A FAMOUS neurologist said recently in a lecture: "We don't give our patients much medicine any more. We give them something to think about. If we can make a man put his thoughts on something constructive and shift the focus of his mind from his bodily ills, we can give him a good start on the road to health." And this is the big idea out of which the story of "The Destroying Angel" is woven. If any of our readers need to get their minds entirely off themselves and their troubles, they will find in this new serial an uncommonly strong magnet. For Louis Joseph Vance, you know, never wrote a tiresome yarn. He keeps your mind electrified and your interest eager from start to finish.

CHAPTER I

—I—

Doom.

"Then I'm to understand there's no hope for me?"

"I'm afraid not..." Greyerson said reluctantly, sympathy in his eyes.

"None whatever." The verdict was thus brusquely emphasized by Hartt, one of the two consulting specialists.

Having spoken, he glanced at his watch, then at the face of his colleague, Bushnell, who contented himself with a tolerant waggle of his head, apparently meant to imply that the subject of their deliberations really must be reasonable.

Whitaker looked quickly from one to the other of his three judges, acutely sensitive to the dread significance to be detected in the expression of each.

Failing to extract the least glimmering of hope from the attitude of any one of them, he drew a long breath, unconsciously bracing himself in his chair.

"It's funny," he said with his nervous smile—"hard to realize, I mean. You see, I feel so fit—"

"Between attacks," Hartt interjected quickly.

"Yes." Whitaker had to admit, dashed.

"Attacks," said Bushnell, heavily, "recurrent at intervals constantly more brief, each a trifle more severe than its predecessor."

Evidently Bushnell considered the last word his prerogative.

There was a brief uneasy silence in the gloomy consulting room. Then Whitaker rose.

"Well, how long will you give me?" he asked in a strained voice.

"Six months," said Greyerson, miserably avoiding his eye.

"Three," Hartt corrected jerkily.

"Perhaps..." The proprietor of the last word stroked his chin with a contemplative air.

"Thanks," said Whitaker, without irony. He stood for an instant with his head bowed in thought. "What a damned outrage," he observed thoughtfully. And suddenly he turned and flung out of the room.

Greyerson jumped to follow him, but paused as he heard the crash of the street door. He turned with a twitching, apologetic smile.

"Poor devil!" he said, sitting down at his desk and fishing a box of cigars from one of the drawers.

"Married?" Hartt inquired.

"No. That's the only mitigating circumstance," said Greyerson, distributing glasses. "He's quite alone in the world, as far as I know—no near relatives, at least. He's junior partner in a young law firm down-town—senior a friend or classmate of his, I understand: Drummond & Whitaker. Moves with the right sort of people. Young Stark—Peter Stark—is his closet friend."

* * * * * * * *

Hugh Whitaker stood for a long time—how long he never knew—bareheaded on a corner, just as he had left Greyerson's office: scowling at nothing, considering the enormity of the wrong that had been put upon him. Later, realizing that people were staring, he clapped on his hat to satisfy them and strode aimlessly down Sixth Avenue.

He turned across town toward Fifth Avenue, came to his club, and went in. Passing through the office, force of habit swung his gaze to the letter-rack. There was a square white envelope in the W pigeonhole, and it proved to be addressed to him. He knew the handwriting very well—too well; his heart gave a great jump as he recognized it, and then sank like a stone; for not only must he die, but he must give up the girl he loved, and had planned to marry. The first thing he meant to do was to write to her and explain and release her from her promise. The next thing...

He refused to let the idea of the next step form in his mind. But he knew very well what it would be. In the backwards of his understanding it lurked—a gray, grisly, shameful shadow.

The elevator kept him waiting a moment or two, just round the corner from the grill-room door, whence came a riot of voices talking and laughing. Whitaker heard what was being said without, at first, comprehending—heard and afterwards remembered in vivid detail.

"Seems to be the open season for runaways," Hamilton was saying. "It's only a few days since Thurlow Ladislas' daughter—what's her name?—Mary—took the bit between her teeth and bolted with the old man's chauffeur."

Somebody asked: "How far did they get before old Ladislas caught up?"

"He didn't give chase. He's not that kind. If he was put to it, old Thurlow could play the unforgiving parent in a melodrama without any make-up whatever."

"It's just like that," said Hamilton. "Remember his other daughter, Grace, eloping with young Pettit a few years ago? Old Ladislas had a down on Pettit—who's a decent enough kid, notwithstanding—so Grace was promptly disowned, and they've no hope of ever touching a penny of the Ladislas coin."

"But what became of them—Mary and the stoker-person?"

"Nobody knows, except possibly themselves."

"What's she like, this Mary-quite-contrary?" inquired George Brenton's voice.

"Oh, nothing but a kid," said little Fiske.

"Not over eighteen."

The elevator was waiting by this time, but Whitaker paused an instant before taking it, chiefly because the sound of his own name, uttered by Hamilton, had roused him out of the abstraction in which he had overheard the preceding conversation.

"Anyhow, I'm sorry for Hugh Whitaker. He's going to take this hard, mighty hard."

George Brenton asked, as if surprised: "What? I didn't know he was interested in that quarter."

"You must be blind. Alice Carstairs has had him going for a year. Everybody thought she was only waiting for him to make some big money—he as much as anybody, I fancy."

Brenton added the last straw. "That's tough," he said soberly. "Whitaker's a white man, and Alice Carstairs didn't deserve him. But I wouldn't blame any man for feeling cut-up to be thrown over for an out-and-out rotter like Percy Grimshaw. . ."

Whitaker heard no more. At the first mention of the name of Alice Carstairs he had snatched her letter from his pocket and was reading. Nobody will ever know just what Alice Carstairs saw fit to write to Hugh Whitaker. The blood ebbed from his face and left it ghastly, and when he had torn the paper to shreds and let them flutter about his feet, he swayed perceptibly—so much so that one of the pages took alarm and jumped to his side.

"Beg pardon, Mr. Whitaker—did you call me?"

Whitaker steadied himself and stared until he recognized the boy. "No," he said thickly, "but I want you. Give me a bar order."

The boy produced the printed form and Whitaker hastily scribbled his order on it. "Bring that up to the library," he said, "and be quick about it."

He stumbled into the elevator, and presently found himself in the library. There was no one else about, and Whitaker was as glad of that as it was in him to be glad of anything just then. He dropped heavily into a big armchair and waited, his brain whirling and seething, his nerves on edge and screeching. In this state Peter Stark found him.

Peter sauntered into the room with a manner elaborately careless. Beneath that mask he was anything but indifferent, just as his appearance was anything but fortuitous. Moreover, Peter had already heard about Alice Carstairs and Percy Grimshaw.

"Hel-lo" he said, contriving by mere accident to catch sight of Whitaker, who was almost invisible in the big chair with its back to the body of the room. "What you doing up here, Hugh? What's up?"

"It's all up," said Whitaker, trying to pull himself together. "Everything's up!"

"Don't believe it," said Stark, coolly. "My feet are on the ground; but you look as if you'd seen a ghost."

"I have—my own," said Whitaker.

The page now stood beside him with a tray. "Open it," he told the boy, indicating a half-bottle of champagne; and then to Peter: "I'm having a bath. Won't you jump in?"

Peter whistled, watching the wine cream over the brandy in the long glass. "King's peg, eh?" he said, with a lift of disapproving eyebrows. "Here, boy, bring me some Scotch and plain water for common people."

The boy disappeared as Whitaker lifted his glass.

"I'm not waiting," he said bluntly. "I need this now."

"I hope," Peter said thoughtfully, "that the man who started that lie about drink making a fellow forget died the death of a dog. He deserved to, anyway." He stopped at Whitaker's side and dropped a hand on his shoulder. "Hugh," he said, "you're one of the best. Don't. . ."

Whatever he had meant to say, he left unfinished because of the return of the page with his Scotch; but he had said enough to let Whitaker understand that he knew about the Carstairs affair.

"That's all right," said Whitaker; "I'm not going to make a fool of myself, but I am in a pretty bad way. Boy—"

"Hold on!" Peter interrupted. "You're not going to order another? What you've had is enough to galvanize a corpse."

"Barring the negligible difference of a few minutes or months, that's me," returned Whitaker.

"I'd like to know what you mean by that," Peter remarked, obviously worried. "What's the matter with you?"

"Ask Greyerson. I can't remember the name—it's too long—and I couldn't pronounce it if I did."

Peter's eyes narrowed. "What foolishness has Greyerson been putting into your head?" he demanded. "I've a good mind to go punch his—"

"It isn't his fault," Whitaker asserted. "It's my own—or rather, it's something in the nature of a posthumous gift from my progenitors; several of 'em died of it, and now it seems I

"You Look as if You'd Seen a Ghost."

must. Greyerson says so, at least, and when I didn't believe him he called in Hartt and Bushnell to hold my autemortem. They made it unanimous. If I'm uncommonly lucky I may live to see next Thanksgiving."

"You can't make me believe that," Peter insisted. "It just can't be so. A man like you, who's always lived clean . . . Why, look at your athletic record! I won't believe it!"

His big, red, generous fist described a large and inconclusive gesture of violence.

"Well," he growled finally," grant all this—which I don't, not for one little minute—what do you mean to do?"

"I don't mind telling you," said Whitaker: "I don't know. Wish I did. At the same time, I've got to do something—get away somewhere."

Abrupt inspiration sparked the imagination of Peter Stark, and he began to sputter with enthusiasm.

"I've got it!" he cried, jumping to his feet. "A sea trip's just the thing. Chances are, it'll turn the trick—bring you round all right-O, and prove what asses doctors are. I can have the Adventuress put in commission within three days. We'll try that South Seas thing we've talked about so long. What d'you say?"

A warm light glowed in Whitaker's sunken eyes. He nodded slowly.

Just suppose now that in Whitaker's battered mind the seed thought of suicide has started to swell and sprout—do you believe that the anticipation of a sea trip will kill the seed? There's a hint in this question.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Not a Thief.

Man who broke into the house while the owner was away and took nothing but a shave could scarcely be called a thief, because he went out with less than he came in with.

Fine feathers often make the old man wear his suit another season.—Kansas City Journal.

Historic Crimes and Mysteries by Walt Mason

M. HENRI QUITS DRINKING.

Eighty years ago Madame Henri had no idea that her fame would extend from the village of Brittany in which she lived to all corners of France, or that her name would ever be spoken in whispers by a nation's story-tellers. She fully expected to lead a quiet and useful life, and in the end be buried with her forbears in the churchyard. She was a quiet, practical woman, a fine housekeeper and an excellent manager, and everybody respected her.

When she was married most of the girls of the village envied her and perhaps a few hated her; for divers damsels had made strenuous efforts to capture the young man who became her husband. M. Henri was extremely handsome, and had a hundred charms and graces. He was the best singer in the countryside, he was full of witty stories, and the way he could dance was a caution. Everybody admired the young man. Well, it is true that the old cure shook his head now and then, when Henri was mentioned. The young man was too flighty, said that reverend man. But the cure was hopeful when he heard the name of Henri's bride.

This girl came of a thrifty family, and she abhorred waste, without being avaricious. She was distinguished for her beautiful complexion, which reminded people of cream and roses; and her face was framed by masses of curling brown hair. And she was celebrated in her own neighborhood for her physical strength. Without being bulky or awkward, she had the power of two ordinary men in her muscles. The strongest man in the village was as an infant in her hands when, to lend interest to the evening sports, she consented to demonstrate her strength.

So Henri married this lovely and attractive girl, and they went to housekeeping, and for a while the husband was a success. He worked diligently, and spent his evenings at home, and his wife managed so successfully that money was being saved. But all the time the young man hungered and thirsted for the bright lights in the tavern windows. And before long he began making frequent trips to the grog bazaar, and when he returned home his breath spoke volumes. In months Madame Henri had to spend her evenings alone. The husband was holding high wassail at the Horn of Plenty Inn.

It was breaking her heart, and she pleaded and argued with him, and even threatened, and all to no avail. Henri came reeling home nearly every night, a spectacle for the gods.

Then a relative of hers died and left her a comfortable legacy. She had long known that this money would come to her, and when she was married she and her husband had made beautiful plans as to what they would do with it. They'd buy a little farm and live happy ever after. And now that the legacy was hers, Madame Henri made one last effort to arouse a sane ambition in her husband. She implored him to quit his foolishness and help her carry out the original plans. He seemed to be roused by her entreaties, and promised her to refrain from the flowing bowl forever. He had sown his last wild oat. She believed him, and negotiated for a farm she had had her eyes on for a long time. Then one day she handed him some money to take to the notary who was conducting the negotiation.

He didn't take the money to the notary. He took it to the Horn of Plenty. Late at night he returned to his abode in merry humor. He opened the door and entered, wearing a vacuous grin. Madame Henri rose from her chair and faced him, and a hot wave of anger swept over her. She forgot her phenomenal strength when she struck him. He fell to the floor like a sack of meal, and she realized that he had taken his last drink.

On succeeding days neighbors paused, as usual, at Madame Henri's garden gate, to gossip a bit, and she volunteered the information to all of them that her husband had quit drinking and was going to settle down. He had gone away to look at several properties which were for sale, and she didn't know when he'd be back. Afterwards the neighbors remembered that she had harped upon this matter insistently, bringing it up every time she talked with them.

A quarter of a mile away from the Henri cottage there was a stream, and upon the bank of this stream there stood a gristmill. One morning as the miller was going to his daily task, he observed a queer-looking object on one of the blades of the waterwheel. With the help of a long pole, hooked at the end, he pulled the thing off the waterwheel and brought it to land. It was a coarse sack, containing something heavy. He opened the sack and beheld a part of a human body. With his dusty hair on end, he went to the village police station, and the officer in charge accompanied him to the river bank and inspected the ghastly discovery.

"This was done by a woman," said the village sleuth. "Only a woman would have used a needle and thread on a sack. A man would have tied it."

The alarm was given, and the villagers helped to comb the stream, and during the day various similar sacks were found, all containing fragments of a human body, and all sewn with needle and thread. The head alone couldn't be found, and the head was necessary to the identification of the victim, and the solution of the mystery. The days went by and no progress was made, but the village sleuth studied and worried over it day and night, and finally concluded that the absence of M. Henri would bear investigation. So he disguised himself after the manner of Vidocq and managed to become well acquainted with Madame Henri, and soon concluded that her stories about her husband were false. Then he accused her of his murder in so many words.

Every Night, Till the Whole Body Was Disposed Of, She Carried a Bundle to the River and Threw It In.

The madam, strong as she was, fell in a swoon, and when she recovered consciousness confessed everything. After finding that her husband was dead, she carried his body to the cellar, and there chopped him into convenient chunks with an ax. The pieces she sewed up in sacks, and every night, until the whole body was disposed of, she carried a bundle to the river and threw it in.

Even when this was known most of the people sympathized with the woman, knowing how much she had endured. The terrible story was carried all over Europe, and for weeks together the newspapers were full of it, and many years afterwards tourists went out of their way to visit the corner of Brittany where Madame Henri induced her husband to sign the pledge.

The woman was tried and convicted in due season, and was sentenced to twenty years at hard labor.

Her Expansive Hat.

A woman entered a car rather out of breath and presented a singular appearance, for instead of a hat she was balancing a huge basket on her head with as much grace and ease as if it had been her Sunday bonnet. She could just manage to get through the doorway, but she sat down with the basket gracefully poised on her head.

"All fares, please," said the conductor. "And I shall want twopence for that there basket, mum."

"Get away with yer," she said. "Do charge anything for ladies' hats?"

"No, mum."

"Thin git on with yer work; 'er basket is a-going to be weighed."—Pittsburgh Chronicle-Telegraph.

Pulp for Paper.

It is reported that the department of agriculture is experimenting with wire grass as a source of supply for pulp for making paper, in place of poplar or liriodendron. This variety of grass grows on the Pacific coast and in western Mexico, and possesses the very desirable property of toughness and can be reduced by the soda process. It is stated that paper manufactured from the stock has proved as satisfactory in physical tests as a first-grade machine-finished printed paper. In appearance and in feeling the paper produced is satisfactory. However, the experiments have indicated that more bleaching powder is required in the bleaching process than in the case of poplar stock.

This Is No Joke.

They graduated in June.

"What are you doing now?" asked the dear girl in the dialogue.

"Newspaper work," replied the young man. "I have charge of the 'Hints to Mothers' column on the Daily Planet. And you?"

"Oh, I'm doing a similar stunt," answered the dear girl. "I write the 'Man about Town' articles for the Daily Gusher."

An Unwelcome Variety.

"Is Bliggins an optimist?"

"Yes. But he's one of the kind that reminds you of all your troubles and then tells you to cheer up."