Success

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Illustrated by

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By BEATRICE REDPATH

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Four men were in the group, middle-aged men of affairs who knew their world.

The club had emptied of almost all of its usual habitués. The click of billiard balls from across the hall had ceased; the laughter of a group of men standing outside on the pavement, waiting for a taxi, had died down to a thin echo. The smell of heated gasoline from their departing motor still drifted in at the windows.

Hicks, the impeccable, had come noiselessly into the room to straighten the papers and magazines on the broad table, and had then withdrawn, his deferential bearing just a shade exaggerated on account of the great man sitting in the midst of the group of men around the far window.

For Fane was great. It was only the very callow, the untried, who did not accord to him a certain recognition, a subtle deference of word and tone. It was a mark of inexperience not to appreciate him. It only made evident a lack of discernment: it could not strip him of his achievements. But the men who sat around Fane that hot August night were of one mind regarding him. He was head and shoulders above the rest of them, and they were only willing enough to render him his due.

It was a suffocating night; a night when the very idea of trying to find sleep between clinging sheets was distasteful. The long room with its high ceilings and windows open to the floor, afforded a certain amount of coolness. Outside the leaves on the trees, motionless, and silvered over by the light from the street lamps, appeared curiously artificial. Through the windows came the slipping, whirring sound of wheels passing incessantly, and the long, low, diminishing hum of far away sounds. There was the sharp smell of pinks upon the air, from the closely filled window boxes.

Four men were in the group, middle-aged men of affairs who knew their world. There was Heyward, just returned from one of his headlong trips around the globe, dropping coloured fragments of talk about places which to the rest were but names printed upon the map, strips of pink and blue and yellow, but which to him were pregnant with an atmosphere and a meaning. Chisholm was there, dreamer and romantic; Newton the scientist, with a mind like a sharp-bladed scalpel, dissecting and cutting facts bare of all useless verbiage; a little inclined to be too positive in his statements . . . and there was Fane.

Fane was not so easily disposed of by a phrase, his being a more complex personality. His greatness spread around him like an aura; it was hard not to be blinded by it, to see anything of the man himself. He did not reveal himself in his short cryptic utterances. It was easy to surmise his power, the wonderful mechanism of the brain that was back of that high brow, curiously enough the brow of an idealist, but contradicted by the mouth with its cruel strength, its dogged determination, its lines of purpose and of will. The man was not easily read. He had none of the self-

satisfaction of the conqueror; it almost seemed at times as though life had failed him, in spite of every evidence to the contrary.

They had been speaking about places, people, and affairs, but the conversation had gradually swung around to abstractions. Perhaps it was because Fane was there amongst them that their thoughts were led in the direction of success as a topic. He was such a monument of success as the world understands it.

"Yes . . . but success," Newton broke in with his rather dictatorial air, "we can only know how far a man has gone on the road to success, when we know the goal he has been trying for."

Chisholm picked up a cigarette and tapping it against his finger repeated slowly:

"A man's reach must exceed his grasp or what's a Heaven for?"

"I think our reach usually does exceed our grasp," Heyward said, champing the end of an old favorite meerschaum. "It's a long road we have to go; when we're young we don't know just how long it will be. How hard the going. But just as long as we don't swerve . . . or give up . . . but keep plugging ahead along the way we've mapped out . . . that is what I should call success."

"Surely that depends," Newton broke in again, "as to whether the goal is worth while. Youth is so often materialistic. The new generation have reversed affairs . . . have become so calculating, that in self-defense we older ones have had to take a more sentimental, idealistic point of view. No, as I said before . . . one must know the goal before one can judge success."

"I think that tangible results are the poorest measure of success," put in Fane, who up till that moment had been meditatively listening, his head thrown back, his face half hidden behind a blur of smoke. He commanded their attention as the one man amongst them who had greatly achieved. And yet he was a man who bore success without a trace of egotism or conceit. They waited for him to continue, and after a moment Fane went on, slowly, as though he were pondering every word.

I should say . . . that a man had succeeded . . . when he had met the crisis of his life . . . and had acted so as ever afterwards to be without regret . . . without reproach."

"I hadn't thought of it in that way," Heyward said musing, "and yet . . . now that you put it so . . . it does seem to epitomise success. I wonder,

though," he went on with his gray eyes narrowing in thought, "how many of us ever realize afterwards our failure to meet our crisis. To realize it . . . that at least means something."

"It can't blot out the failure," Fane replied with the same slow speech, "I knew a man once . . . who failed to meet his crisis . . . and who realized it. I suppose people would have called him successful . . . but he knew himself to be a failure. I knew a good deal about him . . . knew just how he felt all through . . . knew how it all came about . . . I might be able to piece it together . . . to block in the masses . . . to give you some of the high lights. That's if you'd care to hear. It rather bears on what we have been talking about. I think I would like to tell you the story of it."

Heyward rose and pushed the bell concealed in the woodwork.

"Of course we would like to hear it," he said, "wait till I get Hicks to bring in some drinks. I think the weather demands it," he said with a smile as he resumed his seat by the window.

Fane waited until Hicks had finally departed, having supplied them with tall glasses with ice tinkling against the sides, and then, leaning his head against the back of his chair, he began in a slightly desultory fashion.

"I can't tell you the names . . . or the exact facts . . . it would scarcely be fair. We'll call the man . . . Mortimer . . . just for the sake of calling him something. I went to school with him . . . yes, knew him as far back as that. He was a curious little beggar in those days. He had thought a bit too much for his age. It made him too suppressed . . . and a bit unpopular with the rest. A boy should be an unthinking little animal . . . and he wasn't. The others couldn't . . . quite understand him. They didn't know, you see, the curious household he had come from. His father used to come to the school to see him sometimes . . . and Mortimer would always try and slink away with him . . . so that the other boys wouldn't notice. He was a seedy looking individual . . . with red-rimmed eyes that never looked anyone straight in the face . . . and he had an unsavory reputation. Mortimer was ashamed of him. And when a boy is ashamed of his parents it's going to give a queer twist to his mind. Old Mortimer dabbled in various shady schemes . . . occasionally he made money out of them, always at someone else's expense. Mortimer had rather a remarkably clear idea of his father's business deals . . . and he was ashamed of them. He was ashamed in fact of everything that his father stood for. It made him shun the boys who had parents that they could boast about. He had no one. His mother was a rather dreary person, immersed continually in a state of worry over last month's bills. She was sentimental

over Mortimer . . . when she saw him, which was seldom. For the rest of the time she forgot his existence. He knew that too.

You can perhaps imagine his curious outlook on life. He had made up his mind slowly, with a grimness that would have been strange for his age, if he had not just had the experience which had been his, made up his mind quite definitely . . . that the only thing worth having was . . . respectability. A curious idea for a little nipper of his age to arrive at, wasn't it? You see it wasn't money that he wanted; sometimes there had been plenty of money in that narrow, dingy house to which he returned for the holidays. It wasn't power. His father had a certain power over the poor devils whom he fleeced; it wasn't love. Love was the slush of sentiment that his mother expended upon him. No, it was the one thing that he had never caught so much as a glimpse of . . . except outside of his own home. Respectability. Not respectability in any negative sense. He wanted his name to stand for it.

"His father wanted to put him straight into business as soon as he left school, but Mortimer stood out for going to college. It took some power of persuasion for old Mortimer thought it was just a waste of money. He was beginning to lose his grip about that time, and he wanted to put Mortimer into a scheme that he was trying to develop at the moment. But that was just what Mortimer had decided not to do. He wasn't going to have anything to do with his father's schemes. He was going to strike out along entirely different lines. But first of all, he was going to get all the education that his father had never had. He was going to make himself as different from his father as he knew how. He took the old man as a model of everything that he refused to be. He enlisted his weak, sentimental mother on his behalf, and finally the old man gave in.

"He worked hard at college, but he realized that he would have to expand a little more, to make friends, to belong to the right group, to join the right clubs. And yet, all the while, to hold himself just a shade aloof, so as to make his friendship something to be sought. I don't think in those days he made a single move that was not calculated to get him where he wanted to get. He began to have plans about this time, of what he was going to do when he was through college. Of course they were airy castles in Spain, but he was laying the foundations for something more substantial. He didn't want fame or fortune, as I think I have explained before. But he wanted his name on the lips of men who were worth while; a certain deference; a consideration; you know what I mean.

" 'I'm going to stand for something firm and established', he said one time. 'I'm going to make for myself a reputation that will be beyond question, beyond reproach. So that even my enemies . . . for I suppose every man has them . . . can't point a finger at me.'

"It was a worthy enough goal, as you must admit. It proves to my way of thinking that it isn't the worthiness of the goal . . . nor the distance you go towards it . . . which means success.

"It was during Mortimer's last year at college that he met Cicely Farmer. She was the daughter of the man who kept the little public house just outside the town. It wasn't a place with a very good name. She had been sent away to be educated on account of her voice. The idea was that she should go on the stage in light opera. Mortimer met her at a concert where she sang. He was exceptionally fond of music even then. Later it became quite a passion with him. At any rate, that evening, he was completely carried away by her singing . . . or perhaps it was just youth calling to youth . . . the old eternal cry that goes down the ages. Her voice wasn't anything in particular. But Mortimer had never looked at a girl up till then. His mother had represented all of woman he had ever known. He was naturally a little inclined to think that they were all alike. Sentimental, and inclined towards hysteria. Cicely Farmer gave him a very different point of view concerning women. He would take every moment that he could away from his studies, to go the few miles to the town, to the little public house on the highway. It was a quaint, pretty place, with a tiny, square garden choked with every kind of bloom, growing in wild, untended profusion. The scent of honeysuckle seemed to hang always in the air. She used to give him tea and honey in the garden, sitting on an old green bench, sprawled over with initials, cut by countless penknives . . . of other lovers of other days. She wasn't exactly pretty, but she had a soft bloom about her, and she was sweet and responsive to all of his ideas. He could talk to her by the hour . . . perhaps she didn't exactly understand his points of view . . . they were rather strange ones in some respects . . . but he always assumed that she did. She was so tremendously sympathetic. She usually wore dresses of some clear blue material, and her eyes were the same blue. Standing in the sunlight, with the garden behind her, Mortimer thought her the most beautiful thing that he had ever seen.

Sometimes in the evenings they would walk down the little lanes, and she would sing to him. There was one song in particular that she sang most frequently, *Annabel Lee*. He loved it for the words, they appealed to the

romance in him, for he was romantic, in spite of the hard, grim outlook that he had forced himself to take of life.

" 'Sing it again,' he would say to her when she had stopped, 'sing it all over again.'

" 'Don't you ever get tired of it?' she would laugh.

" 'Sing the part . . . "And this maiden she lived with no other thought, than to love and be loved by me," ' he would tell her.

"So the infatuation grew and grew, until he couldn't bear to let a single day pass without seeing her. And yet all the time, there was something curiously cool and quiet in the back of his mind, that told him that it could never be. She wasn't the kind of woman that he could marry. That was quite plain. Her father was an impossible old man, with a face blotched purple from the beer with which he had soaked himself. He had a lamentable vocabulary. Cicely wouldn't have cut herself adrift from him for all the world. She was too damned decent. He would have cut out his heart if it would have given her any happiness . . . he looked up to her as something extraordinary and very wonderful . . . he never suspected of course that he stood in her way at every turn. I know she never let him know it.

" 'He's given me everything he had to give,' she would say in speaking about him, 'I owe him everything I am.'

"And yet, all unwittingly, by doing so, by lifting her up above himself in the way of education and tastes, the old man had made life very hard for her. And there was Mortimer, believing himself actually in love with her, but determined, more strongly determined all the time, to go forward to the goal of his desire, without swerving, without letting anything come in the way of it. And that beer-soaked old man seemed to him an impassable barrier to the kind of thing he wanted.

"I think that, about this time Mortimer's ideas got rather confused. It wasn't particularly worthy to make the girl care for him, and then turn away. It wasn't quite honourable. But I don't know that that thought ever came into his head just then. He didn't really believe somehow that she did care for him very deeply. He was never very vain about himself. It was only afterwards . . . some time afterwards in fact, that he slowly came to realize that she had cared more than he had ever done. It was only a youthful infatuation on his part . . . he was in love with love itself . . . but with her, I think it went deeper. It usually does with women, if they are fine at all. They are not so much given to passing infatuations.

“He went up to London at the end of the year. There were no promises given between them, nothing much said on either side. On his part, he could say nothing with the goal he had in view, and she was proud. His own father had died in the meantime, and Mortimer took a house in Chelsea and lived there with his mother. Then he set to work like a demon. He made some friends, rather influential ones, through the men he had known at college. He was fairly popular. He made himself agreeable to people. He was getting on, too, but it took time. It didn’t go very rapidly at first. But he never grew discouraged, for he knew he was on the right road to the thing that he desired. With patience and perseverance he knew that he would get there in time. It isn’t the men with brains that always succeed. There are other qualities that take one further.

“It had been eight years since he had left college and in all that time he had never heard a word of Cicely Farmer. She had become only a memory to him, something to be associated in his mind with honeysuckle bloom, and long evenings drenched with moonlight and romance. And romance hadn’t occupied him very much in these years. He hadn’t the time for that sort of thing. If he married at all he intended to marry a woman who could help him on towards the bigger things that he was beginning to see ahead of him. About this time he became the protégé of a man whose name carried importance. There was a daughter, Madge, a tall dark girl, rather striking looking, but cold in manner and extremely self-possessed. She wasn’t the type to attract a man like Mortimer, and yet he made up his mind that she was the kind of girl he wanted to marry. He was becoming just a bit like a machine in those days; suppressing everything that was human in case that it might stand in his way. His desire, instead of dying down, was all the time increasing in momentum, hardening him to his purpose, steeling him against everything that stood in the way of his goal.

“They made rather a pet of him, the great man and his family. They seemed to regard him as almost one of themselves. It meant a good deal to Mortimer. It meant an assured future if he could stand in well with the great man. It had been hinted to Mortimer that he might take the place of an understudy, to lift the strain of the colossal amount of work. It was more than Mortimer could possibly have hoped for as yet. He was young to fill such a position. But the great man was inclined to like him. He knew the plodding life that Mortimer lived, he knew that here was a man more serious minded than most men of his age. And he liked him for that. He had been the same kind himself. It seemed to Mortimer that he had reached the very crisis of his life. Things are relative, you know, and up to this time there had not been many events tinged with great importance in his life. If this

position were actually offered to him, he felt that he would have his hand on the lever, and that he could control the future as he would.

It was just at this crucial moment that Mortimer was invited to dinner at the house of the great man. It was to be a family affair, and it seemed to him that this dinner portended something of importance. He suspected that he was being invited for a reason. He instinctively felt that that evening was to be the turning point of his career. Madge seemed to him rather strikingly beautiful that evening; the whole atmosphere of it all pleased him, made him feel that he was in sight of his goal. The dinner went off well, and everyone was in the best of spirits when they made their way out to the small stone balcony that hung out over the gray London street. It was a hot night in mid-summer, and it was pleasant out there, smoking and talking. Suddenly, breaking in upon their talk, the voice of a street singer below made them pause and listen. The voice was a little shrill . . . a little strained. When her song was ended there was a burst of applause from the balcony next door. Someone threw down some silver, and a woman appeared from behind a tree and stood under the balcony on which Mortimer and the rest were sitting.

" 'A music hall singer,' someone remarked. 'I suppose it's a slack time . . . she's hard up.'

" 'They have their fun . . . and then they pay for it,' someone else put in.

"The words of the song drifted up from the gray street and Mortimer sat clutching the balustrade, staring down into the darkness of the shadow where the singer stood. The words seemed to be like little hammers beating against his brain. They were the words of *Annabel Lee*.

> " 'And this maiden she lived with no other thought
> Than to love and be loved by me.'

"In Mortimer's mind was the glimmer of lanes by moonlight, he could smell honeysuckle, he could hear a girl singing to him in the night. The song throbbed with pathetic feeling. The shrill voice seemed as though it would break on the words that came floating up to Mortimer sitting motionless against the balustrade.

" 'Than to love and be loved by me.'

"He sat there, shocked and dazed by the surety of the fact that confronted him. Cicely Farmer . . . singing to him out of the shadows of a London street! There could be no doubt in his mind. He recognised the little

inflections of tone and voice. Someone clapped and threw down a handful of silver . . . and Mortimer winced. It was horrible. The singer came out of the shadow and smiled up at them beneath the mask she wore, like a little black crescent moon across her eyes. They threw down more coins while Mortimer sat rigid, staring down at the slight figure on the pavement. She turned to gather them up. Some of them had rolled out into the street. As she stepped off the pavement a large limousine came noiselessly around the corner . . . and was on top of her.

Mortimer stood at the end of the sofa, staring down at that white face, without any expression in his own, not knowing what to think or do.

"They brought her in and carried her upstairs, and laid her on a sofa. The mask had slipped off and Mortimer saw that it was Cicely Farmer. She lay white and broken, while someone forced brandy through her shut lips. Someone went for a doctor . . . there was confusion and talking, but Mortimer stood at the end of the sofa, staring down at that white face, without any expression in his own, not knowing what to think or do. And then she opened her eyes . . . she saw him there . . . and consciousness came back into her face. She stretched out one limp hand and whispered his name.

"The doctor was just coming into the room. No one else had heard . . . they were moving away to make room for him. Yet Mortimer didn't move . . . he didn't stir . . . he didn't show by a single glimmer of expression that

he recognised her. How could he possibly respond to that appeal? He couldn't . . . he daren't! Slowly he moved away to the other side of the room. He felt that her eyes were following him . . . he knew . . . the pain that was in them.

"His whole mind was in a state of upheaval. If he spoke . . . he knew what the rest would think . . . something quite different to the truth. He couldn't take the risk. He wouldn't be able to explain it away because they wouldn't ask for explanations, or want them.

"The doctor had her carried downstairs to the waiting ambulance. They thought if they operated immediately she might have a chance. They carried her out of the room . . . and as they carried her past Mortimer she opened her eyes and looked into his face. She was giving him his second chance. He refused to take it. He simply lowered his eyes as they carried her past, down the stairs, out into the street.

"She died the following day after the operation. Mortimer went back to work, but somehow . . . things were not the same. A sort of pride in himself had gone. You understand, he didn't care for her any more . . . she was only a little ghost out of the past . . . stretching out weak hands to him . . . just for a moment in passing. And he had turned away . . . he had refused to recognise her. All she had wanted had been her name on his lips . . . and he wouldn't give it to her. He tried to argue it out . . . but he knew . . . within himself . . . that he had come to the crisis of his life . . . and had failed.

"All the success that came to him afterwards never could blot out that one miserable moment of failure. And the irony of it was that it was all to no purpose. He hadn't realized it at the time, but he had actually climbed high enough then not to have to enlist patronage. He had never really given himself the full credit for what he had done. His vision was always so much greater than his achievement, that it belittled, for him, whatever he had accomplished. It was all to no purpose. He had already gained control over his own future. But if you asked him to-day . . . if he thought himself a success . . . he would tell you honestly from his heart . . . from the faith that is in him . . . that he considers himself a failure."

As the door closed behind Fane, Heyward said slowly:

"All the same, I don't quite agree with Fane . . . if you recognise your failure that surely is a sort of success."

Newton looked up.

“You know of course . . . that that was pure autobiography . . . that tale of his?”

“Nonsense,” said Heyward, “a man doesn’t tell those sort of things about himself.”

“He does sometimes,” retorted Newton . . . . . “if the mood is upon him . . . and if he’s big enough.”

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *Success* by Beatrice Redpath]