

# Back to White

GEORGE BARR McCUTCHEON  
ILLUSTRATIONS BY RAY WALTERS

## CHAPTER I.

### The Message From the Deep.

The two old men sat in the library, sipping the unresponsive blue envelope that lay on the end of the long table nearest the fireplace, where a merry but unnoticed bed of coals crackled fiercely in the vain effort to cry down the shrieks of the bleak December wind that whistled about the corners of the house.

There was something maddening in the fact that the envelope would remain unopened until the next morning, Fredrick Brood came home for the night. They found themselves wondering if by any chance he would fail to come at all. Their hour of waiting was ten o'clock, in, day out.

Up to half past nine they discussed the blue envelope with every breath of the house. From Mrs. John Desmond, the housekeeper, down to the voiceless but eloquent decanter of port that stood between them, first of the arm of one chair, then of the other. They were very old men; they could still quibble without in the least disturbing each other. An observer would say, during these periods of unbroken silence, that their remarks were addressed to the decanter and that the poor decanter had something to say in return.

But, for all that, their conversation was broad, blue envelope that had lain there since half-past eight.

They knew that it came directly or indirectly from Mrs. John Desmond, who owed their present condition of comfort and security after half a century of vicissitudes; from the man whom life had saved many times over. In those old, few days when comforts were so evil that they passed without recognition in the maelstrom of events. From midway James Brood was speaking to his son.

Twenty years ago these two old cronies had met James Brood in one of the black holes of Calcutta, his life being swept to perdition with the swiftness and sureness of a tide that knows no pause. They found him when the drugs were at his lips, and the stupor—defiant in his brain. Without meaning to be considered Samaritans, good or bad, they dragged him from the depths and found that they had revived a man. Those were the days when James Brood's life meant nothing to him, days when he was tortured by the thought that would be all too long for him to endure, yet he was not the kind to murder himself as men do who lack the courage to go on living.

Weeks after the rescue in Calcutta these two soldiers of fortune and another, John Desmond, learned from the lips of the man himself that he was not such as they, but rich in this world's goods, richer than the Solomon of their discredited imagination.

What Brood told them was that he brought the grim smile of appreciation to the lips of each. He had married a beautiful foreigner—an Austrian, they gathered with excellent reason—that taken her to his home in New York city, to the house in lower Fifth avenue where his father and grandfather had lived before him—his father, the second of the wayfarers after twenty years, now sat in rural contemplation of a blue envelope.

A baby boy came to the Broods in the second year of their wedded life, but before that there had come a male—a male, dreamy-eyed, handsome, Latin; a man who played upon the harp as only the angels may play. In his delicious ravings Brood cured this man of his fits, and he had stolen away from him; he reviled his baby boy, even denying him; he laughed with blood-curdling glee over the manner in which he had cast out the woman who had broken his heart and crushed his pride; he walked in anguish over the hints he had made him to allow the child to die when he might die and smother in triumph. This much the three men who lifted him from hell were able to glean from lips that knew not of pity. Later on, they were filled with pity. Later on, in a rational vengeance, he told them, but without remorse. A deep, silent, steadfast bitterness, not the violent ravings. He became a wayfarer with them, quiet, dogged, fatal; where they went he also went; what they did he also did; soon he followed; they followed: into the dark places of the world they plunged, for perilous little to him, and he followed. They no longer knew days of peace, no safety. His hand was a whip that fore they came upon James Brood; it was a hurricane after James Brood.

Twice John Desmond, younger than Brood, and James Brood, and Danbury Daves, and Joseph Riggs, saved the life of James Brood by acts of unparalleled heroism; once in a South African jungle when a lion was fought for her young, and again in upper India, when single-handed, he held off a horde of Hindus for days while his comrades lay wounded in a cavern. Daves and Riggs, in the Himalayas, crept down the wall of a precipice, with five thousand feet between them and the bottom of the gorge, to drag him from

### CHAPTER II.

#### Various Ways of Receiving a Blow.

James Brood's hope of a home was a little more than a dream. The house which rightly may be described as "public" in order to distinguish it from other parts where privacy was intended, was not unlike any of the richly furnished, old fashioned places in the lower part of the city, where there are still traces left of the Knickerbocker and its kindred. This was not the home of men who had been merely rich; it was not wealth alone that stood behind these stately investments.

At the top of the house were the rooms which no one entered except by the gracious will of the master, here James Brood had stored his own priceless treasures of his own peculiar fancy—exquisite, curious things from the mystic East, things that are not to be bought and sold but come only to the hand of him who searches in lands where peril is the price.

Words separated the upper and lower regions of the house by a single step took one from the sedate Occident into the very heart of the Orient; a narrow threshold was the line between the rugged and the soft, languorous, seductive East. In this part of the house, James Brood, when at home for one of his brief sojourns, spent many of his hours in seclusion, shut off from the rest of the establishment as completely as if he were the inhabitant of another world.

At the bottom of the house, in a silent man named Ranjab, and on occasions by his secretary, he saw but little of the remaining members of the household. He had been engaged in the task of writing his memoirs—so called—in so far as they related to his experiences and researches of the past twenty years.

His secretary and amanuensis was Lydia Desmond, the nineteen-year-old daughter of his only remaining son and friend, the late John Desmond whose death occurred when the girl was barely ten years of age.

Brood, on hearing of the man's death, immediately made inquiries concerning the condition in which he had left his wife and child, with the result that Mrs. Desmond was installed as mistress of the house. Lydia and the daughter given every advantage in the way of education. Desmond had left nothing in the shape of an estate, but his wife and daughter, by means of a diary kept during those perilous days before he met and married her. This diary was being incorporated into the memoirs of the widow, and was to speak for Brood in words he could not put with poetry after himself. In this case John Desmond was to tell his own story, in his own way, for Brood's love for his friend was broad enough even to admit of the girl's own word.

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old men who had sat up half the night to learn the contents of that wonderful letter from the sea, was whirled on his heel and left the room. One might have noticed that his lips were drawn in a mischievous, sardonic smile, and his eyes were angry.

"Oh, Lordy!" sighed Danbury Daves, blinking, and was on the point of sitting down abruptly. The arm of the decanter.

"I never was so insulted in my life," began Joseph Riggs, feebly.

"Steady, gentlemen," said Jones. "Lean on me, please."

There was nothing else left for him to do. But, for all that, he desired them—justifiably so, no doubt, if one bears in mind the fact that they signified more to Brood than did his long-neglected son.

The cold resolve that extended to a young man did not carry beyond him in the least. He was a member of the household so far as James Brood was concerned. The unhappy boy, early in their acquaintance, came to realize that there was little in common between him and the man he called father. After a while the eager light died out of his own eyes, and he no longer strived to encourage the intimate relations he had counted upon as a part of the recompense for so many years of separation and loneliness. It required but little effort on his part to meet his father's indifference with a coldness equal as pronounced. He was not without his own meaning of filial love; he had been taught by word of mouth to love the man he had never seen, and he had learned to do so with a keenness of calculation. He hated the two old men because his father loved them.

The patient butler, Jones, had made two trips to the library. The first time he had tried to awaken them and knock them off to bed. Each time he had been ordered away, on with the joint admission to "mind his own business."

"But it is nearly midnight," protested Jones irritably, "with a glance at the empty chairs and the closed doors." "Jones," said Danbury Daves, with great dignity and an eye that detected him to such a degree that he could not but feel that he was being stood by Jones was attending them in pairs. "Jones, you ought to be in bed, dear—don't you—both of you. What is your business in coming in here this time of night? It is disconcerting."

"Your infernal irregularity," broke in Brood. "Don't you dare to touch that bottle, sir. Let it alone!" "It's time you were in bed," pronounced Jones, taking Mr. Daves by the arm. Mr. Brood, seated in his chair and grinning triumphantly. He was a short, very fat old man.

"Take him down," said Jones, said Mr. Riggs feebly. "He's kind and—utterly useless as a time like this. Take him down."

"Who the dev—him—is like you, sir?" demanded Mr. Daves, regarding Mr. Riggs as if he had never seen him before.

"You are both drunk," said Jones, succinctly.

The heavy front door closed with a bang at that instant and the sound of footsteps came from the hall—a quick, firm tread that had decision in it. The patient butler, Jones, gave a nervous glance over his shoulder.

"I'm sorry to have Mr. Frederic see like this," he said, biting his lip. "He hates it so."

The two old men made a commendable effort to stand erect, but no effort was made to hide the tremor of their arms and stolid shoulders, which linked them and stood shouldered together.

"Show him in," said Mr. Riggs, magnificently.

"No, we'll find out who in telegram office of him," said Mr. Daves, spitting his legs a little farther apart in order to declare a staunch front.

"It's worth waiting for," said Mr. Riggs.

"Absolutely," said his staunch friend, "Frederic" said, "I'm sorry to have Mr. Frederic see like this," he said, biting his lip.

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WHY A DOG WAGS ITS TAIL  
Italian Scientist Declares Animal Performs Action for Conscious Purpose

Why does a dog wag its tail? This is a question that has long puzzled scientists. A recent study by an Italian scientist has shown that dogs wag their tails as a conscious act of communication.

THE PRACTICE OF KICKING  
Kicking, like shouting, should begin at home. It is a habit that is often learned in childhood.

AN IDEAL MAN  
An ideal man is one who remains unconscious of the fact that his wife is growing stout. This is a rare quality in the modern world.

TO BE CONTINUED