

HAWK in the WIND

By
Helen Topping Miller
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WNY Service.

All the way back to the mill she kept her eyes grimly on the road. Willis sat silent, but his heart was leaping wildly, and a little smile twisted the corner of his mouth.

She was built, fine and gallant and loyal, as a silver sword. She was cut from a golden width of the fabric of dream. For a dream like that a man could wait a lifetime—joyfully!

Virgie went to the mill that Saturday morning, with her face set like the face on a monument.

She had argued with herself through long hours of darkness. Why was she being such a fool, being thrown into a tense panic by Wallace Withers? She could mill pulp and she could sell it; she had proved that. She could borrow money and pay it back. She could manage humble men and make important ones respect her. Even if Wallace bought up her notes, she could pay. She had kept her credit good. The mill would run on.

David would have laughed at Wallace Withers—or smiled his dry, one-sided smile, for David had seldom laughed. He had been intent and



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grave and fiery, like Marian. But he fought an army of enemies and came through. His mill should run on.

Very high-headed, Virgie climbed the steps of her office. And there Lucy Fieldis looked at her with a tragic face.

"The West Virginia people have canceled," she said.

"What?"

"The West Virginia order—they canceled by wire this morning."

"But — their stuff is already milled! It's practically ready to go. What reason did they give?"

"None at all. It was a very short message. They canceled." Lucy was wan-faced. Her fingers were uncertain as she opened a trade paper and indicated a paragraph. "I just saw this. Do you think it could have had anything to do with it?"

Virgie scanned the column. The paragraph Lucy pointed out, was headed, "MORGAN PEOPLE IN TROUBLE." The Morgan mills, so the type stated, were experiencing serious labor trouble, the outgrowth of a shooting affair on the property of the company. Mr. Gordon Cragg, prominent financier and timber magnate, so the story ran, had been shot and dangerously wounded by Thomas Pruitt, superintendent of the Morgan plant.

"Somebody ought to show this to Tom," Virgie commented, flatly. "I don't suppose anybody ever called him Thomas in his life."

"But we depended on that West Virginia order," Lucy worried. "They've never canceled before—I just looked through the files. They've been buying from us for eighteen years. We depend on that order for the tax money."

"I'll have to go up there, I suppose—and argue with them," Virgie said patiently. "Payne and Hooper and Withers, et al., are getting in some fancy underground work."

"How can you go—with Tom's trial starting Monday?"

"Young Daniels will have to go," Virgie sat erect again. At least here was something that could be done. Something definite and on the offensive. "Go get him, Lucy."

While Lucy was gone across the yard, Virgie thumbed the mail over swiftly, scarcely seeing the type that her eye ran over. On Monday, Tom would go on trial before a jury

"And any sentence will kill him—so it would be kinder to hang him and be done with it," she had answered that.

What troubled her most was her own ineffectiveness. She had been fiercely boastful, she had defied the world, as the Irish are so prone to do, she had talked widely and magnificently about saving Tom—of saving the mill and being undismayed by Wallace Withers, and now every recurring blow left her more helpless, more inarticulate, futile, pathetic.

It was a sickening spectacle for a proud woman, to contemplate. It was worse for an honest woman who could not bring herself to stoop to alibis. Up to now, she had been able to do nothing to stem this tide of disaster. Somehow, of course, Payne and Hooper and Wallace Withers were behind this newest catastrophe. She gave Wallace credit—he was overlooking nothing.

Virgie regarded her chemist, her mouth drawn severely straight.

"For a working man," she said, "you're very elegant, this morning!"

Daniels wore his good clothes, a clean shirt, a jaunty tie. He was a trifle pale, but he faced her coolly.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Morgan," he said. "But I'm not working today. I was checking over the laboratory. I am resigning my position with you—today!"

Virgie let the old octagonal clock tick off a measured minute, while she looked him up and down. Lucy stood like a statue, white as death, motionless, hardly breathing.

"So—they got you, too, did they?" Virgie said, presently.

Daniels flushed, then the blood drained out of his face.

"My decision has not been influenced by anyone," he said, stiffly. "I have felt—for some time—that I did not have your confidence, Mrs. Morgan. Chemistry is a responsibility—a serious responsibility. I feel that I don't wish to assume that responsibility any longer in a plant where I'm not—trusted."

"Who distrusts you?" Virgie queried, her eyes as frigid as his.

He was manifestly uncomfortable. Lucy drew a little strangling breath, her hands at her throat.

"You — were very plainly suspicious of me, Mrs. Morgan—when we lost that pulp. And your attitude yesterday—and before that—"

"How much," Virgie cut in, "did Wallace Withers pay you to make that speech?"

Daniels glared, affrontedly.

"I have not been paid—certainly not by Mr. Withers."

Virgie reached for the telephone.

"Call Julia Gill for me, Mildred," she said into it evenly. "Julia? This is Virgie Morgan. Was Wallace Withers in town last night? Oh, he came there to see Mr. Daniels, did he? Much obliged. No—that's all." She hung up.

Stanley Daniels' eyes were blazing.

"I think I have a right to my own affairs," he said, "on my own time—without being spied on—or censored!"

"All the right in the world," Virgie's tone was wooden. "The right to cheat and do sabotage—and destroy the people who have depended on you! The right to disappoint people who look for something decent and square in this younger generation."

"I haven't cheated! I didn't touch that pulp—oh, what's the use? You wouldn't believe me anyway!"

"No," Virgie was patient, "probably I wouldn't. I'm just a stupid old woman. I believe what I see—and what I hear. I see you deserting me—and I hear that you've been in communication with the man who brags that he's going to ruin me. I add up two and two in my naive outmoded way—and I get a plain answer. Now—I'll tell you something, Daniels. I did suspect you—at first I overcame it—because I want to believe in young people. I called you in here just now to send you off on an errand of importance to me—because I hoped you'd be glad of the chance to prove yourself to me. But—all that's ended. Talk is no use. You can check out. Take the inventory over, Lucy—and check him out."

"You'd better check carefully," Daniels flared. "Probably I've been stealing from you, too!"

"The person you've been stealing from," said Virgie, with a heavy patience, "is yourself!"

"Oh, please—I can't!" faltered Lucy.

"I said—go over and check him out," repeated Virgie, evenly, "and remember—all the tragedies aren't played in the Little Theatre!"

At the laboratory door, Lucy turned on Daniels a livid face.

"How can you do a thing like this—to her?"

He flushed angrily. "What chance did I have? I could have explained—but she wouldn't have listened. You heard her give me the third degree—telephoning Mrs. Gill!"

"You could have explained what? What was, there to explain?"

"I could have explained why Withers was there. He—framed me. He would have ruined me. He led me on to talk—he got information out of me—formulas—"

"You told him what to put in a digester to ruin a batch of pulp!" Lucy was all white scorn. "You were just talking—to be interesting—because he made you think you were important. And then when he took the information he got from you—and hired those low-down Spair boys to do the work, probably—"

"How do you know?"

"I don't know. But—it adds up, doesn't it? And then he threatened you—I think you're cheap!" she blazed at him. "I was in love with you! I—suffered because you didn't care! It—makes me sick now when I think about it."

"Hadden't you better get at that inventory?" he said, racking up test-tubes. "I'm leaving town. I don't intend sticking around here forever."

But Lucy did not stir. She stood, with the flat book under her arm, her eyes purple-black and thunderous.

"You're not going!" she slashed. "You're not going through with this. You're going to stick here—and be something—a man!"

"Sorry—I'm going."

She held the latch of the door. She was vibrant all over, like a small bouquet.

"You're not going! There's the mill! I—despise you! When I think what a fool I've been—crying—over you—I never want to see you again. But—there's the mill. It has to go on. It has to go on. And we can't run without sulphides and magnesium and the right formulas. You're not going—because I'm going to lock you in!"

Daniels jumped too late.

She had swung with the heavy door, crashed it shut, and he heard the heavy padlock he had himself put on, clack fast on the outside.

"You're not going, Stanley Daniels," she shrieked at him through the panels. "You can sit in there and make up your mind to that! You can make up your mind to—be a man! You're going to stay in there—till I get good and ready to let you out!"

He dragged at the door, beat unavailingly on the heavy panels. He swore at her.

"You crazy little fool!" he shouted. "You crazy devil!"

But she was gone. He kicked the panels in wrath, but the effort was wasted and he knew it.

Heavily he sank on the greasy stool, watched an upset bottle of acid trickle slowly to the floor.

Who would have thought that quiet, mousy little thing had so much fire in her? His anger relaxed a little. He had been sick, shaken and miserable with a mixture of shame and dread all night. Toward dawn he had decided that the only thing to do was to leave town.

But now his neck stiffened a little, his jaw set. So—she thought he was yellow, did she—the spunky little devil? He'd show her—he went to the door and gave it a resounding kick.

(Continued Next Week)

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WHAT YOUR MOUTH TELLS ABOUT YOUR CHARACTER

Dr. Donald A. Laird, psychologist, writing in The American Weekly with the September 14 issue of Detroit Sunday Times, tells how, although you may not utter a sound, your lips more eloquently express ability, emotions and chances for success than words, or even your eyes, might possibly indicate . . . and tells how to read them. Be sure to get The Detroit Sunday Times this week and every week.

DAMAGE HIDDEN FROM TRAVELLERS

Gestapo agents now wait at railway stations for the arrival of neutrals in cities which have been bombed by the R.A.F., according to a neutral business man who has just left Germany.

The Gestapo agent accompanied this visitor to his hotel when he arrived in Hamburg, cross-questioned him about the purpose of his visit, and when he found that the visitor intended to call on various Hamburg firms told him that he must not leave the hotel.

"What about my business calls?" asked the visitor.

"Your clients will have to call on you," he was told. And they did. This elaborate method was adopted to prevent the visitor seeing any of the damage the R.A.F. had done to Hamburg.



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