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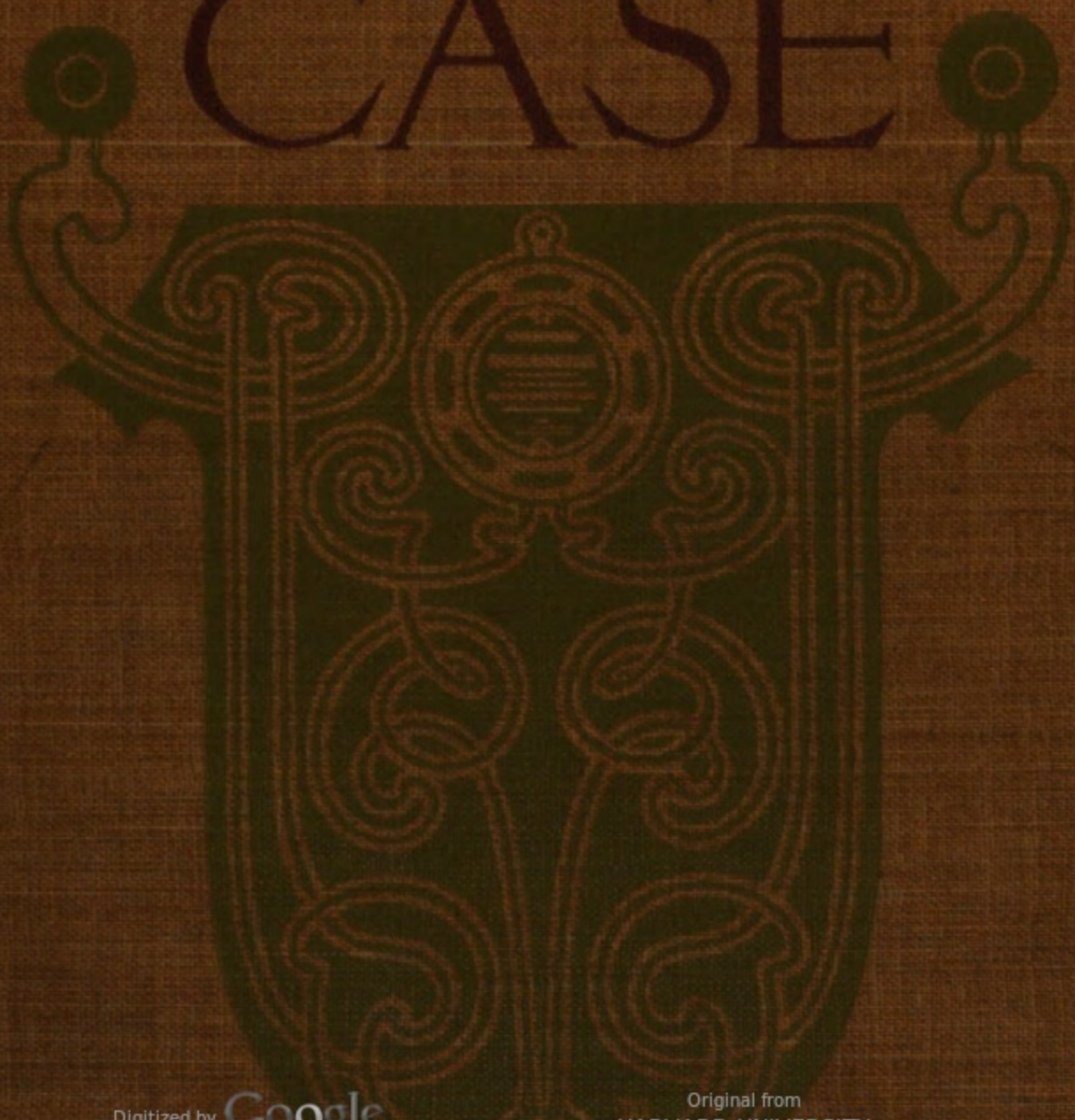
The ARGYLE CASE



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[See p. 165

"YOU'LL BE PROTECTED EVERY MOMENT. I WILL SEND YOU ONE OF THESE LITTLE DETECTAPHONES"

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THE ARGYLE CASE

BY

ARTHUR HORNBLOW

FOUNDED ON THE PLAY
BY HARRIET FORD AND
HARVEY J. O'HIGGINS

WRITTEN IN CÖOPERATION WITH
DETECTIVE WILLIAM J. BURNS

NEW YORK
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ILLUSTRATIONS

"YOU'LL BE PROTECTED EVERY MOMENT. I WILL SEND YOU ONE OF THESE LITTLE DETECTAPHONES" . . . *Frontispiece*

"HERE ARE HER EIGHT FINGER-PRINTS. GET BUSY, JOE! SEE IF YOU CAN GET THE THUMBS UNDER THE EDGE THERE" . . . . . *Facing p. 70*

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THE ARGYLE CASE

CHAPTER I

"NO sir, not a cent! I warned you that I'd have nothing to do with you if you disobeyed me. In spite of all I said you have deliberately defied me by marrying the girl. You must take the consequences. I disown you. You'll never get a penny of my money."

John Argyle, his face purple with rage, his white hair and carefully trimmed whiskers bristling with anger, paced up and down the library of his palatial Fifth Avenue home, while a young man, barely in his twenties, his face pale but with lines of determination about his smooth, sensitive mouth, stood by and listened.

The winter afternoon was drawing to a close, and the rays of the setting sun, streaming through the stained-glass windows, bathed the artistic interior in a glow of rich, warm color. It was a picturesque room, tastefully furnished, with Pompeiian red the dominant note. The walls were all lined with books, the shelves and rest of the woodwork of black flemish oak, and the chairs of the same wood, uphol-

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stered in a red leather. Between the shelves, filled with handsomely bound tomes, was a door which led to the hall. On the other side the books extended as far as a deep bay, opposite which was a large fireplace with dull-brass candelabra on the mantel and huge pine logs throwing out a grateful heat. In a cozy, well-lighted niche was a magnificently carved teakwood table, with telephone and nouveau art reading-lamp. On the opposite side another table was covered with a fabric so exquisite and costly that it might well have graced the collection of some connoisseur. On it was a confused litter of books, newspapers, and cigar-boxes. Several large, comfortable arm-chairs were scattered about, and on the floor one trod on a large, richly woven silk rug of a shade to harmonize with the general color scheme of the room. Conspicuous over the door was a large framed portrait of John Argyle. A truly beautiful room, conducive to reverie or study; but to-day its only occupants were too much excited to take particular heed of their surroundings.

The situation was tense. A spark at any moment might bring about an explosion. There was a difference of forty years and more between the two men, and it needed only a glance to see that they were father and son. When the elder had ceased his choleric tirade and relapsed into a sulky silence, interrupted only at intervals by a series of angry snorts that sounded like petty explosions, the younger man said, respectfully:

"I don't ask you for money. I merely asked for what is mine. If I could get now some of the money

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my grandfather left me, it would help me to get a start in life. It is hard that I should have to wait until I'm thirty. I don't suppose I'll ever be able to earn enough with my art work. I intend to give up my studio. I want to go into business. I have an opportunity to buy a small interest in a Detroit automobile plant. They offer me a salaried position if I can furnish a little capital which will be amply secured. I have investigated the thing, and I'm anxious to get away from New York." Bitterly he added: "Incidentally, it will relieve you of my unwelcome presence in this house."

The elder man had continued pacing the floor like an infuriated lion, apparently paying not the slightest attention to what his son was saying. The young man's closing sentence, however, had the unfortunate effect of adding fresh fuel to the already raging fire. Stopping short and turning quickly, he shook his clenched fist in his son's face and thundered:

"If you are no longer *persona grata* under this roof, whose is the fault? You have no one to blame but yourself. How have you repaid all I have done for you? I gave you every advantage. You've had a good education, a luxurious home, everything you could wish for. What return did you make for all this? You have taken pleasure—yes, sir, deliberate pleasure, in thwarting me at every turn. I asked only one thing—you knew well that my heart was set on it. It was the dearest, most cherished wish of my life. For twenty years, while you and Mary have been growing up side by side, it was my fondest

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hope that you would one day marry. Instead of sympathizing with these plans, you have deliberately scorned them and set me at defiance by contracting a secret marriage."

Bruce shrugged his shoulders as he replied, calmly:

"You asked the impossible. You wanted me to marry Mary, but it was too late even had I loved her. My word was already given to another. Would you have had me throw Nan unceremoniously overboard just to further my own selfish ends? Besides, Mary has never cared enough for me to marry me. We've been brother and sister—nothing more. The idea of anything else never entered my head or hers. She has known all along how fond I am of Nan. When you first suggested the matter Nan and I were already engaged. Surely you wouldn't have had your son play the part of a welsher."

The argument was unanswerable, and Argyle, Sr., knew it, but all his life he had been accustomed to make laws for others, never to have them laid down for himself. What cared he about sentimental boy and girl promises when his heart had been set on seeing his only son marry the orphan of his old comrade, a girl he had adopted as his daughter? When poor Masuret, deserted by his faithless wife, died some fifteen years ago and left little Mary in his care, he had promised him that one day she should marry Bruce. That anything else could happen had never entered his head. The idea that young folks should take their future into their own hands and arrange it to suit themselves was rank rebellion, deserving of fitting punishment. Unable to find words, he merely spluttered:

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"Love fiddlesticks! That's all moonshine! Marriage is based on something more substantial. You'll rue it. I'll teach you a lesson that you'll remember. Had you behaved yourself you would have succeeded me one day as head of Argyle & Co. Your conduct convinces me that you are not fit for any position of responsibility and trust. A firm of the importance of ours requires at its head a man of tact, intelligence, and sound judgment. These qualities you do not possess, and never will. You're a fool to your own interests, and always will be. I'm done with you. As you've made your bed, so you can lie on it. I'll give you a small allowance to keep you from starving, but that's all you'll get. I'm going to telephone to my lawyer right now. Mr. Hurley will come here to-day and draw up a new will leaving everything to Mary."

All his life Mr. Argyle had acted on impulse. He always attributed his success to the fact that once he made up his mind he stuck to it, right or wrong. Crossing quickly to the desk, he picked up the receiver:

"Give me John 3486." While waiting for the number he glared at the young man, as if expecting him to make some protest; but Bruce, although a shade paler, remained calm.

"Very well, sir," he said, "you know best. No doubt Mary will make better use of it than I. I'm sorry I've offended you. I did not do it to annoy you, although you seem to think so. That is absurd. I married Nan because I loved her. Mary never cared for me in that way."

"Sentimental rubbish!" grunted the merchant,

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who in his forty odd years of money-grubbing had forgotten that romance and sentiment ruled the world. "Mary's too sensible a girl not to have accepted you, if you'd treated her right."

The telephone buzzed. The old gentleman turned to the transmitter.

"Hello—is that you, Hurley? This is Argyle—yes—I'm here at the house. I'd like you to come up to see me regarding a little business matter—about drawing a will. Yes—a new one. Oh, any time will suit me—this evening or afternoon. All right; make it this afternoon. I'll wait in for you. Good-by." Turning again to the young man, he went on testily: "Mary knew my wishes, and she would have respected them. But she saw your infatuation for that girl, and could do nothing—"

The young man shook his head.

"You are mistaken, father. You think you can manage affairs of the heart as you are accustomed to manage affairs of finance. It can't be done, and bigger men than you have failed. I don't blame you for getting angry at me." Bitterly he added: "We never got along any too well—you are never satisfied, always expecting the impossible. This has never been a home to me since poor mother died. I'll be glad to get away."

Argyle, Sr., eyed his son narrowly and distrustfully. They had never been friends. By nature cold and reserved, his attitude to his son had been that of a stern, exacting master who must be obeyed implicitly, no matter how preposterous the command. By nature a martinet and strict disciplinarian, impatient, intolerant of argument, accustomed to rule

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and to be obeyed without question, he had resented his son's independence of spirit, and interpreted it rightly or wrongly as wilful defiance of his wishes and orders. There were times when he had wished things might be otherwise, when he could have clasped his son to his bosom and taken pride in planning out his future, but this last disobedience he could not forgive. It was unpardonable. It had completely shattered the one illusion he had left. If a shred of emotion had been excited in his breast at the mention of his dead wife, he managed to conceal it. His voice was hard and unyielding as ever as he asked:

"Where are you going?"

"I told you—out West."

"You have no means."

"No—that's why I came to you."

The old man shook his head.

"No, sir—not a cent. I couldn't if I would. That money is tied up until you reach the age of thirty. You are now only twenty-four. For six years to come you must either be satisfied to live under this roof or earn a living outside."

The boy's face flushed. With spirit he replied:

"Then I'll go out and earn it. I don't know at what. Like most rich men's sons, I'm not good for much. I don't know how to work, because I was never taught. But I'll get along somehow. I'll do anything as long as it's decent."

For a moment the old gentleman looked at his son, and there was a look in his face as if he rather admired the boy's pluck. He made a gesture as if about to take him to his arms. But if he felt any

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such inclination the mood quickly passed. The boy had deliberately disobeyed him, made a mésalliance. He was hurt in his pride. That he could never forgive. Coldly he replied:

"You must get along as best you can—I shall never forgive you."

The young man turned to go.

"Very well—if I go to the devil—it will be on your conscience. You're very hard and unjust, and in your heart you know it."

The old man bounded. Wrathfully he retorted:

"I know nothing of the kind. You alone are to blame. You've wilfully disobeyed me in this case, as in many others. You have never done anything I wanted you to. And now you've disgraced me by marrying a girl without social position and of whose people we know nothing—a disgraceful, degrading marriage I call it, and of which one day you yourself will be heartily ashamed."

Until now the young man's attitude had been deferential, his manner that of a son who, no matter how he may differ with his father, feels in duty bound to listen respectfully to all he has to say. But when his parent so forgot himself as to attack the honor of the girl he loved, no filial consideration could longer restrain him. His face flushing with indignation, he burst out hotly:

"That's a lie! My wife is as good as we are, every bit! Her folks may not have as much money as you have, but at least what they have they came by honestly, which is more than some of us can say. Is your money all as clean as it might be?"

The question came direct and with all the force

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