

CHRISTABEL

by

PEARL BELLAIRS



CHAPTER V PRISONER'S PROGRESS

Perhaps it was the hope that her appeal might succeed which kept Christabel alive and sensitive when she would otherwise have fallen into an apathy of misery during the first month of her sentence.

Grey passages, rows of locked cells, low or wretched faces about one; always the fear that one might do something contrary to the regulations that one had been told nothing about. Such as when they first put her into her cell, and she took down the furniture piled in the middle of it and placed it about as conveniently as she could.

Two days later the warden said roughly: "Wot's all this stuff doing put round the cell like this?" "Why?" Christabel was puzzled and frightened. "Don't 'whay' me!"

The woman went away, leaving Christabel to wonder what was going to happen. The warden came back with a piece of chalk; and with an occasional order: "Get that out o' the way!" and "Shift that!" she chalked on the floor the regulation pattern for the arrangement of cell furniture.

Christabel put it all in order. Such incidents seemed enormous to her tortured mind. How was she to have known? Why couldn't they tell her what the regulations were?

Later the warden adopted a more kindly manner. There was nothing very dreadful about the prison; only an extreme, unrelieved dreariness of time passing in an ugly, unhappy place.

It was a shock, but not a very terrible one when the Court of Appeal found her sentence in accordance with the evidence, and her appeal was dismissed. She had come to believe in her own ill-luck.

As she settled down the heavy work in the laundry became an antidote to depression and her sense of injustice, and she sorted out the facts of the disaster.

Keith was dead, and it was no use blaming him. He had not taken it lightly; the last scene on the ship still gave her dreams from which she wakened at night in a sweat of horror. Craigie was a mere, miserable, terrified little crook. Henry Goring had behaved according to his ideas of right, and the promptings of his sister, a jealous, embittered old woman.

But Hewitson—what excuse was there for Hewitson? She would not have fixed any of her bitterness on him however relentless he had conducted the case against her, if there had been the suggestion that he had hoped for personal gain in doing so. But that was intolerable!

Intolerable to think that he had butchered her to get the better of Ross Barnes, and had walked out of court a more successful man than ever. Whereas Christabel became not even an individual, but part of an institution; not a name but a number; to pay and pay for his success, with days and nights of mental anguish; with hour after hour of privation, monotony and shame, when every instant of self-consciousness was an instant of despair.

In a way it was good for her to have that concrete grudge against one man. All the bitterness that might otherwise have wrecked her character was concentrated on Hewitson.

"Hard labour" consisted of work in

the laundry. In the steamy, heated atmosphere she became very thin, and the work was heavy. But she did not break down, except once, during her first three months, at a time when she was most deeply depressed and could not sleep at night.

The nights were worst. At five o'clock every evening she was locked in her cell, with nothing to do but to tell and retell the story of disasters; to cry with longing for a single friend, the understanding of one human companion. Or to lie in a dull aching apathy, because the ache was better than the pangs of active thought.

Once in that intolerable silence broken only by the dripping of water in a cistern, and a snore from the next cell, she was haunted by an impulse to scream. She grew hot all over as she lay there, thinking: "I might scream. What if I were to scream?"

And then she did scream, scream after scream, shattering the silence into a worse horror.

Like an answer, somebody far away, some soul shut into some other cell, nerves snapped by the sound, screamed too.

Then after that silence. Nothing but her own sobbing, agonized breaths. Nobody came. Darkness. Terror.

Next day in the laundry she fell down in a state of collapse. She was allowed to lie in bed for three days. After which the prison doctor told her:

"There's nothing wrong with you. This won't do you any good. Back to work you go."

So she was sent back to the laundry; and she realized vaguely that it was for her own good. It was no use thinking.

Her hands became red and thick from handling the hot, newly wrung cloths; and sometimes she would cool her stew at the cell window, which she could reach by standing on a chair, and skim the fat to rub her par-boiled fingers.

There were no mirrors in the cells. But there was one, carefully covered with wire netting in case anyone should try to break it, in the bathroom.

Three weeks after she went into prison Christabel noticed it; she looked at herself, saw a frightened face peering back at her through the netting; and for as much as six months never looked into it again. When she did—it was April by then, and there was a windy blue sky over the exercise yard—she hardly recognized herself. Her face was so thin and so pale, her hair so straight and lank. She looked older, older; that was her first thought. She saw all her wrecked and wasted life gazing out of her own dark eyes, and turned away in despair.

CHAPTER VI BEAUTY BEHIND BARS

But those were the early days. There comes an end of the ability to suffer. After some time there came a change. What saved her was a sense of her own innocence; the realization of her own strength to endure. It was a gradual change, becoming conscious, perhaps, from the moment when she scattered some crumbs to the sparrows through the cell window, and saw a cross glittering on a distant church spire and it seemed like a sign; when, with a sort of coincidence, the warden who was sometimes so brutal, smuggled a bar of chocolate in to her with her evening cocoa.

The same warden went about one day with a red and swollen face. Her

son had died in Canada.

"I was 'ard on 'im!" said the warden to Christabel, sniffing wretchedly and not caring who saw her. Perhaps she suddenly felt equal in guilt with the prisoners. "I was 'ard on that boy!"

As Christabel grew more aware of the grey, half-muted life inside the prison, and learned the stories of the unfortunate, abnormal, or merely feeble-minded women about her, her sense of her own comparative integrity gave her strength. The havoc of her life was all without; there was no real ruin within; perhaps only a greater strength from suffering and experience.

She glimpsed her face in the mirror in passing one cold morning, when she was thinking of these things—surprised herself with a glimpse of beauty. After that she could look into the mirror with detached interest.

She saw there a face no longer tortured-looking with nervous strain. A pale face with dark eyes alight under mild lids, and subtle shadows under the cheek bones. Someone who was quite different from the girl Christabel. A woman. A woman who, as she knew everything and yet was still herself—because she was fundamentally innocent.

The thought of going out troubled her more and more. She had assumed that she must sink, that she would find an occupation scrubbing workhouse floors, perhaps; she could not believe that she would ever take her place again in the world as an ordinary middle-class woman.

"You must make the effort," said the chaplain.

"But how shall I be able to conceal where I've been? How can I go back?"

"Prisoners go back every day," said the chaplain. "To their old homes, and their old occupations!"

She was glad that at least there was no old home to face.

Her mother had written to her regularly; but as Christabel "would understand," it was too difficult for her to visit the prison.

The Haye's pitied Christabel, but were sorer for themselves. There was the disgrace to be lived down.

"Poor Christabel!" Mrs. Haye would say, half tearfully.

Mr. Haye would tighten his lips, so that she was afraid to say more; it seemed indecent to have mentioned the matter.

The problem of what to do with Christabel when she came out had to be faced. His dignity would not allow Mr. Haye to leave her to the care of the Prisoners' Aid Society. It was usual for prisoners to be sent into the country to some women's rest camp or convalescent home after their discharge, but Christabel wrote to her mother:

"They want me to go to a home for three weeks, but I feel I can't face it. Any more institutional life after coming out would drive me mad. If I may borrow the twenty-five pounds you offer to give me, I will look around for a job as soon as I come out."

A respectable boarding house was found for her to go to for three weeks in Richmond; and Mr. Haye arranged for her mother to take her from the prison to Richmond in a hired car; after a fortnight's rest she was to go to an employment agency recommended by the prison chaplain, and try to get a job.

(To be Continued)

Province Shirks Relief of Single and Transients

(From Toronto Telegram)
With the resumption of seasonal employment in the spring, it is natural that efforts should be made to move young men out of the relief ranks. But, as Mayor Day has pointed out, it is unreasonable that the Province should take the stand that after March 31st it will make no contribution towards the relief of this class. The city's 2,200 single unemployed and 630 transients cannot be turned out before winter has fairly gone, nor can the city undertake the entire cost of providing for them.

The province's responsibility in this respect is just as great in April as it is in March, and unless it intends to launch a work scheme before the usual spring operations open, to arbitrarily close its purse at the end of March is a rather callous disregard of its obligations. Its only possible excuse for such an action would be that the municipalities will take care of these unfortunates and will see that they don't suffer. But that, as the province knows, the municipalities are in no position to do.

When Premier Hepburn got back from Australia with news of the lower taxation on property there and the stimulating effect on the building industries and business generally of such lower taxation, it was hoped that there would be an end of the unloading of provincial burdens on to the shoulders of the municipalities which has been so familiar in Ontario. These burdens rest almost entirely upon real estate, and have had a paralyzing effect. The Queen's Park order, however, makes it look as though the old system is to continue, for the present at any rate. But if the province slips out ostentatiously from under its responsibilities and piles them upon the municipal taxpayer, it won't forget to cheer him by the reminder on his tax bill that his taxes are one mill less by reason of a provincial subsidy—even if that subsidy was taken out of the municipal coffers by the provincial assumption of the income tax revenue.

of Canadian Industries Limited. The competition calls for a proficiency rating of 75 per cent, and provides training in revolver shooting for every member of every force. Tests have to be repeated every six months and constables scoring a minimum of 75 per cent of the possible total are entitled to wear an arm badge of crossed revolvers. The revolver training is part of a nation-wide movement that in recent years has changed police protection from a haphazard affair to a science. In addition to undergoing a training in the care and handling of firearms, says the writer, a constable today has to prove himself physically fit, well educated and mentally alert before he can take the beat.

Policemen Practicing For Marksmanship Tests

Hundreds of Canadian policemen are participating in the Dominion Marksmen Mass Efficiency Revolver Competition, says a writer in the current issue of the C-I-L Oval, the magazine

Blairmore Enterprise—Jackie says, "a spinster is a bachelor's wife."

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Bargain coach excursion tickets will be valid on Trains 2 and 46 and their connections, Thursday, March 16. Passengers who use our Train No. 2 will connect at North Bay with C.P.R. Train 2, leaving 8.20 p.m. same date. Passengers who use train 46 will arrange their own transfer to North Bay C. P. Depot and take C. P. Train 8, leaving at 1.00 a.m. Friday, March 17th.

Tickets are valid to return, leaving destination point not later than C. P. Train No. 1 from Windsor Street Station, Montreal 10.15 p.m. Sunday, March 19th and connecting at North Bay with our train 1 at 12.45 p.m. Monday, March 20—EXCEPT passengers from points north of Porquis MUST leave not later than C. P. Train 7, from Montreal 7.50 p.m. Sunday, March 19, to connect at North Bay with our Train 47, Monday, March 20th.

Tickets will not be honoured on Trains 49 and 50 "The Northland." Tickets destined Quebec and Ste. Anne de Beaupre not good on Semi-Streamlined Trains 350 and 352 to Quebec and 349 and 351 from Quebec, but good on all other trains between Montreal and Quebec.

Tickets good in coaches only. No Baggage Checked Children 5 years of age, and under 12, when accompanied by guardian. HALF FARE

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Most Domestic Homicides Come from Minor Causes

Domestic quarrels over trifles are responsible for more than three times as many slayings as gangster killings, the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company has found from an analysis of 500 homicides, says Science Service.

The domestic quarrels that led to 11.6 per cent of the murders were not triangle cases. Jealousy or thwarted love accounted for 17.6 per cent of the killings, but these came third on the list. Second greatest cause of killing was quarrelling over money or property, sometimes as little as 25 cents being involved.

The disputes over domestic or family affairs that led to murder were of the following type: "An irate husband beats and kills his wife because his dinner is not ready on time; a drunken youth shoots his mother for renegeing with him about drinking to excess; a man shoots a friend after an argument over being the last to be served a glass of beer in a neighbour's home."

The lesson to be learned from this study of 500 murders is summed up in the report as follows:

"Practically all killings arise under the stress of emotions of fear, hatred, anger, jealousy or greed. And, absurd as it may seem, by far the majority are due to disputes or quarrels about trifles. Surely under such conditions it should be possible to reduce the number of homicides to the point reached in other civilized countries."

North Bay Nugget:—A Vermont farmer believes that his cows produce better milk to music and has installed a portable radio out in the barn. Perhaps he's even thinking of raising his Grade A milk to Grade A-sharp.