

# IN THE TWINKLING OF AN EYE

by

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(Author of *Mark of the Beast*)

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

### A CASTAWAY

MADGE and her husband left Albany on the Monday morning, ostensibly for a brief honeymoon, but, chiefly, with a view to recruit her husband's health. They had gone to a tiny little house among the Catskills, kept by a woman named "Julie." The pastor had been there before, and had himself chosen this quiet retreat for their marriage trip.

The heart of Madge was broken, for her husband would not be friendly with her. He was barely civil when he spoke to her, and answered her in short, sharp monosyllables only. All the old natural pride, with which she would have met this treatment a fortnight ago, or less, was, fortunately, for him, swallowed up in her new found faith in, and her utter surrender to GOD. And with this there had come to her the patience and purifying, born of the Hope of the near return of the Lord, whom she now loved.

She had been alone, thinking over the whole position, for a couple of hours. The situation had become intolerable. She determined to make an appeal to him, though it hurt her natural pride even to contemplate it.

"Help me! Teach me! Guide me!" she cried unto her GOD. And in the strength of the divine promises of upholding and guidance, she decided to go to her husband.

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He was alone, with a book before him on the table. But he was not reading. He was not even thinking. His mind was in a confused whirl, born of the inward rage of a much discomfited man. He had made a fool of himself, in public. He knew it, and he had been too proud to apologize.

He had spurned and snubbed the woman, for whom he had professed to be dying of love, and who had made the greatest sacrifice any honest woman can make to man - since she had offered herself to him, in marriage.

He knew that, in the eyes of his wife, and in the eyes of the little world he had lived and labored in, that he had lowered himself, had proved himself less than ordinarily human.

Some of his own recent platform and pulpit utterances, returned to his mind, and they stung him by their reproach. The very last sermon he had preached, before his breakdown of health, had had for its text, "**To him that overcometh, will I give.**"

In the course of his address he had alluded to the shame of some of life's failures, and had quoted William Walsh's "*Ichabod.*"

Now, as he sat brooding over his own fall, the lines returned to him. They mocked him, gibed at him, becoming, to his brooding imagination, sentient things with laughing, mocking, sneering voices, - that somehow contrived to fling back into his ears, the very tones of his own voice, as he had declaimed the verses from his platform, weeks ago:

"Alas, for the lofty dreaming,  
The longed-for high emprise,  
For the man whose outer seeming  
His inner 'self belies!

"I looked on the life before me  
With purpose high and true,  
When the passions of youth surged o'er me,  
And the world was strange and true.

"Where the hero-soul rejoices  
I would play the hero's part;  
My ears were attuned to the voices  
That speak to the poet's heart.

"I would conquer a place in story,  
With a soul unsmirched by sin;  
My heart should be crowned with glory  
My heart be pure within.

"But the hour that should have crowned me,  
Cast all high hope adown,  
And the time of trial found me,  
A sinner, coward, clown."

The thought that many of those who heard him declaim those lines, would be now recalling them, and perhaps be applying them to himself, half maddened him.

And it was at this worst of all moments for her mission of reconciliation, that Madge entered the room.

With a rare gentleness she began to plead with him, reminding him of all the passionate love he had expressed for her up to the very moment, almost, when they entered the church together for that Sunday morning service.

He answered her coldly, sullenly at first. Then he grew pettishly angry with her, and snapped sharply at her, contradicting her in nearly all she said:

"But, Homer," she pleaded again, and in the deep yearning heart to win him back to his old loving self, she knelt before him, and tried to take his hand.

With an angry exclamation, he rose sharply to his feet and thrust her away with his foot, as he cried:-

"I don't want you! You go your way, I'll go mine, and -"

He stopped suddenly. With a sharp cry of agony, he stretched his hands out into the empty space, where an instant before, she had knelt - for, in one flashing moment, she had disappeared from before his eyes.

"Madge! Madge, dear love, dear love, dear wife!" he cried.

The sound of his own voice struck chilly upon his soul. Deep, deep down in his heart he knew what had happened - only he would not own it to himself.

He flashed a swift glance at the window and door. Both were fast shut.

"This is what Doig preached! What Madge believed would come to pass!" he cried, hoarsely.

There was a strange look of terror in his eyes. "Julie will have gone, too, if it is the - the -."

He did not finish his muttered thought. Like a man walking in his sleep, he moved to the door, opened it and called, loudly:- "Julie!"

There came no reply. An eerie stillness was in the house.

He moved on into the kitchen, the room was empty.

A saucepan of milk was boiling over on the hot-plate of the grate!

He hurried into the garden, calling "Madge! Julie!" There was no response.

He went back to the house. The turkeys had strayed into the kitchen, there being no one to drive them back. He made a hurried, fearsome tour of the house. Every room was empty!

He went back to where he had been, when Madge was taken, with a groan he dropped into his chair, staring into space with horror-stricken eyes.

Suddenly, as though a living voice uttered them, the words of Scripture sounded in his ears.

**"Lest, that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."**

A mortal agony filled his eyes, as he groaned:

"GOD help me! I know now that I have only been a minister, by training and by profession, I have never been a son of GOD by conversion, by the New Birth!"

His untaught soul had misinterpreted the real inwardness of that passage of Paul's. But it was true, in the sense he meant it, he was **"a castaway."**

~ end of chapter 27 ~

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