy were he not the hypocrite she knew him!

'She'd show him! But somehow—though it was manifestly what he deserved—she found she couldn't look him in the face while she did it.

So she dropped her eyes to the floor and waited for a moment of tense silence. Then, "Am I to consider this a proposal, Mr. Woods?" she asked in muffled tones.

Billy stared. "Yes," said he gravely, after an interval. "You see," she explained, still in the same dull voice, "you phrased it so vaguely I couldn't well be certain. You don't propose very well, Mr. Woods. I—I've had opportunities to become an authority on such matters, you see, since I've been rich. That makes a difference, doesn't it? A great many men are willing to marry me now who wouldn't have thought of such a thing, say—say four years ago. So I've had some experience. Oh, yes, three—three persons have offered to marry me for my money earlier in this very evening—before you did, Mr. Woods. And, really, I can't compliment you on your methods, Mr. Woods; they are a little vague, a little transparent, don't you think?"

"Peggy!" he cried, in a frightened whisper. He could not believe, you see, that the woman he loved was speaking.

And, for my part, I admit frankly that at this very point, if ever in her life, Margaret deserved a thorough shaking.

"Dear me," she airily observed, "I'm sure I've said nothing out of the way. I think it speaks very well for you that you're so fond of your old home—so anxious to regain it at any cost. It's quite touching, Mr. Woods."

She raised her eyes toward his. I dare say she was suffering as much as he. But women consider it a point of honor to smile when they stab; Margaret smiled with an innocence that would have seemed overdone in an angel.

Then, in an instant, she had the grace to be abjectly ashamed of herself. Billy's face had gone white. His mouth was set, masklike, and his breathing was a little perfunctory. It stung her, though, that he was not angry. He was sorry.



VERY PUZZLED, AND VERY EXCITED,
AND VERY PENITENT

"I—I see," he said very carefully. "You think I—want the money. Yes—I see."

"And why not?" she queried pleasantly. "Dear me, money's a very sensible thing to want, I'm sure. It makes a great difference, you know."

He looked down into her face for a moment. One might have sworn this detected fortune-hunter pitied her.

"Yes," he assented slowly; "it makes a difference—not a difference for the better, I'm afraid, Peggy."

Ensued a silence.

Then Margaret tossed her head. She was fast losing her composure. She would have given the world to retract what she had said, and, accordingly, she resolved to brazen it out.

"You needn't look at me as if I were a convicted criminal," she said sharply. "I won't marry you, and there's an end of it."

"It isn't that I'm thinking of," said Mr. Woods with a grave smile. "You see, it takes me a little time to realize your honest opinion of me. I believe I understand now. You think me a very hopeless cad—that's about your real opinion, isn't it, Peggy? I didn't know that, you see. I thought you knew me better than that. You did once, Peggy; and—and I hoped you hadn't quite forgotten that time."

The allusion was ill-chosen.

"Oh, oh, oh!" she cried, gasping. "You to remind me of that time!—you, of all men! Haven't you a vestige of shame?—haven't you a rag of honor left? Oh, I didn't know there were such men in the world! And to think—to think—" Margaret's glorious voice broke, and she wrung her hands helplessly.

Then, after a little, she raised her eyes to his and spoke without a trace of emotion. "To think," she said, and her voice was toneless now, "to think that I loved you! It's that that hurts, you know. For I loved you very dearly, Billy Woods—yes, I think I loved you quite as much as any woman can ever love a man. You were the first, you see, and girls—girls are very foolish about such things. I thought you were brave, and strong, and clean, and honest, and beautiful, and dear—oh, quite the best and dearest man in the world, I thought you, Billy Woods! That—that was queer, wasn't it?" she asked with a listless little shiver. "Yes, it was very queer. You didn't think of me in quite that way, did you? No, you—you thought I was well enough to amuse you for a while. I was well enough for a summer flirtation, wasn't I, Billy? But marriage—ah, no, you never thought of marriage then. You ran away when Uncle Fred suggested that. You refused point-blank—refused in this very room—didn't you, Billy? Ah, that—that hurt," Margaret ended with a faint smile. "Yes, it—hurt."

Billy Woods raised a protesting hand, as though to speak, but afterward he drew a deep, tremulous breath and bit his lip and was silent.

She had spoken very quietly, very simply, very like a tired child; now her voice lifted. "But you've hurt me more to-night," she said equably—"to-night when you've come cringing back to me—to me, whom you'd have none of when I was poor. I'm rich now, though. That makes a difference, doesn't it, Billy? You're willing to whistle back the girl's love you flung away once—yes, quite willing. But can't you understand how much it must hurt me to think I ever loved you?" Margaret asked very gently.

She wanted him to understand. She wanted him to be ashamed. She prayed that he might be just a little, little bit ashamed, that she might be able to forgive him.

But he stood silent, bending puzzled brows toward her.

"Can't you understand, Billy?" she pleaded softly. "I can't help seeing what a cur you are. I must hate you, Billy—of course, I must," she insisted, very gently, as though arguing the matter with herself; then suddenly she sobbed and wrung her hands in anguish. "Oh, I can't, I can't!" she wailed. "God help me, I can't hate you, even though I know you for what you are!"

His arms lifted a little; and in a flash Margaret knew that what she most wanted in all the world was to have them close about her, and then to lay her head upon his shoulder and cry contentedly. Oh, she did want to forgive him! If he had lost all sense of shame, why could he not lie to her? Surely, he could, at least, lie. And, oh, how gladly she would believe!—only the tiniest, the flimsiest fiction her eyes craved of him.

But he merely said, "I see—I see," very slowly, and then smiled. "We'll put the money aside just now," he said.

"Perhaps, after a little, we—we'll come back to that. I think you've forgotten, though, that when—when Uncle Fred and I had our difference, you had just thrown me over—had just ordered me never to speak to you again? I couldn't very well ask you to marry me, could I, under those circumstances?"

"I spoke in a moment of irritation," a very dignified Margaret pointed out. "You would have paid no attention whatever to it if you had really—cared."

Billy laughed rather sadly. "Oh, I cared right enough," he said. "I still care. The question is—do you?"

"No," said Margaret with decision, "I don't—not in the least."

"Peggy," Mr. Woods commanded, "look at me!"

"You have had your answer, I think," Miss Hugonin indifferently observed.

Billy caught her chin in his hand and turned her face to his. "Peggy, do you—care?" he asked softly.

And Margaret looked into his honest-seeming eyes, and, in a panic, knew that her traitor lips were forming "Yes."

"That would be rather unfortunate, wouldn't it?" she asked with a smile. "You see, it was only an hour ago I promised to marry Mr. Kennaston."

"Kennaston!" Billy gasped. "You—you don't mean that you care for *him*, Peggy?"

"I really can't see why it should concern you," said Margaret sweetly; "but since you ask—I do. You couldn't expect me to remain inconsolable forever, you know."

Then the room blurred before her eyes. She stood rigid, defiant. She was dimly aware that Billy was speaking, speaking from a great distance, it seemed, and then, after a century or two, his face came back to her out of the whirl of things. And, though she did not know it, they were smiling bravely at one another.

"—and so," Mr. Woods was stating, "I've been an even greater ass than usual, and I hope you'll be very, very happy."

"Thank you," she returned mechanically; "I—I hope so."

After an interval, "Good-night, Peggy," said Mr. Woods.

"Oh—? Good-night," she said with a start.

He turned to go. Then, "By Jove!" said he grimly, "I've been so busy making an ass of myself I'd forgotten all about more—more important things."

Mr. Woods picked up the keys, and, going to the desk, unlocked the centre compartment with a jerk. Afterward he gave a sharp exclamation. He had found a paper in the secret drawer at the back which appeared to startle him.

Billy unfolded it slowly, with a puzzled look growing in his countenance. Then, for a moment, Margaret's golden head drew close to his yellow curls, and they read it through together. And, in the most melodramatic and improbable fashion in the world, they found it to be the last will and testament of Frederick R. Woods.

"But—but I don't understand," was Miss Hugonin's awed comment. "It's exactly like the other will, only—why, it's dated the seventeenth of June, the day before he died! And it's witnessed by Hodges and Burton—the butler and

the first footman, you know—and they've never said anything about such a paper. And, then, why should he have made another will just like the first?"

Billy pondered.

By and by, "I think I can explain that," he said, in a rather peculiar voice. "You see, Hodges and Burton witnessed all his papers, half the time without knowing what they were about. They would hardly have thought of this particular one after his death. And it isn't quite the same will as the other: it leaves you practically everything, but it doesn't appoint any trustees, as the other did, because this will was drawn up after you were of age. Moreover, it contains these four bequests to colleges, to establish a Woods chair of ethnology, which the other will didn't provide for. Of course, it would have been simpler merely to add a codicil to the first will, but Uncle Fred was always very methodical. I—I think he was probably going through the desk the night he died, destroying various papers. He must have taken the other will out to destroy it just—just before he died. Perhaps—perhaps—" Billy paused for a little and then laughed unmirthfully. "It scarcely matters," said he. "Here is the will. It is undoubtedly genuine and undoubtedly the last he made. You'll have to have it probated, Peggy, and settle with the colleges. It—it won't make much of a hole in the Woods millions."

There was a half-humorous bitterness in his voice that Margaret noted silently. So, she thought, he had hoped for a moment that at the last Frederick R. Woods had relented toward him. It grieved her, in a dull fashion, to see him so mercenary. It grieved her—though she would have denied



THEY FOUND IT TO BE THE LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT OF FREDERICK R. WOODS

it emphatically—to see him so disappointed. Since he wanted the money so much she would have liked him to have had it, worthless as he was, for the sake of the boy he had been.

"Thank you," she said coldly, as she took the paper; "I will give it to my father. He will do what is necessary. Good-night, Mr. Woods."

Then she locked up the desk in a businesslike fashion, and turned to him and held out her hand.

"Good-night, Billy," said this perfectly inconsistent young woman. "For a moment I thought Uncle Fred had altered his will in your favor. I almost wish he had."

Billy smiled a little.

"That would never have done," he said gravely, as he shook hands; "you forget what a sordid and heartless and generally good-for-nothing chap I am, Peggy. It's much better as it is."

Only the tiniest, the flimsiest fiction her eyes craved of him. Even now, at the eleventh hour, lie to me, Billy Woods, and, oh, how gladly I will believe!

But he merely said, "Good-night, Peggy," and went out of the room. His broad shoulders had a pathetic droop, a listlessness.

Margaret was glad. Of course, she was glad. At last she had told him exactly what she thought of him. Why shouldn't she be glad? She was delighted.

So, by way of expressing this delight, she sat down at the desk and began to cry, very softly.

XIII

HAVING duly considered the emptiness of existence, the unworthiness of men, the dreary future that awaited her—though this did not trouble her greatly, as she confidently expected to die soon—and many other such dolorous topics, Miss Hugonin decided to retire for the night. She rose, filled with speculations as to the paltriness of life and the probability of her eyes being red in the morning.

"It will be all his fault if they are," she consoled herself. "Doubtless he'll be very much pleased. After robbing me of all faith in humanity I dare say the one thing needed to complete his happiness is to make me look like a fright. I hate him! After making me miserable, now, I suppose, he'll go off and make some other woman miserable. Oh, of course, he'll make love to the first woman he meets who has any money. I'm sure she's welcome to him. I only pity any woman who has to put up with *him*. No, I don't," Margaret decided, after reflection; "I hate her, too!"

Miss Hugonin went to the door leading to the hallway and paused. Then—I grieve to relate it—she shook a little pink-tipped fist in the air.

"I detest you!" she commented between her teeth; "oh, how *dare* you make me feel so ashamed of the way I've treated you!"

The query—as possibly you may have divined—was addressed to Mr. Woods. He was standing by the fireplace in the hallway, and his tall figure was outlined sharply against the flame of the gas-lights that burned there. His shoulders had a pathetic droop, a listlessness.

Billy was reading a paper of some kind by the firelight, and the black outline of his face smiled grimly over it. Then he laughed and threw it into the fire.

"Billy!" a voice observed—a voice that was honey, and gold, and velvet, and all that is most sweet, and rich, and soft in the world.

Mr. Woods was aware of a light step, a swishing, sibilant, delightful rustling—the caress of sound is the rustling of a well-groomed woman's skirts—and of an afterthought of violets, of a mere reminiscence of orris, all of which came toward him through the dimness of the hall. He started noticeably.

"Billy," Miss Hugonin stated, "I'm sorry for what I said to you. I'm not sure it isn't true, you know, but I'm sorry I said it."

"Bless your heart!" said Billy; "don't you worry over that, Peggy. That's all right. Incidentally, the things you've said to me and about me aren't true, of course, but we won't discuss that just now. I—I fancy we're both feeling a bit fagged. Go to bed, Peggy! We'll both go to bed, and the night will bring counsel and we'll sleep off all unkindness. Go to bed, little sister!—get all that beauty-sleep you aren't in the least need of, and dream of how happy you're going to be with the man you love. And—and in the morning I may have something to say to you. Good-night, dear."

And this time he really went. And when he had come to the bend in the stairs, his eyes turned back to hers, slowly and irresistibly drawn toward them, as it seemed, just as the sunflower is drawn toward the sun, or the needle toward the pole, or, in fine, as the eyes of young gentlemen ordinarily are drawn toward the eyes of the one woman in the world. Then he disappeared.

The mummery of it vexed Margaret. There was no excuse for his looking at her in that way. It irritated her. She was almost as angry with him for doing it as she would have been for not doing it.

Therefore she bent an angry face toward the fire, her mouth pouting in a rather inviting fashion. Then it rounded slowly into a sanguine O, which, of itself, suggested osculation, but, in reality, stood for "observe!" For the paper Billy had thrown into the fire had fallen under the gas-lights, and she remembered his guilty start.

"After all," said Margaret, "it's none of my business."

"It may be important," she considerably remembered. "It ought not to be left there."

So she fished it out with a big paper-cutter.

"But it can't be very important," she dissented afterward, "or he wouldn't have thrown it away."

(Continued on Page 20)

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THE EAGLE'S SHADOW

(Continued from Page 11)

So she looked at the superscription on the back of it. Then she gave a little gasp and tore it open and read it by the firelight.

Miss Hugonin subsequently took credit to herself for not going into hysterics. And I think she had some reason to; for she found the paper a duplicate of the one Billy had taken out of the secret drawer, with his name set in the place of hers. At the last Frederick R. Woods had relented toward his nephew.

Margaret laughed a little; then she cried a little; then she did both together. Afterward she sat in the firelight, very puzzled, and very excited, and very penitent, and very beautiful, and was happier than she had ever been in her life.

"He had it in his pocket," her dear voice quavered; "he had it in his pocket, my brave, strong, beautiful Billy did, when he asked me to marry him. It was King Cophetua wooing the beggar-maid—and the beggar was an impudent, ungrateful, idiotic little piece!" Margaret hissed, in her most shrewish manner. "She ought to be spanked. She ought to go down on her knees to him in sackcloth, and tears, and ashes, and all sorts of penitential things. She will, too. Oh, it's such a beautiful world—such a beautiful world! Billy loves me—really! Billy's a millionaire, and I'm a pauper. Oh, I'm glad, glad, glad!"

She caressed the paper that had rendered the world such a goodly place to live in—caressed it tenderly and rubbed her cheek against it. That was Margaret's way of showing affection, you know; and I protest it must have been very pleasant for the paper. The only wonder was that the ink it was written in didn't turn red with delight.

Then she read it through again, for sheer enjoyment of those beautiful, incomprehensible words that disinherited her. How lovely of Uncle Fred! she thought. Of course, he'd forgiven Billy; who wouldn't? What beautiful language Uncle Fred used! quite prayer-bookish, she termed it.

Then she gasped. The will in Billy's favor was dated a week earlier than the one they had found in the secret drawer. It was worthless, mere waste paper. At the last Frederick R. Woods' pride had conquered his love.

"Oh, the horrid old man!" Margaret wailed; "he's left me everything he had! How dare he disinherit Billy! I call it rank impertinence in him. Oh, boy dear, dear, dear boy!" Miss Hugonin crooned, in an ecstasy of tenderness and woe. "He found this first will in one of the other drawers, and thought he was the rich one, and came in a great whirl of joy to ask me to marry him, and I was horrid to him! Oh, what a mess I've made of it! I've called him a fortune-hunter, and I've told him I love another man, and he'll never, never ask me to marry him now. And I love him, I worship him, I adore him! And if only I were poor——"

Ensued a silence. Margaret lifted the two wills, scrutinized them closely, and then looked at the fire interrogatively.

"It's penal servitude for quite a number of years," she said. "But, then, he really couldn't tell any one, you know. No gentleman would allow a lady to be locked up in jail. And if he knew—if he knew I didn't and couldn't consider him a fortune-hunter, I really believe he would——"

Whatever she believed he would do, the probability of his doing it seemed highly agreeable to Miss Hugonin. She smiled at the fire in the most friendly fashion, and held out one of the folded papers to it.

"Yes," said Margaret, "I'm quite sure he will."

There I think we may leave her. For I have dredged the dictionary, and I confess I have found no fitting words wherewith to picture this inconsistent, impulsive, adorable young woman dreaming brave dreams in the firelight, of her lover and of their united future.

I should only bungle it. You must imagine it for yourself.

It is a pretty picture, is it not?—with its laughable side, perhaps; under the circumstances, whimsical, if you will; but very, very sacred. For she loved him with a clean heart, loved him infinitely.

Let us smile at it—tenderly—and pass on.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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