CHRISTABEL

by

PEARL BELLAIRS

CHAPTER XXI

HEWITSON'S "HARD"

Christabel moved with her inimitably poised step to the window, and looked down on the rain-wet trees in the square.

"It's charming," she said. "The whole outlook! And the room, for a man's room, is extremely pleasant!"

"'For a man's room'! Men as a rule have a better taste than women, when they bother to exercise it!"

He stood smiling at her, studying the delicately pencilled black and white of her beauty, and appreciating it in every nerve.

He had given his hat to his man and asked for afternoon tea as they came in.

"Sensible fellow!" he said. "The fire is laid!"

He stooped to light it.

"Oh, don't light the fire," said Christabel. "It isn't as cold as that."

But he had already done so, and the flames were licking upwards.

Christabel moved about the room, looking at the prints on the walls; her movements were restless and her manner constrained.

He was a little constrained, too, but when she came to his writing table he found something to talk about.

He showed her a large pile of odd-sized papers, roughly bound, and a smaller, neater stack of manuscript.

"Here is the work of years," he said, pointing to the larger pile. "Notes—all the data I have collected since I first took a practical interest in psychology. And here—also the work of years, three years to be precise—is the theory I've based on the practical investigation."

He laid his hand on the smaller stack of manuscript.

Christabel came nearer to look. He went on explaining, with a smile which attempted to hide the importance, to him, of what he was telling her:

"This is my own contribution to the fund of knowledge of criminal psychology! Put together with three years of unremitting labour. Ready for the typist in another few months now, and after that for publication; and after that it will be famous among psychologists throughout the world. Which means, of course, Christabel, that very few people will ever hear of it——!" He ended, with a laugh.

"Three years!" said Christabel, and glanced at him with a faint smile, and such an extraordinary look that he was puzzled.

"Why?"

"Nothing," said Christabel, half turning away. "Don't you think three years is a long time?"

"Are you suggesting it wasn't worth it?"

He looked nettled; but her tone was amply convincing as she said:

"Oh, no! No, not for a moment! It must be a triumph for you to have finished it—I'm sure you feel it is!"

"I feel I have at last done something that I really wanted to do," said Hewitson. He moved away from the table, and she said:

"Do you think it's quite safe to leave the manuscript there like that?"

"Safe?"

"Well, something might happen to it—suppose someone stole it?"

"What?" Hewitson laughed. "Who on earth would want to steal a treatise on psychology?"

"Perhaps—perhaps somebody who has less to show for three years labour!"

"Three years 'hard,' do you mean?" he said, with a quickness of perception that startled her. "I can't imagine a burglar being attracted by it—except to light fires with. No, it may be the child of my intellect and dearer to me than rubies, but I'm under no illusion about the fact that ninety-nine persons out of a hundred would pay to have it taken off their hands!"

Christabel smiled, and turned away as the manservant brought in the tea.

She sat by the fire and poured it out. Hewitson became quiet, chastened, almost domesticated; she felt his eyes on her, watching her movement. The light in the room was dimmed by the clouds over the sky, and the fire threw a glow on their faces.

HOW'S THE MEMORY

Hewitson talked about his sister, pausing to ask first:

"You remember Molly?"

"Yes."

He looked a trifle surprised, and told her:

"She and Sanders are going to be married next week. At some church in Chelsea; Molly told me the name of it, but I can't remember it. Sanders wanted me to be best man, but thank heaven I've got out of that, because it seems that I have to give Molly away."

Christabel saw him glance at her, and knew that he was wondering whether she recollected what had happened about Sanders. She deliberately looked as vague as she could, and merely remarked, with mock seriousness:

"I suppose you will have to try to remember where the church is before the time comes."

"Yes, but I expect someone will tell me."

He always affected an inability to keep anything which did not interest him in his head.

"I was once invited to go to the races with a party," he said. I execrate horse racing, but for some reason I said I would go. And I did. But I faithfully drove to Epsom instead of to Goodwood. You can imagine my relief when I found I had arrived at a race course where there was neither a race meeting nor a party. However, I shouldn't laugh at it; it's the most acute form of escapism there is to forget what one wants to forget."

The manservant came to take away the tea table. When he had gone, Howitson, conscious of Christabel's silence, the aloofness about her which kept him at a greater distance than he meant to keep, said:

"You don't look yourself. How are you feeling?"

"Fairly well," said Christabel, evasively, feeling tracked down and near to being trapped, by the searching of his eyes.

"You're paler than usual, and you've changed. You're more as you used to look!" He knitted his brows and asked abruptly: "How's the memory?"

"Coming back," said Christabel. "I remember—more now!"

She leaned back in her chair and looked up at him for he had risen to light a cigarette, and was standing over her.

"Do you? What do you remember?" His tone was kinder, softer than she had ever heard it.

"Things," said Christabel evasively. "Just things!"

He did not ask her what they were. He put one hand on the back of her chair, leaning over her; then threw away his newly lighted cigarette, and said:

"Let me see what I can do for that headache!"

He sat down on the arm of her chair and put his hand on her forehead.

Christabel's heart beat heavily, her breath caught by expectation, emotion, she hardly knew what.

"Look at the fire!" he told her.

She found breath to say faintly:

"Don't hypnotise me—I won't be hypnotised!"

But his face only leaned nearer over hers, and he said, almost in a whisper:

"Look at the fire!"

She obeyed. She looked as though relaxed, but in reality every muscle in her body was rigid, years of resentment and indignation rose in resistance against his attempt to impose his will.

"You feel very sleepy, don't you?" His voice, conversational at first, gradually dropped to its hypnotic tone. "You feel sleepy, you feel very sleepy, you want to close your eyes . . . Your eyelids are too heavy for you to keep them open."

His voice went on in a gentle monotone; not quite the usual voice he used for hypnosis, it shook a little, and fell with the softer murmur of affection. In spite of herself Christabel was soothed; though she did not intend to go to sleep for him, some nerve in her quivered, and the tears came into her eyes under their closed lids.

"You're very sleepy . . . sleep, you're going to sleep . . . "

A pause, and then his voice said:

"No, you're not asleep, but never mind! You love me . . . You love me Christabel, and you're going to marry me!"

Christabel opened her eyes abruptly, and stared up at him. The glow from the fire lighted his face a little in the shadow, looking down at her. He smoothed the hair on her forehead with his forefinger, saying still in the same low voice:

"Well? Are you?"

REVENGE AT LAST!

A hush in the room; only the whisper of the flames in the hearth and the murmur of London outside. For a moment there was a hush in Christabel's heart too; the calm of an emotion too deep for tears, too deep even to be understood.

And then, while the room was still so quiet, while Hewitson sat without moving or speaking, gazing down at her pale, enigmatic face, with its two glimmering dark eyes, the calm within Christabel broke. With a heave, like the rising wave in her consciousness, and then another, the pent up emotions of three years burst in her soul, shaking her with grief, wildly demanding expression.

Her breast rose convulsively as she drew a deep breath.

And then the sharp whirr—whirr—whirr of the telephone ringing in the hall smote suddenly on their silence.

"Dash!" said Hewitson.

He rose from the arm of her chair, and stood with his back to the hearth, a little pale, half smiling. His man tapped on the door, and entered diffidently:

"Sir Bernard Trapper on the phone, sir."

"Very well, Sims. Excuse me, Christabel!"

Hewitson walked out, and the manservant followed him, closing the door.

The moment she was alone Christabel sprang up from her chair. She took a short step towards the door, then turned again, as though goaded into frantic movement by the wild conflict of her emotions—for there was a conflict, a sort of melting grief, a glimpse of possible joy which checked the old hatred and resentment for an instant.

But the sense of wrong which she had brooded over for so long during her prison torment surged up and overpowered everything else. She was possessed by the emotions she had indulged too bitterly, a helpless automaton bent upon the destruction of the whole world and herself if need be—only to be revenged.

There was Hewitson's manuscript on the table, the fruit of a long labour and ambition. There was the fire. And in her head was still that idea that had come into it earlier that afternoon.

She could hear the murmur of his voice over the phone. Another minute—two perhaps—but enough to rob him of his three years' labour, even though he could not be robbed three years of life!

Her hands grasped the neat pile of manuscript; she thrust it under her arm, clutched the pile of case notes. The room rang faintly with the ringing in her ears, and looked dark as she crossed it to the fire, loose sheets falling from the notes and fluttering behind her.

She threw the manuscript on to the fire first, but it slithered off the grate, collapsing in the hearth, even as she realized that the main part would take minutes to burn. Crouching in the hearth she snatched up the thickest bulk of paper and divided it, wrenching it apart from the clips which held it, and applied a smaller bundle, corner down, to catch the flames. Edges blackened, words curled away, vanished in smoke; flames roared up the chimney, glared in her eyes.

On one of the writhing sheets Hewitson's writing seemed to start towards her in the moment of extinction.

"Case No. 10. Mrs. D., a charwoman, aged forty-five, suffering from a minor epilepsy . . . "

The rest of the sentence vanished in flame.

The sight of that sentence pulled Christabel together, brought her with a sudden shock to the full realization of what she was doing.

This stuff she was burning was all concerned with the alleviation of suffering, the curing of sick minds. It had value to other people besides Hewitson. Despair overwhelmed her—her purpose broke.

She snatched the papers out of the fire, beat out the flaming edges in the hearth. Two-thirds of them were badly scorched, but still decipherable, only a dozen sheets completely destroyed.

Beating out the last flames, she threw down the blackened sheets on to the unburned remainder of the manuscript where it lay wrenched to pieces on the floor beside her. Not much was burned; the rest could be put in order again.

She rose slowly to her feet, sick with reaction, with weak knees, and stood trembling. Her burned fingers throbbed and stung, but she hardly noticed the pain. She accepted her own weakness in not being able to take that particular revenge. The mistake was in having started to do it, not in stopping——!

She tried to get her breath, to strengthen herself.

She heard the click of the receiver going down, a step outside, and Hewitson came in.

(To be continued)

Highlights of the Porcupine Camp

Sanitation and Comfort Stressed. Athletics Featured.

The following is the fourth in the series of articles on "Highlights of the Porcupine Camp," by Sidney Norman, mining editor of The Globe and Mail:

Sanitation and Comfort Stressed

No record of the Porcupine camp would be complete without more or less extended reference to the efforts made by all operating companies to render life for the miners and staffs as satisfying and comfortable as possible. The advances made in the years since this busted writer first took up pick and shovel for a living have been great indeed. Back over forty years ago, at an elevation of 7,500 above sea level in the Selkirk Mountains of British Columbia, we thought three-tier bunks made of rough lumber were fairly swanky and up-to-date. Mattresses were culled from the fir trees and one always rolled his own blankets. I can now and then detect a faint whiff of the bunkhouse odor even now. Today, in the Porcupine and other camps of the country, sterilization-sanitation is the order of the day. The miner comes from the cage to the dry room, strips to his birthday suit, whisks his digging clothes upward by pulley rope, where hot air plays upon them from a central heating plant. From there he goes to the showers, tepid at first, gradually increasing in temperature and finally tapering down to cold as he comes out. Then on into the dressing room, where his street clothes are neatly kept in his own steel locker. When the miner is through with this performance, he is clean, spick-and-span, ready for the dance if need be, or the movie. It's only those of us who knew other ways and other times who can really appreciate the change.

Athletics Are Featured

Athletics are not overlooked by any means, as each big mine helps to support hockey, baseball, badminton, tennis and football teams, and there are some pretty good ones in Porcupine. The skating rink at Schumacher, a gift of McIntyre Porcupine Mines, is one of the finest in Canada; in fact, as good as the Maple Leaf Gardens, on a smaller scale. It seats 1,700 comfortably and will hold 2,500 at a pinch. During the past season, the first since the rink was completed, the facilities of the building have been strained at many games, where one sees hockey as good as professionals can dish up. Under the rink roof is a splendid community meeting hall, fitted with stage, with several conference rooms for smaller gatherings. A charming young lady teaches the young how to skate and one can see more than one coming Sonja Heine whirling around. An innovation for the boys at McIntyre is an ultra violet-ray bath, through which, after donning goggles, they travel by moving sidewalk in fifty-three seconds and thereby gain what is said to be equal to two and one-half hours of sunshine. Their lunch buckets, too, move along a conveyor belt from the dry room to the dressing room. Of course there is no suspicion of high-grading, but if there were, the custodian of the buckets at the receiving end would have something to say about it.

A Young Man's Camp

Mining is a young man's occupation and Porcupine a young man's camp. You'd be surprised at the number of fine looking young fellows you meet in the bowels of the earth handling a muck stick, running a drill or loading a car. Many a time I have stopped to talk to them and often in answer to a question have I been told that this or that fellow graduated from mining school at Queen's, Toronto, or McGill. As to the staffs, they present a fair cross-section of the great mining schools of Canada, with a sprinkling here and there of graduates from the other side of the line—Houghton, Rolla, South Dakota, Boston Teck, Columbia, Washington or California. There is no finer, cleaner, more competent bunch of young fellows anywhere, and the future of the mining industry of Canada will be quite safe in their hands. I should like to take this opportunity of thanking those who helped me through the intricacies of the mines I visited on a recent trip and extend to each an invitation to look me up when in Toronto. Life is indeed full for youth in Porcupine.

Labour Turnover Light

The labor turnover in Porcupine is light and becoming less and less each year. That may be partially do to the scarcity of jobs in a general way, but in my opinion more to the treatment of employees and provisions for their comfort and future. There is always a long waiting list at each of the producing mines in the area, particularly those that are near towns and have instituted pension, health and other service plans. My understanding is that there are about 1,000 unemployed in the district, but I imagine a goodly part of that number are of a class that could not be absorbed by the mines. Another feature of the Porcupine situation is the large percentage of British or naturalized employees. At the three big mines the proportion is around 70 per cent. and so far as can be observed any agitation among laborites is largely confined to Timmins itself, and is not encouraged to any extent by present mine employees. Details concerning plans instituted by Dome Mines for its employees will be presented in the final part of this series.

Doctor Cancels Debts

The town of Bateman, Sask., will share the fortune of its Dr. H. A. Woodside. He won $50,000 in the Irish sweepstakes and forthwith cancelled the biggest part of debts owed by his patients.

Find Frozen Body of Baby in Handbag Near Sudbury

A group of children playing about a farm at Hanmer near Sudbury some days ago were horrified to to find the body of a dead baby in a handbag. The children had noticed the handbag some days before but did not then investigate it. The matter was at once turned over to the provincial police who are now seeking to learn the identity of the baby and of the person or persons throwing it where it was found. Dr. Laflamme, of Sudbury, says the baby was a new born infant that had received no care after birth, but had been allowed to die. The body when found was frozen as solid as a rock. While clues in the matter are naturally few, the people are making very earnest efforts to solve the mystery and bring those responsible to punishment. It is thought that the body of the baby (a little boy) may have been lying in the handbag where it was thrown for a month or maybe longer.

Gore Bay Recorder—Few people realize the actual coverage of even the most modest weekly paper. Not long ago an advertising expert stated that careful research had ascertained that city newspapers are read, on an average, for the space of twenty minutes, while the average home town weekly and semi-weekly newspaper has a 'reading life' of three hours to its credit. It is kept around the house for a week. That is something for both subscriber and advertiser to think about.

Toronto Telegram—Man can't outwit nature. Most everything has been made foolproof except man.