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# THE BREATH OF SCANDAL

EDWIN BALMER

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**She snatched up a letter; held it.** ***Frontispiece.***
***See page* 71.**

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# THE BREATH OF SCANDAL

BY

EDWIN BALMER

WITH FRONTISPIECE BY
RALPH P. COLEMAN

BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
1922

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You know the reasons; the question is, why should
?"

A couple of thousand more a year, Bill."

To do what?"

Market that new carburetor of his."

Do you want to market carburetors the rest of your
?

egg laughed disarmingly; it was always impos-
for Billy to get wholly angry with him, much as
erious and conscientious Whittaker would have
o punch Gregg's careless, handsome head, if that
put some sense of self-accountability into it.

ok here, Bill; I don't really get any deep experi-
t of selling refrigerating machines; but I do it
seven thousand a year. Honestly, I don't see any
l or moral difference, except for the possible
f shock on my creditors, if I'm able to pay 'em
ng nine thousand from Hartford for boosting a
carburetor for Fords."

nn!" said Whittaker, who seldom swore. "No
mparing the moralities of refrigeration and
ors. We're talking about what you're doing
life in shifting about whenever you get a good
selling kerosene carburetors is what you want
develop yourself, you know I say, 'Go to it.'
r what you want to do, find the thing that is
to it. To do something else only for the
king in more money now is ——" he halted
nestness of his exasperation.

, Bill."

yourself, Gregg; and you've no end of offers
lf. That's your trouble. Everybody likes
er you care to have 'em or not. Everybody
ease you; everybody that's got something to



sell wants you to go with him; and a man who's buying your line likes to wait to see you. There's no development in that for you; just a little more money without any more effort. Oh, you don't even know what I'm talking about."

"Of course I do, Bill. You want me to be making effort, for effort's sake, even when it's not necessary; you want ——"

But Bill had turned in his hopelessness and gone back through the bathroom into his own room, pulling the door firmly shut behind him. Gregg, left alone, put his hand in his pocket over the note from Marjorie Hale, and he was standing at his window looking out at the lights by the breakwater and whistling quietly when somebody tapped cautiously on his door to the hall, opened it and looked in.

He was a compact, alert-looking young man, a few years older than Gregg and Billy; Cuncliffe by name, and the Chicago agent for an Akron tire company. He was wearing a silk hat and had on a dark overcoat above evening clothes, evidently.

"Come in, Jim!" Gregg welcomed him. "When did you drop up? I didn't hear you."

"Um!" Cluncliffe warned, shaking his head and raising his hand toward Whittaker's room as he came in. "I came up during the discussion. What was that Bill's all worked up about anyway, Gregg?"

"Oh," said Gregg. "Just me; another round of the ordinary riot we stage whenever we're bored. Hartford — you know him — made a proposition to me; I mentioned it to Bill and, of course, he thinks I shouldn't go to selling carburetors unless I can feel sort of religious about them; so I could go into a Billy Sunday frenzy for kerosene combustion."

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his home to go 'out of town,' he's going
faction or get Hale."
sat down and leaned over, flecking an im-
speck from his dancing shoe; Gregg lit his
is slender, strong hands quivering in a man-
to him.
re you telling me all this for, Jim?" he de-
ectly at last.
passed it to me, because I knew Hale and
re passing it on to me."
know them at all; you're a friend of theirs
ou say something about going to a dance
ton to-night?"
g with Bill," Gregg said. "He's the friend
uld think Bill would be the one to——"
ed, ashamed of himself.
care of this?" Jim said, smiling grimly
d toward the door which Gregg himself
fully closed. "You don't want Bill even
ut it, do you? You bet not; you know
Can you just imagine him trying to tackle
he'd be knocked absolutely flat; he'd take
nd when he came to, he'd have to start
erybody concerned and work up a strong
ntiment. Good old Bill; he thinks the
un on ten commandments and fourteen
ng but open alliances, openly arrived at.
mpossible for Bill but figure where it would
t into that mix-up; he'd lose his Marjorie
orie?"
you been recently? You never heard
g twice at a girl before; but he's her



picture next to his mother's on the dresser in there, hasn't he? He's up in Evanston every time I hear of him out anywhere; looks to me he has to have that girl, Gregg, or he'll never have any one. If there ever was a one-woman man, that's Bill. Lucky she seems to like him; of course she ought to, if she knows a good man when she sees one. Now, do you want to slip him the job of mixing into that affair?"

Gregg shook his head, hoping that the cigarette smoke was hiding the redness of his face. "No, Jimmie — but how the devil can I?"

"What've you got to lose?"

"I mean, how can a fellow like me mix into Mr. Hale's personal concerns? Damn it, it's his own life."

"You haven't got to argue it's not; no one's expecting you to start a reform; you simply have to tip him not to give Russell any opportunity for action just now. Why, he'll thank you for it, Gregg. He has his family to protect and his job to look out for, too. He's worked up into a big position; making a lot of money, but he hasn't a stock interest that amounts to anything yet; and a man doesn't advance himself to be general manager of a big company like Tri-Lake Materials without pushing aside a lot of others and making his enemies. Take E. H. Stanway, right there in his company; he figured only a year or so ago there was nothing surer in the world than for him to step into the presidency of a ten-million-dollar corporation when old Dorsett shuffles off or gives up; but here's Charles Hale coming along so fast that, if Stanway is vice-president, he knows that Hale's practically past him. He don't want Dorsett to resign any more, unless he can kill off Hale first. Now suppose Russell takes a shot at Hale near that flat to-night or anything else

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## CHAPTER II

Y went out together in Gregg's car, which
a new one, not fully paid for, but a good
l better than Billy's. It was a roadster
for three on the wide seat, and consequently
ile he drove, had plenty of room to sprawl
y, especially as Billy, who never let himself
erect on the right. They did not talk much
hing and not at all of Marjorie Hale or of
er from Hartford. The March night was
nild for Chicago at the end of the winter;
ow had fallen the day before, and melted
and after sunset had refrozen, forming a
here and there on the roadway.

ght to have chains on," Billy advised.

ike to slip a little—— How do you care
k-up of this engine? Michigan's playing
ketball to-night."

at Ann Arbor. *How is our five, Gregg?*"

hought much about what he was saying;
igarette and absorbed himself in his own
As they proceeded from the promontory
"made" land, they turned north beside
the Drive, which follows the line of the
the perfectors of Chicago temporarily have
indulgent to nature that they have merely
ack the washing waters with a low, grace-
escarpment and planted a strip of park
stern beach and the Drive. Opposite, on

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the west side of the Drive and facing the lake, stand a row of stone and brick and terra-cotta mansions, each of obvious expense and, patently, so costly to own and inhabit that this stretch of the Lake Michigan shore is familiarly referred to as "the Gold Coast." These huge and pretentious homes, known by the names of many of the most wealthy and conspicuous families of the city, always represented to Billy Whittaker a certain end of ambition, spurring his determination to work faithfully so that on some day, perhaps fifteen or twenty years ahead, he might be able to purchase one of these houses and move his wife and family to the Drive. For long before he fell in love, Billy formed the habit of thinking of himself with a wife and children, whenever he imagined himself in middle age. Now he thought of bringing Marjorie, and her children and his, to live on this stretch of the lake front.

There was a large and particularly pleasant-looking house a little above the Bordens' (which was one of the few homes which Billy knew even by name) which he hoped would be the one on the market when he should be ready to buy; when he passed it, he dared, for a few bold heart-thumps, to picture himself at the door with Marjorie; then he came down to earth and earnestly devoted himself to his serious preparations to interest Marjorie that evening and to say the right thing to her father, to whom he found it rather difficult to talk. Billy never had any trouble with Mrs. Hale, who had strongly favored him from the first.

In so far as Gregg ever made mental preparations, he took thought for Marjorie's mother; for Mr. Hale and he always got on without effort. To-night, of course, was likely to prove a special case; but Gregg

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letting future difficulties look out for them-

erved that the great castle of the Potter
me was still dark and closed; something
be going on at the Reynolds'; and at Victor
house; and evidently there was a dinner at
's'; probably for those official French people
in the city, Gregg thought. The possessors
the homes on the Drive were more than mere
im; for he had been a guest at an occasional
entertainment in certain of the mansions
But it never occurred to Gregg to dream
one of them; indeed, his hazardings of his
e altogether too vague to picture himself
family. Gregg meant to marry, but the
a girl never started such institutional ideas
as belonged in Billy's.
xpected only that some day he was to dis-
he no longer could be satisfied with mere
with a certain girl — with bantering, teas-
broken by sudden, serious interludes of con-
o longer content with handclasps at greet-
h the intimate, and yet so meaningless, em-
beside the lake on an autumn day or by
at her side in a theater. Some day the
lingering good-by at midnight no longer
erable; and she and he together would agree
hat mystery of love which neither of them

days, when Gregg fancied what sort the
be who would stand with him "in the
God and this company," to take the queer,

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old-fashioned oath of marriage, he imagined himself beside a girl very like Marjorie Hale; indeed, when he thought of her, he wanted her no different from Marjorie; and yet he would not let himself think of marrying Marjorie Hale; for, as Jim Suncliffe had said, she was Bill's and the only girl whom Billy had ever loved. Gregg had cared about a lot of other girls; and he knew himself well enough to believe he was likely to care for many more.

Yet he had never felt for any girl as he was feeling for Marjorie Hale now; as he drew nearer and nearer to her, he found himself for the first time forgetful, during long stretches of his musings, of the fact that she was Billy's girl; he was thinking of her as the girl whom he must protect from a blighting danger threatening her of which Billy was not even aware.

When, with a start, Gregg came back to consciousness of Bill, it seemed unfair somehow not to let him know; then Gregg glanced at Bill's familiar, clean-cut, obstinate face. Good old Bill! How little he let himself know about the low in life; he simply did not think of the low as existing for him or for his; and now for Gregg to take him into this affair! Suncliffe was right; Gregg could not hand Bill anything like that.

The car, having passed through Lincoln Park, was rushing on beside miles of apartments, shops and motion-picture theaters and soon approached a gay, brightly lighted district of resplendent, garish buildings where, a few years ago, had stretched the wide lawns and winding roads and patches of bush and "woods" about family homes of which Eugene Field had sung in his poems. Not far away to one side had lived Eugene Field and over there had been the "Waller

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to think it out; so Gregg had bothered him-
the subject very little, even when he heard
Hale was one of those who had his own way
Gregg had wished, vaguely, that Marjorie's
re different; at least, Gregg would have pre-
have known nothing about it, but he had not
it an alarming matter. For a man like Mr.
course, would be discreet. Yet, sometimes,
a man lost control of the situation and the
outflare of the thing concealed swept a sensa-
the country. Gregg bent forward a little, to
w the street he was passing; and suddenly
ck with the fear which gripped him as he
Marjorie's father exposed in a public scandal,
world to peer into, and Marjorie learning

g.

sped into a quieter section of homes of men
ccessful and, on this north shore of the city,
the older dwellings of the Drive; then a few
of more modest houses and apartments
em to the first of the suburban towns, almost
Chicago and, in spite of the great inflow of
vals, still recognized as staid, intellectual
tic, a small, well-kept city of fine homes and
churches, of schools and a university.
ar passed large, good-looking houses, far
the street and each set on a wide lawn and
by trees, Billy Whittaker felt the sort of
with this beautiful suburb which he be-
ght to combat in himself; for to him Evans-
r pleasant, meant an abandonment of the
East Pearson Street to the Drive. He
men living here as lacking the ambition or
within themselves of want of ability to

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win their way into the front rank of city society. An agreeable position in Evanston satisfied many, of course; he thought of Marjorie's parents as thus satisfied; but he would not let it satisfy Marjorie and himself.

He hunched impatiently forward in his seat as Gregg turned at last into the avenue which led to the Hales'; Gregg swung the car between wide gate posts and, crunching through the newly frozen crust over a private driveway, he came to a stop at a porte-cochère beside a big, brightly lighted, warm-windowed house where a manservant opened the door at the top of a short row of steps. Billy pulled back the catch of the car door before he recollected himself and sat back.

"Get out, Bill," Gregg bade.

"You're running back to the garage?"

"No; just up on the lawn there. I'll not freeze up to-night. Get out."

Billy complied and ran up the steps; Gregg drove on a few yards, where he killed his engine and stepped down, stamping his feet while he gazed up at the big, white, wide-verandahed home of the Hales, always friendly looking and welcoming. Lights shone in warm, inviting colors, and a dancing glow on some of the window-panes told that wood fires were blazing in the drawing-room and in the hall. Gentle currents of the night air wafted down from the chimney the soft odor of wood smoke, and it brought to Gregg memories of an old, rambling, beloved home in Michigan; he thought of his father coming in, tired and mud-spattered from a long drive over winter roads, but smiling, as Gregg always remembered him, when Gregg or Gregg's mother met him at the door. Gregg recollected how he used to go for his father's slippers while

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r brought a tray of hot supper to the little
re the library fire, whereupon his father would
down to him and kiss her.
t deal of love, always faithful and constant
liked to feel sure — had made his home. He
s thought of love making pleasant this big,
of the Hales; for though he recently had not
f Mr. and Mrs. Hale loving as his own father
r did, yet there always appeared to be har-
een them, and a good deal of affection; and
loved their daughter as she loved them.
seemed to adore her father, particularly.
ped quickly toward the house, where a door
d and a servant took his things.
evening, Gregg," Mr. Hale's hearty voice
im. "Mighty glad to see you. You came
new car to-night, Billy says. How does she

fine; all right, I guess," said Gregg, giving
o the warm, steady clasp of Mr. Hale and
greeable stir within, as the older man looked
r. Hale's friendly brown eyes had, as often
t of meeting, an expression which seemed to
, I've not seen you for a day or two; any-
ened to you, meanwhile? Apparently not."
ys liked that look, and he liked, naturally,
arjorie's father always seemed to mention
bject interesting the other person.
lmost as tall as Billy, but he had the knack,
lacked, of never impressing his superiority
er another. To-night, he seemed to be in
ven better than his usual good physical
he vigorously maintained by golf during
s, and by squash or handball every second



day in winter. He was the sort of man who surprised you when you saw him with a grown-up daughter and made one wonder how young he was when he married; as a matter of fact, he had been twenty-four then; so he was forty-seven now; but it was stale flattery to him to say that he did not look it. He had possessed the birthright of a sound, well-formed body and the physical advantage of having been brought up in a none-too-indulgent home in a town in northern Illinois; he had always had to work and, while working, had educated himself. Until he had earned it, he never had had more than enough of anything; and now, by habit, he still worked hard and, in all obvious matters, kept himself in restraint. So his brown eyes were clear and there was no dragged skin in the firm, agreeable lines of his capable face; his brown hair was thick and little gray; his body was free of excess weight. Gregg never quite liked his mouth, which had lips too thick; but his mustache improved them and his mouth was pleasant when he smiled. He had even, almost perfect teeth.

Here was a man certain to understand the risks in anything dangerous which he undertook, Gregg thought; he could be counted upon to protect his family and himself. Yet, if he mistook some element, what a calamity for such a man to be commonly disgraced; and — Gregg thought — what an impossible man to approach on a personal affair.

"Well, Gregg Mowbry, I did manage to get you here!"

Gregg spun about; there was Marjorie. "Nobody like you!" he exulted, almost aloud. He forgot her father; forgot that he had been thinking of her in danger and himself protecting her. He felt only the

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lightful jump which she always startled in
ch he always expected and which, therefore, he
ave been able to discount; but it still surprised
ts sudden lift in him. She spoke quickly yet
ll alive, she kept herself; and she made you feel
ve, too, however fully alive you had thought
the minute before. You could never keep in
mory of her quite that quality of her voice,
und; again it surprised him; and the sight of
rised him, too.

as, as always, prettier than he had expected.
ord, pretty, to run in your mind to describe
of the pleasant sensation the sight of Mar-
e you; for she was never one of those stupid
m people call pretty and beautiful. She
certain, perfectly definite beauties; like her
ly, very fine hair and very abundant, dark
color. She had not bobbed it but, in a
hich Gregg liked best since he observed it was
wore it dressed low and close about her head;
a broad, capable forehead, brown, definite
blue, pleasant eyes; her mouth was a trifle
her lips had none of the thickness of her
It was a wholly agreeable, good-tempered
ggestive of nothing more disturbing than a
to independence and recklessness. Her
e skin was one of her best features, and she
ifully shaped hands, which were strong and
ped for a girl who had never been obliged to
them. Her arms were well-shaped and so
r body. But Gregg seldom thought of her
a beautiful form; he thought of her as able
all sorts of active, interesting things and,
requiring something active, and preferably



a bit dangerous, on which to spend some of her energy. How she liked to get on a clear, country road and, with nobody else in the car, set the motor humming!

She seemed to feel like that to-night and, not being able to drive, she seemed to be finding some excitement in shocking Bill, beside whom she looked smaller and even younger than her twenty-two years. For Billy, when with a girl, had a way of becoming mature, particularly when he was shocked.

It was not difficult for Marjorie to shock Bill, Gregg knew; undoubtedly her new dancing dress was enough to do it. Of course, it was cut low, with only two slim bands of blue silk over her white shoulders; blue and opalescent silk clung to the roundness of her small bosom, bound her slender, supple waist and fell into a skirt of simple, graceful loveliness. Her arms were all bare but for a bracelet of platinum and sapphires; a tiny, glinting chain of platinum with a glistening sapphire was about her smooth, white neck. As she approached, and Billy came with her, Gregg saw that her brows had been darkened a trifle and her lips touched, unnecessarily, with a rouge stick—extra items of usual and fashionable procedure but undoubtedly designed to tease over-proper old Bill, and her greeting to Gregg obviously was part of the same design.

"You managed to get him?" Billy repeated, challenging her.

"Certainly; but I had a terrible time. I wrote him a special note; and then telephoned him twice, besides begging you to bring him; didn't I, Mr. Mowbry?"

"Certainly," Gregg said seriously.

"What?" demanded Billy.

"Oh, Billy," she cried fondly, to let him know she was teasing him; and Gregg laughed a bit foolishly

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