

PART FIVE

They Had the Likeness of ~~MAN~~, and Every One Had FOUR FACES

CHAPTER I

Mr. Black Shows a White Hand

Shortly after their return from an abbreviated honeymoon, George and the Dreens were invited to dinner at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Jerome Black. It came rather as a surprise to Solomon and Lena, neither of whom had a personal acquaintance with the couple, to be invited to their home.

George was telling the Dreens, "No more reason for me to be invited than you."

"You know them George," Solomon said.

"And don't forget you have been at the wedding," Lena reminded him.

"Only as a reporter," George said.

"Well, your report on the wedding didn't lower you in the eyes of Mr. Black," Solomon ventured.

"If I know Mr. Black at all," George said, "it's not his way of showing appreciation, if that's what you mean. It may be purely social, an evening with them, but I am inclined to think that Mr. Black has other reasons."

"Wondering," Solomon put a finger to his lips.

"Guess."

"Yes?"

"Well," George said, "I heard Mr. Black visited your show. Is it tr

"I believe he did. And not so long ago either."

"After the letters in the press began appearing against you?"

"That's true. But..."

"Mr. Black doesn't go around to girl shows unless there is a purpose behind it. Tonight we might hear of that purpose."

It was^a pleasantly cool ~~July evening~~ July evening, and young Mrs. Black was charming in shimmering dark-purple velvet which clung flatteringly to her trim figure. Mr. Black was brisk and volatile with nervous energy in his smartly cut gray-flannel. George thought this was a different man from the one he had encountered at the wedding. The heavy jowls weren't there. Just a massive jaw, which had mobility and expression; and a squarish chin that showed determination and a little of pugnaciousness. On the whole he appeared quite youthful in a business suit, not the stodginess of formal dress. George could now well sympathize with Miss Taylor's appraisal of him. In her young womanhood Mr. Black must have cut a prominent niche in her heart, as certainly as he must have made a handsome figure of a man.

The Black house which stood on the Eastern Promontory of Portgrave, three houses away from where the Dervins lived, had no claim ^{to} ~~on~~ pretentiousness. It was a two storey bungalow, tastefully but simply furnished, according to the wishes of the new bride.

George who disliked formal introductions said, "I give Mr. and Mrs. Dreen ~~to~~ Mr. and Mrs. Black."

bowed to the women.

The men shook hands, ~~the~~ women kissed. Mrs. Dreen said, "It would seem as if I had known you a long time, Mrs. Black."

"Arlene, please. And may I call you Lena?"

"It simplifies things, doesn't it?" said Mrs. Dreen. "George, here, always makes things simple."

"Like old friends," Mrs. Black laughed. "Have known George since school."

days."

"Hardly had time to forget him," Lena smiled, dimpling lightly.

"If I am ^{not} mistaken the women already are discussing George," Mr.

Black grinned his broad-gauged grin as he turned to the women.

"The ever popular George," Mr. Dreen said, "or should I say 'Significant George'. You tell me George."

"You wouldn't be wrong on either count," Lena said. "But why embarrass our young friend."

"I am not blushing," George said.

"Which may mean anything," Mr. Dreen said.

"Or that he doesn't give a damn! Isn't it so, George?" Mr. Black said.

The Grand-Father's clock in the corner of the front-vestibule struck a musical note. It was seven o'clock.

Mrs. Black saw George admiring the clock.

"A wedding present from my husband," she said. "Beautiful!"

"Quite an antique, I should say. And not too ornate."

"No ornament in the house to rival Mrs. Black, George."

"Yes, Mr. Black, I agree."

"Jerry!" Mrs. Black exclaimed.

"My wife is like George, Mr. Dreen, she doesn't like to hear praise - in the open."

Mr. Dreen smiled at his wife. Lena looked with admiring eyes at the newly married couple, and said nothing.

At the dinner table Mr. Black watched his young bride with glittering eyes of love and pride. Quietly efficient, she made a perfect hostess, a quality he hadn't known she possessed. Looking across to her at the opposite end of the table, he said with a twinkle in his eye: "I owe my wife another honeymoon. Had to cut this one short -"

"Oh, Jerry, please!"

In her tender feelings for her husband she was always afraid that he might say something which would demean him in the eyes of others. As yet she didn't quite know how to take this broad-guaged, somewhat blustering man. She knew there was admiration in her, even beginning of love, for his seeming faults, but she wanted to shield him from the eyes of others who might not see him as she did.

"But, darling, it's coming to you. To both of us." He smiled broadly. Understanding her confusion he wanted to reassure her that his weren't the words of a blustering fool, to put on a show, that he meant every word. Yet he couldn't forego the temptation of a bit of levity. "There is a bit of affair here that needs straightening out," he continued. "And now! Meanwhile you be a good girl and figure on how many and what continents to visit on our unfinished wedding trip."

"Can't you ever be serious with me, Jerry?"

"Never more serious, darling."

"No telling, Mrs. Dreen, when he is serious."

"I am sure he is now," Lena said.

After dinner the three men repaired to Mr. Black's den, which served as a semi-official business office when at home. They were served their after-dinner coffee.

Mr. Black lighted a cigar. ~~He rather than a smoke right now, he~~
~~declined.~~ "Better relaxation, better digestion. Would you have a cigar, Mr. Dreen? They are quite mild I assure you."

"Thank you, but I prefer a cigarette. Never could get used to the long heavy smoke of a cigar, no matter how mild. How about you, George?" he joked, "your smoking taste hasn't been violated by cigarettes."

"Well, let's keep it inviolate," George said.

"Not even a puff, George?" Mr. Black teased.

"Once, longer than I care to remember," George reminisced, "I re-

laxed in the luxuriant fragrance of a puff or two of cigar smoke, on a dare. To this day I can bring up that feeling of lightheadedness. Sort of becoming chicken-headed. So light it floats in your stomach which comes up to meet your head. And naturally the stomach revolts. And how!" There was laughter, a hearty one from Mr. Black. "I indulge a cigarette on occasion, but hope my taste will improve with time."

"Well, the cigarette to me is sort of a nervous smoke," Mr. Black was generalizing, "for me the lasting aroma of a good cigar. And it doesn't make me chicken-headed." The last was said with a grin for the benefit of George. "If it did I couldn't afford it now."

"Now it comes," George whispered to Solomon.

"A little business I want to discuss with you, gentlemen," Mr. Black went on, "but I must insist that until the time is ripe what is being said here tonight must remain in strict confidence." ~~As if~~ Instinctively, he lowered his voice. "It came to me while on our trip that Forrest had put in a bid for the now defunct Emporium Theatre. I had suspected it for some time but didn't think it'd come so soon. For obvious reasons I hadn't ~~much~~ time to put much thought ^{on} ~~to~~ it." And he smiled broadly. "Well, the deal is in my portfolio now. Forrest doesn't know it. I'll ^{yet} let him go on bidding. Every hundred that goes up will take so much out of his hide. --- Believe me, he deserves a bit of his own medicine. The skinflint! What do you think, Mr. Dreen, he wants with the old ruin?"

"I am afraid I'd make a poor guess," Solomon shrugged his shoulders.

"Maybe you have a certain suspicion in your mind. Not so? I'll define it for you." Solomon said nothing. "You had inquired from the owner about the building, isn't it so?"

"Why, yes, but that was so long ago," Solomon recalled.

"But not long enough so Forrest wouldn't remember."

"What would he do with it?"

"The Forrest conniving type is perhaps strange to you, but it is quite

obvious that he would forestall you from getting it. He'd be willing even to sacrifice a thousand or more, if it came to that, so much he hates you and Lena. But it could redound to his profit. The building could very well be converted into a storage house."

"It would serve the latter better in its present state," Solomon admitted. "Frankly, I have given up on it after going through it. Too much repair. Too costly a proposition."

"That's where I come in."

"You, Mr. Black!" Solomon wondered, "what possibly could you want with it?"

"A theatre, of course."

"You with a theatre?" George barely suppressed a grin of irony. "Imagine a business tycoon fooling around with that... that..."

"It's good business, George, I can assure you. I have thought this thing through thoroughly. And not for profit. As a pet project it'd be worth more to me than the cash invested. Like dandling a pet on your figurative knee."

"In the right hands the Emporium has possibilities," Solomon was enthusiastic.

"All right, you shall have the 'right hands'". There was a briskness to Mr. Black's voice. "My backing, your theatrical experience, and George's writing talent. An unbeatable combine -what!"

"Especially, your money," George was serious. "I know nothing of the theatre. And my 'talents', such as they are, have been requisitioned and paid for."

"Not quite enough, from what I hear."

"You know about that too, Mr. Black," George stood up.

"Know about what, George?"

"About my being taken on on the Eventide,"

"Just know about it - that's all.... I knew your father before you."

"Again my Father... Not that I resent my Father's name! But will people ever take me as I am - for myself?"

"Being the son of an illustrious father is not easy, often it is a handicap, but also often a stimulus, a help. To the right son." And Mr. Black looked calmly and appreciatively at George. "In your case the appointment was all on your own merits."

"If I had skidded on that report - the wedding - I would have been sacked on the spot," George lashed out.

"Not at all. You were entirely free."

"Your instructions?"

"No, ~~Mr.~~ Wallace's. We just happen to be friends."

"And you probably own most of the Eventide's stocks," George flared with more antagonism.

Mr. Black smiled at the new challenge. He seemed to enjoy the encounter with George. "Yes, I own a good-sized block of stocks in the Eventide, but not a controlling interest. Well, let's say not until this morning." He looked at George, a good-natured grin playing on his broad, kindly face. "Let me anticipate you, George. I absolutely do not control the thoughts, ideas of Mr. Barton, or editorial opinion, in the running of the paper. It would be profanity in the first place, for he is too good a man to interfere with. Second, I know nothing of policy. Mr. Barton and I are good friends, and I am proud of the fact that he was my first choice as editor. Well, I am not such a fool I couldn't appreciate genuine qualities?"

"But this Emporium business..." George persisted.

"Mr. Barton and I had a little conference yesterday about the scurrilous letters appearing in The Light, ^{and some in the Eventide-} concerning Mr. Dreen's show. As a result, as of this morning, I own a majority stock in the Eventide; also the Emporium, a year's lease on Damon Hall, and a year's option of the same. ~~I figured.~~ I figured, Mr. Dreen, that you'd have no use for Damon Hall after two years, on the outside."

"You are a little ahead of me, Mr. Black," Solomon said.

"Very simple. The Emporium is yours Mr. Dreen. The funds to rehabilitate it are on deposit at the Candal Bank, on your call, let's say, in three or four months. Meanwhile let the building remain in its doddering, desolate state, to be appreciated the more when it flourishes in its new splendor. People are impressed that way. This will give George time to write his play. Knowing George, Mr. Barton suggests a religious play, Biblical pageantry - sort of a Spectacular, to be produced at the Yuletide season."

George was taken with youthful enthusiasm.

"Certainly you thought of every angle, Mr. Black. Suddenly I feel adventurous. What do you think of it, Mr. Dreen?"

"Why, it's fantastic to have foreseen every detail. Even to the leasing of Damon Hall."

"Damon Hall could be Forrest's first target," Mr. Black said. "You'll need it for rehearsals before the Emporium is ready."

"Suppose I fail. With all the money you'll have invested I'd feel like charity."

"It ^Won't be a failure, and it won't be charity if it does fail. I'll have had my money's worth anyway." He paused to deliberate, as if uncertain of himself. Anchoring his gaze at the farthest corner of the room, he continued, "What I am going to say has no selfish motive. It has come to me this ^{afternoon,} and of course after the morning transection had been completed. I had a rather strange visitor at my office this ^{afternoon,} strange in the sense that my brother, only surviving kin hereabout, rarely ever comes to see me. I didn't know him at first. He wasn't his natural self - the hobo I knew. Or may be he was and therefore I didn't recognize him. I wouldn't know really which self is natural with him. For that matter, do any of us know? Maybe I'd make a natural hobo like my brother, full of adventure and worlds that don't exist - and of dreams that do exist - if I had the

skill
natural to make a good one, king of the hoboes. As you see, my brother and I try to excel in things we take up. By now you probably have an idea who my brother is. No, he wasn't the black sheep of the family. He isn't now.

"He was in his second year at Bocly when it happened. Everything seemed fine at the beginning, but gradually toward the end of the second semester I saw a change taking place in him. He was neither the brilliant student of the previous year, nor was he as assiduous in his studies. He dragged through that year barely making his grades in the second half. In mid-winter of his third year he disappeared. I know he ^{had} intimated to Dr. Capen that it was a "dose" that did it to him, but that was the last straw that broke the camel's back." He faced up to Solomon, peering at his face and beyond, in deep thought, trying to make a decision. "It's all right, Mr. Dreen, what I am going to say is probably ^{only} a slight concern to you. But here it is. My brother was ^{intensely} and unfalteringly in love with your wife, back in their high-school days. He confided in me, his older brother. And I didn't blame him. She was sweet and lovely. But my brother had no chance when Foster Forrest Second came on the scene. Fine family, fine student, captain of football, hero of baseball, and tall and handsome to boot. Bob wasn't exactly a slouch, but Foster it was. But he had never forgotten Lena. On the night of the fire, you'll remember, one stallwart stood up to the mob mouthing villifications, and to the bullies who had meant physical harm. He said that he had been in love with her himself, but that the better man had won. That much was true. What wasn't true was his claim that ~~that~~ he was a poor scamp of a working man, or a trolley man. None suspected otherwise. He is a man of parts and many personalities. He can act them all quite well. One day he is the prince of the hoboes in regal dress, the next day he is just a pauper in frayed garb. He likes the last better. He can laugh at the world ~~in the last~~ better.

"He was buoyant and spirited this afternoon, crackling and spark-

ling with witticisms, like his old self. I thought if I could strike the right chord in him he might complete the circle and come back to me. Financial assistance or advice from an older brother I knew was out, so I touched him in a tender spot: the theatre. I told him of my plans for the Emporium. He evinced interest, but from the gleam in his eyes I surmised that he already knew of my plans, and that ^{he} had come for actual facts. He'll come back. I know, even ^{if} he doesn't suspect, that he had taken part in stock companies; small parts, but he did them well. I have my sources of information. Now I want to assure you both that I had no part, and have not now, in promoting him. All the arrangements have been made before I even knew he was in Portgrave. But if he does come, he may be of help to both of you. I am making no stipulations. In the last analysis, the Emp^orium is yours, Mr. Dreen, with ^{no} strings attached. And the play, or the Spectacle, as Mr. Barton prefers to call it, all yours, George. If Bob wants to help and you find him helpful, it'll make me happy..."

Solomon hurried to say,
"I remember the scene of the fire quite well," Lena recognized him, but things moved too fast to thank him. Then she thought, maybe he didn't want to be recognized. If I know the theatre at all he carried out his part magnificently. I would be happy to have him join us."

"An old pro like him, it would be delightful," George added.

They drank their demi-tasse on it.