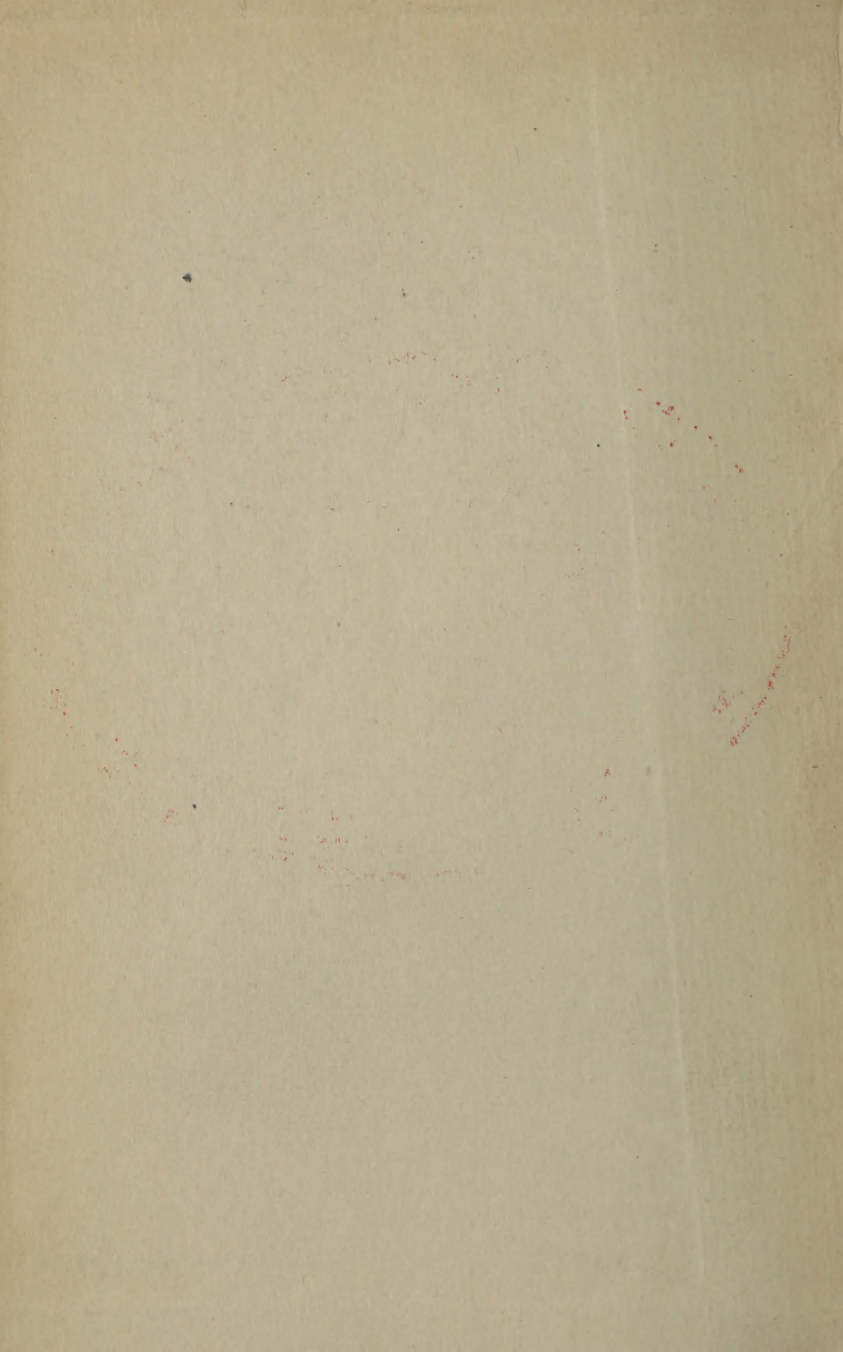


*The  
Fugitive  
Millionaire*

*Carlyle*



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THE FUGITIVE MILLIONAIRE



# THE FUGITIVE MILLIONAIRE

BY

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## CHAPTER I

“YOU ’LL *have* to marry, Lee! There is absolutely nothing else for it!”

Mrs. Dorice stirred among her piled-up cushions, dropped her cigarette ash untidily onto the carpet, and pushed a pile of bills petulantly off her knees.

Her small, fair, rather exquisitely tinted face was clouded, her clear, carefully modulated but hard voice was querulous. She looked across at the slim, straight, white-clad figure at the window at once speculatively and with annoyance. She found her step-daughter annoying more often than not; and she was never wholly at her ease with her.

There was something about Lee’s power of listening to a conversation or argument in complete silence which was discomfiting as well as irritating. Moreover, she found it quite impossible to fathom the working of the

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girl's mind behind her long, grey, black-lashed eyes. Outwardly, at any rate, Lee Dorice was never ruffled, angry, or dismayed. She accepted pleasant or unpleasant things with the same expressionless calm.

Men found her difficult to get on with, though decidedly intriguing and attractive. Women—for the most part—avoided her. They did not understand her any more than her stepmother understood her. There was an aloofness about her supreme indifference to the ordinary pettinesses of everyday existence which they openly deplored, and envied in secret. It gave her an air of distinction which singled her out for notice wherever she might go, and made her completely different from other girls.

Beyond this there was nothing very remarkable about her. Her beauty was of the kind that makes itself felt slowly, rather than at once. She was pale, extremely slender, boyishly graceful. Her eyes were grave, steadfast, and clear. The blackness of her lashes made them seem much darker than they were in reality. Her features were good, not strictly regular, and the vividly red mouth was perfect. She carried herself superbly,

and dressed with a shrewd good judgment and taste which made even well and expensively dressed women regard her wistfully.

There was nothing "fluffy" about her. She wore her hair smoothly and neatly knotted at the back of her small head, and only a few of her acquaintances knew that it was long enough and thick enough to cover her like a cloak to her knees. It was black with a density seldom seen in the hair of any but Oriental women, or a rare type of Irish, and it made the whiteness of her skin dazzling.

She stood now with her hands resting lightly on the window-sill, her eyes upon the distant sea. A faint haze slightly obscured the sun, and softened the rather rugged, rocky coast-line. Through the mist, seemingly very far away, loomed a high grey shape, like a huge hillock. Lee's rather sombre gaze shifted slowly to it, and grew momentarily intent. But she did not answer Mrs. Dorice, and after a moment that lady spoke again, with some asperity.

"Are you *listening*, Lee?"

Lee nodded.

"Oh, yes," she returned quietly—"I 'm listening."

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She changed her position slightly, leaning a shoulder against the window-frame and tilting her head back.

Mrs. Dorice frowned, then sighed exasperatedly.

“ You are quite the most impossible person! Almost as bad as your poor dear father was!”

Lee stirred, and her black brows met for an instant, but she made no comment. Only into the wide eyes there crept a great wistfulness, a great regret. Her father had been very dear to her, her constant companion and friend, her only intimate. Life at his side had been well worth living, if not prolific of luxuries, until his utterly unexpected and mistaken marriage to Teresa Ford, an appealing and more than pretty widow of thirty, possessed of an overgrown, lanky, and wilful daughter of twelve.

This had happened five years ago, when Lee was not quite nineteen. Mrs. Ford, having contracted a ridiculously early marriage with a penniless boy not many years her senior, had regretted it and her lost opportunities ever since. She had welcomed the advent of her child with resignation and the subsequent decease of its father with relief. She was

young, attractive, with extravagant tastes and somewhat highly coloured ambitions. She was sufficiently well-bred to hold her own in any society; she was clever, conceited, and very sure of herself.

With the death of her child's father she had matter-of-factly made up her mind to marry again, but this time advantageously. Unfortunately those men with whom she was able to come in contact were neither wealthy nor important. It was not until grave-eyed, amiable Tom Dorice had drifted across her path that she had seen any hope of attaining her desires.

He was plainly good-tempered, unmistakably a gentleman. He was generous in expenditure, and when his occasional literary efforts brought him in anything substantial in payment he lived up to his possessions. He was in funds when Mrs. Ford had met him. His name was an old and good one; by dint of judicious inquiry Mrs. Ford discovered that his connections were wealthy, and that a remote cousin was a baronet.

After some slight consideration she had decided upon conquest; and, rather miraculously, had achieved it. Long afterwards

Dorice confessed, sheepishly, to his bewildered daughter that he had not the faintest idea of how the thing had happened. He seemed scarcely to remember proposing. Certainly he was neither infatuated nor in love with Teresa.

But she led him triumphantly to the altar, and only when it was too late discovered that, far from being a man of means, he was possessed of an income which had made existence for two merely comfortable.

The blow had been severe, but she had comforted herself with the reflection that as Mrs. Dorice she had a higher social standing than a richer man might have given her, could move among people of position and a certain importance, while her active mind dwelt secretly upon the bare possibility of Tom Dorice stepping, romantically, into his distant and titled cousin's shoes.

This, however, had not happened. The distant cousin was also struck with the idea of matrimony, and within course of time rejoiced in the possession of a sturdy heir. This further blow had almost embittered Teresa; and then, while she was yet sombrely reflecting upon it, Tom Dorice had been brought back



to her from the hunting field one morning with his back broken.

He had died with Lee's hand in his, smiling at her steadfastly, but without speaking. He had not much to leave, sufficient perhaps to bring in an income of a bare five hundred a year; and that, in a moment of mental aberration, and fancying that he was doing the right thing, he had left, in a hastily made but perfectly valid will, to his second wife.

He had meant no neglect of his daughter—that daughter who looked at him with his first wife's eyes and smiled with her smile. Yet he had made her, by a stroke of his careless pen, utterly and completely dependent upon the woman who had usurped her mother's place.

The girl had uttered no protest; had shown nothing of what she felt. She had known her father so well, and in her every thought of him there was an indulgent tenderness rather than hurt or resentment.

But she felt her position keenly, the more so as Mrs. Dorice, while a little afraid of her, was not the sort of woman to allow her to forget it even for a moment.

Lee felt herself an encumbrance, and found

it increasingly intolerable. At the same time it was impossible to break free. She was well-bred, cultured, charming, but she had few accomplishments that were of a marketable value. It had never been Tom Dorice's intention that she should work for a living; she realised herself, dismayedly, that she was incapable of doing so.

She roused from her sombre memories at Mrs. Dorice's next words.

"Anyway, things can't go on much longer like this! It 's bad enough to have the expense of bringing up Terry, and dressing her, but with *you* on my hands as well I 'm nearly at my wit's end! If you were n't quite so standoffish, Lee, you 'd be a good deal more attractive to men, let me tell you that. You 've looks, of course"—the concession was so grudging that Lee unexpectedly smiled—"but looks are n't much good without a little animation."

Lee shrugged.

"I 'm not aware," she observed drily, "that—just lately—we 've met any men worth attracting! One can't look upon sea-side acquaintances as prospective husbands, you know!"

“ I don’t know anything of the sort!” Teresa’s voice was sharp. “ I ’ve found that one meets really nice people at the seaside. But of course you give yourself such airs!”

Lee laughed rather sadly, but she made no comment. Her eyes were still upon the ungainly, indistinct bulk looming through the mist, her lips pressing so firmly together that her whole pale face looked unnaturally hard.

Teresa Dorice recovered her bills, and viciously flung her half-smoked cigarette into the empty hearth.

“ As to meeting people,” she proceeded, “ we won’t be here much longer. I ’m tired of it; it ’s too dull and too expensive. I ’ve decided to go back to town at the end of the week.”

Lee straightened herself, and turned slowly into the room.

“ I ’m going to-morrow,” she announced. “ I had a letter from Patty Clay asking me to join her there and go on with her for a fortnight to her place in Surrey. I accepted—chiefly because I thought it would be a relief to you to have me off your hands if only for a couple of weeks!”

There was no bitterness in her voice; never-

theless Mrs. Dorice stirred uncomfortably. Again her voice was sharp when she answered.

“ You can't blame me if it is!” she pointed out. “ Things are getting more impossible every day. I hardly know where to turn. One can't live suitably on what I 've got, and keep two girls as well. And Terry 's growing up. She 's seventeen—”

She checked herself, and flushed.

As a rule she was careful to avoid any mention of her daughter's age, and generally spoke of her as “ my little girl.” Secretly she rejoiced that a very curly, rather close-cropped nutbrown head, an affection for very short skirts, and a decidedly diminutive stature made Terry appear a full two years younger than she was.

She encouraged a display of long black-stockinged legs, and a liking for rather childish amusements; smiled indulgently at a somewhat slipshod manner of speaking, interspersed with slang, and was often heard to quote, in soft admonishment, that “ little girls should be seen, and not heard!”

Terry was quite well aware of her motives, and grinned impishly at them. She was, personally, quite content with the arrangement.

She had a lot of freedom, and used it as she chose. Her feeling towards her mother was tolerantly contemptuous rather than affectionate; she avoided her company as much as possible, and for the most part completely ignored her authority.

She enjoyed herself thoroughly, and accepted her childish rôle amusedly. She was in no haste to grow up.

Lee, thinking of her, frowned. She was more than a little fond of Terry, and regretted her upbringing. She looked now at Mrs. Dorice.

“I know,” she said. “And she ’ll soon have to stop running wild like this, of course. Oh, I assure you, Teresa, I ’m by no means blind to the fact that I am not only not wanted, but very much in the way. I am in your way now—in a little while I shall be in Terry’s! Believe me, the position is as galling for me as it is annoying for you. But I ’m quite helpless to alter it. I was n’t, unfortunately, brought up to be useful! And father never meant me to be dependent.”

Mrs. Dorice sat up quickly. A little angry flush ran up over her fair skin; her big, pansy eyes began to sparkle.

“Are you,” she demanded, “trying to insinuate that your father was influenced in his disposal of his property? That—”

“I am insinuating nothing,” Lee interrupted. “I am merely stating a fact. He did not realise what he was doing when he left everything to you, otherwise he would not have done it. He would not have been so unjust. You see”—her voice seemed to catch for an instant—“it was n’t as if his health was not of the best. He expected to live so much longer, and I suppose”—there was a sudden bitterness in her tone—“that he, too, expected I should be provided for long before his death. As it is—”

“As it is,” Mrs. Dorice was wrought up enough to declare, “you ’re most ungrateful, and positively insulting at times. Really, Lee, I find it more difficult to get on with you every day!”

Lee did not answer. She crossed the room, picked up a thick white sports coat, and a close-fitting hat, and proceeded to put them on. Her face was expressionless, but a close observer would have seen that her eyes were very dark, as if with anger, and that her hands trembled a little.

At the door she glanced back.

"I 'm going for a row," she said levelly. "I shan't be back to tea, and something cold for supper will do when I come in."

She laid her hand on the knob, but paused as Mrs. Dorice gave a little exclamation.

"Really, Lee! You were telling me about going to Patty Clay's to-morrow, and if you leave early I shall certainly not see you before you start. I suppose you 'll join us afterwards in town?"

Lee lifted her brows.

"I suppose so. Unless you change your mind and don't go back! But I 'll write you, anyway."

Mrs. Dorice drummed her fingers on the arm of her chair.

"I suppose," she suggested tentatively, "you could n't take Terry? She is always so much wilder when you 're not about, and besides she gets on my nerves. She—"

"Patty Clay does n't know Terry," Lee interrupted uncompromisingly, "and, anyway, she is n't fond of flappers."

Teresa's lips tightened, but she shrugged resignedly.

"Ah, well. I suppose it 's out of the ques-

tion. Anyway, you 're lucky to be going. Patty always gives you a good time, does n't she—and I suppose there 'll be a crowd of interesting people there. Perhaps"—she stopped drumming on the chair to look with new eagerness at the girl—"you 'll meet some men there who will be more congenial. If so—"

She stopped. Lee met her eyes suddenly, straightly. She spoke with a note in her voice that Teresa had never heard in it before.

"My dear Teresa," she cried, "I 'll promise you *this*. The very first man who asks me to marry him, whoever he is, or whatever he is—I 'll *accept!*"



## CHAPTER II

UPON her way to the shore Lee came upon Terry. She was the centre of a group of men and girls, all of them chance acquaintances, and was energetically sucking peppermints while she talked.

She had been bathing, and was attired in a limp linen skirt, and a striped jumper that had seen much service. Feet and legs were bare, her hair was still wet, and a couple of sodden bath-towels hung over her arm.

Terry was not yet at an age when appearance meant very much to her. She disliked intensely having to be careful of her clothes, and Mrs. Dorice encouraged this attitude by providing her only with the plainest of apparel.

Oddly enough her lack of adornment lent the girl attraction. She was thin to a degree, and awkward as a young colt, and in conventional garb she looked, as she herself cheerfully described it, a "freak." The short skirt and rough wool jumper suited her. She looked nothing more than a child in it.

Her face and arms and neck were burned a uniform deep brown. Her eyes were brown too—the red, warm, clear brown of an Irish setter's. There was nothing of the pansy softness of her mother's about them, but they were large, and clear, and well-shaped, black-lashed as Lee's own, and full of fire and sparkle and expression.

Her features were well-formed, if scarcely regular. Her mouth was wide and generous, her nose rather short, the chin square and very determined.

In character she was somewhat complex. She was a creature of impulse, wayward, headstrong, and inconsequent as a butterfly. Warm-hearted and generous, she was quick-tempered to a fault. She defied any person's authority, save, sometimes, Lee's. She was painfully outspoken, fiercely resentful of ridicule, and passionately fond of animals. She was fearless, strong, and as active as a little wildcat, contemptuous of cowardice in any form.

Impatient of restraint, she had gone her own sweet way since babyhood. She was shrewd and far-seeing as well as intelligent. She read voraciously at such times as she was

forced to remain indoors; but she was never quite happy unless she was in the open air.

She possessed a collection of animals which amounted almost to a menagerie, and which she insisted upon taking everywhere with her. She shrugged at Mrs. Dorice's objections and ignored other people's. Her affection for her creatures was intense and deep-rooted.

She had acquired a nondescript, shaggy beast, of such mixed ancestry that he was beyond description from the half-drunken brute who had owned him, for the price of his licence and a pint of beer; she had found a ribby, wistful-eyed terrier on the kerb one night, and had been given a thoroughbred and well-nigh perfect Pomeranian by a youthful adorer who had surreptitiously purloined it from his mother's prized kennel upon the morning of the Dorices' departure from that particular neighborhood.

They formed a constant bodyguard, each equal in favour, in company with a one-eyed cat of morose demeanour, and a canary which had been sold to her by a persuasive and evil-visaged proprietor of a dingy birdshop in Lambeth with the assurance that it was a male bird with the promise of a glorious voice, and

which had protested against this misrepresentation by laying an egg almost as soon as she had got it home.

There was also a parrot who swore picturesquely, a white rat, and a mongoose. Terry earnestly hoped in course of time to add a monkey to their ranks, while she found the greatest happiness of her life in ministering to their various wants.

To-day only the dogs accompanied her, the mongrels bright-eyed and wet, the Pom fastidiously avoiding their moist company and shrilling indignation at the encroaching sea.

Terry silenced it with a well-aimed, playful blow of a bare heel, and grinned at Lee.

“He ’s nearly in hysterics,” she explained, meaning the Pom, “because I tried to make him go in too. Have a peppermint? Where are you off to, and what are you looking so glum about?”

She investigated a sticky bag and thrust another black ball between her lips, then linking her damp arm in Lee’s, nodded carelessly to her companions, took the peppermint out of her mouth to whistle the dogs piercingly, and moved lightly on.

“Mother been nagging you again?” she

demanded, when they were alone; and shrugged as the other replied only with a swift gesture. She continued to suck noisily until they reached the old fisherman from whom Lee generally hired her boat. Then: "Going out? Is n't it rather misty to-day?"

"It 's only a haze," Lee returned. But the old man interrupted:

"Likely it 'll turn to fog later, miss. If you be set on goin' I 'd not stay long—these fogs come sudden, and last a fairish while. Maybe to-morrow 'd be a better day—"

"But I shan't be here to-morrow!" Lee told him, with that sudden rare smile of hers. "And I want to go."

"Not here to-morrow?" Terry caught up the words shrilly. Her eyes shadowed with a faint apprehension.

Lee, watching the old man preparing the tubby little boat, explained. The younger girl made a sharp gesture.

"How perfectly rotten!" she exclaimed. "I 'll miss you disgustingly!"

Lee laughed. She was quite aware of Terry's affection for her, and returned it. The girl was lovable, for all her faults, and when

she gave her liking she gave it in full measure. Lee had a certain amount of influence over her, which Terry would not, for the world, have admitted. She valued her opinion as she valued the opinion of no one else, and hers was the only real companionship Lee had known since her father's death.

"Mother's a perfect rotter!" Terry went on, having paused to masticate hastily the remains of the peppermint. "Oh"—as Lee made a movement—"don't tell me! You're going because of her—to get away from her and her grougings for a bit! *I* know!"

Lee did not reply, but she gave the hand Terry had dropped on her arm a quick, warm pressure. Her sympathy was comforting; the hard lines of Lee's face relaxed.

"Where're you going?" Terry went on.

Lee answered, moving to the end of the jetty and preparing to step into the boat:

"Patty Clay's. Only for a fortnight. I'll join you in town."

"Town?" Terry's glance held dismayed questioning. "Good Lord! Is mother going back to town in a fortnight?—and this only the beginning of September. Oh, she's too bad! She promised to stay till the twenty-

ninth, and I *hate* town, and suburbs, and a lot of dreary houses and poky shops! She—come back, you little fool ”—this admonishingly to the Pom who was endeavouring to follow Lee into the boat—“ *knows* I hate it!”

She caught the Pom up by the scruff of its neck and held it to her. Her eyes were flashing, her cheeks flushed.

“ I ’d like to slap her sometimes! If she does go back to town I ’ve a jolly good mind to get into long frocks and drop the little girl stunt forthwith. Lee—can’t I come rowing with you?”

Lee shook her head.

“ Not to-day,” she said. “ I don’t want to listen to chatter, or to talk—just to be alone and get comfortably tired. I ’m sorry.”

“ Don’t mensh. I understand, my dear. Only don’t forget the time and pull out too far. I ’m going to the theatre with a bunch of Tim Rawdon’s friends to-night, so you ’ll probably be in bed and asleep when I come in. But I ’ll be up good and early in the morning so as to see you off. ’Bye-ee!”

She stood waving, the Pom under one arm, until Lee and the boat became indistinct in the faint mist, then, with a word to the old

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boatman, started running back over the sand, concocting, as she went, various means of impressing, forcibly, her disapproval upon Mrs. Dorice.

Lee, pulling slowly seawards, glanced about her like one uncertain of quite which direction to take. Then, over her shoulder, she caught sight again of the vague, uneven shape which she had been watching from the windows of her stepmother's room, and a sudden gleam of determination came into her eyes.

She knew the shape to be that of an island, some little distance out from the mainland, and, even on a clear day, not near enough to be plain to the view. It was called Ruff's Island, and once had been the site of a lighthouse, now nothing but a mass of ruins. There were some well-known and dangerous rocks in its immediate vicinity, and while it was possible to approach it, few ever went near it. It was bleak, and lonely, and rather sinister-looking, and since the days before the lighthouse had fallen to ruin there was no record of any one having been tempted to explore it.

Terry had first put the wish to do so into Lee's mind. Terry was an adventurous spirit,



with a vivid imagination. She had frequently voiced her conviction that the ruins would be well worth investigating; and to-day Lee was conscious of a desire for something out of the ordinary to distract her attention.

She began to pull more strongly, and in a little while could see the outline of the island and the forlorn pile of ruins quite plainly. She found the approach fully as difficult as it was said to be, and it was only by a skilful manœuvring of her little boat among the jagged rocks that she was finally able to effect a landing.

But she managed it at last, and, securing the boat as best she could, she began clambering over the rocks. The air was mellow; high above, faintly red through the mist, the sun glowered, and the chill of evening was still absent.

The island was bigger than she had imagined, and, farther up from the sea, the ground was sandy and easier to walk on. She went on, her attention absorbed by shells and weeds, until a glance at her wrist-watch told her it was nearly five. Then she turned with the intention of going back.

She could see the crumbled ruins of the

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lighthouse, and, among the rocks below it, her little boat. The next instant, bewilderingly and completely, both were obliterated. There were no longer any rocks, any ruins, or any sea. Unexpectedly, dankly, like a thick, impenetrable blanket, the dense sea-fog was wrapping the whole island.

### CHAPTER III

IT did not occur to Lee at once that, not only was she cut off from the mainland, but completely lost. A moment before she had been within not so many yards of the ruined lighthouse, and quite near to the rocks and her boat. Now it was as if both had been wiped off the face of the earth, and she was alone.

She stood for a second or two quite still, bewildered, dismayed. Then she began to stumble and grope her way forward. The ruins had been directly in front of her, and she faced in what she believed to be their direction. But a sudden slip made her realise that she had left the sandier ground, and was almost upon the rocky foreshore again.

Recovering herself she stood, breathing a little quickly, and trying to pierce the fog for some faint glimpse of any landmark that would give her her bearings. But all she could see was the thick spirals of mist in her immediate vicinity, wreathing about her like the menacing tentacles of some huge, intangible monster of the sea.

Her dismay returned. She dared not move either one way or the other. She was conscious of feeling suddenly very cold; in spite of her thick wool sports coat the damp mist seemed to penetrate to her skin, and she began to shiver.

Gradually it was dawning upon her that her situation was desperate. There was no hope of making herself heard however loudly she might call. The island was deserted, and dangerous, and very far from the mainland. Nor was it likely that she would be missed, at any rate for some considerable time, unless, perhaps, by the fisherman from whom she had hired the boat.

And it was more than likely that he would conclude she had rowed along the coast, and had pulled inshore as soon as she had realised the fog was creeping upon her. Certainly he would never imagine that, upon such a day as this, she had been mad enough to row to Ruff's Island.

Quite suddenly she was aware that her lips were trembling, and bit them fiercely to still them. Lee was no coward, but the prospect of remaining in this one spot, powerless to make any attempt to find shelter, waiting

shivering and sodden by the fog for the day to come, was appalling.

She felt smothered, choked by the heavy atmosphere, breathless. With each passing moment she was beginning to be more and more frightened. The thick silence oppressed her, made her know for the first time the real meaning of loneliness.

Perhaps for five minutes she stood thus, her hands pressed hard against her breast, her breath held, eyes straining into the vapour. Then, so involuntarily that the sound of her own voice scared and startled her, she gave vent to a long, shrill, rather tremulous call.

Not that she had the faintest hope of making any one hear; only the silence was already becoming intolerable. The fog seemed to beat her voice back upon her, but she uttered the cry again—and then stood suddenly tense and very still.

For an instant, it seemed to her, another sound followed upon it, indistinct, scarcely audible above the monotonous sucking sound of the waves among the rocks. With a quick hope leaping up in her heart she called a third time, less quaveringly now.

This time there was no doubt about the

answering sound. It was a voice, a deep voice, still muffled and distant, and Lee caught a half-sobbing breath of relief. She pitched her own voice now to a piercing "Coo-ee!" This time there was no reply, and she waited anxiously.

Then:

"Hallo-ee!" Lee started and turned her head. The shout had sounded just behind her, yet she could see no one. "Hallo, I say! Where are you? Keep calling, will you—as loud as possible!"

The tone was at once cheerful and authoritative. It brought comfort with it, and relief. Lee obeyed, facing towards the unseen speaker. Then with an unexpectedness that made her gasp he loomed up directly in front of her; a hand gripped her arm.

"Good!" its owner declared with satisfaction. "I did n't hope to get to you so soon—you must have been nearer the lighthouse than I thought. Don't bother to talk—yet. Just grab hold of my arm and hang on. The ruins are really quite close!"

Lee laughed a little hysterically. Not until this moment had she guessed how desperate had been her plight; the reaction from an

increasing and overwhelming dread to relief and a sense of security was unnerving. She clung with a desperate determination to her rescuer's arm, trying not very effectually to steady her voice as she answered him.

"I know. I saw them quite near to me when the fog suddenly swept over everything—but unless you 've got very remarkable eyesight or a unique sense of direction, I don't know how you 're going to find them."

She spoke in jerks, breathlessly. The man peered at her for a minute through the fog wreaths, then laughed, boyishly, reassuringly.

"Got a rope tied to the door, and round my waist!" he explained. "Sense of direction is of no use in a fog like this—nor is eyesight. What in the name of all that 's sensible made you come out here on such a day?"

Lee laughed again. She was stumbling along beside him, keeping fast hold of his arm with both hands.

"I did n't guess there 'd be a real fog till night—and I did n't really mean to land at first. Not but what"—with a little shudder—"I 'm glad I did! To be adrift at sea in an open boat now would—would be ghastly!"

She spoke through chattering teeth and

blue lips. On no winter's day had she ever felt so cold. And then, before he could reply, a breath of hot air touched her face, a light showed dimly directly in front of her. She saw an iron-clamped wooden door, with a rusty ring of a handle to which was attached a rope, standing ajar before her. Beyond the narrow opening was a glow of grateful warmth and light—the sound of snapping twigs and crackling logs. Then a firm hand was on her shoulder, beneath its pressure she passed a shade uncertainly across the threshold as the big door swung wider; then the latch clicked, and in a moment the chill world without was shut away from them.

With a sigh that was half a sob Lee stood blinking dazedly in the centre of the queer, rough room, conscious only at the moment of the mellow embrace of the big fire. Then her glance went to the man.

Unusually big and broad he looked in his heavy, dripping oilskins, seeming to fill the little room. He was not looking at her, but busily unfastening the rope from about his waist. This accomplished, he raised his head.

His glance flashed over her—a keen, piercing, blue glance that made her flush a little,



while it seemed to note every detail of her woe-begone appearance.

“ You must be drenched through!” he commented. Then he jerked his head towards a gaudy, heavy, many-coloured blanket slung on a rope across the other end of the room.

“ I ’m afraid it ’s rather primitive accommodation,” he said, “ but it ’s better than nothing. And you don’t want to lose any time about getting out of those wet things if you hope to avoid pneumonia. There ’s a wooden box with my kit—such as it is—in there. You ’ll find pyjamas and a bathrobe, and some rough towels. You ’ll feel better when you ’ve had a rub-down; and I ’ll have some hot tea all ready in five minutes.”

He turned his back on her and began to divest himself of his oilskins.

For just an instant Lee hesitated; then with a murmured word of thanks she crossed the room and passed behind the heavy blanket.

She felt a little dazed now. The whole thing was so unexpected, unreal, unusual. If she had sought distraction from her thoughts in setting out upon her voyage this afternoon, she had certainly found it.

This was decidedly an adventure, and a little pink glow crept into her pale cheeks as she hurriedly divested herself of her wet things and rummaged in the plain deal box that stood, with a candle upon it, beside a narrow camp bed.

The colour deepened as, having arrayed herself, she surveyed the result in the small, cheap square of mirror on one of the rickety walls. She presented an unusual and unconventional picture, the big striped bathrobe wrapped closely round her over a suit of pyjamas, and gathered at the waist with a long cord.

She had rubbed her hair hastily dry, and fastened it up anyhow at the back of her neck with pins. Its smooth, sleek perfection of outline was gone, it was rough and untidy, but it was by no means unbecoming. Her eyes widened as she looked at herself. Vaguely she felt that she, too, had changed—like one who has stepped without warning out of the everyday world into another, fantastic, more than a little unreal.

It was difficult to believe that she was the same Lee Dorice who had passed from the rather overscented and untidy comfort of her

stepmother's room not much more than an hour and a half ago.

Fear and excitement had made her eyes look almost black; the unconventionality of the situation, and her apparel, deepened the rare rose in her cheeks. The tumble of night-dark hair looked like a dusky halo about her face.

But after a moment she turned, and, pushing aside the guarding blanket, stepped quietly into the glow of firelight again. There was nothing of hesitancy in her manner now. She moved with her customary supple grace and half-unconscious dignity, despite the fact that her feet were bare.

The man was bending over the stove. He glanced back over his shoulder, gave her one penetrating, steady glance, then smiled at her. It was a quick, boyish, pleasant smile, and she found herself responding to it immediately.

"Find everything you wanted?" he asked, his attention on a big brown teapot, and Lee nodded.

"I 'm very comfortable, and beginning to feel deliciously warm. Only I 'm not quite sure yet if I 'm awake or dreaming."

“ You ’re awake all right!” He set back the kettle and carried the steaming pot to the table. “ You ’ll realise it when you begin to eat. I hope you ’re hungry, because I generally combine tea and supper when I ’m leading the simple life. It saves bothering about too many meals.”

“ I ’m ravenous!” Lee assured him, and, rising, came to the table at his quick gesture of invitation.

She had recovered her poise and her assurance, and moved naturally, betraying no self-consciousness or awkwardness. She might have been presiding at the tea-table in the drawing-room at home, and a flicker of interest and appreciation touched the man’s eyes.

He had placed her before the cups, and took the seat at her side. The meal he had prepared was plain, but it was well cooked and appetising—thick rashers of rather fat bacon, fried eggs, with butter and honey and bread to follow.

They ate, both of them, hungrily and in silence, absorbed in the important matter of satisfying their appetites. Finally, with a long sigh, Lee pushed her cup away with the unconscious gesture of a child replete with good

things, and leaned back. Across the big brown teapot their eyes met, and suddenly they both laughed.

It was a merry, spontaneous sound that made them, somehow, friends at once. The man got up, found a tin of cigarettes and an old pipe and came back to the table with them.

For the first time, discreetly, Lee inspected him closely. He was not nearly so big as he had at first appeared in his heavy oilskins; indeed he was thin to gauntness, and only a little above the average height. But he was muscular and well built, and he moved without clumsiness.

His hair had been cropped uncompromisingly close, but at the temples it showed a tendency to curl, and was a crisp, fair brown.

He was deeply weather-tanned, but he had little colour, and his cheeks were very hollow. The eyes looking out from thin, fair brows and lashes were an ordinary, clear blue, and not striking except when he was roused to interest and animation.

His features were clear-cut and well modelled; there was strength and a certain sweetness in the sensitive mouth; the square

chin spoke of determination and power. On the whole, she decided, he might quite easily be described as good-looking, if not remarkably so.

She watched him filling his pipe, pressing the tobacco down with a very brown, capable finger; as he looked up she smiled.

“Do you know,” she said, “I am awfully curious. I never knew this island was inhabited.”

He looked down again at the pipe, still pressing the tobacco carefully. There was the faintest line of a frown between his narrow brows.

“It was n’t,” he told her rather curtly it seemed to her, “until I discovered it—and decided to play Robinson Crusoe.”

“But is n’t it rather dull?”

For answer he waved his hand. On rough shelves along the opposite wall there were piles of books.

“One can never be dull with books—and the sea!” he told her, and she nodded in a sudden, swift comprehension.

There was a short pause; then:

“But I did n’t see you when I landed,” Lee said.

He grinned suddenly.

“I was alternately playing ’possum, watching you through the crack of the door, and endeavouring to douse the light of a fire I had only just succeeded in coaxing to burn. I was afraid you ’d see the smoke. I assure you your intrusion put me out a good deal.”

Lee lifted her head quickly, and flushed. He saw it, and made a little gesture.

“That sounds horribly inhospitable, does n’t it? And not very complimentary, perhaps; but one so seldom finds a place like this, literally isolated from mankind, and I had horrid visions of an inquisitive young person poking round my laboriously constructed camp, and going back to tell excitedly of her discovery of a modern Robinson Crusoe on shunned Ruff’s Island. You *won’t*, will you?”

His voice had softened, warmed to a half-pleading, coaxing note. He added, as he met her puzzled stare: “Give me away, I mean—tell folks I ’m camping here, and bring the hordes of curious civilisation down upon me?”

He spoke lightly, but there was an underlying seriousness in his tone. His eyes were upon hers rather intently. She frowned slightly, and made a little gesture.

“Of course I won’t, if you don’t want me to!” she cried. Her eyes were a trifle puzzled.

He met them and smiled frankly.

“Thanks awfully! Somehow I guessed you would n’t if I asked you. You see, I ’d hate to have to pack up traps and decamp in a hurry. It ’s very peaceful here.”

“But”—Lee’s voice was astonished—  
“why ever *should* you?”

She broke off. Very slowly the expression of her face changed. Suspicion dawned behind the perplexity of her gaze, a faint apprehension. She added, quickly:

“You don’t mean—you ’re not *hiding*, are you?”

Her companion’s pipe had gone out. He relighted it carefully. In the glow of the fire-light his face was undisturbed; his eyes were intent upon his task. He took a couple of leisurely puffs before replying.

“I suppose that *is* about the size of it,” he admitted cheerfully. “One is apt to find too much publicity—too much of the limelight—a little trying at times.”

Lee drew a long breath. She flushed again, and the suspicion died out of her eyes. She gave a quick little laugh.



“Oh! I *see!*” she cried. “At least, I think I do. You ’re rather well known?—a celebrity, perhaps?—”

She hesitated. The man shifted slightly in his chair; his eyes were still fixed upon his pipe-bowl. For the merest second his lip twitched.

“Well—yes. Pretty well known. I dare say I might even claim a certain amount of—er—notoriety. However”—he shot a sudden lightning, searching glance at her—“it is evidently not quite so far-reaching as I had imagined. *You* don’t know me.”

Lee made a slight gesture. She looked puzzled again. Her clear eyes rested on him earnestly for a minute, then she shook her head.

“No,” she said, and there was a half-note of apology in her tone. “I don’t know you. But then, you see, I never glance at society journals, and very seldom look at newspapers. Sometimes as long as a fortnight passes and I don’t see one. I ’m sorry—”

The man got up quickly. The expression of his face was almost of relief. He laughed down at her, suddenly, gaily.

“I ’m not!” he asserted with emphasis.

“ I assure you, it ’s an immense pleasure to find that one is just an ordinary, everyday person for a change. I don’t suppose you can understand it—”

“ I can’t!” Lee interrupted rather drily. “ You see, I ’m such a very ordinary, everyday person myself—”

This time it was he who interrupted.

“ Not ordinary!” he said, and there was a sudden something in his voice, in his brief, sweeping glance that startled her, brought a deeper flush to her usually pale face. He saw it and turned away immediately, crossing to the door and pulling it open. A whirl of smoke-like, ice-cold vapour poured in, and he banged it to quickly again.

“ No chance of it clearing to-night!” he announced; and then, at her dismayed exclamation, “ I ’m most awfully sorry. But there it is. I ’ll do my best to make you as comfortable as I can, and it ’s warm and dry here. We ’ll just have to make the best of a bad job, and wait for the morning.”

“ But—” Lee was on her feet now, a vision of a scared Terry, an hysterical Mrs. Dorice, and a shocked and scandalised community assailing her mentally.

Perhaps he read something of her thought, for his lip twisted again, half cynically, half humorously.

“There ’s really nothing to worry about,” he assured her, breaking into her half-uttered sentence. “Honest, I ’m not so bad as my probable reputation; and as far as Mrs. Grundy’s cackle—well, there can’t be any, can there?—not if you keep your promise and don’t mention there ’s an inhabitant on this island.”

Lee bit her lip, then dropped back into her chair with an exasperated laugh. There was something at once boyishly disarming and amiably reassuring about him as he stood before her, hands thrust into his pockets, his fair head flung back. He smiled suddenly as their eyes met, and she found it gave to him an unexpected, sunny charm that was very pleasant.

“It ’s really pretty simple, is n’t it?” he proceeded. “You rowed out in this direction—got caught in a fog—and sheltered in the ruins. Straightforward enough story, don’t you know—and no need to enlarge upon it. Meantime ”—again he smiled—“we ’ll ignore the awkwardness of the situation and just do

our best to amuse each other. There are heaps of things to do, primitive though this little old shack appears. Cards—chess—books *and* music.”

He indicated a gramophone with a proudly proprietorial wave of his arm, adding, with a grin:

“ We could even dance!”

Lee laughed in spite of her annoyance. His matter-of-factness and her own sound good sense did much towards restoring her ruffled equanimity. The laugh cleared the air. Her host nodded, pulled the chairs close to the fire, and smiled down at her.

“ Shall we talk first?” he asked almost eagerly, and Lee laughed again.

Thereafter neither noticed the passing of the hours. Lee forgot the strangeness of her adventure, the grey world without, the aggravations of the earlier day. She showed an animation which would have astonished even Terry, and which made of her rather elusive beauty a real and living thing.

They flitted from one subject of conversation to another, idly, and for the most part good-humouredly, though once or twice they found themselves entering into an animated

discussion upon some book or picture, which occasionally ended in controversy.

Lee was amused, the man evidently enjoying himself thoroughly. Later, when he had made coffee and cut some thin sandwiches, the conversation became more or less personal again. He drew Lee out more than she realised. She touched briefly upon her happy life with her father previous to his marriage; she spoke of her loneliness since, the impossibility of her position. She spoke affectionately of Terry, with an unconscious coldness and restraint of Mrs. Dorice. She forgot this man was a stranger, only felt the warmth of his sympathy. She fell silent for some minutes; then stirred as he asked quietly:

“But you can't go on like this. You're wasting your years, your youth—hardening yourself. You'll end by imprisoning your soul, shutting up all that's best within you behind bars, and growing bitter!”

He spoke quickly, leaning forward. He was oddly in earnest, for one who was so completely a stranger. Lee smiled.

“Surely you can break away?” he went on, and she interrupted with a sudden hardness in her voice.

“ I made up my mind to, to-day! In the only way I know how!”

“ And that is?—”

His eyes were earnest, questioning. Lee met them, and smiled cynically.

“ Marriage with the first eligible and really worth-having man who offers himself!”

She flushed brightly a moment after she had spoken the words, and bit her lip fiercely. She was angry with herself for having spoken so, with him for having drawn from her such a confession. He stared at her for a moment, then got up quickly.

“ You could n't do that!” He spoke almost roughly. There was angry distress in his clear eyes. He went on quickly, rather disconnectedly: “ I have n't seen many women—girls—like you for—for quite a good many years. In fact I have n't seen much of women at all. And I don't understand 'em. But I do know you 're not that sort of girl.”

Lee's chin tilted. She was still angry. She felt suddenly resentful. Her voice had completely changed when she spoke again. It was chill, no longer mellow.

“ I am, all the same!” she retorted. “ But it 's scarcely a profitable discussion, is it?”

Let 's talk of something else. About you. I confess I 'm puzzled. I can't place your profession. You know an awful lot about books, but I don't believe you write. Yet—pictures—?”

She paused with wrinkled brows. He was still standing; now he frowned, as if the subject jarred. But he answered quietly:

“ I—act!”

Something in his tone forbade comment or further question. They drifted into impersonal talk again; but once or twice, looking at him, Lee was puzzled afresh. She had imagined herself fairly familiar with the faces of most actors of the day; but she was quite certain this man's had never been among those she had seen. Again, uncannily, he seemed to guess her perplexity, for he broke off in the middle of a sentence to say:

“ I have not yet acted in England.” And added, so slowly, and with a deliberation so peculiar that she looked at him quickly. “ I hope to, however—almost immediately.”

And then again he changed the subject. Presently he rose and started the gramophone. He stood beside it, watching the girl. Her slim figure was relaxed in her chair, her head

thrown back. The sleeve of the bathrobe had fallen back, leaving her arms bare; he could see the soft pulsing of her upflung throat.

Her eyes were very deep and very dark; a little of her rare colour still lingered in her cheeks, and her brilliantly red lips were a trifle apart. She was unaware of it, but her hair had fallen loose. It rippled all about her, silken, dense, wonderful. The man caught his breath oddly as he looked at it, and went an unconscious step nearer. At the movement Lee looked up and met his eyes. They were aglow, shining.

They held hers against her will; without reason her heart began to beat. But she sat very still, bathed in the firelight, and still the languorous tune that he had chosen throbbled on. . . .

It was only for a minute, that meeting of their glances. But to each it seemed many. A spell seemed to be upon them—neither moved.

Then a log dropped, and Lee sprang to her feet. "It 's—it 's unconscionably late!" she said rather stammeringly. "And I 'm dead tired—I think I 'll say ' Good-night '!"



His glance dropped to her lips. She was standing with her hand on the curtaining blanket, her hair all about her. Again, involuntarily, the man took a step forward.

“Good-night!” he echoed. His eyes were still upon her mouth, and she blushed suddenly, flamingly, as though the glance had been a caress. The next moment she was gone.

For several minutes he did not move. Then the music jarred to a stop. He shut the gramophone and came slowly back halfway to the curtain.

“I want you,” he said abruptly, “to tell me something—quite truly. Did you mean what you said just now—about marrying?”

There was an infinitesimal pause. There was a look in Lee’s eyes as she heard him that was bewildered, and a shade scared. Then she answered matter-of-factly, on an unconcealed yawn.

“What a stupid question! Of *course* I did! Good-night!”

“Good-night!” The man turned away slowly. But there was no hint of disappointment in his tone, and after a minute, very gently, he began to smile.

. . . . .

The morning dawned clear as though fog had never been. Lee, coming into the outer room at breakfast-time, found her host flourishing a frying-pan over the still brilliant fire. He smiled upon her genially.

“Fried eggs and bacon again,” he apologised. “But you won’t mind if you ’re as hungry as I am.”

Lee glanced at him quickly, a vague recollection of something disturbing the night before in her mind. She sat down relieved. He placed her breakfast before her with another flourish, and kept up a lively chatter all through the meal.

Later he helped her into her boat, and, pushing it out from the rocks, ran out into the water knee-high. Then he stood, a hand on either side of the little craft, holding it steady. Lee smiled at him under her lashes.

“You ’ve been very kind,” she said. “I really enjoyed my adventure. Perhaps—some day—we shall meet again.”

“Sure!” He spoke with a conviction that took her aback. He was watching her lips and trying not to let her see it. His lids were lowered, and an odd light came and went beneath them. Suddenly he leaned forward.

Before Lee could stir, his mouth was pressed fiercely, eagerly upon hers. As, outraged, furious, she struggled free, he stood upright and pushed the boat out to sea.

“Sorry!” he said, just a shade breathlessly. —“I ’ve no excuse to offer—except that I have fallen in love—already!”

## CHAPTER IV

LEE made her explanations of what happened curtly and briefly, ignoring alike Terry's tearful relief and Mrs. Dorice's reproaches. She caught an earlier train to town than she had at first intended, and was almost feverishly gay when she met Patty Clay.

At that lady's charming Surrey home she did her utmost to eradicate all recollection of Ruff's Island, her adventure, her night there, and her rescuer's face completely and absolutely from her mind. To this end she unbent as she had never before unbent, she was animated—brilliant—restless. She ensnared and enchained, flirted and laughed until Patty stared.

But she found the task she had set herself no easy one. The memory of the caress of the man's eyes, as much as that of his lips, burned her. She was furious with herself and a little frightened.

That kiss was the first she had ever known. Her throat throbbed whenever she thought of it, and though she would not admit it, beneath

her rage there was an odd, tingling sweetness.

She knew a fierce self-scorn for her folly—that folly that allowed her to linger, even against her will, on the memory. But she knew too that the kiss had robbed her of something, while it had given her something, and that she would never be the same again.

A letter from Terry came at the end of the first week. It was brief and characteristic.

DARLING,

We are back in town—of course. Some one mother knew had a flat to let furnished, cheap, and she took it for six months. It 's very small, all white enamel, pink roses, and smelling of mice. Buster had a glorious kill the first night and ate so many he was sick. I hate it—being here, I mean.

We 've only been here three days, but mother has, I feel sure, "got off" again! I know you hate the expression, but it 's the only way to describe it. She met him—the victim—at somebody's reception, and as he 's literally rolling in money she appropriated him at once. Not that he seemed averse. I never saw any one fall for mother so quickly before. He 's called twice, and is dining to-night and taking us—*us*, my dear—to a theatre. His name 's Smithers, and he 's quite

old. He stoops, and walks with a cane, and his hand shakes when he lights a cigarette or cuts up his food. He told mother he 's sixty-five, but I say nearer seventy. He is really quite decent, though, and has a scrumptious house! Mother is most elated, of course, and "my little girl's" me until I feel like cussing! I do hope you won't stay much longer—it 's a perfect scream.

He 's promised me a red setter! He really is n't a bad sort. Mother was quite excited to-day because some one told her he 's practically a millionaire. It appears he made all his money out in Rio, or somewhere like that—anyway, he 's piles of it. Guess it 'd be a good thing for the house of Dorice if he *did* come up to the scratch. And I think he will. Otherwise he would n't hang round as he does. 'Scuse the slang, I 'm bored stiff. Come back soon. You did n't get a chill on that awful island, did you?

Heaps of love

TERRY

P.S.—Benny has fleas.

Lee shrugged, laughed, and put the letter away. She did not want to go home, but she knew she must, and she set to work feverishly to make the most of her second week.

She danced, rode, fished, and golfed, and when Patty saw her into the train at the end

of her visit she looked worn out. But she had not succeeded in forgetting Ruff's Island.

For half her journey she sat thinking, while her pulses tingled afresh and her throat contracted.

Once she got up and stared at herself in the strip of glass flanked by highly coloured pictures of Haslemere.

"I hate him!" she said, aloud, and viciously. "I hate—hate—*hate* him!"

And then blushed as she had blushed that night when he had looked at her lips. She sat down hastily, wondering, in spite of her anger, if she had named the right emotion.

At one of the stations nearing the end of her journey a newsboy ran past. On the poster in front of him were two glaring black lines.

## CARSON MURDER CARSON BREAKS JAIL

Lee stretched out a hand and idly opened the paper the boy thrust into it. As idly she read the column on the first page.

Denham Carson, who was tried for the murder of his wife at her apartments in New York

## 54 THE FUGITIVE MILLIONAIRE

five years ago, escaped from prison, we are informed, some weeks ago. So far no trace has been found of him. It is now believed that he may have managed to get to England. We publish a photograph below. Carson is a millionaire, and has many influential and wealthy frie—

Lee's eyes drifted from the printed words to the photograph below. She did not move, but after a moment the paper slipped from her hand, and she leaned back in her corner, her handkerchief caught up against her lips.

From the floor the pictured face still smiled at her. It was the same face that had smiled at her, boyishly, genially, over a smoking frying-pan of eggs and bacon in the lighthouse ruins on Ruff's Island!

For the remainder of the journey Lee sat quite motionless, staring straight in front of her. She was shocked beyond expression; stunned. There was not one moment's doubt in her mind that the man of Ruff's Island and he whose portrait lay before her were one and the same.

There could be no mistake—no chance likeness here. The same sensitive, half-humorous mouth; the same level, lazy eyes, mildly amiable, boyishly serene. The only



difference was that in the portrait the hair was not so closely cropped. . . .

Lee shuddered suddenly, and her pupils dilated. She understood now—understood so much! That unusually short hair—the queer choice of a dwelling, surely unnatural under ordinary circumstances in a man of his temperament—the open confession that her arrival had disturbed him; his appeal, half jesting, to her not to “give him away.”

She moistened her lips; then rubbed her handkerchief across them again. He had been clever. Oh, yes; he had been very clever! His whole manner had been so natural, so frank. She herself had thrust the rôle of a celebrity, modestly seeking immunity from the occasionally embarrassing attentions of an admiring public, upon him. His acceptance of it had been inimitable. No one could have harboured suspicion in the face of it.

She remembered his shrugging reference to “the limelight,” his lightning glance when he had suggested she had no idea of his identity; his half-laughing, but evidently genuine assurance that he was glad of it. She remembered half a dozen other things which had been without significance before, and bit her lip till the blood came.

Presently she stooped stiffly and recovered the newspaper. She avoided glancing again at the photograph, but read the paragraph above it with a sort of shrinking deliberation.

Denham Carson, who was tried for the murder of his wife at her apartments in New York five years ago, escaped from prison, we are informed, some weeks ago. So far no trace has been found of him. It is now believed that he may have managed to get to England. We publish a photograph below. Carson is a millionaire and has many influential and wealthy friends, all of whom we learn believe in his innocence, or are fully in sympathy with him.

The case roused considerable interest and some of the scenes at the trial were almost unprecedented. Denham Carson from a boy has always been a favourite, and his ill-advised marriage to a girl of far lower station than his own—a very pretty model, Chrissie Grey, whom he met at a friend's studio—caused great consternation among his own people and his intimates. It transpired at the trial that the marriage had not been one of affection, at any rate on Denham Carson's side. His own reluctant evidence at his trial went to show that while he had admired her and been foolishly attentive, he had meant nothing more; but the girl was clever, turned those attentions to account, contrived to get them talked about very considerably, and

finally practically forced young Denham to marry her. From the first it was not a happy union. Mrs. Carson, though she had the wealth and luxury for which she had yearned, was not received well by Carson's friends, and found herself painfully out of her element. She soon tired and took to frequenting her old haunts anew. Naturally Denham Carson objected—to this, and to the people whom she made her intimates. The result was a separation, and Mrs. Carson took an expensive apartment in the heart of New York. She continued to get herself talked about, disregarding alike her husband's protests and appeals. She got in with an undesirable set, and when her name became coupled with that of a man of still more undesirable reputation, Denham Carson went in person to interview her. It was a stormy interview, ending in a violent quarrel, which was heard by a good many people in other apartments. Carson had chosen the late evening for his visit, and no one, apparently, saw him leave. Nor was Mrs. Carson seen again that night. There were no servants in the apartment at the time; she was a difficult mistress to get on with, and generally relied upon outside help, in spite of her means. It was not until the following morning that she was discovered by the janitor, who came to the assistance of the woman who was working at the apartment and who, in spite of repeated knocking, had failed to gain admittance.

Mrs. Carson was still in evening dress, and

was lying huddled on the floor. She was quite dead. There was a livid bruise extending from her temple to the cheek-bone, and which must, according to medical evidence, have been caused by a violent blow from a man's clenched fist. Also the same evidence proved that she had been dead for hours, probably since before midnight.

No one but her husband, Denham Carson, was open to suspicion. He was arrested immediately and put on trial for his life. Circumstantial evidence was dead against him. He declared that when he had left her his wife had been perfectly well, though still in a stubborn, angry mood. He admitted that they had quarrelled; denied fiercely that he had struck her.

Public opinion was divided. There was not enough evidence to exact the extreme penalty; but in the minds of a good many there was little doubt that, in a gust of blind anger, he had struck the blow which had killed Mrs. Carson.

He had already served five years of his sentence when he made his sensational escape. Up to the time of going to press no further particulars have transpired. If—

Lee put down the paper again with a long breath. She felt sick, shaken. It was with almost feverish relief that she alighted on the platform at Waterloo.

Terry was waiting for her, the Pom under

one arm. Long-legged, untidy as ever, but oddly arresting, she caught Lee's eye at once, and she went forward with unwonted haste.

Never had the sight of Terry been more welcome. She stood for ordinary, placid, everyday things—made the past feverish fortnight and the day which had preceded it seem like a nightmare. Her merry laugh even helped to obliterate the horror of the paragraph Lee had just read.

Terry greeted her with effusion, and, talking energetically, piloted her through the stream of passengers.

“My dear! But it's no end of a relief to have you back! Positively, there is n't an intelligent human to speak to among the crowd mother contrives to collect about her! Except old Smithers! He's pretty decent—quite above the average. I like him!”

All this was breathless and exclamatory. Occasionally she gave Lee's arm an affectionate squeeze; once she paused to admonish the Pom, who was endeavouring to wriggle out of her hold in his delight at seeing Lee; once to pull up her stocking. She had a slight altercation at the barrier concerning her platform ticket which she had lost, which was term-

inated by Lee impatiently paying the penny, and bestowed a sharp but effective reprimand upon an investigating youth who pulled the dog's tail.

This necessitated her remaining behind for a moment or two. Flushed but triumphant, she caught Lee up at the entrance. J

"Little sweep!" she exclaimed. "Said he wanted to see if it was real—Chicot's tail. I guess he 'll know his own ear 's real enough for an hour or so—I tweaked it hard enough—"

"Terry! You—"

"I 'm anything but ladylike! I know it. And I can't help it. In fact, I 'm rather glad of it. Ladylike girls must have a devilish dull time—and, anyway, they 're pretty out of date, are n't they?"

"I 'm afraid they are." Lee's tone was unconsciously prim.

Terry pinched her arm and laughed.

"Dear old girl! Don't look so severe. It does n't really suit you a little bit. . . . Oh, I was saying that old Smithers is a decent sort, was n't I? He—"

"Terry! Really 'old Smithers' is scarcely a graceful way of speaking of a person. You

are *not* a little girl now, you know, in spite of Teresa's endeavours to keep up the farce that you are. And—"

"Suffering Moses!" Terry's voice was plaintive; she "eyed" the other with questioning reproach. "What 's the matter with you, Lee? He *is* old—quite old—and, anyway, he can't hear me. By the way, we 're driving back in his car—or, rather, one of his cars. He 's got about half a dozen. This one 's a beauty, and I 'm learning to drive it. Frost 's teaching me."

"Frost?"

"Old—Mr. Smithers's manservant. He 's topping. Just like one of those you read about or see on the stage. Very stiff and straight, you know, and clean-shaven. *And* perfectly wooden. I don't believe if he heard the end of the world was approaching he 'd move a muscle. Mr. Smithers has had him for years—he says he 's indispensable, quite devoted, and the most efficient servant he 's ever known. He certainly does know how to do most things pretty well. He drives better than Haines. That 's the chauffeur. But he 's a good lot younger than Frost, and more reckless. Mr. Smithers says he thinks my powers

of persuasion would be too much for him, and he 'd take risks—but he 's rather nice. Haines, I mean—though, of course, Frost is a dear. Only you can't move him by a hair's breadth. He takes his orders from Mr. Smithers, and Mr. Smithers only—”

She paused for breath. Lee's lip twitched. There was something of bewilderment as well as a faintly contemptuous amusement in her eyes.

“ You certainly seem to have become pretty familiar with this Mr. Smithers and his household in a remarkably short time!” she observed drily, and Terry humped an expressive shoulder.

“ Sure we have. I told you in my letter he 's absolutely bowled over. Can't understand it myself. Mother is n't a bit the type I 'd have thought would appeal to him—he 's one of those old gentlemen you read about, you know, Lee—' old school,' courteous, charming, for the most part, but with a rather fierce manner, and inclined at times to become explosive. Very white—very bushy eyebrows—very stooped. Speaks slowly, deliberately—almost hesitatingly. And simply *rolling* in money. Of course mother 's all over



the place with excitement. Biggest catch she 's landed yet— *if* she pulls it off!”

She gurgled at Lee's protesting “ *Terry!*” and shifted Chicot to the other arm.

“ Not that I have much doubt she *will*. He must mean business or he would n't hang round like he 's doing. He comes every day—and if he does n't come to us he takes mother out somewhere. Most often he takes both of us. He 's a brick like that. I 've never had such a scrumptious time—theatres—flowers—chocolates! And one or other of the cars to take us. Mother 'll be a pudding if she rides so much.”

“ But, Terry—” Lee paused hesitantly. Her eyes were troubled, perplexed. She added a moment later: “ It seems such an extraordinarily sudden friendship—intimacy. Who *is* Mr. Smithers, anyway?”

Again Terry shrugged.

“ *I* don't know. But he has all the necessary credentials. You can bet your life mother 'll see to that *this* time—in fact, she said as much, though she does n't talk to me about things often. And then there are lots of paragraphs about him in the papers. He 's going all out to get himself talked about—

could n't help it, with so much money. Oh, you need n't curl your lip, Lee. He 's no parvenu."

Lee made a little impatient movement. She did not answer, and a moment later Terry's eager hand jerked her to a standstill before a big chocolate car upholstered in soft fawn.

"I 'm driving!" she announced, "so Frost came instead of Haines. Get in. I 'm going in front."

The man opened the door, wrapped a thin rug carefully about Lee's knees, and Terry, depositing Chicot in her lap, whirled into her seat before the wheel with a great display of long black legs. Lee caught a glimpse of a ladder in one silk stocking and a hole in the heel of the other, then, before Frost was well in his seat, the car jerked forward.

Terry's driving was decidedly erratic; but at those moments when Lee fully expected disaster Frost capably and silently took command.

The older girl, snuggled in a cushioned corner with Chicot curled blissfully beside her and occasionally licking her wrist, grew gradually conscious of a sense of soothed enjoyment. It lulled her rasped memory of the

day's shock and her perplexity regarding this new intimacy of Mrs. Dorice's alike.

A rare feeling of well-being was upon her. The day was mellow, perfect, golden. The big car, for the most part, slid on its way without a jar. Frost's straight back and unwavering attention to Terry's manipulation of the wheel inspired confidence. Lee ceased to wonder if she was to meet a violent death beneath the wheels of rear and advancing traffic and gave herself up to enjoyment of the easy, gliding motion.

For not the first time in her life she came enviously to the conclusion that it must be good to be rich as, evidently, this man who owned the big chocolate car was rich. She found herself wondering what he was really like. Terry's descriptions, though occasionally crude, were as a rule apt. And a faint interest stirred Lee, even while she frowned disapprovingly at the thought of her step-mother's easy acceptance of a stranger's favours.

She was intrigued by Terry's description of Mrs. Dorice's new "victim." He might, quite easily, be a rather attractive person, though, she decided, it was more than possible

that Terry, like her mother, was carried away by the influence of Mr. Smithers's possessions and amiable attentions.

It was not until an hour and a half later, in her somewhat flamboyantly decorated room, that she found her thoughts reverting to Denham Carson.

It occurred to her, with a sudden startled sense of shock, that it was plainly her duty to tell of her meeting with him on the island. And for a moment she stood, brush in hand, her cloud of wonderful hair all about her, staring with widening, dismayed eyes at her reflection in the mirror.

Her breath caught, she recoiled in horror from the mere idea of such a thing—like a flame the memory of that kiss of his burned her. She dropped the brush and caught her hands up to her face.

“I could n't!” she said, half aloud. “Oh—I *could n't*—”

She stood for a long moment without moving, thinking deeply. When at last she let her hands fall, her face was set, a little hard, her mouth tightly closed. In those few moments she had faced the situation grimly, had decided upon her course of action.

Rightly or wrongly she had made up her mind to remain silent as to the fact that she had had a companion on Ruff's Island. From this hour she meant to forget it, to forget everything that had happened that night and the following morning. She was determined to put this man absolutely out of her thoughts—to forget his audacity and her own folly; to kill, deliberately, inexorably, that faint, insidious warmth of feeling which, against her will, had been growing in her heart for him.

With steady hands she coiled her smooth hair about her head; carefully, judicially she chose a gown. Perhaps she was a little paler even than usual as she made her way out of the room and along the narrow hall. But that was all; there was nothing otherwise to show that her customary serenity was in any degree ruffled.

A little while ago she had peeped, unexpectedly, at a fresh page in the book of her life. A brief page, rather dazzling, oddly alluring. She sighed as she remembered—and bit back the sigh angrily.

To-night she had closed down that page, for all time.

## CHAPTER V

LEE did not meet Jason Smithers until the following day. She returned home to the flat after a wearisome and lonely afternoon of desultory shopping to find Mrs. Dorice, looking absurdly young and quite bewilderingly pretty, chattering to him vivaciously while she dispensed tea.

A passing frown shadowed her good-humour at Lee's entrance, and she performed the necessary introduction with a rather impatient note in her voice. The interruption was not welcome. Mrs. Dorice's elation at this man's persistent attentions was growing; nevertheless the character of those attentions left her just a shade puzzled. In her heart of hearts she was bound to admit that she was not really very certain what they might be leading to.

Obviously Mr. Smithers found pleasure in her society, liked visiting her and taking her about. But his manner to her was never

anything but that of a greatly older man enjoying the society of a much younger and very pretty woman. Not by the greatest stretch of her imagination could she construe his attitude into that of a man inclining towards amorousness. And she was puzzled. At the same time, triumphantly aware of her own attraction and unusually youthful charm, she was growing gradually more and more sure of her ability to bring things, in due course, to a satisfactory climax.

Mr. Smithers was a very desirable *parti*. He appeared to enjoy a large measure of power as well as a more than usually large fortune. He had not been in England any length of time, yet he was already received by a good many of the people who mattered. The house that he had purchased was furnished with a luxurious good taste; he did not entertain largely, as yet, but he was lavish, thoughtful, observant, and the machinery of his household seemed to run upon oiled wheels.

Another woman might have hesitated before accepting his attentions, his flowers, and his dinners and lunches and theatres. But Mrs. Dorice had no scruples in this respect;

besides which, she declared later to Lee, it was quite evident that he was persisting in deepening the intimacy with some serious end in view. Added to which he invariably included Terry in the amusements he offered.

As she gave him her hand, Lee regarded him closely, her direct gaze resting steadily upon him.

She saw a man of medium height, who looked shorter by reason of the pronounced stoop of his somewhat thin shoulders. In his face was the yellowish pallor of old age. His hands were ivory white, big, and well shaped. They shook a good deal, and he moved rather stiffly with the aid of a long, gold-topped cane. His hair was snow white and very abundant, brushed straight back from his forehead, and worn a little longer than was perhaps usual.

His brows were very bushy and very black, but his close-trimmed, thick, pointed beard was as white as his hair. He wore very slightly smoked and heavily gold-rimmed *pince-nez*, from behind which a pair of deceptively mild blue eyes looked forth.

He had a habit of blinking when speaking, or when especially interested. He spoke with a slight hesitancy that was at moments almost



a stammer, and his voice was a little harsh. Later she learned that the mild eyes could flash very fiercely should an order be disobeyed or his will be crossed in even the smallest matter.

She learned, too, that he was irascible, irritable, fidgety, and more than a little dictatorial. At the same time he was decidedly likeable. She decided that almost as soon as she found herself seated in the chair he had pulled forward for her on this first afternoon of their meeting.

He had an old-world charm of manner, a graceful, half-deferential courtesy in speaking to all women that was refreshing and rather delightful. She found herself talking to him easily, as to an equal, and without restraint. She observed with relief that he was a gentleman, and noted with still greater relief that there was no maudlin leaning towards sentimentality in his attitude to her stepmother.

He was interesting to talk to, more interesting than any person she had ever yet met beneath her stepmother's roof. He excused his ignorance of strictly topical affairs through his having been out of England for a considerable number of years, but assured

her that he was rapidly making up for lost time.

It appeared that he went everywhere with untiring energy, and saw every play, worth seeing or not. Discovering her real liking for books, he begged her to visit his library, and when she subsequently found herself within it, Lee was roused to genuine enthusiasm.

It was a library such as she might have dreamed of, but had never hoped to see. Everything was there, old as well as the most modern. She left the big, handsome house impressed, and—to Terry—admittedly envious.

But in Mrs. Dorice's pink-and-white drawing-room she was occupied with studying the man himself. To her own surprise he impressed her very favourably. She herself was aroused to a rare animation. It brought a warm tint of colour to her cheeks, and an added brightness to her grave eyes.

Terry, bouncing in presently, stared at her, then, subsiding into a chair, proceeded to drink the tepid tea Teresa handed her and to feed the Pom on cake.

“I've been trying out the new car,” she announced with a little cheerful nod at Mr.

Smithers. "I went with Haines, but Frost insisted upon coming along too. Said those were your instructions."

The old man glanced at her quickly and quizzically through his glasses, then laughed.

"Quite so. Frost is a remarkably reliable person. By the way, I told him to keep the car here."

"It 's waiting—the admired of the entire neighbourhood! Every curtain in the lower part of the building was disarranged as I drove up. Haines hardly had the wheel once, Mr. Smithers. He says he thinks I 'll be expert in another week; only I 'm not quite sure if Frost agrees."

She laughed and took another piece of cake.

"But I think he 's annoyed because in turning a corner I scraped a bit of the paint off her side on the mudguard of a 'bus. The driver swore furiously, and Frost opened and shut his mouth like a fish. But Haines laughed. Do you know, Mr. Smithers, I like Haines awfully. *Much* better than Frost."

Mr. Smithers smiled. Before he could answer Terry rattled on once more.

"Anyway, I have n't done much damage. It 's really only a little scratch, so I hope you

won't be angry when you see it. I really did n't mean to be reckless, and I 'm ever so grateful to you for letting me learn and giving me such a rattling good time."

Her gay voice was suddenly earnest. She looked up at the old man with frank, wide eyes that had grown for a moment grave. He took her small sticky hand and patted it.

"That 's all right, my dear. I 'm glad. I 'm glad you 're getting on well and that you like it. I like young people to be amused—just as I like a lot of youth about me."

He turned to Mrs. Dorice and Lee again.

"By the way, I have a box at the Majesty's for to-night. Will you share it with me—all of you? I thought you might care to dine first at the Ritz."

Mrs. Dorice stirred slightly. The faint frown was back in her eyes again.

"It would be charming," she declared quickly. "But, you know, Mr. Smithers, you 're quite spoiling Terry—she 's losing a fearful amount of beauty sleep. And Lee does n't very much care for theatres—do you, Lee?"

Lee's lips twitched for a moment, her soft eyes darkened. Then she shrugged. But the

old man's eyes were upon her; he persisted gently:

"I hope you 'll come," he said simply. "It 's a very big box—and I believe the show is particularly good."

"Of course she 'll come!"

Terry whirled to her feet, nodding emphatically, and completely ignoring her mother.

"We 'll both come, like a shot! It 's ripping of you to ask us."

The old man's eyes were still on Lee. She met them suddenly, and smiled.

"I shall love to come," she told him quietly, and rose.

He bowed, and turned to Mrs. Dorice. He murmured a few words in his odd, hesitating way as she gave him her hand, held it for a moment, then moved to the door.

Terry followed him.

"You really are a brick, you know," she observed frankly. "I can't make out why you 're so jolly decent to us all—"

She broke off abruptly, standing awkwardly on one leg and rubbing the other up and down it, to the detriment of her silk stocking.

Mr. Smithers patted her shoulder paternally.

“I think,” he said, “it is you who are ‘jolly decent’ to me. I ’m a very old man, you know, and not a very amusing one. It is very delightful to have young people”—his courteous inclination of his white head very decidedly included Teresa and she flushed, the frown disappearing as if by magic—“about one. It is a long time since that pleasure has been mine. I have—especially of late years—been very lonely.”

He looked away for a minute towards the window. In his voice there was a note almost of bitterness. Lee looked at him quickly; Terry balanced herself on the other leg.

“But have n’t you any one belonging to you?” she demanded. “Have n’t you *ever* had any one?”

Jason Smithers brought his eyes back from the darkening sky without and blinked at her.

“Never,” he returned quietly. “Never—not any one that mattered.”

. . . . .

Some minutes later, leaning forward with Terry to look down into the street, Lee saw him moving stiffly across the pavement to the waiting car, with Frost’s hand under his elbow.

His voice, harsh, querulous, impatient, came floating up to them. It rose once, angrily. The rap of his cane on the kerb was distinct.

Terry grinned.

“ I expect he ’s seen the scratch!” she said. “ And Haines is getting hauled over the coals for not keeping a closer watch over me!”

Among her pink cushions Teresa stirred. Her good-humour was fully restored; she eyed Lee complacently.

“ Well,” she demanded, unconsciously glancing towards a distant mirror and stretching up her throat. “ What do you think of him?”

Lee did not answer at once. She was watching the car drive away. Then she shrugged and turned back into the room.

“ I have n’t,” she replied, “ seen quite enough of him to be able to decide yet. But he certainly does seem awfully kind-hearted.”

Just before she had finished dressing that evening, a maid came to her room with a great box of flowers. Jason Smithers’s card was attached, and the girl drew a deep breath of pleasure as she took the roses out. They were deep and red and wonderful, and she

held them for a moment against her face.

Then, after a moment's hesitation, she took one from among them and fastened it to the breast of her white gown.

From across the hall she could hear Terry's and Mrs. Dorice's voices raised in altercation. Teresa's was shrill; Terry's calmly determined.

"I can't help it. He asked me to go, too, and I'm going. He would n't have asked me if he had n't wanted me. And, anyway, it's not my fault if I have n't any decent clothes—now, is it? If you're ashamed of being seen with me in my old ones—well, you'd better get me some new. It'd be worth while—if only to keep old Smithers well impressed. Besides—if you think I look too shabby like this I'll go and ask Lee to lend me one of her white muslins. It'd be too long, of course, and I'd look years older; but—"

Lee heard no more. Mrs. Dorice's door shut; and half an hour later Terry, in overshirt skirts, as usual, but flushed with triumph, was doing justice to Mr. Smithers's excellent selection of a dinner.



## CHAPTER VI

THAT night was the first of many such. Jason Smithers was as persistent in his attentions as ever; as eager to give the two girls a good time as to amuse Mrs. Dorice.

And, while there were moments when she chafed at his delay in making plainer his intentions, Mrs. Dorice was very well content. It was a content which had deepened since one day he had begged for her advice concerning the furnishing of certain rooms in his big house.

“It ’s too dull,” he had declared in his irascible way. “Because I ’m an old man the people who did the whole place for me made up their minds it should be without colour—sombre. That ’s all very well up to a point, but a woman would n’t like it. She ’d want something brighter—gayer. I thought you might help me.”

Flattered and fluttered, Teresa had declared herself delighted. Nevertheless, her inclinations had been for a more expensive edition of her own present rooms—pink-and-white

chintzes and diaphanous hangings, and Mr. Smithers had appeared dubious.

Later he had appealed to Lee. She had frowned and shrugged, then laughed. Finally she had looked at him very straightly.

“ My dear Mr. Smithers, my taste and my stepmother’s are utterly opposed. Don’t you think that Mrs. Dorice would be able to help you more effectively?”

Behind his smoked glasses Mr. Smithers’s eyes had blinked in complete perplexity. But he had said no more. Nevertheless, Terry brought the information that part of the house was being redecorated.

“ It ’s ripping,” she declared. “ He showed it to me. All soft pastel shades, and old oak—oh, and a lot of those pictures you were admiring the other day, Lee. You ’d love it.”

Thus a month slipped by, six weeks, eight. Lee had learned to accept the old man now, and to like him a little. He neither bored nor annoyed her, and she went out of her way to be nice to him. And then, one afternoon, she came home to find the maids running about with hot-water bottles and sal volatile, and Terry, very red in the face, choking on the threshold of her own room.

“Come in!” she gasped; then, as Lee followed her wonderingly, dropped limply on to the edge of the bed. “It ’s all right. No one ’s ill. Only—only mother ’s had hysterics—”

She began suddenly to giggle helplessly, heartlessly. She struggled manfully for composure after a minute, and went on.

“And—I don’t wonder. You see—Jason Smithers came to-day. He asked to see mother alone and—and—oh, *Lee!* it is n’t her he wants to marry at *all!* It ’s *you!*”

. . . . .

Lee grew slowly scarlet. For a moment she stood, with eyes that had begun to sparkle more than a little angrily, speechless. Then she flung her muff and gloves on the bed and began to loosen her furs.

“Really, Terry,” she said sharply, “you are getting absolutely incorrigible. Some jokes are in exceedingly bad taste. Tell me what is the matter with Teresa at once—”

“I *have* told you!” Terry’s tone was at once injured and eager. “And I ’m *not* joking! It ’s perfectly true—every word of it. Mr. Smithers came this evening, and made Teresa a formal proposal for your hand in the

good old-fashioned style. Personally, I don't see what she has got to do with it—you're your own mistress—but then Mr. Smithers belongs to the old school, I suppose, and looks upon her as your guardian. Anyway, there it is. He wants to marry *you*, Lee. It is *you* who have been the attraction all the time! And even *I* thought that Teresa had added another scalp to her belt. You see, he was so—so—eager for our society long before you came home. But apparently, there was nothing in it—unless"—with another giggle—"he fell in love with your photograph. I remember showing him a couple of snapshots I took of you with your hair down—"

She paused for breath as Lee made a sharp movement. The colour was still in her cheeks, but her eyes were startled now rather than angry. Terry's tone carried conviction. She no longer doubted the truth of her utterly astonishing statement; and she felt for the moment a little breathless, more than a little dazed.

The thing was so sudden, so unlooked-for. Like the younger girl, Lee had been convinced that there was something deeper than mere friendship prompting Jason Smithers's con-

tinued attentions. But she had never for a moment doubted that Teresa Dorice was the magnet which drew him so frequently to the flat.

Never for a moment had it occurred to her that the old man's interest might be centred in herself. She had learned to look for his coming, to try to entertain and amuse him, even to like him a little. She had found him a by no means dull or stupid companion; had discovered that their tastes in many things were very similar, and that she could give him real pleasure by listening while he talked to her on various subjects, or in playing for him occasionally a little of his favourite music.

But she certainly had not guessed that his courteous appreciation of her efforts to entertain him had cloaked any warmer feeling. He had never thrust his company upon her, had claimed only a very little of her time, and had apparently devoted himself to Mrs. Dorice. So that Terry's news came upon her with a shock that literally took her breath away.

She let her furs slide from her shoulders and fall unheeded at her feet. Her thoughts were chaotic; she was bewildered, half indig-

nant, still faintly angry. Visualising Jason Smithers, she told herself that the thing was preposterous, absurd. He was an old man—so very much older than he desired, it would seem, his acquaintances to believe him. She remembered the stoop of his shoulders, the unsteadiness of his hands, the stiffness with which he rose and moved—and in a quick revulsion of feeling flung out her hands.

“It—oh, I *could n't!*” she cried, and there was almost horror in her tone.

Terry glanced at her and grinned.

“Bit of a staggerer, is n't it?” she demanded with relish; then added more slowly: “*And*—of course—an opportunity in a thousand.” She grinned again. “I 'm quoting mother. In her opinion, at any rate, Mr. Smithers is *the* catch of the season, as it were.”

Again Lee's hands went out, then up to her flushed cheeks. In spite of herself, the words stuck. “An opportunity in a thousand! . . .”

She moved sharply and turned away. As she did so she met her own eyes in the little oval mirror on Terry's dressing-table. Their expression startled her, and a hotter flame ran up over her face.

Abruptly, vehemently she exclaimed:

“It ’s quite out of the question—impossible! I—I can’t imagine how ever he could have dreamed that I would even listen to such a suggestion—”

She spoke jerkily, more flurriedly than Terry had ever heard her speak before. Out of her vivid brown face the grin died suddenly; her eyes became thoughtful, oddly calculating. For a moment she sat, hugging her thin knees, watching Lee. Then she sighed, shrugged, and got to her feet.

“That ’s a pity,” she observed. “There are n’t so many brilliant matrimonial chances knocking about that one can turn ’em down. Old Smithers is really an awfully decent sort. Not a bit stingy, and not—I should imagine—so frightfully hard to get on with. A bit gouty and irritable, perhaps—but one can’t have the earth with a fence round it, can one? Not when it comes to marrying to get it, anyway.”

She paused to tilt her head sideways and listen to the distant, querulous sound of Teresa’s slightly raised voice, and a flicker of amusement crossed her impish face.

“Poor mother!” she murmured, with un-

wanted sympathy. "I should n't wonder if she 's completely prostrated for nearly a week! I 'm quite sorry for her. Or, perhaps, to be really honest, I 'm sorry for myself. I 've been having a thundering good time lately, and I suppose if the poor old chap gets turned down I 'll have to say good-bye to it."

She sighed again, making a rueful grimace, and after a moment followed Lee, slipping a hand in the crook of her elbow as she stood before the dressing-table.

"I suppose," she suggested tentatively, "you could n't think it over? It never does to decide hastily, you know. And you 'd have no end of a ripping existence, Lee. My mouth waters whenever I look round that house of his—'specially since he 's had it re-decorated. Then the cars—and he 's going to buy a couple of riding hacks! Oh, Lord, Lee! It ought to be easy enough to say 'yes.' Especially for you. You don't care tuppence for men *as* men—and it is n't as though you were in love with any one else!"

Lee withdrew her arm so quickly that the movement was almost violent. A startled look swept her face—her eyes widened for a moment, darkened as if with a memory that



held more than a little of pain. During these long weeks she had very deliberately put all thought of the episode of Ruff's Island away from her. But now Denham Carson's face rose before her anew—fiercely she bit the lips upon which, once, his had lain.

Then, abruptly, she turned, gathering together her muff and the furs.

“No,” she said, so decidedly that it would seem she was striving to convince herself, “it is n't as if I—loved some one else—”

She broke off as a maid appeared in the doorway. She held a big salver on which lay a small square envelope, and offered it to Lee.

“From Mr. Smithers, miss,” she said. “His servant is here waiting for an answer.”

For an instant, flushed, uncertain, Lee hesitated; then she picked up the envelope and tore it quickly open. Over her shoulder Terry read it.

May I see you this evening after dinner, at nine? Or if that is inconvenient, to-morrow at noon?

J. S.

Lee folded it carefully and put it slowly

back into its envelope. Terry opened her lips as if to speak, then closed them again. There was something in Lee's face that was unaccustomed and rather subduing.

Lee spoke after a moment, deliberately, quietly, though two bright spots of colour flamed for a moment in her cheeks.

"Tell Frost," she said, "that I shall expect Mr. Smithers at nine this evening."

## CHAPTER VII

LEE found the ensuing hours even more uncomfortable than she had anticipated. Contrary to her expectations, her stepmother sent a message demanding her immediate attendance; and, somewhat reluctantly, but with her head held very high, the girl made her way down the narrow little hall, and into the over-luxurious pink-and-white room in which Teresa awaited her.

She was propped by innumerable pillows, and looking, for once, a travesty of her usually charming self. Her attack of hysterics had, upon this occasion, been genuine—and violent. Her pansy eyes were almost hidden between swollen lids, there was an ugly flush in her cheeks, and Lee, shutting the door gently behind her, was conscious of a sharp sense of recoil, of apprehension.

Mrs. Dorice was quite quiet again, but by no means yet recovered from the ravages caused by her outburst. At the sound of the

shutting door she turned her head slightly, and, as she met Lee's eyes, her lips twisted sharply.

For a long moment there was silence. Lee, outwardly cold, unruffled as ever, was aware of an inward distress and embarrassment. She would have given quite a good deal to be spared the ordeal of interviewing Teresa at this particular moment. She sighed a little, and came a slow step farther into the room.

"You sent for me?" she said evenly, and Teresa made a sudden, violent movement. Again her lips twisted; abruptly she turned on her side, leaning upon her elbow.

"Yes," she cried, her voice still husky from the recent storm. "I sent for you. Jason Smithers was here this evening. He—"

"I know!" Lee spoke quickly, a faint colour rising in her cheeks. "Terry told me. I—am awfully sorry."

There was a genuine regret in her voice that seemed to goad Teresa. She laughed shrilly, her eyes glinting between their swollen lids.

"Don't be a hypocrite!" she retorted, and added on a rising note of indignation—"Oh, you stand-off, touch-me-not girls! You 're all

alike—as sly as they make them. You—”

She broke off. Before the slow, growing scorn of Lee’s level gaze the accusation fell somewhat flat. She was silent for a moment, breathing quickly. She longed, viciously, to make Lee smart even as she had smarted during the last hour; her pride and self-esteem had been seriously wounded; she had told herself passionately that she had been made a fool of, while in her heart of hearts she knew that she had made a fool of herself.

Her supreme conceit had made her blind to the reason for Jason Smithers’s visits, she had misread his courteous attentions, had jumped at once to the conclusion that he had succumbed to her fascinations. She had spent days and weeks in self-satisfied dreaming, had made dazzling plans for the future—worse than all, she had spent freely and recklessly in an effort, by personal adornment of a more than usually extravagant kind, to make herself more than ever attractive. No wonder the awakening had been bitter!

Characteristically she thrust the blame upon Lee, instead of accepting it herself, even while she found it impossible to cheat herself into the belief that the girl had been any

wiser regarding the old man's intentions than herself.

After a moment, with an effort, she forced herself to speak more quietly.

"Of course," she declared, "he is awfully old, and very old men never know their own minds two minutes together! You 'll find it wiser to make up your mind without too much dallying, Lee. He may want to back out later on. Not"—with another shrill laugh—"that being tied up for life to any one *quite* so senile is altogether enviable, when one comes to think about it! I can imagine that Mr. Jason Smithers can be more than a little trying on occasions. He 's pretty peppery, at the best of times—"

Lee interrupted deliberately.

"Are n't you taking a great deal for granted?" she said. "I am not aware of having said or done anything to give you the impression that I have any intention of—of accepting this preposterous offer! I—"

"But you *are* going to?"

Teresa's voice was sharp. She sat upright among the cushions, and pushed the hair impatiently out of her eyes.

Lee looked at her in vague surprise, and,

reading the glance, Teresa flushed a little more deeply.

“Of *course* you are!” she repeated. “You ’ll be crazy if you don’t!—”

Lee made a restless movement.

“I think,” she cried, “that I should be mad if I *did*! Why, it—it ’s unthinkable. Mr. Smithers is almost old enough to be my grandfather—”

“Tclck!” Teresa scoffed. “I tell you it ’s a chance in a million! Besides”—she hesitated for a moment, and her eyes narrowed—“things can’t go on here as they are. I can’t have you on my hands any longer, Lee. I hinted as much before you went to Surrey; I told you you ’d have to marry. I ’ll speak more plainly still to-night. You ’ve *got* to marry—or—or find somewhere else to go. I simply can’t afford to keep you or dress you—*or* have you hanging around. It ’s no use mincing matters. You ’re in my way now; as you yourself said, you ’ll very soon be in Terry’s. There ’s no room for the three of us under the same roof, Lee.”

She paused, eyeing the girl a trifle nervously; then before Lee could speak she added:

“ Besides, you know, you *said* that the very first proposal you might have, whoever or whatever the man, you 'd accept.”

Lee started. Her eyes had darkened. She was no longer flushed, but very pale. Her lips were pressed close together, and her breath was not quite even. She was conscious of a suffocating sense of bitter resentment—and of sudden, utter helplessness. The pride in her cried aloud to her to take Teresa's unexpectedly blunt ultimatum in the same spirit in which it had been flung at her. Existence under Mrs. Dorice's régime had been difficult since the moment of Tom Dorice's death. Lee knew that after to-night it would be impossible. She had endured dependence upon her stepmother stoically until now; but she could endure it no longer. Things had come to a climax; the breach between them was open now. Teresa had said in the heat of the moment and the bitterness of her angry disappointment that which she had only hinted at before. But it was her concluding sentence that seared her mind now, and would not be denied.

Her thoughts leaped back to that other interview, weeks old now—to the defiant



promise which had been wrung from her by the goad of Teresa's complainings. And a vivid flush flamed up to her temples, to fade leaving her paler than before.

Her own words seemed to flash before her:

“The very first man who asks me to marry him, whoever he is, or whatever he is—I'll accept!”

She stood very still, staring back into Teresa's eyes. For perhaps the first time she fully realised the real meaning of Jason Smithers's offer, and involuntarily she gasped. Then, rather blindly, and without a word she turned, and, wrenching open the door, went swiftly out of the room.

## CHAPTER VIII

BUT when, more than an hour later, she stood face to face with Jason Smithers, Lee was perfectly composed. Whatever of agitation she might have felt she successfully concealed. She gave the old man a cool hand, and he held it for a moment, blinking at her in his odd way from behind the smoked glasses.

Lee met his glance straightly and in silence, making no attempt to free her fingers. Presently he let them go, and the girl dropped back into the chair from which she had risen.

“ I was here this afternoon,” Smithers said, “ but I did not wait to see you then, as your stepmother seemed a little—upset.”

Lee was conscious of a momentary almost irrepressible desire to smile. She said, after a slight pause:

“ She has a headache. She is lying down now. But ”—the colour rose faintly in her cheeks—“ she has told me the nature of your interview with her.”

Mr. Smithers looked relieved.

“ I ’m glad of that,” he said quietly. “ It

simplifies matters for me—and you will have already had time to give my—ah—suggestion some slight consideration.”

“Yes.” Lee’s voice was quite expressionless. She sat with her head slightly bent, her hands clasped in her lap.

The old man peered at her, slightly frowning. Behind his glasses his glance was more piercing, and a great deal more anxious than she knew.

He coughed gently.

“I ought, perhaps, to have approached you on the matter before speaking to Mrs. Dorice. But I belong to another generation, and have, perhaps, rather old-fashioned notions. Regarding Mrs. Dorice as your natural guardian, I thought best to make my offer through her.”

Lee half opened her lips, and her clasped hands stirred slightly. But she remained silent, and he looked at her tentatively.

“I felt, however,” he proceeded, “that I should like to have my answer direct from you.”

He moved a little nearer to her, and stood above her, leaning rather heavily on his long, gold-topped cane. Lee, rather abruptly, turned

her face away. Only the stirring of the slender, white, ringless fingers betrayed the fact that she was not altogether as calm as she would appear. Mr. Smithers's eyes rested on them briefly, then lifted to the fine, soft curve of her cheek.

"Before you give it," he went on slowly, "I would like to say a few words to you which—possibly—may influence your decision."

Lee bent her head. She felt the intentness of his gaze, and was angry with herself because of the deepening colour in her cheeks. Her thoughts were still chaotic; her emotions difficult of definition.

"Had I been even ten years younger," the slightly hesitating voice went on, "I might not have summoned sufficient courage to dare so much—or to hope at all. Because I should not then have found it so easy to keep out all question of sentiment. Ten years ago I might have wanted more from you than you would have been willing to give—more than just the joy of your youth near me, your companionship. As it is—"

He paused as Lee stirred sharply, and looked down quickly at the hands upon his supporting cane. They were even more un-

steady than usual, and in the hidden eyes was an expression which might have startled Lee more than a little had she seen it. It passed, and he went on quietly:

“As it is, you can—if you will—make the remainder of my life less empty, and less cold. I have a great deal that men envy me, wealth, ease, comfort. But I want more. I have wanted more—all my life!”

His voice rose a trifle, grew less hesitant. For an instant it was vibrant with an almost passionate vehemence. He leaned a little nearer, and Lee laid her hands rather nervously on either arm of her chair. She was looking at him now, looking at him with a new interest, intently. He caught the look and held it. When he spoke his voice was repressed, once more hesitantly gentle.

“I want companionship. I want youth to watch, even if I may not share it. I want to make real—in a measure—the dreams I dreamed long ago; dreams of a home, and a woman’s presence to make it sweet. Above all, I want an end to my loneliness.”

He paused, but as Lee was about to open her lips raised his hand.

“Wait. Let me finish. These things you

can give me. No other woman could. Had Fate been kinder—”

He broke off. Lee, still watching him, was rubbing her fingers up and down the arms of her chair.

He bent suddenly and laid his hand over one of hers.

“ I have seen that you are not happy, Lee. Had you been I might not have spoken at all of my feeling for you. As it is it seems to me that it is just possible you may bring yourself to consent. As my wife you would know ease, luxury, comfort. You would find yourself honoured, guarded, and—loved.”

He tightened his fingers over hers as she moved them sharply, and smiled for a minute, oddly, whimsically.

“ I am not breaking my promise and bringing in sentiment. I am simply stating a truth. I do love you, in my way. I am not fool enough to make protestations of a lover’s adoration, any more than I am fool enough to hope for more than just a little liking. But it would make me happy to have the right to have you constantly near me, to give you all that I should like to give. You would, in marrying me, sacrifice nothing but your free-

dom. I should ask of you only comradeship, a little of your time and a small share in some of your interests. I should expect a faithful honouring of the bond between us. In return—”

He paused again, straightening himself rather stiffly.

“I think, in return, I could give you much that your life has lacked. A home—a real home; a little of the gaiety and pleasure that is due to you. In short, I would try to make your bondage as bearable as possible, though I am afraid you will find me pretty exacting. I ’m peppery, and old and easily irritated; I ’m gouty, and frequently grumpy; I have n’t much control over my temper, and I like my own way. But I ’d try to make you happy. I think that ’s all.”

He moved, still stiffly, away from her and she watched him in silence, still, quite unconsciously, rubbing her hands up and down the arms of her chair. She was touched, stirred by an odd flutter of compassion and sympathy. His manner of dealing with the situation had surprised and relieved her. She regarded him with more of kindness in this moment than she had ever known for him before. And he

had made her sorry for him. He was lonely; and Lee understood loneliness.

Abruptly, impulsively, she got to her feet. He turned at the movement and met her eyes. Again the smoky blur of the glasses hid from her their expression, but her face grew flushed anew. Mr. Smithers smiled.

“Well?” he asked quietly. “Do you think you can bring yourself to say yes?”

Lee stood very still. Troubled, undecided, she stared back at him, weighing all that he had said—hesitating, shrinking—bewildered by her own unsure emotions. And then, across the silence there came the distant sound of Teresa’s voice. It rose peevishly, upon a complaining, plaintive note—and Lee drew a sudden, sharp breath.

Then, quickly, she crossed the room to Jason Smithers’s side.

“*Yes!*” she said.



## CHAPTER IX

LEE married Jason Smithers one month later. Somewhat to her astonishment, and not altogether in accordance with her own desire, the old man insisted upon a wedding of conventional type. He explained somewhat drily that while he did not desire a farcical "show," he objected to an unnecessarily "quiet" ceremony. He was proud of his good fortune; proud of the woman who was to be his wife; he desired all the rest of the world that mattered to be aware of it.

He upheld Terry in her insistence upon acting as bridesmaid. He invited all such friends and acquaintances as he had made in England since his arrival. He made it plain to Lee that he hoped to see her friends also, and he was irascibly annoyed at her suggestion that she should be married in a travelling costume.

"Nonsense, my dear!" he urged. "You'll make a charming bride—a charming bride! I want you to look the part!"

There had been a note of command beneath

the courteous plea, which Lee had caught and resented, without resisting. She had made no further protest, but had shrugged and yielded.

Terry, observing her closely during that month, had not quite known what to make of her. Lee was, in some ways, considerably changed. Undemonstrative as ever, she was not so cold. It was as though the knowledge that the time was near at hand when she would, more or less, be her own mistress, had thawed and softened her.

And since that interview with Jason Smithers upon which he had made clear to her his attitude towards her, and just how much he expected at her hands, her regard for him had deepened.

He never thrust himself upon her, but he made it clear that she was always in his thoughts, he was considerate, kindly, and careful in no way to startle or distress her. The relations between them grew solidly friendly some time before the day upon which the ceremony was to take place.

Terry came to the conclusion finally that Lee was really happy, and marvelled thereupon, at first in secret, then openly.

“I can't understand it!” she declared once,

when the wedding day was so near that the little flat was in confusion and innumerable bags and boxes littered Lee's room. "I think I'm the most surprised person of all!—counting Teresa out! I fully expected you to be moving about like a martyr, colder and silenter, and more stand-offish than ever! I've imagined you walking up the aisle like a marble image, and making your responses in a voice that would freeze boiling lard! I've even stayed awake at nights wondering if you were fretting in that funny, chilly way of yours. And here you are, laughing, criticising gowns, making plans and trotting here, there, and everywhere with Papa Smithers, for all the world as though you really enjoyed it! I believe you're *happy*, Lee!"

Lee did not answer for a moment. Then, suddenly and charmingly, she smiled.

"I'm happier," she declared with conviction, "than I've ever been since—since my father married. It's almost as if I had him back again."

"Humph!" Terry eyed her shrewdly, and then grinned. "Poor old Smithy!" she cried audaciously. "It strikes me he's losing his freedom to gain a *daughter*!"

She saw Lee's quick flush, and, springing up, flung an arm over her shoulders.

"There! Don't wither me, even if I deserve it. I really *am* glad you 're feeling as you do. You 've had the very dickens of a time with Teresa—and Jason may be a bit of a bear sometimes, but he 's got a jolly good heart! You may count yourself lucky. And he 's as generous as they make 'em. Lee, do you know what my bridesmaid's present is? A car of my own—a Rolls-Royce! And *I* am going to drive you down to Brookbridge for your honeymoon and return under the escort of the estimable Haines! How do you like the idea?"

Lee shrugged, then laughed. Her eyes warmed to a quick affection as they rested on the flushed, freckled face. Then she slid from beneath the encircling arm and began taking down her hair. She did not answer, and Terry proceeded, balancing herself on the bed-rail and swinging her legs:

"He says he wants you to have me with you quite a lot—so you won't be lonely. And the stables at Brookbridge are a *dream*—Jason 's never seen you on a horse, has he? You 'll knock him endways when he does. Dash! That 's Teresa—"

She was gone with a grimace and a scowl. Lee looked after her, then brought her glance back to the mirror.

“ Yes,” she murmured, unconsciously speaking aloud, “ I really *am* happy! And—I think I ’m quite as surprised at it as is Terry!”

. . . . .

Terry, as chauffeuse, was in her element upon the all-important morning of the wedding. She whirled the newly married pair down to the unpretentious but charming house Jason Smithers had taken at Brookbridge, on the fringe of the Surrey hills, in record time. She chattered enthusiastically to the silent Haines all through the journey, and, by some miracle, succeeded in reaching her destination with herself and her passengers unscathed.

She made up for their silence during luncheon, spent an ecstatic afternoon in the stables, enthused joyously over Lee’s new abode, and departed towards dusk. Lee and she had taken tea in the latter’s boudoir, and for a little while after she had gone, the older girl sat with half-closed eyes, trying to realise that she had indeed burned her boats behind her.

She had not seen Jason since lunch, when

he had retired, on Frost's arm, to the library. Now, as she dressed for dinner, she smiled to herself half whimsically, yet with the shadow of a frown between her brows.

She made a very careful toilet, pausing in the middle of it to glance towards the window at the sound of a car in the drive below. It stopped at the house, and later she heard it slurring away towards the gates of the short drive.

When, presently, she descended the shallow oak stairs she found Frost awaiting her. He bowed, and made a little gesture towards the dining-room.

"Dinner is served, ma'am," he murmured. "Mr. Smithers desired me to tender you his most sincere apologies, and to tell you that he had been unexpectedly summoned to Oak-bridge, a village only a few miles from here, ma'am. The matter is important and cannot be ignored, and he begs that you will understand. He hopes to be home in a few hours, but begs that you will not wait for him. Will you take dinner now, ma'am?"

For a moment Lee stared, flushed, bewildered, and utterly taken aback. She was conscious of a strange mingling of chagrin,

anger, and amusement—then, against her will, she laughed.

She partook of her meal alone, but with enjoyment. Her surroundings were delightful, soothing, peaceful, and involuntarily as she left the table and passed into the smaller drawing-room, with its big hearth, she drew a deep sigh that had in it an immensity of satisfaction and appreciation. For an hour she dreamed, for a little longer tried to read. Then she went upstairs to her own apartments. She lingered over her toilet, and it was fairly late when at last she found herself in bed, and with a tired sigh she fell almost immediately asleep.

It was perhaps two hours later that she awoke, clearly and abruptly, wide-eyed, and with a queer consciousness of some disturbing sound. She sat up among her pillows, listening. The sound came again—the faint scrape of a window gently shutting, that soft tread of cautious feet past her door. She heard the stairs creak—heard a movement in the room below her, and shivered suddenly; more from excitement than fear. After an instant's hesitation she glanced at the illuminated clock by her side. It was three in the morning, and

upon an impulse she slipped out of bed. There was another stir from the room immediately below her, and she stood for a moment frowning.

Then, in the darkness, she felt for and found a long silk wrapper, and, pulling it round her, gently opened the door. Silently, swift as a shadow, she ran down the stairs. The room immediately beneath hers was, she had already discovered, the library. She turned towards it now. The door was partly ajar, and a faint light shone through.

Again she hesitated, then moved lightly across the hall till she stood on the threshold. Very gently she pushed the door wider. By one of the long windows a man was standing. A cap was pulled down over his eyes, a long coat hid his figure, but a swift, searching glance told her that he was not Jason Smithers or Frost. And, before she fully realised what she was doing, she reached out and touched the electric switch, flooding the room with light.

And then, with a smothered cry, she dropped her arm. The man at the window had turned sharply. In the dazzling glow from the electric bulbs their eyes met, and Lee gave a sudden, choked gasp.



Under the cap-brim a very brown face showed clear. A pair of blue, pleasant, startled eyes met hers—the eyes of the man of Ruff's Island—the eyes of Denham Carson, the murderer.

## CHAPTER X

TERRY, whistling the "Wedding March" shrilly and exuberantly, guided the big new car skilfully through the tricky lanes in the immediate vicinity of Brookbridge, only slowing the pace reluctantly when at length she came into the more busy thoroughfares.

At her side, alert and watchful, Haines sat. He made no attempt at interference; Terry was already fully capable of managing any car, and had proved an intelligent and apt pupil of whom her teacher was openly proud. If she possessed the fault of over-much daring at times, Haines, being young and reckless himself, condoned it secretly, though he made a pretence at protest which deceived Terry not at all.

Terry liked Haines. He was young, and enthusiastic, and distinctly more human than any of the other servants in the Smithers ménage. Indeed, there were times when she quite forgot he was a servant. He could talk interestingly upon other subjects besides automobiles and the way to drive them. Having

discovered this, Terry encouraged him to do so, and found her enjoyment of her lessons added to thereby.

In the commencement of those lessons, Frost, wooden, silent and attentive, had invariably accompanied them. During the last month, however, the exigencies of the many preparations for his master's coming marriage had claimed him; a fact which Terry found rather a relief. Frost was an excellent person, but a trifle apt to insist deferentially upon his master's instructions with regard to the daily drive being carried out to the letter. With Haines Terry knew that she could have her own way entirely; nor did she fail to take it.

The excitement of Lee's approaching wedding palled upon her very soon, and she took advantage of it to enjoy more time with her beloved animals, or in one or other of the cars. If her absences grew longer, the fact was unnoticed now. The hour's drive was frequently lengthened to two, sometimes even to three. Haines shared her love of animals and out of doors. He became more and more communicative, and achieved an unshakably high place in her estimation when he pulled the Pom through a serious gastric attack

which Terry had distractedly decided would prove fatal.

So that, on the whole, through this last month Terry had enjoyed herself more than ever she had in her life, and had known more of companionship as well as of freedom.

To-night, except for her piercing, boyish whistling, she was silent. She was absorbed in recollections of the day's doings, more especially of Mr. Smithers's stables. She broke off in the middle of the "Wedding March" to inquire of Haines if he had seen them.

"The horses are *gems!*" she declared. "Especially the red mare which is Miss Lee's—I mean Mrs. Smithers's. Lord! What a very unattractive name Smithers *is*, to be sure! Mine's a black—the one I'm to learn to ride on, I mean. I wonder who'll teach me. I'm going back to Brookbridge in a fortnight to stay for a while, you know."

"Yes, miss. Keep a little more to the left, Miss Terry, there's not much room just here between the tram lines and the kerb—*Steady!*"

Terry had steered obediently but recklessly to the left, with the result that her mudguard

came raspingly in contact with a lamp-post, and Haines stiffened alertly in his seat. But with a superb disregard of possible damage the girl proceeded to guide the car on to a more even course and went on.

"I only saw the head groom, and he does n't look as though he 'd be a very inspiring teacher! He looks like Lester in the Arcadians!"

Haines grinned.

"Yes, miss. But I expect I shall teach you, miss. Mr. Smithers said something about it only this afternoon. I 've a pretty fair knowledge of horses, and I think you 'll like the little black. She 'll carry you nicely."

"*You!*" Terry widened her eyes and peered up at him as well as she might in the gathering darkness. "Gracious! What a very versatile person you are, Haines!"

She studied him with a new interest, approvingly. In his neat chocolate livery, sitting very straight and upright, he looked wiry and capable, and rather remarkably pleasant. He spoke again as she turned the car into one of the wide roads crossing Ham Common.

"If you 're meaning to drive through the

Park, Miss Terry, you 'll have to let her out a bit. It 's longer that way, and I 've got to get back to Brookbridge to-night."

"To-night!" Terry's voice was a little blank. "Why, Haines! If you 're going back to Brookbridge, how about my lessons?"

Haines was looking straight before him. He spoke with well-trained expressionlessness.

"You 'll not be needing lessons any longer, Miss Terry. It 's only practice you 're needing now. And Butler is in charge of the town garage. You 'll find him very efficient, miss."

"But—" She stopped abruptly, conscious of and amazed at a disappointment out of all proportion to its cause. Almost involuntarily she increased the speed, racing through the silent park, and thrilling as the car leaped forward. Mentally she decided unkindly to give the estimable Butler, who was Scotch and dour and cautious, a few sharp jolts.

They passed out of the park and reached the ridge of Richmond Hill. Without slowing up, she let the Rolls-Royce sweep giddily down it, and drew up with a jar and a jerk halfway along the narrow main street. A newly decorated hotel in a short side street

flung inviting lights through the gloom. Terry began to loosen her coat-collar, and free herself of the thick rugs about her knees.

“ I ’m hungry,” she announced. “ I think I shall have some dinner here, and go on to town later, Haines.” She wriggled free of the rugs and made a movement to rise, then stared with raised brows at the chauffeur as he did not stir. “ You can bring the car back here in forty minutes,” she added as she stood up.

Haines’s face was utterly blank. He looked for a moment at her stupidly, as though he had not heard aright. Then mechanically he rose to let her pass him, but instead of descending and opening the door for her, slid into the seat which had been hers. As he realised that she was quite in earnest, his eyes changed a trifle, grew intent, hardened.

“ Excuse me, Miss Terry,” — he spoke quickly, with his habitual quiet deference,— “ but I don’t think you can do that. I mean —Mr. Smithers was very particular that I should get you home and the car safely garaged before—”

“ *Hang* Mr. Smithers!” Terry retorted indignantly and inelegantly. “ It ’s nothing

to do with him where I choose to dine or when I get back. The car 's *mine*, anyway. While you 're driving it, Haines, you 'll take my orders."

There was a rather odd expression in Haines's eyes as they rested on her. For all her happy-go-lucky carelessness of conventions and appearances, Terry could, when the need arose, be very much upon her dignity. She spoke now coldly, incisively; there was a rebuke in her voice beneath which the chauffeur flushed.

He stirred a little uncomfortably.

"I 'm afraid," he said rather hesitantly, and with real reluctance, "in—in this particular case I can't, Miss Terry. Mr. Smithers's orders were imperative—to see you direct to your home, and to return to Brookbridge at once. Besides, he would be very much put about at the idea of you dining alone in a Richmond hotel, miss."

Terry began to lose her always somewhat fiery temper. Two brilliant sparks of anger lit her eyes.

"Mr. Smithers did not marry me as well as my sister!" she retorted. "And because he has given me a car and lent me his chauffeur,



he must not expect to either control my actions or interfere with my inclinations through that chauffeur. Open the door, Haines, please."

Haines stooped forward and laid his hand upon the door, but he did not open it. His mouth was set obstinately, though his voice was still deprecating when he answered her.

"I 'm sorry, Miss Terry. It 's imperative I should get—we should get to town as quickly as possible. Besides which, I am, up to a point, responsible for you. It would be very undesirable for you to go into that hotel alone. I—er—I could n't let you do it, even apart from Mr. Smithers's orders."

"*Let me do it!*" With a sudden movement, flushed, quivering, and more angry than she remembered ever being, the girl stooped and wrenched open the door. "I shall do exactly as I please, Haines! The sooner you understand that the better!"

She stepped out quickly, but the chauffeur was quicker. His arm closed round her. Before she realised it, she was lifted back into the seat beside him, and at the same moment the car leaped forward. She struggled, passionately, furiously, but she was helpless.

Haines held her, driving with his left hand until they were spinning rapidly along the Kew Road. Then he released her. And as she found herself free, Terry's rage flared, utterly uncontrolled. Lifting her hand she struck him with all her force across the face.

For just an instant the grey eyes, looking straightly out from beneath the peaked cap-brim, hardened to steel. But the set mouth did not uncloze, nor, for one instant, did the strong hands upon the wheel waver.

At their destination he alighted swiftly, opened the door, and drew the rugs from about Terry's knees. As she stepped down into the road he touched his cap silently, and again her anger flamed.

"I will give my orders concerning the car to Butler to-morrow," she said. "You, Haines, have forgotten yourself unpardonably."

Haines's finger went to his cap again.

"Yes, miss," he returned meekly, and remained motionless as she turned away.

But her glance had caught the darkening wheal across his cheek, and at the entrance to the flat she hesitated. Then, impulsively, she turned and went back to him. Her head

was held high, her cheeks aflame, and her eyes were brilliant and defiant. But they met his levelly.

“So did I, Haines!” she said clearly. “I beg your pardon!”

Haines’s cap was swept suddenly to his knee, revealing a curly fair head and a face as deeply flushed as Terry’s was pale. His own eyes warmed, smiled. Beneath them Terry’s face grew unexpectedly hot.

“Forget it, miss!” said Haines. And for many minutes after she had disappeared he stood bareheaded by the car, his eyes on the dark door that had swallowed her.

From among the spare rugs thrown loosely on the seats inside the car something stirred and a hand reached out stealthily to open the door. A man, wearing a cap pulled low over his eyes and a white muffler close up about his chin, stepped silently out on the roadside. He left the door swinging and moved rapidly away. But at the corner of the street he looked back, and chuckled. Haines was still looking at the entrance to the flats with his cap hanging loosely in his hand.

## CHAPTER XI

BEREFT of the power of either speech or movement, Lee stood staring dumbly into Denham Carson's startled eyes. Her heart was pounding wildly, suffocatingly; utter bewilderment was upon her.

For an instant Carson had been as taken aback as she; but only for an instant. The next he was at her side; a long, strong brown hand closed upon her wrist, pulling her almost roughly across the threshold into the room. Then he released her, the door was jerked shut with a soft click, and he stood facing her with his back to it.

Lee caught her wrap more closely round her and laid a not very steady hand upon the back of the nearest chair. Her lips were trembling a little, her eyes were frightened. They clung to the lean, brown face, rather set now, and hard, searching, questioning. Her breath still came rather gaspingly.

Denham Carson smiled suddenly—that quick, boyish smile which she had found so

disarming and so reassuring when first she had seen it. It brought with it a poignant stab of memory, and the colour flooded her face in a hot wave. Some of the fear left her eyes and a half-scornful anger took its place; the soft lips shut abruptly in a straight line.

She was beginning to recover herself, and she made a quick, half-nervous gesture, speaking at last, rather jerkily.

“What does this mean?” she asked. “What are you doing here? How did you get here?”

Carson made a deprecating movement of his broad shoulders.

“Through the upstairs hall-window, *via* the verandah pillar and a remarkably strong vine! The invitation was impossible to resist. I hoped I had not disturbed any one.”

He was bewilderingly at his ease. His lack of agitation increased her own, while it roused in her a quick gust of anger. His effrontery was astounding, and she reddened anew.

“I mean”—she flung at him sharply—“*why* are you here?”

She spoke without lowering her voice, and saw a faint shadow of apprehension cross his eyes as he glanced behind him at the door.

Somehow it served to give her back a measure of her composure. Turning, she crossed slowly to the hearth. The electric bell was within reach of her hand, and again the flicker of apprehension showed in Carson's eyes as they rested upon it. But he spoke rather softly, quite without flurry or haste.

"Chiefly," he told her in answer to her question, "in the hope of finding something to eat and drink. I'm rather thirsty, and quite decidedly hungry. Fugitives from justice, you know"—his voice was light, but there was a sudden bitter note in it—"have a fairly strenuous time on the whole! I've found to-day—in particular"—he grinned unexpectedly, with a gleam in his eyes that was disconcertingly mischievous—"even more than usually exciting! There's been mighty little time to attend to the inner man, I assure you. But then, that's generally the way at weddings, is n't it?"

Lee started and swung round. Her eyes were very bright, and at something within them—something of shrinking with which was mingled defiance—Carson's smile died abruptly.

"I don't understand!" The girl's voice

was halting, a little shaky. "You don't—you can't mean that you—" She stopped.

Carson met her reluctant glance straightly. His lips twitched again.

"That I witnessed the interesting ceremony? But certainly. I would n't have missed it for the world! Human nature 's odd, is n't it? There 's a certain fascination in looking on at another chap's good fortune—more especially when one 's utterly down and out. I suppose that 's why gutter-kiddies always linger outside the most expensive toyshops! Besides, I really did n't believe you 'd do it! I thought you 'd funk at the last minute!"

Lee gasped. A sudden fierce anger blazed in her eyes.

"How *dare* you!" she said in a stifled voice.

Carson regarded her gravely.

"I did, really," he assured her. "Of course, I have not forgotten what you told me about yourself—your life—that night on Ruff's Island, but I did n't credit you with the courage to make a marriage so frankly mercenary."

Lee's face went quite white. She reached

out her hand impulsively behind her to the bell—then drew it back. She spoke after a minute, coldly, very quietly.

“Your comments,” she informed him levelly, “are impertinence to which I have no intention of listening! You have no right to make them, or to criticise—”

“Oh, but I have!”

Carson left the door suddenly and came across to her. One hand was thrust idly into his pocket, in the other he swung his cap. The light shone upon his clean-cut head, the hair no longer close-shaven, but grown to abundance, boyishly curly. Lee rested her eyes upon it, and turned them abruptly away. Her heart was stirring strangely, her throat contracted. For a moment it seemed as if the scent of wood-smoke, and sea mist was in her nostrils.

“I have the greatest right of all!” Carson went on. “The right of a man who loves you—and who has been the first to kiss your lips!”

He met the blaze of her startled, angry eyes quietly, even seriously. His own looked vividly blue—bluer because of the deep tan of his face—and again, in spite of herself, in



spite of her indignation, Lee's heart fluttered and stirred.

She was dumb for a moment; then she flung out her hands.

"You 're mad!" she accused him.

He chuckled suddenly, amusedly.

"I 'm beginning to think I am! If I were sane I surely should n't indulge in such adventures as weddings and wedding journeys! But all dreamers of dreams and lovers who are very much in love are mad, are n't they? And—I 'm both! I 've had ample time for dreaming, you know"—rather grimly—"and the sweetest of them has been the dream of riding at a dream woman's side on her wedding day. Only"—he shrugged, with a rather twisted little smile—"though the dream materialised up to a point, circumstances somewhat spoiled the illusion! Such a journey should be accomplished openly, not in concealment."

"But"—the question was wrung from Lee in sheer amazement—"you can't mean that you came here with *us*—in our car?"

Carson laughed.

"Why not? It was a big enough one in all conscience! And simply piled with rugs!

Besides, Brookbridge is nice and out of the beaten track, though quite conveniently close to town."

He was leaning against the mantelpiece now, very close to her. Instinctively, with a breath-catching in her throat, she moved back a little. Carson went on without appearing to notice.

"You see, I was beginning to suspect that I 'd been spotted in London. A sojourn in the country or suburbs is desirable for a week or so; and I knew I 'd never be suspected of making a get-away in the company of the newly married Mr. and Mrs. Smithers! I reckoned on just glimpsing your new home, and then wandering on across country somewhere. A garage is quite a comfy place to take a nap in, I assure you, and on the whole I 've had quite a pleasant time. Only"—he laughed again, low in his throat—"I 'd forgotten my appetite! I like food, and I 've had precious little all day! You can understand now the temptation of that open hall window!"

Lee stirred, but she did not speak. He went on, conversationally.

"In a house like this I knew there 'd be

sure to be biscuits and drinks around in either dining- or smoking-rooms—and even Osbornes appeal to a desperately hungry man. Of course there was a risk—but seeing *you* has made that more than worth while!”

The lightness, almost flippancy, of his voice changed to an unmistakable sincerity. Under his steady gaze Lee's dropped. She was shaken and bewildered, and completely at a loss how to act; she found the whole situation increasingly difficult to cope with. Carson's serious declaration of feeling had invested it with a new significance.

Her own feelings were chaotic. She should have known for him shrinking, horror, even fear, as well as anger. Yet she was conscious of none of these things—not even, at this moment, the anger. His voice and words had touched some strange chord in her heart, had again thrust memories—poignant and undeniably sweet—upon her. She felt in the steady regard of those blue eyes the same mute caress that she had known in it that night upon Ruff's Island—was aware of the same flame of emotion beneath it.

The silence between them lasted a long time. Carson broke it.

“ Well?” he asked. His voice had changed again, was curt, rather sharp. Lee looked up, and as their eyes met he straightened himself. “ What are you going to do?” he added. “ You know who I am now, of course. You know that I ’m hiding from justice. The hand of every man is against me, the brand of Cain upon me. You ’ve only to touch that bell and bring your servants upon us. I should n’t attempt to escape, since I know I should n’t have a chance. Or—you can let me go.”

Lee drew a quick, almost painful breath. Her face was pale now, her eyes uncertain. She stood with her fingers locked tightly together up against her throat, her lower lip held close between her teeth.

Again Carson spoke.

“ It may influence your decision if I tell you that I am absolutely innocent of the crime that has been laid at my door. Of course you may not believe me. There is no reason why you should.”

He paused. Once more Lee drew a deep breath. Her eyes were upon his, searching, earnest. He met them levelly, steadily—and suddenly she let her hands fall. Yet

still her whole attitude was one of indecision.

Carson made a sudden, shrugging movement of his shoulders.

“Or,” he asked, “did I dare too much at the moment of good-bye on Ruff’s Island? Was my offence so great that you are unable to resist sinking mercy beneath a desire for revenge?”

He watched the colour flood her cheeks, mounting to the very temples, sweeping even over the white throat. Then, meeting the flash of her eyes, in which there was a queer hurt as well as resentment, he flung wide his hands in a gesture of appeal and apology.

“Forgive me,” he begged, and there was a new, warm, husky note in his voice. “That was a hateful thing to say!”

Lee did not answer him. Very quietly she brushed past him and moved to the door. But even as she reached the threshold, she stopped abruptly. From somewhere outside there came the sound of steps on the gravel, the muffled sound of voices. Through the narrow parting of the heavy blinds there flashed a light. Somewhere in the house itself there was a stirring.

Lee let her outstretched hand fall, and

swung round, gasping. Denham Carson, grim-lipped, had already sprung for the window; but the girl stayed him with a quick, low cry.

"No—no! Whoever is out there is on the drive—and they 've got a light. They 'd see you—you could n't get away!"

Her voice was shaking. Carson, halting, turned to her slowly. His face was very white; his eyes were aflame.

"*Damn!*" he whispered, very softly, just above his breath. Then he lifted his arms and let them fall limply. The gesture was eloquent of hopelessness; beneath the gleam of his blue eyes there was a bitter despair that made Lee put her hand quickly to her throat. Then, suddenly, she reached out behind her and turned the knob. Her own eyes were as brilliant as his now, her lips were quivering.

"Go this way!" she commanded imperatively. "Upstairs! There are no servants in this wing—not even my maid. You can get out through my room—it 's just above this—and there 's a balcony outside the window that runs all round the wing! *Be quick!*"

She pulled the door open as she spoke.

The light flooding from the room showed the shallow, thickly carpeted staircase. Steps sounded in the house, but they were distant; the swinging light from without shone through the crack in the curtain again. In a flash Carson had passed her, and as she heard him running up the stairs she leaned for a moment weakly against the door.

But she had no time for analysis of either her actions or her feelings. The steps outside were close to the window now. Those within the house were hurrying nearer to the room.

For an instant Lee hesitated, then she crossed the room and pulled aside the curtains.

A moment later she had unlatched the window. One of the grooms came forward eagerly, then drew back at sight of her, making a quick salute, just as Frost came hurrying into the room.

Lee was conscious of a swift relief at sight of him. The groom spoke quickly, almost apologetically.

“ Beg pardon, ma’am—but we thought we heard some one monkeyin’ round outside the stables—and then we saw the lights down here an’ came along—”

He met Frost's eye and paused. Lee laughed a little shakily.

"I heard a sound, too!" she explained. "That 's why I came down! I was frightened—but if there was any one here he—they—must have gone before I got down. I—"

She broke off. Frost's quiet eyes were upon her. They were as expressionless as ever, yet somehow she felt herself flushing slowly, guiltily, beneath them, while she was impelled away from the window and towards the door.

Frost made a slight inclination of his head. His voice was reassuringly respectful when he spoke.

"I think there is no need for alarm, ma'am. I will see to it that the house is thoroughly searched—as quietly as possible. Mr. Smithers is a trifle unwell, ma'am, and is only just gone to sleep; it would be better not to disturb him. You can leave things quite safely with me, ma'am."

Lee accepted the information gratefully, and hurried out of the room. She was tingling all over, still bewildered, scared, and more agitated than she had ever been in her life. At the open hall window she paused, leaning



against it for a moment and drinking in thirstily the crisp, cold air.

She was utterly weary, the whole day had been trying in the extreme, and her head was throbbing painfully. In spite of the cold the night air was refreshing, and she was too restless to go to bed—too uncertain of how Denham Carson had managed to make his escape.

She waited, drooping against the casement, by the window, listening to the murmur of voices below stairs, watching, presently, the firefly-like flicker of lanterns across the lawns and through the shrubberies. From somewhere on the distant road there came the slurring hum of a car—an owl hooted sleepily.

At last, with a little sigh, and shivering, she straightened herself. Softly she padded up the remaining stairs and along the corridor to her room, groping for the handle.

As she passed through the door and closed it behind her, she stifled a sudden cry and stood rigid. At the farther end of the room, by one of the windows, a shadowy figure stirred. Denham Carson's voice, whispering, reassuring, came through the darkness; in a moment she found him at her side.

"Hush! It 's all right!" he declared. "I could n't go—not till I 'd seen you again. I want to know why you 've done this for me?"

Lee gave a smothered exclamation.

"But you are utterly mad!" she whispered back fiercely.

She started away as she felt his hands grope for hers, but he was too quick; his fingers closed tightly about her wrists. She strove for a second to free herself, then stood very still.

Carson bent his head down close to hers.

"Why did you?" he asked. "*Why* did you?"

She caught the insistence of his voice, a throbbing note of passion in it; her captured hands were touching his breast, and she could feel the beating of his heart beneath them.

She stood for a moment thus, her head flung back, her lips apart. Then she wrenched unexpectedly free. She was trembling a little, and in the darkness her eyes shone strangely. For a few, pulsing seconds she did not speak. It was as though she found great difficulty in choosing her words; when they came, it was haltingly, a trifle breathlessly:

"Because," she said, and flung an arm

towards the window, " I suppose—I am mad, too! Now go!"

In the darkness Carson laughed. There was something in the sound that made Lee catch her hands up to her face, even though she knew he could not see her. Through her interlaced fingers she saw the indistinct figure lean towards her.

" That 's not the only reason," he asserted confidently; and laughed again—an odd, low, gentle laugh that still had in it something of triumph.

Then he straightened himself, moved away from her, and a moment later stood silhouetted against the window. He pushed it open soundlessly, and stepped over the low sill. From the other side he leaned back into the room.

" This is n't 'good-bye,' you know!" he told her, with that audacious assurance which was, to the girl, alike baffling and bewildering. " We 're going to meet again!"

The window slid down softly; from beyond it came a muffled "good-night" that Lee sensed rather than heard. The silhouette wavered, and was gone.

Lee stood without moving, her hands still

laced across her eyes. But they were wide-open eyes, in which there was flickering a wholly new expression—a wonder, a fear, and a wild unrest.

The comfortable serenity which had grown up within her during this last month was gone. Her cool satisfaction with her changed lot was no more. The blood was surging hotly through her veins; her heart was leaping. Even she herself did not know what the medley of emotions in that heart spelled. She dared not ask.

It was not until she had stood so long that she began to sway that she moved at last. Then, rather stumblingly, she felt her way to the bed and flung herself down across it, catching her long hair across her eyes so that they still were hidden.

## CHAPTER XII

LEE came down to breakfast the next morning looking listless, and with a faint shadowing beneath her eyes. Her usual delicate pallor was accentuated, her manner nervous. Her sleep had been fitful, troubled, and she still felt shaken, bewildered, and vaguely apprehensive.

She found her husband awaiting her, and she greeted him with an unaccustomed awkwardness which made her feel absurdly young and *gauche*. She bit her lips as he took her outstretched hand into his and bowed over it in his odd, old-fashioned, courteous way, striving after the composure which so seldom deserted her.

For the first time since he had asked her to marry him she was conscious of being averse to, almost resentful of, his touch. The knowledge of the tie between them seemed suddenly to loom up before her, oppressive, even menacing. Yesterday her bonds had lain upon her lightly; to-day the world was changed.

She knew it even while she refused to face

the knowledge, and as Smithers released her hand she drew a deep, long breath of relief and dropped somewhat limply into the chair opposite that which Frost was carefully arranging for his master.

She glanced at the man quickly. Deft, capable, unobtrusive, he had a hand beneath his master's elbow and was lowering him into his seat. It struck Lee with sudden force how stiff and slow of movement Jason Smithers was; she was aware almost of a pang of dismay. Somehow she had not seemed to notice it very much before: if she had it had not affected her in any degree personally.

With the passing of weeks and the new interest and excitement which had been crowded into her days, the memory of the few brief hours on Ruff's Island with Denham Carson had worn fine. There had been no one with whom to contrast Jason Smithers. Now there was. Once more Carson had been hurled into her life, as it were, out of a clear sky. Once more the impression of his vivid personality was strong upon her. Once more the queer, quick charm of his smile, the boyish straightness of his eyes dominated her thoughts.

Just what his appeal was to her she did not know. Certainly, in part, it was his youth, his strength, his virility. For the rest—

She jerked herself away from her own thoughts with a startled upward glance as Jason Smithers's voice came to her. He was peering at her through his smoked spectacles, blinking quickly.

"I hope you were not disturbed last night," he said. "Frost tells me there was a scare—burglars, or something of the sort; that you were alarmed?"

His tone was at once irritable and solicitous. Lee, after that first quick glance, applied herself to the task of pouring coffee, and did not look up again. She answered a little hurriedly.

"I'm afraid I was in a measure responsible for the scare. I thought I heard a noise downstairs and came down—I expect my switching on the lights made the men think there was something wrong here at the house. Was there"—she forced herself to ask the question steadily—"any one, after all?"

Mr. Smithers stirred the coffee Frost set beside his plate, and looked up at him.

"Well, Frost?"

“We did not find any one, sir. It is quite probable that a tramp sheltered in the garage or stable loft, and slipped out when he thought there would be no one about. I feel convinced there is no cause for further apprehension, sir.”

Again Lee's lashes lifted, and she gave the servant a quick look from under them. His face was as expressionless as his voice, and his attention was entirely with his master. Once more Lee experienced a feeling of relief, and relaxed, leaning back comfortably in her high oak chair. Mr. Smithers blinked at her benignly.

“I hope you feel satisfied on that point, my dear?” he observed, and she started, making a quick gesture.

“Quite,” she assured him, with a rather nervous laugh.

He nodded, then dismissed Frost. With the quiet closing of the door Lee's uneasy shyness returned to her. She dreaded, suddenly, and for the first time, being alone with him. She was conscious of a distressing sense of guilt, of deception; and while she felt his eyes upon her face she avoided meeting them.



For the first part of the meal the conversation was brief. Mr. Smithers applied himself heartily to his breakfast, and when he spoke it was upon quite ordinary subjects. Lee answered him monosyllabically and ate scarcely anything, though she drank two cups of coffee thirstily.

With the toast and marmalade the old man gave her more of his attention. He looked at her, and at the untouched food on her plate, and a little frown brought his shaggy brows together.

“You ’re looking pale,” he told her, “and you ’ve eaten nothing. I suppose you were more scared and upset last night than you ’re willing to admit!”

His tone was testy; she felt the penetration of his gaze, though she could scarcely see his eyes behind the smoked glasses, and she stirred beneath it distressfully.

“Indeed, no!” she hastened to assure him. “But I have rather a headache this morning. It—it has been a crowded month, you know—and yesterday was a rather trying day. Even you”—she forced herself to look at him, and smile faintly—“were overdone, it seems. Frost told me you were not

well. I 'm sorry, and I hope you were n't disturbed. I 'd no idea even that you had returned."

"God bless the girl!" Smithers's voice was still more testy, and he applied marmalade liberally to his toast and butter with shaky fingers. "What sort of hours do you think I keep? I only drove into a neighbouring village to see a man on business—going abroad to-day, or something of the sort, so could n't wait. I was back soon after you went to your room. I did n't let you know, as I 'd a touch of gout and I 'm devilish irritable when I 'm not up to the mark. By the way, I hope Frost made my excuses adequately? You must have thought my leaving you to dine alone last night was rather extraordinary. It occurred to me afterwards that I ought to have explained matters myself—that you might be offended?"

He peered at her somewhat anxiously, and again Lee's nervous hands fluttered out in a hurried movement.

"But of course not!" she declared. "Frost made things perfectly clear, and I quite understood."

Mr. Smithers beamed.

“That ’s very sweet of you.” He reached across the table and patted the slender hand upon which the little gold circle gleamed so newly. It twitched slightly, but she did not draw it away, and after a moment the old man withdrew his own to make a second raid upon the marmalade pot.

“What are your plans for to-day?” he asked presently, and Lee shook her head.

“I don’t know. I—had n’t thought. Perhaps—if you don’t mind—I ’d like to ride this morning. That red mare is perfectly beautiful. I did not see you after our visit to the stables yesterday to thank you. I—you ’re too good to me!”

Her soft voice took a sudden new warmth; she leaned forward, involuntarily stretching her hand towards him. A second time Mr. Smithers laid his own upon it. He was smiling, but there was a note of seriousness in his tone.

“I could n’t be. I want you to be happy, Lee—*really* happy! I want you to live your life as nearly as possible as if you were free. Above all things ”—very earnestly—“ I want you never to—to regret!”

Lee did not answer immediately. The con-

sciousness of guilt, of deception, was upon her anew; and she was deeply touched. When at last she looked up there were tears in her eyes. She tried to speak, but found it, at that moment, impossible to frame words that were suitable. Her husband spared her the necessity. With a final pressure he relinquished her fingers and leaned back in his chair.

“ There, there! That ’s all right, my dear! We ’ll quit being sober till there ’s need for it—which I sincerely hope there never will be. Ride, by all means; and don’t let me keep you if you ’ve finished your own breakfast. I like to read my paper over my last cup of coffee. I expect I shall have got through with the news by the time you ’re ready to start. I ’ll like to see how the mare carries you.”

He passed his empty cup to Lee as he spoke. It rattled in the saucer, and watching the white, unsteady fingers, the girl knew a fresh pang at the recurring signs of age in this man; a fresh, faint dismay—a sense of oppression.

She filled the coffee-cup in silence, and, rising, came with it to his side, setting it down

beside his plate. Her own mood bewildered her. A warm gratitude towards him for his kindness, his understanding, and the quiet tact with which he had made more easy this first embarrassing meal together in newly intimate surroundings warred with a rising revolt—an almost overwhelming desire to escape, to undo that which she had done.

It would pass presently, she knew. But it frightened her while it lasted. She had not expected to feel like this; she had dreamed of no stirring of regret. But the events of the preceding night had changed her outlook upon the future. In spite of her fierce efforts to forget him, Denham Carson's face kept rising before her eyes—his last words seemed to ring in her ears:

*“This is n't ‘good-bye,’ you know! We're going to meet again!”*

She turned rather abruptly towards the door, pausing the next moment as Smithers spoke.

“Frost has put the papers at your end of the table, my dear. Will you give them to me before you go?”

Lee reached out a long arm for them and picked them up. But she did not give them

to him. Instead she stood quite still, even as she had stood once before, staring at black headlines above a familiar photograph and Denham Carson's name.

For an instant her vision blurred; her heart leaped, then seemed to grow still. Breathlessly, utterly forgetful of Jason Smithers's presence, of what he might think, she began to read.

### DENHAM CARSON IN LONDON

Denham Carson, the American murderer who escaped recently, and who was believed to have contrived to make his way to England, was seen twice in London yesterday. The first occasion was in the morning, in a quiet street backing a square of fashionable houses. A working-man passing him was struck by his likeness to the photograph of Carson published in the various newspapers some weeks ago. Unfortunately the man did not attempt to detain him, but went in search of a policeman, and in spite of the fact that there was one quite near, upon their return there was no trace of the wanted man. It is something of a mystery how he contrived to get out of sight so quickly, as the street is a long one, with the very high walls of the outer premises of the square houses upon one side, in all of which the gates were found to be securely

locked, and a row of smaller houses upon the other. The street was almost empty at the time, and no one else appears to have noticed Carson. But the workman's description tallies absolutely in every detail with that of the murderer, and there is little or no doubt that it was he. . . . Later he was recognised by several people at a popular restaurant; but again contrived to get out and away before an alarm was given. And again it would appear that there was something of a mystery in his complete disappearance. According to all statements he was not recognised until leaving the restaurant, although he had made no attempt at all at disguise. He walked out of the place so quietly that no one realised he was gone until it was too late. Once outside he seemed to vanish. The police, however, are hopeful of tracing him and effecting his arrest within the next twenty-four hours—

“What in the world is the matter, child?” Jason Smithers's voice, a shade brusque and impatient, roused Lee violently to a realisation of her surroundings. With a little gasp she thrust the newspapers into his outstretched fingers.

“I—why, nothing—” she steadied herself for a moment with her hand against the table's edge. “I was—just interested—”

She knew that she spoke shakily, and that

her face was white. Jason, however, paid no heed. With the paper held close to his eyes he was reading the paragraph she had just perused.

“Humph! The Carson case cropped up again! . . . By Gad! But it ’s outrageous! Outrageous, the way the police let a man walk away right under their noses! Dunderheads, that ’s what they are! Drivelling dunderheads! If they had n’t been utterly incompetent they ’d have arrested him before he ’d been in England two days! Disgraceful, I call it! No protection in the arm of the law at all!”

He thumped the paper violently with an indignant hand, glaring at Lee truculently. She looked at him vaguely, only half comprehending what he was saying, but feeling grateful for the explosion in that it gave her time to recover herself. Smithers, laboriously continuing the paragraph, snorted anew:

“—‘ Hope to effect an arrest within twenty-four hours,’ indeed! I should hope so, too!”

Lee turned away rather abruptly, crossing to the hearth. Her face had hardened ever so slightly, her eyes were grown brighter.



Vaguely, within her, some instinct of defence was rising.

She spoke quickly, almost before she quite knew what she was about to say:

“ But, perhaps—he is not guilty—”

Her voice came faintly. Mr. Smithers made an abrupt movement that sent a fork clattering to the ground, and laid down his newspaper. His face was curiously blank; his tone so sharp when he spoke, that Lee started.

“ Not *guilty!* Good Gad, Lee! What are you talking about? He ’s been tried, has n’t he? And imprisoned? As far as I can make out it ’s by the merest miracle he escaped the extreme penalty! Not guilty? What the devil else should he be?”

“ There was no—*real* proof—”

Again something within her drove her, unwillingly, to a defence of Carson that was half defiant.

Mr. Smithers thumped the table vigorously.

“ God bless my soul, Lee! Are you going to tell me that you ’re in sympathy with the fellow?”

His voice was profoundly shocked. Lee, flushing deeply, let her hands fall to her sides and turned slowly to face him. Her eyes

looked unnaturally dark and troubled, but they met his steadfastly.

“As much,” she declared quietly, “as I am in sympathy with any creature that is hunted! I don’t ride to hounds, you know, for that reason!”

She was crossing the room as she spoke. As she passed him she stooped to pick up the fork, and smiled at him half wistfully, with a sort of faint apology. Mr. Smithers cleared his throat with unnecessary noise, and blinked rapidly.

“God bless my soul!” he ejaculated. And again, as the door closed upon her—“God bless my soul!”

## CHAPTER XIII

THE days that ensued were peaceful, very pleasant, and altogether uneventful. For the first week Lee was jumpy, nervous, and not quite herself. She had endured a greater strain than she had guessed; the effect was not easy to shake off. She knew a tremor every evening and morning that she picked up a newspaper; but the Carson affair was soon relegated to the background and other interesting events placed before it, so that gradually she mentally relaxed.

In a little while she found it possible to appreciate and enjoy her new position. For the first time since Tom Dorice's death she was really free; for the first time in her life every luxury that any woman could desire was hers.

Resolutely she turned her face to the future and strove to forget the past—that past in which Denham Carson had played a part. But there were moments when she knew that she never could forget.

Perhaps because of this, and a sense of guilt that still lingered, she gave Jason Smithers a good deal more of her time and company than otherwise she might have done. At first he had appeared surprised, then flattered and pleased. He roused himself to enter into her moods and the spirit of her desires with an eagerness which touched and warmed her heart towards him.

There were nights, in the pink glow of candles and firelight, with just Frost in attendance at the table when the halting hesitancy left his speech, his stooped shoulders seemed to straighten, and his eyes to gleam in defiance of the smoked glasses that blurred them; nights when he renewed a little of that lost youth of his which he had so reluctantly let go; nights when, over a perfectly served dinner, he recalled interesting stories to tell her, or discussed with her their favourite books, and later, alone in the drawing-room with her, sat in the shadows while she played to him, and sometimes sang, in her throaty, sweet, rather weak voice.

There were mornings when he watched her, with a wistfulness she sensed, riding away on the red mare down the drive; and late, misty

afternoons when he walked with her, stiffly, under the dripping trees.

An intimacy grew between them which even the girl found more than merely pleasant. It was comforting to be loved and cared for. It reminded her of the glad old days when she and her father had taken their pleasures together. She knew something of the same warmth of well-being now.

Jason Smithers needed her. He gave her much, but she returned it with her constant companionship, her sweetness, and her youth. She had swept his days bare of loneliness; as, curiously enough, he had swept hers.

Only on occasions now did she think of the ties which bound her with shrinking. For the most part they lay lightly upon her; and at all times Jason Smithers's affection was unobtrusive. It was not difficult to be happy under such circumstances, and when, a week later than had been expected, Terry came to them for her visit, she found Lee with brighter eyes and pinker cheeks than she had ever known her.

She regarded her for a few minutes consideringly, then came quickly across to her where she sat, knees hunched, slim arms

encircling them, upon a squat, puffed satin and brocade cushion before the glowing log fire, and stooping laid two firm brown hands upon her shoulders.

“ Lord, Lee!” she ejaculated, with a greater depth than usual in her gay voice, “ but it ’s good to see you again—especially looking as you are now! It strikes me that being Mrs. Jason Smithers has done you good!”

Lee coloured a little, but her eyes smiled. Terry gave her an ecstatic squeeze.

“ Then things really *are* working all right?” she demanded. “ You ’re still happy—have n’t begun to—to be sorry?”

There was the faintest note of anxiety in the young voice; the red-brown eyes were mercilessly searching. For one brief second Lee turned her own away from them; unexpectedly the memory of Denham Carson stirred and shook her. A sharp pain that was almost physical stabbed at her heart and was gone, followed by a surge of remorse that was almost tenderness as she thought of the queer, crotchety old man who was her husband.

Slowly, resolutely she met Terry’s gaze, and her lips lifted in a fine, faint smile that was not without sweetness.

“No,” she said—and believed honestly that she spoke the truth—“I have n’t begun to be sorry!”

Terry let her hands fall and drew a long, deep breath.

“Cheers! I ’m no end glad, Lee!”

She straightened herself, stretching. Lee’s eyes grew at once soft and grave as they watched her. Long-limbed as ever, and as carelessly garbed, Terry yet seemed to have subtly altered. The too thin limbs were ever so slightly rounder, her movements not so awkward. Lee got up rather abruptly, and, following her as she moved restlessly round the room, linked a hand in her arm.

“You really ought to have different dresses, Terry!” she exclaimed. “I thought—I hoped Teresa—” She paused, biting her lip vexedly.

Terry grinned. “Would spend some of the money you ’ve been sending her on *my* wardrobe?” she interpolated swiftly. “Guess again, honey! And don’t forget that each inch on my skirts adds a year or so to mother’s age!”

She pirouetted cheerfully before a long mirror, adding as she did so:

“And mother ’s having a gorgeous time just now. You ’ve been much too generous, Lee. She does n’t deserve it, and it only encourages her extravagance. But she certainly is enjoying herself. She ’s taken to entertaining quite a good deal, and is always collecting new people about her. . . . But you really ought n’t to do it, Lee. She ’s such an ungrateful little cat!”

She let her fanning skirts settle about her, and laughed at Lee’s half-startled, half-reproving expression.

“But I don’t want to shock Smithy, or scandalise Frost, so I ’ll let down my evening frock a couple of inches. By the way, I suppose Haines is still here?”

The tone was disinterested, but a deeper rose burned for a moment in her cheeks. Lee nodded.

“I don’t know what Mr. Smithers would do without Frost and Haines! I think he would feel utterly lost.” She laughed, and Terry gave a sigh of satisfaction.

“That ’s a good thing—that Haines is here, I mean. You see, I ’ve a horrible suspicion that Toby, the terrier, has mange, and if so he ’ll have to be isolated, poor dear, and I ’d



like Haines to look after him. If you don't mind"—she glanced at the clock—"I think I'll slip along with him to the garage at once—there's half an hour before dinner."

She was gone with her whirlwind impetuosity; to reappear as dinner was announced still surreptitiously battling with the fastening of her belt.

Her toilet had obviously been hastily made, and the front of her frock was decidedly longer than the back; but she was flushed and smiling, and unusually bright-eyed.

She had found Haines, and, superbly ignoring the incidents of their recent drive to town, had immediately enlisted his sympathy and services for the terrier. After which she had made a brief inspection of the little black mare awaiting her in the stables, and had returned to the house only a few minutes before the dinner hour.

Jason Smithers greeted her warmly, and throughout the meal she chattered gaily and unceasingly, with an animation which seemed to have increased even since her arrival. Over the prospect of her riding lessons she waxed especially enthusiastic, and drifted from this subject to a collection of droll descriptions

of her various adventures in driving the big Rolls-Royce.

“ I don't know what I should do without it!” she declared. “ Butler looks after it for me, of course, but I never take him out with me now if I can help it except at night. He 's so *awfully* Scotch, is n't he? I don't believe he 's ever exceeded the speed limit in his life!”

She paused to make a hearty attack upon her sweet, then went on:

“ I drive perfectly, now. And it 's awfully handy having a car when one is perpetually having guests. Patty Clay asked us down soon after your wedding, Lee. Rather decent of her, was n't it? She had a new man there—an American—awfully nice chap!”

The pink deepened in her cheeks; a pair of mischievous dimples came and went.

“ We 've seen quite a good deal of him since. He was only at Patty's for a week-end visit, and he drove back to town with mother and me.”

She dimpled again, and Lee looked at her for a moment searchingly. Terry caught the glance, and blushed.

“ I rather like him,” she confessed candidly.

“He ’s a sport, and never treats me like a kid. We ’ve had some ripping runs in the car together—Butler ’d have had heart-failure if he ’d been with us!”

Jason Smithers chuckled, blinking across at her indulgently. Lee looked a little thoughtful. Terry was the least shade self-conscious, and she had never seen her so before. It startled her; made her realise how nearly across the border of womanhood the girl was.

“What sort of boy is he?” she asked gently; and Terry frowned.

“He is n’t a boy. He is n’t even *really* young—perhaps forty, mother thinks. Maybe a bit more.”

Lee checked a smile and a sigh. Smithers, meeting her glance, passed a rueful hand across his thick white hair. Terry proceeded volubly.

“He ’s fearfully attractive. I ’m not interested in men as a rule, but he ’s different. He ’s *remarkably* handsome, and, I should think, as rich as *you* are!” This to Smithers. She added, pulling grapes from their stalk, and eating them childishly, stones and all, “His name is Roland Gish! What on *earth* ’s the matter?”

Frost, in the act of handing coffee which had been ordered at the table, caught his elbow sharply against his master's chair. There was a tinkle of silver, a soft crash of one of the shell-like cups on the thick carpet, a startled mutter of apology from the man.

Lee glanced apprehensively at her husband. He had not moved, and a deep frown was his only indication of displeasure. She noticed that his usually unsteady fingers were clasped firmly upon the stem of his wineglass.

Terry, bewildered by something in his expression that was not merely annoyance at Frost's clumsiness, exclaimed:

"Why? Have you heard of him? Do you know him?"

Very slowly Mr. Smithers brought his glance back to her face. He did not even look at the distressed Frost.

"I do not know him," he returned. "But"—he lifted his glass and deliberately drained its contents—"yes. I have—heard of him!"

## CHAPTER XIV

TERRY'S riding lessons commenced the next day, and proceeded highly satisfactorily. Haines was, she discovered, a superb horseman as well as a careful and efficient instructor.

At the end of a week the paddocks were forsaken for the roads. Terry, absolutely in her element, glowed with enjoyment and enthusiasm. Haines, who was her attendant always, and who had apparently utterly forgotten the Richmond incident, appeared to know even more about horses than he did about cars.

Upon reflection Terry decided that he seemed less like a servant. In his riding kit he might very easily have been a man of her own world; and perhaps it was this which caused her subtly to change her attitude towards him. On horseback, out in the stinging freshness of the open, it was difficult to remember that they were not equals. Terry did not try. She was perfectly content with

things as they were, and was enjoying herself immensely.

Three weeks later, when Christmas was almost upon the world again, Teresa Dorice wrote to her stepdaughter. She commenced with trivialities, finishing characteristically:

. . . I shall be all alone at Christmas, and this flat, though convenient ordinarily, is too small for any sort of entertaining. I suppose you will have a house-party? If so, can I come and bring one or two people with me? I 've heard such a lot about Brookbridge, and of course I want to see your home there. . . . Let me know quickly, as I shall have to arrange things accordingly. I hope you 're not spoiling Terry. . . .

Lee went in search of her husband and put the letter into his hand. He looked up at her after he had perused it, raising his brows.

“You must do exactly as you like,” he told her. “I shall be delighted, of course, to welcome Mrs. Dorice and any friends she cares to bring, if you wish it, too. Personally, I like a houseful at Christmas, and there is plenty of room here.”

He gave the letter into her hand, holding it for a moment in a warm clasp. He sat in a deep leather armchair before the fire, his long

cane propped beside him, a book on his knee. It struck the girl suddenly that he looked very lonely, and her eyes softened. He met their glance and smiled.

"You 're quite happy?" he asked, and she made a quick movement of assent.

"I should be very ungrateful and hard to please if I were not!" she said gently. She did not try to disengage her hand, and after a moment he lifted it and held it against his cheek. Then, with a sigh, he let it go.

Lee looked down at him gravely. Upon an impulse, colouring faintly, she asked:

"You are, too? I mean—I want to feel that I have not failed you in any respect—that—"

"I 'm happier," Smithers interrupted—and the hesitant voice was suddenly firm and very deep—"than I ever hoped I could be!"

There was a sincerity in his tone that brought the colour again to Lee's face, a brightening of relief to her eyes. She dwelt no further on the subject, and stood beside him speaking for a few minutes of quite ordinary things. But before she left him she laid a slender hand lightly, half caressingly, upon his shoulder.

She wrote to Teresa that night, stating her accommodation for guests and the number she was already inviting, with the assurance that Mrs. Dorice and any friends she cared to bring would be welcomed whenever she chose to come with them.

Two days later, following a belated telegram, Mrs. Dorice arrived. Two women and a man were with her, Patty Clay, a girl whom Lee had met at the latter's house, and a man whom she had never seen before.

He was a rather big man, well dressed, immaculate, and decidedly handsome in a dark, clean-shaven, rather heavy way. He had splendid teeth and an ingratiating manner, and bowed before Lee with a smiling air of deprecation as Teresa airily presented him.

"This is Mr. Gish, Lee. I expect Terry has spoken to you of him. He has only recently come to England, and has n't very many friends as yet. He was contemplating a horribly lonely Christmas, so I brought him along!"

Lee, giving Gish a cool hand, was aware of a sudden, sharp movement behind her, and, looking back over her shoulder, saw her hus-



band half rise, then drop back into his chair again. His face was in the shadow, but there was a curious rigidity about him that she could not fail to notice. Remembering his odd manner when Terry had mentioned Gish before, she proceeded to present the younger man to him a shade uneasily.

Smithers acknowledged it with an unsmiling, courteous bending of his white head. His hands were occupied in fumbling for his cane. Behind his smoked glasses Lee saw a momentary quick gleam of unwonted keenness. Then, rosy, bright-eyed, and tempestuous Terry whirled into the room, and with a squeal of delight precipitated herself upon Roland Gish.

“What an utterly ripping surprise!” she exclaimed. Then, having greeted her mother and the other two women, she flung her hard little hat into a chair and herself into another. “I simply *must* have my tea before I get out of this habit!” she declared; and with something like relief Lee moved to her place to dispense it.

She was puzzled, and, watching Terry and Gish, not altogether satisfied. She noticed that Jason Smithers was watching them too,

and she frowned faintly as her white fingers moved among the cups.

“Do you ride?” Terry was asking, over her second cup of tea. Gish looked at the glowing face and slender figure in its neat habit, and, courageously ignoring a certain stiffness of his limbs, nodded. Terry beamed.

“You must come out to-morrow. This country is lovely. We went quite a distance to-day, up over the hill and past the woods. Do you know, there ’s the quaintest little hut right in the middle of those woods! Quite a rough place, but furnished; and it looks as though it had been lived in quite recently. Haines did n’t want to stop and investigate for some reason, but I made him. I can’t imagine who could choose such a lonely spot—and, anyway, they must be trespassing. All that is your property, is n’t it?”

She turned to Smithers. His hand shook more than ever as he set his tea-cup down, and he looked at Lee with a frown.

“Too much sugar, my dear—I ’ll have another cup! Yes, Terry, the wood is my property. The hut is occasionally used at night by one or other of the gamekeepers.”

He turned to Mrs. Dorice with a courteous

question, and Terry gave her attention once more to her tea and Gish.

Later, visiting Toby in his cosy quarters in the garage, she found Haines dressing him. He looked up eagerly.

"He 's almost well now," he told her. "You 'll be able to have him with you in a week, I expect."

"Good!" Terry bent to pat the terrier's head. "You 're a wonder, Haines. Oh, by the way—you won't need to ride with me to-morrow. Mr. Gish rides, and will be coming with me—we 'll want the horses about eight. I want to show him. What *is* the matter, Haines? You look as if you 'd swallowed a peppermint ball!"

Her tone was aggrieved as well as startled. Haines looked as she had only seen him look once before, and instinctively she drew back.

"*Gish!*" he repeated slowly. "Not Roland Gish?" Then, as she nodded, staring blankly: "Good God! Do you mean to say that Roland Gish is here—staying up at the house?"

Terry reared her small head aggressively.

"Really, Haines! And why *not?*"

"Why *not!*" Haines choked, then he flung

away, taking a couple of swift strides towards the door. "Good God! Why *not*? Because he 's a rotten cad—a bounder—a cur! Because he 's got one of the worst reputations of any man in the whole of the United States! Because he is n't fit to breathe the same air as decent men and women! God! And he 's under Jason Smithers's roof!—talking of riding with *you*—"

He stopped abruptly. His face was suffused with dark blood, his eyes aflame. Abruptly, before she realised it, he laid his two hands upon her shoulders holding her in a grip of steel.

"See here," he said hoarsely, ignoring her furious effort to free herself, and the indignation of her face, "let me see Roland Gish within two yards of you and—and I 'll break every bone in his abominable body!"

He loosed her, breathing hard. Then, stooping, he gathered up Toby and strode to the narrow stairway leading to the rooms above. Halfway up he looked down at her.

"Don't forget!" he said, in an odd, strained sort of way as though he still found self-control difficult. "I mean it!"

And was gone.

## CHAPTER XV

It was characteristic of Terry that she hesitated not a moment in going to Jason Smithers with her complaint against Haines. Boiling over with indignation and a sense of outrage, she felt that she hated the man and hoped vindictively that his master would make him smart for his intolerable impertinence.

How had he dared, she demanded furiously of herself, to speak to her so—to treat her as though he was her equal? She could feel the touch of his strong hands upon her shoulders still as she precipitated herself into Mr. Smithers's presence, and shrugged them violently, disgustedly, as if to rid herself of it.

Lee was with her husband, and listened, shocked and bewildered, to her stepsister's storm of words. But the old man himself heard her with unruffled equanimity.

He was silent for a moment or two when she had finished. Lee, watching him a little anxiously, could make nothing whatever of his expression, yet she somehow felt that inwardly he was not so composed as he would appear. He met her dismayed glance, and

smiled at her. Then he looked again at Terry.

"Is that all, child?" he asked, in his indulgently gentle way, and Terry made a wide, fierce gesture.

"*All!*" she exploded indignantly. "Is n't it *enough*? Because Haines is an old and trusted servant of yours is he to indulge in insufferable liberties and offer gross impertinences to your guests? How *dare* he criticise people who are under your roof—or my actions? Because you allow him to swank about doing nothing most of the time for all the world as if he were a gentleman—"

"Terry!"

Lee's voice was gentle, but it held a note of quiet command that checked Terry in spite of her rage.

Mr. Smithers coughed slightly behind his hand. One might almost have suspected that he smiled, but his tone was absolutely serious when he spoke.

"Perhaps," he said in his courteous way, "you will find Frost for me, Terry, and tell him to send Haines to me here immediately after dinner."

Terry opened her lips, looked at him, and

closed them again. Still flushed, she made for the door, but paused as Smithers's voice spoke her name again.

"Terry!" There was an unaccustomed note of incisiveness in his usually hesitant tones that made both girls look at him quickly. "A moment, my dear."

He leaned slightly forward, meeting the impatient questioning of the still brilliant red-brown eyes, smiling into them benignly.

"I don't wish to appear fussy, but if you ride with Mr. Gish to-morrow instead of with Haines, I want you to wait until Lee finds it convenient to accompany you. I suppose I am old-fashioned, but I like young women and girls to be somewhat strict in their observance of the conventions. And Mr. Gish—"

He paused, drumming long white fingers on the arm of his chair.

Terry flung up her head resentfully, but he gave her no time to frame the retort hovering on her lips.

"Mr. Gish is, of course, a friend of your mother's—and for the moment my guest. At the same time, if my memory serves me rightly, he has—ah—the reputation of being rather more of a man of the world than—er—"

I consider quite desirable in an intimate acquaintance of a very young girl. That is all. I feel quite sure you have too much common sense to bear me any malice for my plain speaking—which, after all, must be forgivable in an old man.”

He blinked at her benevolently, nodded in kindly dismissal, and after a brief instant of hesitation the girl passed out of the room, still flushed and in silence.

As the door closed upon her, Lee went quickly to her husband’s side. She, too, was a little flushed, her soft eyes troubled.

“ I ’m awfully sorry,” she declared distressfully; “ I had no idea of whom Teresa would choose to bring with her. If I had I ’m afraid I should not have interfered. I ’ve never even heard of Mr. Gish before.”

The old man lifted one of the slender hands and patted it reassuringly.

“ Tut! tut! There is nothing to bother your pretty head about, my dear—nothing at all. It is unfortunate that young Haines let his feelings carry him away—I must, of course, speak to him seriously about it. As to Gish—”

He paused, and again Lee was aware of a



certain stiffening of his body, a subtle alteration of his expression. Her eyes deepened to anxiety.

“Is he—is n’t he the sort of person one ought to know?” she asked; and added, with faint exasperation, “I ’m afraid Teresa really is dreadfully casual in her choice of acquaintances—”

Her husband did not answer at once. He was looking straight before him, and while he still held her hand the caress had gone from his touch. It was unconsciously hard; he gave the impression of being tense with a curious restraint. He spoke quietly enough at last.

“Had I been aware of Mrs. Dorice’s intention of bringing him here, I should have suggested the selection of another guest in his place. As it is”—Lee felt the thin, white fingers tighten with unexpected strength over hers—“as it is, under the circumstances, and since he is our guest, we must make the best of it. And now—let us talk of something else. I want you to come to me when you are dressed for dinner, before you go down. Frost will tell you when I am ready.”

Lee said nothing further on the subject. They talked desultorily for a few minutes

before she went to her own room. Smithers appeared quite unruffled, and some of her own anxiety subsided. She dressed quickly and came to him again at Frost's summons.

He had already dressed, and was standing leaning on his long cane. With his white hair he made an impressive figure, despite his bowed shoulders and the continual shaking of his hands, and the girl, meeting his eyes, smiled at him involuntarily.

She herself looked more lovely than she guessed. She was wearing white, and was without ornament of any sort. Smithers's eyes flickered as they rested on her, and he slipped a hand suddenly into his pocket. When he drew it forth a long string of pearls hung, gleaming mistily in the candlelight, from his fingers.

Lee had halted on the threshold. The old man came to her slowly, in his stiff way, the hand holding the pearls outstretched.

"My Christmas present, Lee," he said. And added, simply, but with a warm satisfaction in his tone that brought the rose flooding to her cheeks, "I 'm glad you 're wearing white!"

He threw the string of pearls lightly over

her small head as he spoke, and she drew a quick breath as their warmth touched her skin. For an instant they faced each other, quite silent.

The old man spoke pleasantly.

“I hope you ’ll like them. They are historic—none of your modern stuff.”

Lee was weighting the chain in her hands. She looked up with misty eyes, her cheeks still rosy.

“You ’re far too good to me!” she declared. “You give me so much that it makes me feel—unfair.”

Her husband’s eyes went from her face to the white, bare shoulders. A dull flush crept into his cheeks; for a moment, behind his glasses, she saw his eyes gleam. Then his outstretched hand went out and closed upon her arm above the dimpled elbow. He held her gently, looking down at her. When he spoke it was a shade jerkily.

“You ’re very beautiful, Lee! . . .” He drew her suddenly closer to him. “If I were a younger man—I ’d give all the years of my life to making you love me. . . .”

Lee did not move, but the rose faded from her face, her eyes darkened.

A little abruptly Smithers released his hold, and she moved quickly away from him, her hands still clasping the pearls. He followed her presently and stood just behind her.

"I 'm sorry," he said; "I have made you angry."

The girl shook her head quickly. Then with an effort, she faced him, meeting his eyes.

"Of course not!" she declared with an attempt at lightness that was not very successful. "I—I should be foolish if I were angered at so pretty a compliment!"

He looked at her oddly from behind his glasses, but he did not answer her smile.

"I want to be sure of that!" he told her quietly, and there was a sudden vibrant wistfulness in his voice that caught at her heart-strings.

She stood looking up at him for a moment, uncertain, hesitant. Then a quick tenderness that held in it much of pity welled up into her eyes.

Impulsively she answered:

"You *can* be sure. . . ." And, as impulsively, she reached up a long, white young arm and, circling his neck, drew his face down. For just one fluttering instant cool, unimpas-

sioned lips touched his cheek. Then, at the sound of voices without, she turned quickly aside and moved towards the door.

At it she paused and looked back at him. In one hand, caressingly, she held the pearls. She looked down at them, and up again, smiling.

“They ’re lovely!” she declared softly, and was gone.

Mr. Smithers stood without moving. He had not altered his position when Frost came to him quietly from the dressing-room beyond. Nor did he look round. But he spoke after a moment, testily.

“Frost,” he said, with an irritable jerk of his stooped shoulders, “Haines is a fool! A *damned* fool! . . .”

He paused for a moment, and straightened himself stiffly. Under his shaggy white brows he glared at himself frowningly in the candlelit mirror. His cane had fallen to the ground. Frost picked it up and gave him a sharp glance.

“A damned fool!” Mr. Smithers repeated; and added, with a sort of grim impatience, as he took the cane from the man’s hand, “And so am I!”

## CHAPTER XVI

IT was perhaps not surprising that Lee found her rôle as hostess of a large house-party a more difficult task than at first she had imagined it would be. Her guests in the main were well chosen, and appeared to be enjoying themselves. But Roland Gish's presence, and Terry's defiant attitude, had struck a jarring note.

Lee was disturbed, despite her outward serene composure. Nor, it seemed to her, did the atmosphere grow clearer as time went on. Of necessity Terry had obeyed her host's desire in respect of her rides with Gish; nevertheless, she was continually in his company, seemed, indeed, to take pleasure in it, and to encourage his decidedly marked attentions.

Lee did not like Roland Gish. Still less did she like a certain possessiveness in the way he sometimes looked at Terry.

At the same time, in fairness, she could not feel wholly out of sympathy with the girl.

Observing Gish carefully, she was bound to admit that the man was good-looking, pleasant, and possessed of a breezily jolly manner which was not without fascination.

Lee felt an impatient, rising anger against her careless, butterfly stepmother. She had always been hopelessly indiscriminate in her haphazard collecting of chance acquaintances. Before it had not mattered so much; now Terry was growing up—and Terry was impressionable.

She voiced something of this, impulsively, to Mrs. Dorice a few days later. She had been riding with the two—a somewhat silent and unobtrusive, but none the less observant, chaperon. On the ride homeward the two had almost seemed to forget her presence. Terry, a vivid picture of youth and health and elfin loveliness, was provocative, alluring; the man's manner towards her was caressing, more than ever possessive.

These things had troubled Lee. Still more was she troubled by an incident which occurred just after they had entered the drive gates. Haines, walking, was coming towards them. Terry was so intent upon something that Gish was telling her that she had not even

seen Haines. But Lee, glancing at him with a little nod of greeting, was shocked and startled by the expression of his face.

In a flash it had seemed to her to change. For an instant suffused with dark, angry blood, it grew immediately very white—a very passion of anger and resentment and dislike showed in it, and Lee, riding up quickly abreast of the other two, frowned.

She liked Haines well enough, but to-day she felt really angry, resentful of his resentment, puzzled and annoyed at his manner. He certainly was showing presumption that amounted to impertinence, she told herself, and she carried her ruffled sense of the fitness of things into her stepmother's presence.

She found that lady half drowsily consuming cigarettes, in a delightful negligee before an enormous fire. She looked up, raising her brows at Lee's somewhat unceremonious entry.

"Hullo?" she greeted lazily; and added, after a keen glance at the other's flushed face: "Anything up? You look bothered."

Lee did not answer at once. She came slowly across the room, pulling off her gauntlets. Then rather abruptly, she asked:



“Teresa, is Mr. Gish staying for the whole of your visit?”

Mrs. Dorice stared. “My dear girl, I suppose so—I asked him for the whole of it. Why?”

Lee looked down at her dusty boots, then up, suddenly and directly, into her step-mother’s eyes.

“I hoped he was n’t,” she said quietly. “For one thing, Mr. Smithers does not like him; nor do I. I believe—from what I have heard—that he is not altogether a desirable acquaintance.”

“Really!” Mrs. Dorice sat up with a jerk.

Lee brought her brows together, making a little impatient movement.

“I ’m sorry, Teresa. I have not forgotten that Mr. Gish is our guest, or that I asked you to bring whom you pleased. I know nothing about him personally; I know, too, that probably you know as little. . . . You never do know very much about the friends you make, Teresa. Generally it has n’t mattered. This time it does.”

She was still looking levelly into Mrs. Dorice’s eyes, and she went on deliberately before the other could voice a protest.

“ I mean—because of Terry!”

“ Because of *Terry*?—” Mrs. Dorice’s voice was shrill. Then she began to laugh. “ My dear Lee! What bee have you got in your bonnet now?”

Again Lee made a movement of her hands.

“ Mr. Gish,” she said quietly, “ is paying Terry far too much attention.”

Teresa gasped. For a moment she seemed bereft of speech. Then she pushed her cushions away from her and got to her feet.

“ I guess you ’re crazy, Lee!” she retorted. “ I never heard that a man worth what Roland Gish is worth *could* pay a girl too much attention! Unless”—with another shrill laugh—“ you ’re under the impression that those attentions are not serious. Because I can assure you that they *are*. I know the signs. Besides, he has as good as said so to me.”

Lee’s fine brows contracted.

“ It is the fact that he ’s serious that troubles me!” she returned. “ Terry ’s far too wholesome and sensible to be carried away by a mere flirtation. As it is—oh, Teresa!”

She stretched out a slim hand in sudden

appeal to the other woman, her beautiful eyes very earnest, very troubled.

“Can’t you see that it ’s all wrong!” she went on swiftly. “Terry ’s so young. And Mr. Gish is a man of the world—a man whose—whose reputation is not altogether enviable. Who—”

“That ’s enough!” Mrs. Dorice’s voice was harsh, her pansy eyes agleam, her face unbecomingly flushed. “I don’t know if you ’re aware of it, but you ’re positively insulting—not only to Mr. Gish, but to me. I can tell you I ’m getting sick, sorry, and tired of your airs, anyway! It was bad enough when I *had* to put up with them. Now I don’t—and I ’m not going to. It strikes me that old Grandpa Smithers has succeeded in making you an even greater prig than you were before. . . .”

Lee’s face flushed hotly at the sneer. She opened her lips quickly, then closed them again and, turning on her heel, moved to the door. Teresa’s voice followed her.

“Terry ’s old enough to know her own mind, anyway. And if Roland Gish wants to marry her and she ’ll have him, I should feel inclined to go down on my knees and thank the good Lord for it! Terry has looks of a

sort, but she 's not a girl to appeal to every man, and I certainly never hoped I 'd get her off my hands so early. See here, Lee,"—the shrill voice sharpened and grew hard,—“ I don't want any interference from you. I won't put up with it!”

Lee did not answer. Outside in the wide corridor she stood for a moment uncertainly. From the hall below there came the sound of laughter and voices. Slowly she moved to the stairs, and, standing against the oaken bannisters, looked down. Tea-tables were being set before the huge hearth. Terry, still in her habit, was standing at Roland Gish's side, her face uptilted, eyes and mouth mischievous and mirthful. The man was looking down at her with veiled eyes, and Lee studied him, earnestly.

From this distance he looked debonair, handsome, rather attractive—a fine figure of a man in his riding kit. But she remembered his eyes, and certain lines of dissipation about a mouth that was very hard and even cruel when it did not smile, and she drew a long sigh.

She wondered, in troubled fashion, what there was actually against the man. For a

moment she was almost tempted to seek Jason Smithers and ask him. So far some unexplainable instinct had withheld her from doing so. She had sensed that, always, in Roland Gish's presence her husband had not been himself—that he had restrained his feelings with an effort that was almost violent, and she had hesitated to add to an agitation at which, she knew, he would not, for the world, have had her guess.

Now, as she prepared slowly to go downstairs, a step sounded behind her and she looked round.

Frost stood at her elbow.

“If you please, ma'am, Mr. Smithers would like to speak to you in his room. He has been indisposed since luncheon, ma'am—a return of the gout, I think.”

Lee turned back at once, a real sympathy in her eyes, a little of anxiety. Frost opened the door of Jason Smithers's room for her and disappeared. Smithers was in a deep chair at the shadowy end of the room, his foot propped up. She went to him quickly, laying a light hand upon the long, nervous one on the chair arm.

She felt it quiver for an instant, then, to

her surprise, he jerked it almost violently away. He spoke abruptly, irritably:

“Don’t! I hate being touched when I ’m ill! This damn gout—” The words ended in an inarticulate growl.

Lee let her hand fall and stood waiting.

“I ’m sorry,” the old man said after a moment, still testily, but with faint contrition. “But it ’s damnable being tied here by the leg! Damnable, to watch youth all about one and to—and to feel a cripple. . . . There, child! Don’t take any notice of me. I ’m like a bear with a sore head. Did Frost tell you I want you to do something for me?”

Lee shook her head. Smithers moved his swathed foot gingerly, and swore softly, apologising an instant later.

“I ’m a grumpy old curmudgeon, child! But I hate inaction. . . . Now, then. I was going into Brookbridge village this evening after dinner—meeting the nine o’clock from London. There ’ll be one of my men of business on it with some important papers—devilish important papers—that I ought to deal with to-night. I could send Frost for them, but I dare n’t—can’t spare him when I ’m like this. And my man will only give them up to

a responsible person. Will you go? Haines will drive you, and bring you straight back, so you 'll be quite safe."

For an instant she saw his eyes glint—was conscious of an odd, suppressed eagerness in his voice.

Then she laughed.

"But, of course I 'll go! I—I 'm only too glad to be able to do anything for you—that is of the slightest help."

She spoke shyly, half stammeringly. Smithers looked up at her, and away rather quickly. He spoke almost brusquely.

"Good!" He leaned slightly farther back into the shadows. "Haines will be waiting with the car at eight-forty; that will give you plenty of time. You 'll be back before your guests have time to miss you. Give the papers to Frost. I don't want, on any account, to be disturbed again to-night. Before you go, just touch the bell, will you?"

Lee obeyed in silence. She felt herself dismissed, and flushed slightly at his almost churlish tone. But there was nothing of resentment in her heart: it was so seldom that the old man showed her anything but a charming courtesy and consideration, and she was

conscious of a little pang of pity for him as she looked back from the doorway.

It was not until she was at the dinner table that she remembered she had wanted to question him concerning Roland Gish.

Later, in the wide hall, Terry pirouetted round her while Frost, wooden and deft as ever, put Lee into a huge fur coat.

"Why did n't you tell me you were going before, Lee?" she demanded. "I 'd have driven you myself. Now I 've just promised Mr. Gish to tell the cards for him! . . ."

Frost had opened the door. The headlights of the big car shone blindingly. Haines, erect, stood beside it. Lee merely laughed and passed out, but Terry ran on to the step after her, a white, radiant little figure in the mellow glow from the hall.

"Ugh! But it 's cold. You 'll be half frozen when you get back. . . . Why, it 's freezing. . . ."

She had slipped and recovered herself as she spoke. Lee, bundled in her furs, looked up. Haines was already in his seat, but he did not start the car. He, too, was looking up towards the group on the steps and his face was white, set, and very grim.



Roland Gish had caught Terry as she stumbled. He kept his hand upon her arm, familiarly, smiling down at her reassuringly. For one instant Haines sat quite still. Then he started the car with a jerk so violent that it flung Lee forward.

He raced the machine down the drive and out of the gates. In the highroad he slowed up a little, and, without turning round, he spoke:

“ Say, Mrs. Smithers—there ’s something I ’ve got to say to you, right now—if you ’ll listen.”

Lee, startled, surprised, looked up. She could see his profile faintly, hard and set. For a moment she hesitated, then she bent her head. Haines drew a long breath and guided the car expertly round a dark corner.

“ I want to know ”—he said slowly, very deliberately—“ if *you* can’t take a hand and do something to stop that affair between—Gish—and Miss Terry—before it ’s too late? I guess, if some one don’t—I ’ll have to.”

## CHAPTER XVII

FOR the space of some seconds, utterly taken aback, Lee remained dumb. Then she stiffened among her furs, turning eyes of amazed indignation upon the grimly set profile of the chauffeur.

“*Really*, Haines! You ’re forgetting yourself unpardonably! I am not accustomed to discussing either my sister’s or my guests’ affairs with my servants.”

There was icy rebuke in her voice, and Haines flushed dully, but for a moment met her eyes steadily. Then he took one strong, nervous hand off the wheel to make a swift, sweeping gesture.

“I guess we ’ll cut that out. I have n’t always been a servant, and I ’m not meaning to take liberties. This thing ’s serious—deadly serious. It seems to me you ’re the only person I can appeal to. Your sister ’s heading for disaster and certain damnation—and I reckon there is n’t any too much time to pull her up!”

Again his hand swept out violently. Again his eyes flashed a glance into hers, only now they held a desperate appeal.

“For God’s sake, Mrs. Smithers, let me say what I ’ve got to say, and take it in the spirit in which it is meant. I tell you, I know what I ’m talking about. I know Gish!”

Lee heard his teeth grit for an instant, the harsh breath he drew through them. Gasping a little, she relaxed. She was utterly bewildered, but her sense of outrage and resentment was fast slipping from her. There was a deadly earnestness about the man at her side which impressed her strongly; vaguely she realised that he was speaking as one of her own kind might have spoken, also she was aware of a subtle change in his tone and his accent. She spoke abruptly:

“You are an American?”

Haines looked round at her quickly, then away to the road ahead of them. She fancied that he hesitated before replying, but when he did it was tersely.

“Yes. And, as an American, I know a good bit more about Gish and his reputation than folks over here. He ’s an out-and-out rotter, a wrong ’un to the core. He is n’t fit

to breathe the same air as a decent woman. His touch would pollute the lowest!"

He drew a hard breath that was almost a gasp and stopped. Lee stirred among her furs uneasily, but she no longer sought to stay him. Her eyes were fixed upon his face but dimly discernible save when they passed a light; her hands were clasped tightly in her lap.

"He 's rich; but the way he 's made his money would n't bear investigation. I guess he 's ruined more lives and wrecked more homes than any man of his time. If you folks could know him for what he really is—know one half of what he 's done—you 'd hound him out of society, back to the scum where he belongs. I 'm speaking strongly, but I know what I 'm talking about. He wants shooting—like a dangerous, unclean beast!"

Lee gasped anew. Her eyes were wide and dark with anxiety and a growing horror. Haines was labouring under very strong emotion; every harshly uttered word carried conviction, and with a sudden feeling of sickness she thought of Terry. Impulsively, almost pleadingly, she leaned forward.

"Haines!" He turned, and she went on

quickly, with quivering lips. "Oh—Haines! Are you *sure*? Sure that it 's the same man—sure that he—he 's really—what you say—?"

"Sure!" Haines laughed hoarsely. "I 'm sure, all right. I ought to be. See here"—he slowed the car suddenly and bent forward—"you 've heard of the Denham Carson case, have n't you?"

Lee's heart leaped to her throat; involuntarily she shrank back. Haines went on rapidly, without appearing to notice.

"You know that Denham Carson spent years in prison for the murder of his wife. Well, Gish was the man who was responsible for putting him there! Carson was a fool—he got himself entangled with a girl he did n't care a cent about. He let her blackmail him, and instead of buying her off he married her. It was a bad marriage—a sad marriage. The girl was n't much good, and she was weak as water. Gish came along, and turned her head. It was Roland Gish whose name was coupled with hers. It was because of that Carson went to see her that fatal night—the night of the murder. He 'd stood for a good deal, had Carson, like the chivalrous, quixotic fool that he was—but he could n't stand for

that. He went to tell her she 'd got to give up Gish or he 'd bring an action for divorce. . . . You know what happened."

Lee did not answer. She had turned her fur collar up about her face as if to hide its deadly pallor, and the hands that held it were trembling. A little way ahead of them gleamed the station lights. She saw them as through a mist, heard Haines's voice as if from a great distance away.

"That 's one of the things Gish did —yet here he is, an honoured guest—fooling round that kid sister of yours. Oh, my God!"

They glided through the station gates. Haines wrenched the wheel round, brought the car to the platform entrance, and stopped the car. He sprang out, and as he opened the door for her the lights shone full upon his face. Looking down at it, Lee forgot herself, and the shock the mention of Denham Carson had given her. It was drawn and strained and white, and there was that in the clear eyes so nearly like agony that she gave a little, startled murmur.

"You—you 'll do something?" Haines asked. "You 'll stop this damnable thing going any further? Terry will listen to you

—believe you—only she 's such a kid!—”

His voice broke oddly. The roar of the approaching express sounded suddenly. Very slowly Lee stepped out of the car. Her eyes were still on his, in them was a startled question, a deep distress. He met them and smiled a crooked little smile.

“She 's always been Terry to me—in my heart!” he said simply. “I 've a man's feelings—and she twisted me round her little finger from the very first. I—love her!”

## CHAPTER XVIII

LEE collected a thick packet, sealed and securely tied with red tape from a little, bespectacled, deferential man, who accepted her assertion that she was Smithers's wife without question, with her explanation of the latter's absence. In less than five minutes she was in the car again, rolling homeward through the frosty night.

She did not speak to Haines, but now and again she glanced at him with troubled eyes. Beneath her perplexity and distress, her horror at what he had told her of Gish, she was conscious of a new interest in him. The way he had told his story had made an odd appeal to her. And for the first time she realised that, whatever the circumstances of his entering her husband's service, he was, most distinctly, not of the ordinary servant class.

Nevertheless, she was dismayed and perturbed to a degree at his declaration of his regard for Terry. She was so occupied with the whole problem that she did not notice the



gradual slowing down of the car until it came to a sudden, jerky halt.

Then she looked up quickly. Haines was still sitting with his hands on the wheel. It struck her vaguely that he showed no surprise, but after a moment he got out. She sat while he made his investigations, glancing about her. They were, she discovered, on the narrow road leading through the woods. The trees reared themselves bleakly on either side of it, stretching skeleton branches against the shimmering dark.

Haines straightened himself presently, and came back to her, a spanner in his hand.

"Engine trouble," he explained briefly. "She won't budge another inch. It looks like I'll have to cut along back to the garage and fetch another car. We'll have to tow this one home."

He glanced about him, swinging the spanner, and added, in answer to her dismayed exclamation:

"I won't be long; but maybe you'd best take shelter in that hut down there." He pointed suddenly to a hollow clearing below them on their right. A faint light showed, as from a half-hidden window. "Gamekeepers

use it sometimes at night—one of them will be around somewhere sure, so you 'll be quite safe and warm. I 'll see you down."

Lee hesitated for an instant, frowned, and shrugged. She pulled her furs closer about her and stepped into the slippery road. Haines steadied her as they made their way through the bracken. There came no answer to his knock when they reached the hut, and he lifted the latch and pushed the door open.

Lee, pausing on the threshold, glanced about her. A hurricane lamp hung from a nail on the wall, there were a few glowing embers in a rough hearth, and the faint odour of tobacco-smoke hung about. Haines crossed to the fire, poked it, glanced about him and sniffed.

"One of the keepers here to-night, sure," he told her easily. "He 'll probably be back in a few minutes. I 'll get back quick as I can."

He passed out and closed the door behind him. Lee heard him crashing his way through the bracken, then silence fell again. For several minutes she stood looking about her, with but a faint curiosity. Her thoughts were far away, her mind wholly occupied with

the unexpected conversation with Haines—with Terry, and with the man who was still a guest beneath her roof.

At thought of him she shuddered. Then, moving nearer the fire, she slipped her furs from her shoulder, and, throwing them over the back of the wooden chair, sat down.

She did not hear a sound behind her, did not know that she was not alone, until a hand touched her arm, a voice spoke her name, very low, but with a familiar intonation, a vibrant, quivering eagerness that brought her leaping to her feet, trembling all over.

*“Lee!”*

With the light of the hurricane lamp shining down full upon him, Denham Carson stood above her. And, even as she cried out, his arms went about her. Into his eyes there leaped a sudden fierce, hot passion. Helpless, she found herself caught, and held close — so close that she could feel the thick beating of his heart. Then his lips found hers.

## CHAPTER XIX

INSTINCTIVELY, almost wildly, Lee had struggled to free herself. But with the meeting of their lips she became still, as though, suddenly, her strength had left her. She lay passive in Carson's hold, with closed eyes, and as at last he straightened himself, her head drooped limply forward against his shoulder.

She was pitifully white; so white that he gave an exclamation of mingled remorse and anxiety, tightening his hold upon her.

*“Lee!”*

His voice was infinitely gentle, held at once remorse and a caress. At the sound of it a shuddering breath left her lips—her slender body quivered. Impulsively Denham Carson stooped his head and rested his cheek against her soft hair.

“What a fool I am!” he said, in fierce self-condemnation. “What a thoughtless fool—to frighten you so! Lee—you're not going to faint?”

She stirred anew at that, caught desperately at her self-control, and, straightening herself, drew back. He did not try to hold her, but let his arms drop to his sides and stood looking at her. A little of the eager light had died out of his face, the vividly blue eyes looked troubled. Lee met them and the colour flooded into her pale cheeks. Involuntarily she lifted one hand, pressing the back of it against those trembling lips his kisses had bruised and scorched.

Yet the eyes that looked back into his were neither angry nor resentful. They held only a shrinking bewilderment and a rather piteous questioning.

“No—no!” she answered his question mechanically; and added: “But—I don’t understand! How did you come here—?” She broke off.

Carson replied swiftly, almost curtly:

“I ’ve been here all the time. Stumbled across this place that night—you remember—and stayed here ever since. I ’ve kept a good lookout, of course—the keepers don’t come here often, and other folks scarcely ever. It has n’t been difficult to dodge them. And it ’s as good a place as any to hide in. Besides”

—Lee looked away quickly from the deepening warmth of his eyes—“ I wanted to be—near you! I *had* to be!”

Lee drew a long breath, and smote her hands together softly, despairingly.

“ Oh,” she whispered shakily, “ but you ’re quite mad—*quite* mad!”

Carson laughed. It was a wholesome, hearty, boyish sound that filled the whole cabin.

“ Sure! And so you ’ve told me before! As I think I told you on another occasion—most men who are very much in love are more or less mad! . . .”

“ *Don’t!*”

She turned sharply away, reaching out for her coat. But Carson stood between her and the door, and he did not move. After a moment, weakly, she let her hand fall. Carson swept his glance over her, from the averted head and delicate profile to the absurd gold brocade slipper that she was tapping nervously on the uneven boarding of the rough, bare floor. The line of her long throat, the drooping, slim shoulders and slender arms shone warmly white in the leaping firelight. Impulsively he went a step nearer.

“ I must,” he said very low; and now there was in his voice a hoarse note of passion that made her fling him a swift, panic-stricken glance. “ *I must! I do* love you, Lee—I ’ve loved you ever since that night on Ruff’s Island. . . .”

His outstretched hand touched her arm. She caught her breath sharply, shaken by the rising tempest of her own emotions. She was incapable of very clear thought. She only knew that beneath the deepening note of passion in his voice her heart was stirring and throbbing wildly. She longed to break away from his touch, to rush out into the night; but she had to stay. She wanted to close her hands over her ears and shut away the maddening tenderness of his voice; but she had to hear.

She knew, too, that presently she would despise herself for her weakness, would lash herself with scorn for her yielding. At the moment the personality of the man dominated her utterly—that, and something that was growing and strengthening irresistibly within herself.

“ I had to be near you, Lee!” Carson spoke again, his voice shaken, his eyes beginning to

glow anew. "Call it madness, folly, what you will—I could n't go away. I had to see you sometimes—hear your voice. . . . But being near has made it harder to keep silent. God! How I 've longed to *say* a little of what is in my heart for you! How I 've longed to be with you alone—to hold you close to me . . . to kiss your lips!"

His fingers fastened upon her arm above the dimpled elbow, tightened there, tensely. His breath came unevenly, his voice was husky.

"Above all," he went on, "how I 've longed to hear you say that you care, too! That you love me, Lee—that you *love* me!"

"Ah!"

The word was a choked cry. She wrenched her arm free and shrank back. There was something of the wildness of desperation in her eyes, the terror of a snared bird. To Carson it was a revelation that sent the blood pounding hotly to his temples, and set him shaking suddenly all over. Upon her little, piteous cry there followed a silence that was painful in its intensity. Carson broke it. He spoke haltingly, stumblingly, yet on a quivering, rising note of triumph and eagerness.



“You *do* love me, Lee! . . . Oh, my God, girl! I ’ve hoped it—hoped it with every heartbeat, every fibre of me—but I could never be really sure! And I ’ve got to be sure, Lee—I ’ve *got* to be sure. . . .”

His hands were outstretched to her, supplicating. His lips were unsteady, his eyes ablaze.

“Say it, Lee!” he urged again. “Lee—*Lee!* . . .”

His arms closed about her, but she struggled free, thrusting him away from her, stumbling back against the wooden chair and dropping into it weakly. She held one white arm upflung across her eyes, as though to shut away the flame of his. Then suddenly she let it fall, and, turning her face against the thick fur of her coat, began to cry helplessly.

“I ought to hate you!” she wailed. “But—I can’t! I *can’t*. . . .”

Minutes later she stirred, sighed, and sat upright. Denham Carson was kneeling at her side, his face hidden against her knees. His arms were about her. At her movement he, too, stirred and looked up. There was a light in his face that made her catch a sharp breath

and brought the blood flooding pitilessly up over her throat and cheeks in a rose-red wave that burned to her temples.

Even as she made an instinctive, panicky gesture to thrust him from her there came from without the faint note of a motor-car horn. Lee stiffened where she sat; then with a little gasp she strove to get to her feet.

"It 's Haines!" she whispered, as Carson's arms refused to uncloze. "You—you must get away, quickly—oh, quickly!"

She was on her feet now, and the man rose with her.

He still held her, his eyes clung to hers. His lips were not altogether steady.

"I 've got to talk to you, Lee!" he whispered back, huskily. "There are things I must say to you. . . . Promise you will come here again, *soon?*"

The sound of the horn had ceased. Following it came the unmistakable hurry and stumble of heavy steps among the frosty bracken.

Carson bent his head lower.

"Promise!" he urged. "*Promise!*"

Lee's lips were trembling. She closed her eyes desperately against the pleading in his.

When she opened them again, they were dark, almost tragic with suffering and unwilling surrender.

“ I—promise!” she said.

## CHAPTER XX

LEE, her huge fur collar hiding all of her face save her unnaturally wide eyes, delivered the packet of papers into Frost's hands, and, avoiding those rooms in which her guests were congregated, went swiftly to her own.

Dropping into a chair, she sat staring at the shadows in the faintly firelit darkness. She had forgotten that she might be missed downstairs, had forgotten her husband, Terry, and Haines . . . everything save Denham Carson's presence, the strength of his arms, and the touch of his mouth upon hers.

She was stripped bare, to-night, of all pretence, face to face with that truth which she had refused to acknowledge, which she had hidden half guiltily, but of which she had been aware as long ago as that misty morning when she had rowed herself away from Ruff's Island.

It was a truth that left her dazed and numb, while it dominated her. She had forgotten the black shadow that hung over Denham Carson. She felt only as though the flame of his passion still enwrapped her, waking answering

fires within her own soul—unsuspected, fierce fires that left her trembling and afraid.

She loved Denham Carson. She made no longer any attempt to deny it, or to thrust the knowledge from her. And presently, with a long, shuddering sigh that was almost a moan, she turned and laid her forehead wearily against the silken cushions piled about her.

Here Terry found her twenty minutes later.

The girl dashed in with her usual impetuous lack of ceremony, halted with a little exclamation at finding the room in darkness, then, as Lee stirred and looked up, went towards her quickly.

“*I thought* I heard the car come back. . . . Why, Lee! How queer you look!”

She had switched on the light, and stood frowning questioningly into the other girl’s face. Lee covered her eyes. When she let her hands fall a moment later, she had recovered much of her calmness, and answered quite quietly:

“Do I? . . . It was bitterly cold, and the car broke down. I hope I have n’t seemed very neglectful—I ’ll come down in a minute.”

She put a nervous hand against her temples, and Terry, still frowning, swung herself on to

the broad back of the brocaded chesterfield.

“Much better get into something warm and cosy and stay here!” she advised. “They ’re all playing cards or dancing in the music-room—you won’t be missed. ’Sides, I want a quiet chat with you, Lee. I never seem to get you alone lately.”

Lee sank back again among her cushions. She shrank from the thought of going among her guests in her present mood; yet she was glad not to be alone. With an effort she concentrated her thoughts upon Terry and her chatter, brought her mind back to the problem of the girl and Roland Gish—and Haines.

Terry now was swinging one slim, silk-stockinged leg and looking into the fire with a rather odd expression in her eyes. She was still chattering, but fitfully, and with more than her usual inconsequence. Lee watched her with a shadow creeping into her face. After a moment she spoke, a little hesitantly.

“Terry—I want to say something to you. It—it ’s about Mr. Gish.”

Terry looked up quickly. A little colour had crept into her cheeks, the expression of her eyes was defensive.

“I hope it ’s something nice!” she returned,

her clear young voice faintly shrill. "I like Roly Gish—quite a good deal."

Lee's fine brows met. A sudden distaste tilted her lips upward; the shadow in her eyes deepened.

"I'm sorry," she said steadily, "to hear it! I don't. And—it seems to me—Mr. Gish's feeling for you is more than liking."

Terry slid down from her perch and moved slowly on to the hearth before Lee's chair. Her brown head was flung up, her usually merry mouth was a trifle compressed.

"You're not being very nice, Lee! . . . What if it is?"

Lee got up. Her eyes met Terry's steadily.

"Just that he will try to make you think that your feeling is the same—that you love him. You *don't* love him, Terry?"

Despite the note of anxious interrogation the words were uttered rather in assertion than question. Terry wriggled a pair of slim shoulders impatiently.

"But," she declared cheerfully, "I *do!*"

There was no tremor in the clear voice, no added colour in the healthy, pretty face. The red-brown eyes were wide, unembarrassed. Lee looked deeply into them for several sec-

onds, and an oddly tender smile curved her mouth.

“Oh, Terry! You child. . . . You only know how to *spell* love as yet. . . .”

Terry wriggled her shoulders again.

“You ’re being very horrid!” she complained. “I thought you ’d be sympathetic—though, of course, I can’t help seeing that you don’t care about Roly. I don’t know *why*—he ’s quite the nicest man *I ’ve* ever met.”

“Good Heavens!” There was that in Lee’s tone that sent the half-defiant complacency out of Terry’s face, brought her glance flashing to the troubled one above her. “The man ’s impossible!” Lee went on abruptly. “His attentions are—are an insult. . . .”

“*Lee!*”

“It ’s true. Had I guessed just what kind of man he was—I would n’t have received him. I can’t imagine how Jason *let* me!—even hospitality has limits. And Roland Gish is—is. . . . Oh, I don’t want to talk about him. But I ’ve learned enough about him to-night—”

“To-night?” Terry’s brows flashed up.

Lee made a quick gesture, blundered on, off her guard, and stopped with bitten lip.



“Haines told me about him—”

“*Haines!*” There was a choked fury in Terry’s voice. Her eyes were ablaze, her face quite white. Words, for the moment, were beyond her, and Lee flung out her hands in a quick movement of distress.

“Terry! Oh, my dear, you don’t suppose I would have listened if—if I had n’t known that he was speaking the truth. . . . I’ve been afraid for you ever since Teresa brought the man here. I knew from Jason he was not—was not a desirable acquaintance. I begged Teresa to—”

“I’ve heard enough!” Terry’s voice, hard, inflexible, struck coldly across the stammered words. She swung round, white skirts fanning about her, white face set, and moved to the door. As she wrenched it open, she glanced back over her shoulder, eyes smouldering.

“Roland Gish asked me to marry him to-night,” she said. “I’m to give him my answer to-morrow. I—shall say yes!”

## CHAPTER XXI

THE formal announcement of her daughter's engagement to Roland Gish was made triumphantly by Teresa Dorice as early as the luncheon hour next day. She was almost trembling with excitement; Roland Gish wore an air of deep satisfaction, and Terry, finding herself the centre of attraction and some one to be envied and congratulated, was in almost boisterous good spirits.

Only Lee, sitting apart, stunned and dumb and immeasurably distressed, detected a certain hardness in her laughter sometimes, a glint of defiance in her eyes. But it was obvious that she was more than content, and that Gish's loverlike attentions really pleased and flattered her.

For Lee that luncheon seemed interminable. The chatter and laughter, the gay badinage, made her wince and bite her lip, and it was with a long sigh of relief that she escaped at last.

Jason Smithers was still confined to his room, and she found Frost waiting with a

message from him asking her to go to him at once. As she passed into her apartments he spoke her name sharply, hoarsely.

“Lee!”

The girl started, looking at him with a sudden little flicker of bewilderment in her eyes. She had never heard him speak quite like that before, the whole tone of the hesitant, rather quavering voice had subtly altered.

“Lee! Is this thing true—that Terry has promised to marry that—to marry Gish?”

Again Lee shot him a half-puzzled glance. He was leaning forward, his white hands gripping the arms of his chair, and was evidently labouring under a stress of great emotion. She bent her head slowly, without speaking.

“Great God!” Smithers made a movement as if to rise, and checked himself. “But it’s unthinkable! It must not be! That man—and a child like Terry! That—”

“Hush!” She went nearer to him quickly, really alarmed at his manner. She added quietly, rather hopelessly: “I—wish I had known as much about Mr. Gish a short time ago as I do to-day. At least I could have undeceived Terry—”

She hesitated, unconscious of the note of reproach in her voice.

Smithers stirred and reached out a hand to her. His lips twitched.

"I was a fool!" he said. "A selfish fool! I ought to have thought—"

He stopped rather abruptly; then added:

"But something must be done. Terry must not take so terrible a step. The man is unspeakable—the utterest cad!"

"I know!" Lee's voice was weary. "But Terry won't believe it. It would need some time and a considerable amount of proof to convince her—or other people—that he is anything but what he appears. And any attempt at interference would only precipitate matters. If we are to prevent this marriage, we shall have to go to work carefully."

Her husband opened his lips and closed them again. Lee, standing beside him, proceeded to sketch briefly her interview of the night before with Terry. Smithers listened without comment, sitting with his chin dropped forward, frowning fiercely.

"I blundered hopelessly," Lee added miserably. There was a sound of tears in her voice and he stirred uneasily.

“It was not your fault, child! If it comes to that, it is I who am to blame for the whole wretched business. . . . But it ’ll be all right. I ’ll do my utmost to make it right.”

Lee made a gesture of her hands and let them fall. For several minutes there was a troubled silence. Lee broke it, irrelevantly. Smithers had turned his face slightly to the light and she could see him more clearly.

“Have you knocked yourself?” she asked. “There ’s such a brown mark on your forehead—there!”

She laid a finger lightly on the spot. Smithers started almost violently, then unexpectedly reached up and caught her hand, drawing it down over his eyes, holding the pink palm close against his lips.

For an instant Lee stood motionless. Then with a choked cry she snatched her hand away. Her face was flaming; the memory of last night—of Denham Carson—seared her. Smithers’s caress had brought back anew a suffocating consciousness of guilt—of wrongdoing. An overwhelming shame and self-scorn scourged her.

“Why, child!—”

She heard her husband’s voice, suddenly

gentle, as she caught her hands up over her hot face. Then, in the other room, a step sounded—on the threshold Frost coughed discreetly; and, precipitately, Lee turned and fled.

. . . . .

Lee spent a wretched, unrestful hour in her own room. Later, making her way listlessly to the stairway, she encountered Teresa Dorice at her room door. Her eyes were hard and bright with anger; the unbecoming flush that temper brought was hot in her cheeks. Behind her Terry was standing. She, too, was flushed, her mouth mutinous, her eyes aflame with defiance. It needed but one glance at both of them to tell Lee that something had put Teresa out seriously, and that Terry's inflammable temper had been fanned to furnace heat and was wholly dominating her. Interrogative, distressed, she paused, and Mrs. Dorice lifted a clenched hand in which was a crumpled note.

"I suppose," she said thickly, "this is your doing!" Then, as Lee stared, "Read it! Roland has just sent it up to us!"

Silently Lee took the paper and read:

Mr. Smithers regretfully requests Mr. Roland Gish to make it convenient to leave Brookbridge to-night. Mr. Gish's notoriety in the United States of America has become known to Mr. Smithers, which will doubtless be sufficient explanation of his seeming inhospitality. . . .

As silently Lee gave the note back. The distress in her eyes deepened; she looked almost appealingly at Terry. But Teresa spoke before the girl could.

"I 'll never forgive you for this, Lee—never! I 've got a good deal piled up against you, anyhow, and this about makes the limit! And I 'll take care I get even with you for it—somehow, some day—and with that interfering, domineering, senile caricature of a husband of yours! . . . For the rest, you might as well know that when Roland leaves here it will be to make arrangements for an immediate marriage! Terry and I join him as soon as we hear from him that he has the licence! . . ."

Her voice caught and broke hysterically. Terry, with a not too gentle hand, pulled her back into the room. Lee, white-lipped but composed, passed on, and down the stairs to her waiting guests.

When, some time later she was about to return to her room to dress for dinner, a servant came soft-footed to her side.

"Haines is in the library, ma'am. He wishes to know if it will be convenient for you to speak to him for a moment."

Lee started. She had nearly forgotten Haines. For an instant she hesitated, then she nodded.

"Thank you. I will go to the library now," she said.

She found the chauffeur standing by the uncurtained windows staring at nothing. As he turned to her, the look in the boyish face made her cry out in quick pity and distress. He appeared years older, his mouth was twisted and grim, his eyes haggard.

"*Haines!*" She uttered the word breathlessly. "Don't—don't look like that! . . ."

She broke off. In a few long strides he had reached her side. His lips were twitching uncontrollably.

"It's true, then?" His voice seemed to her to hold a savage accusation.

She threw out a protesting hand.

"Yes." Her voice shook a little. Again she found herself disregarding this boy's



position in her household, and speaking to him as to an equal. "Terry has consented to marry—Mr. Gish. Mr. Smithers—has, I am afraid, precipitated matters by intimating that he finds Mr. Gish an unwelcome and undesirable guest. . . . He has already left." She hesitated, turning her eyes from his face, and added: "I understand that he is making preparations for an—an immediate marriage. Terry and Mrs. Dorice say that they are joining him in a few days."

"My God!" Haines recoiled as though she had struck him. Then he reached forward and caught her wrist. "Do you mean to say she knows—knows the sort of man he is, and still cares enough—"

"*Cares!*" Lee faced him again, her head flung up, her voice and eyes half scornful. "*Cares!*—I tell you, Terry no more knows what caring means—what it is to love than the veriest baby. She 's infatuated, flattered. Men have treated her like a child or a school-girl hitherto. He does n't. If she 's in love at all, she 's in love with love!"

Her breath caught, but she went on again before he could speak, passionately, tensely:

"She 's a child—a headstrong, wild, impres-

sionable child. When she gets angry, she loses all sense of balance—and she 's angry now! Angry at interference—angry at what she looks upon as your impertinence in intruding upon her affairs. . . . Oh, I muddled things wretchedly last night, Haines. I tried to make her see—the truth. And I failed ignominiously. Between us we 've flung her into the man's arms. And there 's nothing I can do—nothing anybody can do!”

She threw her hands wide, despairingly, and let them fall. Her eyes were almost as tragic as his own.

“Whatever she is told of him now,” she went on, “she will refuse to believe . . . even if she listens. And she is beyond forcible restraint—neither I nor my husband have any power over her. She has her mother's approval and sanction.”

She stopped. Haines had turned his back on her and was staring out of the window at nothing again. She saw that his hands were clenched and trembling at his sides.

“God!” he whispered—“I wish I 'd broken Gish's back the day he came here! He deserves it. First Carson's life ruined—and now—”

He broke off abruptly, swinging round. His

eyes were on her face. Something in their gaze, something earnest, inexplicably pitying and understanding, startled her. With his next words her heart leaped, and seemed to stop beating.

“Carson’s a white man all through!” he said. “He would n’t strike any woman—like they said he did! . . .”

He turned away again. Lee moved to a chair and sat down weakly. Without looking at her Haines said:

“For Terry’s own sake—if I need it—may I rely on a little of your help?”

Lee answered him with stiff lips. “What do you mean?”

There was an attempt at hauteur in her manner now, but there was terror too—terror of what he might know, what his words implied. He sensed it and came quickly back to her. His young face was changed—he smiled suddenly, rather wonderfully, and again with that strange, subtle suggestion of understanding. Then it hardened again, the mouth grew grim.

“Just that Terry has got to be saved!” he answered simply. And added, while she waited, dumb:

“ I guess—after all—it ’s up to me to take a decisive hand in the game!”

There was something in his voice that brought her glance quickly to his face—a deep warmth, a grim determination, a little of something oddly exulting. . . .

He met her eyes and smiled. The smile was quite without mirth, but it brought a blue flame to his own eyes that made her blink. He was already at the door. In sudden apprehension Lee checked him.

“ What are you going to do . . . ?”

He looked back. The flame was still in his eyes.

“ Employ the methods of the uncivilised and primitive male!” he told her; and went.

## CHAPTER XXII

A COUPLE of afternoons later, as Lee sat listlessly turning the pages of a book after luncheon, her maid came to her with a note.

“A boy from the village met Frost and gave it to him, ma’am. He said there is no answer.”

Lee took the flimsy, cheap envelope with its awkward pencilling of her name, and opened it. Upon the half-sheet of note-paper it contained was written the one word:

“Come!”

For a long time Lee sat very still. A wild surge of mingled resentment and longing beat up within her suffocatingly. The longing conquered. Despising herself for her weakness, conscious of an ever-increasing sense of guilt, she got into out-of-door apparel hurriedly, without summoning her maid, and went out.

As she hurried down the drive, she told herself rather piteously that she must make Carson understand that this sort of thing could not go on . . . must not go on. But,

once more in his presence, the adoration of his eyes caressing her, fanning anew the flame of this new-found love of hers, her determination weakened. There was appeal in her protests rather than decision, and he swept them ruthlessly aside.

“I ’ve got to see you sometimes,” he told her. “It may be wrong—mad—what you will, but it ’s got to be. I ’m going to steal some hours of sweetness from life, Lee, whatever the consequences. . . . Unless you come to me here, it will end in my seeking you!”

But she had cried out at that, in a panic of dismay.

“No, *no!* Oh, you must not. . . . You might be seen. You would be jeopardising your freedom every moment!” And had added, miserably—“But it is wrong, this, Denham—all wrong! I feel despicable—wicked—ashamed!”

The vivid blue eyes had softened to an infinite tenderness.

“Poor little girl! Oh, my dear, if any one is doing wrong, it is I. But we can’t help where we love, Lee! And I ask of you but an occasional hour of your time—the sound of your voice and the touch of your hands—of

your lips—to remember and dream about!”

And then, a moment later, he had flung away from her, his face fallen into haggard lines, the blue eyes very tired.

“God! If I were only free!” he had cried. “Free to move among my fellow-men . . . it would all be so different, Lee!”

The girl had shaken her head a little drearily.

“It could not be different. You are forgetting—my husband!”

She had felt his eyes on her then, with something in their depths that puzzled her, that she could not fathom. He had answered very quietly:

“No. I am not forgetting your husband!”

There had been the same puzzling quality in his voice. But he had said no more.

As, later, she had come homeward up the drive, her stepmother had watched her idly from a window.

“I sometimes think Lee ’s crazy!” she observed to Terry, who was shaking raindrops energetically from a yellow tam. “Fancy letting a wretched begging note drag her to the village on a day like this!”

“Lee did n’t go to the village,” Terry inter-

olated. "I saw her in the woods from the upper road when I was exercising the dogs—quite a way in them—near the keeper's hut. . . . Bother! I believe this tam 's spoiled!"

"But her maid said—" Teresa was beginning, and shut her lips abruptly upon the words. She watched Lee thoughtfully until she was lost to view, and there was a new, odd little look of speculation in her pansy eyes that might have startled Lee considerably had she seen it.

That surreptitious meeting with Denham Carson was not the last, in spite of Lee's desperate resolutions. The heart-hunger she had come to know, and her fear that Carson might do something reckless in an effort to see her if she did not go to him, were stronger than her sense of wrongdoing, of infidelity.

More sensitive than even those who thought they knew her intimately would have guessed, Lee was beginning to suffer intolerably. She avoided Jason Smithers now as painstakingly as, only a few weeks back, she had endeavoured to give him as much of her company as he desired. Whenever she was with him she was conscious of a suffocating feeling of constraint. His every kindly word was a stab



that made her wince inwardly. It was with secret relief that she found that he still kept to his own rooms save for a couple of hours in the very early middle day. The old pleasant, even happy intercourse with him was no longer possible, and, wretchedly, every day she told herself that the situation was getting beyond her.

The house-party had broken up a few days after Gish's departure. The attitude of both Mrs. Dorice and Terry towards her was frigid, and added to her discomfort, while her anxiety concerning Terry's future was still acutely real despite her own problem.

A little over a week later, Mrs. Dorice announced that she and Terry intended terminating their visit the following day, adding that they had heard from Roland Gish that his affairs were smoothly settled.

Lee accepted the information without comment, and with an inward consciousness of utter impotence, and of vague discomfort under Mrs. Dorice's unusually intent gaze. More than once, of late, she had caught her stepmother looking at her with an expression in her eyes that had made her vaguely uneasy, though she could not have said why.

They were in the hall after lunch when Mrs. Dorice made the announcement. Lee was silent. Jason Smithers, leaning rather more heavily on his cane than usual, expressed his regret at losing them in his customary courteous way. Frost was hovering near by ready to assist him to his room. Terry was reading the daily newspaper. She flourished it suddenly.

"I wonder," she said, "if we 're ever going to hear the last of this wretched Carson case! Here 's some more about it again."

Lee grew white. It seemed to her minutes before the idle young voice went on:

"It seems they 've found another clue, or something."

"*Clue!*" Mr. Smithers's tone was irritably belligerent. "Only a clue! Why the deuce don't they find the *man!*"

Terry shrugged. "It 's nothing much, anyway. Only that, it appears, the apartment where Mrs. Carson was murdered has been shut up since, and only recently re-let. The new tenants, in cleaning up, have found the half of a man's cuff-link wedged between the floor boards close to the hearth, just where Mrs. Carson had been found lying. There

seems to be a theory it snapped off her assailant's cuff when he struck her, fell on the boards, and was trodden between them by the people who found her, unnoticed. The link is described as a particularly fine piece of jade hand-carved in the form of a perfect elephant—evidently Indian. They—but I don't suppose you want to hear any more."

She tossed the paper down. Mr. Smithers clicked his tongue against his teeth testily. Frost's hand was on his arm. Lee saw him glance at the man with something of question before they moved to the stairs. Then she turned wearily away.

At the door of his apartments Mr. Smithers halted and jerked his elbow from Frost's hold.

"What the devil 's the matter with you?" he began, and paused. Frost's wooden countenance was twitching, his eyes unnaturally bright. He answered, stammering:

"I valeted Mr. Gish when he was here, sir. He had jade cuff-links among his things, carved like elephants. And—my God, sir!—one was broken—the other half was gone!"

## CHAPTER XXIII

TERRY, wandering to the garage to collect Toby for his afternoon scamper with the other dogs, encountered Haines upon the threshold. He was examining one of the closed cars which he had either just brought in or was about to take out, but he was not in livery, though he wore his goggles pushed up over the peak of his soft cap.

He looked up briefly, touched his cap, and returned to his work as Toby came scampering eagerly down the narrow stairs from the quarters above. Terry had hesitated and drawn back on catching sight of Haines; she recovered herself instantly, and bent above Toby with a slightly heightened colour and an air of nonchalance which she did not really feel. Indeed, she was conscious of an odd and disturbing flutter of her pulses as she met the honest, quiet gaze the man turned upon her. She was, to her own bewilderment, by no means at her ease. Inwardly she raged at herself for her folly. She had already voiced to Lee and to her mother her opinion that the chauffeur

should have been summarily dismissed for his impertinence; but this evening there was that in the way he looked at her that was oddly disturbing. It made her feel somehow defensive and guilty.

She was selecting one of Toby's collars from among the many varied ones that, with their accompanying leashes, hung above his basket, when Haines abruptly spoke.

He had passed across the threshold, leaving the car, now purring softly, outside, and had drawn one of the doors slightly to behind him, obviously to prevent Toby dashing exuberantly past him.

At the sound of his voice, Terry wheeled, then stood still. His face was quite without expression, but his eyes shone.

"Is it true," he asked, without preamble, "that you are going to marry—Roland Gish?"

Terry gasped, strove for a crushing retort, met those shining, steady eyes, and answered, against her will:

"Yes!"

Haines leaned a broad shoulder against the lintel of the unclosed, heavy door, and thrust his hands deep into his pockets. His eyes did not leave her face.

“ I want you,” he said quite calmly, “ to alter that decision!”

Again Terry gasped, and now the angry red flamed high in her cheeks, her eyes were flashing.

“ This is intolerable! . . . Your audacity is only equal to your impertinence, Haines! You—you—” she broke off, breathless, impotently furious before his unshaken quiet. “ What do you mean by it, I say? What—”

Haines’s mouth twitched faintly at the corners. He held the passionate indignation of her regard levelly, answered as levelly:

“ That I love you. . . .” He took his hands out of his pockets and came a step nearer to her.

“ I ’d rather see you dead,” he went on, and now his voice was vibrant with repressed passion, “ than sullied by that man’s touch! . . . I ’d rather die for you, here and now, than let you go on with this criminal folly that you are contemplating! It ’s not even as if you loved him! You don’t! You ’re not the sort who loves easily. Oh ”—he drew a long breath, straightening himself suddenly and standing upright—“ I *know!*”

He flung his hands wide, passionately. His

face shone whitely against the growing dusk without. His nostrils were ever so slightly dilated, his eyes burning.

“You ’re a baby. You don’t know what love means. . . . You ’ll never know if you go to a man like Roland Gish to teach you!”

Terry opened her lips and closed them again. Toby, panting, ears cocked, circled round her, occasionally sniffing at the collar in her hand. Outside the thrumming purr of the big car seemed to grow louder. Above it Haines’s voice rose again, vibrant once more, almost savage in its intensity.

“Only—it ’s not going to be. I tell you, *it ’s not going to be!*”

Terry found her voice at last. It rose shrilly, almost hysterically. At the rasp in it Toby stopped gambolling and slid hurriedly to the shelter of his basket.

“*You—*” she choked back her fury, steadied herself. “And who ’s going to prevent it?”

“I am.” Haines’s hand flashed out suddenly and closed about her wrist. He jerked her close to him, holding her fast. “I tell you,” he added thickly, “*I love you! . . .*”

In the shadows Terry’s eyes were momen-

tarily like live coals. She brought the heavy brass and leather dog-collar down with all her force across his forearm, so that with an involuntary cry of pain he unloosed his fingers and let his arm fall.

“*Love!*” the girl raged. “The love of a paid servant—a—a—”

She got no further. Haines wrenched the collar from her hand, drew her close again. His breath came quick and fast, the savage passion of his grip numbed her. As she strained against him, he brought his lips roughly, bruisingly, against hers.

“The love of a *man*—” he cried hoarsely. “Oh, my girl—my girl! The love of a mate! . . .”

He let her go as quickly as he had caught her. Breathing heavily, he stood against the door again, his hands fumbling at the thick woollen scarf about his throat. He dragged it suddenly down as Terry made to pass him, and an instant later its folds were about her face. . . .

In the shadows, shivering, Toby yelped a piteous protest as Haines swung the girl, struggling, off her feet. In the far distance a stableboy whistled cheerily. A persistent yap-



ping of an impatient Pom came from somewhere in the low-lying house.

Presently the big car outside the garage ceased to purr and began to throb. Then, silently, smoothly, headlights challenging, dazzling, like the eyes of some monster of the night, it glided down the drive and out into the highroad.

Against the cushions within, very pale, very still, and unexpectedly small and childish, Terry lay.

## CHAPTER XXIV

It was close upon the dinner hour when Toby called attention to his mistress's continued absence. In her room the Pom had long since barked himself hoarse and had curled himself up in a chair, reproachfully resigned to an unusual neglect.

Toby, collarless and whining, had circled the grounds and house for nearly two hours before he finally made his way within. Mrs. Dorice and Lee came together down the stairs, and the dog precipitated himself upon them eagerly.

Lee stooped to pat him, then glanced about her quickly.

"Why—where *is* Terry?" she asked. "Toby has n't got his collar on, and she generally takes him straight to the garage."

There was a faint, puzzled apprehension in her tone. Mrs. Dorice shrugged.

"She 's in her room, I suppose. Probably Toby slipped out after her."

Lee, still caressing the whining dog, ac-

cepted the explanation, but the uneasiness deepened in her eyes. She was quick as Terry herself to understand a dog's moods, and Toby's manner was unusual. It was not until dinner was announced, and Terry did not appear, that Teresa, too, showed surprise.

"Where on earth can she be?" she exclaimed, adding: "Now I come to think of it, she went to fetch Toby, but I did n't see her come back for the other dogs, and that wretched Chicot was yelping in her room for hours, it seemed to me."

Lee did not answer, but ran lightly up the stairs and on to Terry's room. Chicot yelped with delight as she entered, and Toby, still whimpering at her heels, rushed in eagerly. But, save for the animals, the room was empty.

"Where *is* she?" Lee heard Teresa's voice, querulous and bewildered, at her elbow.

She shook her head, a grave disquiet in her eyes.

"I don't know. . . . She can't have come in since she went to fetch Toby. I 'll send down to the garage. Haines has charge of Toby, and since the dog is loose Terry must have been there."

Something in her voice made Teresa look at her quickly, and frown. Lee's face was a little pale; it wore a startled look which the older woman found perplexing. But she made no comment until an answer came to Lee's message. One of the chauffeurs brought it, standing awkwardly before the two women. He had himself seen Miss Terry on her way to fetch the dog, but he had not seen her since. He had been surprised to find the dog loose about the yards later, especially as he was collarless.

There he paused and hesitated.

Lee looked at him searchingly.

"But Haines had charge of the dog!" she said. "Surely he would know if Miss Terry took him out with her as usual, and if so in which direction she went?"

The man shifted from one foot to the other a trifle uneasily.

"Haines is not in the garage, ma'am. We can't find him anywhere, and one of the men says he saw him driving Miss Terry's car out of the drive gates a couple of hours or more ago. He has n't come back yet—leastways Miss Terry's car is n't garaged."

Lee's breath caught suddenly. A bewil-

dering suspicion was dawning at the back of her mind. She flung a swift glance of dismay at Teresa, then said quietly:

“Thank you. Probably Miss Terry decided to go for a spin at the last moment instead of taking the dogs out. . . . There may have been some trouble with the car. . . . In any case, let me know as soon as Haines returns. Thank you—that is all.”

The man touched his cap and departed. Lee, outwardly quite composed, passed on into the dining-room.

Teresa, exclamatory and indignant, followed her.

“Terry really is impossible sometimes!” she declared; then, catching sight of Lee’s face, stopped. The rest of the meal was partaken of in silence, but when the servants were gone, she looked suddenly, shrewdly, across into Lee’s eyes.

“Do you know anything more about this, Lee?” she demanded, and knew, by the girl’s quick start, her heightened colour, and startled glance, that the shot had struck home. Nevertheless, Lee’s voice was quite steady, a little contemptuous when she answered.

“Only as much as you do!” She returned

the other's keen regard composedly. "Why should you think otherwise?"

"I don't know." Teresa's voice was edged, her pansy eyes were narrowed. "Only—it seems queer, rather—Terry going off joy-riding like this, *especially* with Haines, whom she can't tolerate. . . . Besides, you 've got a sort of funny expression, you know."

Lee jerked back her chair and rose. Her eyes were scornful.

"You are absurd! Terry 'll probably be back in a few minutes now, half-starving, and quite oblivious of time!"

But her voice lacked conviction. Her eyes remained troubled, and Haines's words of a night or two ago were still ringing in her ears.

The evening passed restlessly for both women. By bedtime Teresa was on the verge of hysterics.

"Terry must be quite *mad!*" she wailed. "These pranks were bad enough before, but *now*. . . or maybe there 's been an accident. Lee, for Heaven's sake, can't you *do* something—send some of the men to look for them? I believe you 're remaining inactive on purpose—because you don't want Terry to marry Roland Gish. . . ."

The shrill voice ceased before the sudden flame of Lee's eyes. The girl said quietly after a moment:

"If inaction on my part would bring about a break in *that* direction, I would not lift a finger!"

She turned away as she spoke, but Teresa caught her wrist.

"I believe you *do* know something!" she cried. "My Heaven, Lee! If so—if to-night's doings are in any way your work—you 'll be sorry for it. And I can make you sorry, don't forget that. I 'm not blind, you know"—there was a queer, ugly sneer in the words—"and I know a good bit more than perhaps you think I do!"

Lee's expression remained unaltered. She freed her wrist and passed on into her own room. But, once inside, she leaned for a moment limply against the panels of the door, her face very white, her eyes dark with apprehension, Teresa's venom-pointed words singing maddeningly in her ears.

## CHAPTER XXV

LEE scarcely slept that night. With her letters her maid brought her a message. Terry's car had been found in the village garage, where, according to the proprietor, Haines had left it the previous evening. Nothing at all had been seen of Terry. Haines had taken a drink in the village inn, and had gone.

Lee rose listlessly, dressed, and made her way to Teresa's room. A maid informed her that Mrs. Dorice could see no one, as she was suffering from acute nervous headache, and quite prostrate. Lee left the message, partook of a scant and solitary breakfast, and drifted afterwards to her husband's rooms.

Here Frost informed her that Mr. Smithers had not enjoyed a good night. He was sleeping still, and did not wish to be disturbed at all during the day.

Lee, with Toby at her heels, went out. It was a clear morning and mild, and she stayed until luncheon-time. The conviction was growing upon her that Haines was responsible for Terry's disappearance, and, while she was



genuinely distressed and anxious, she felt curiously disinclined to do anything further, to take other steps than she had already done.

In the early afternoon a thumbed envelope, upon which her name was scrawled illiterately, was brought to her. The sight of it brought her heart leaping to her throat and the startled blood to her cheeks.

She opened it reluctantly. Teresa Dorice was with her, and Lee knew that the pansy eyes, a little narrowed, very hard, were upon her.

The note was the same as a former one. Just the one word "Come," but underlined this time. Lee tore the paper into shreds with fingers that shook, and rose.

"I have to go out," she said. "I expect I shall be back by tea-time, but don't wait for me."

Mrs. Dorice merely nodded. But as Lee reached the door she said, casually:

"To the village?"

"Yes." Lee's tone was absent, yet nervous. Already her mind was with Denham Carson, her pulses stirring at the knowledge of their coming meeting. Ten minutes later she went swiftly down the drive. Teresa, from the

morning-room window, watched her thoughtfully. Then she rose, went leisurely to her room, and made an unusually quiet walking toilette.

. . . . .

With the first touch of Denham Carson's hands about hers, nervous, tense, painfully hard, with the first glance into vivid blue eyes that were literally blazing with excitement, Lee knew that he was labouring under an emotion that had shaken him to the depths.

"Lee!"

The whisper of her name was hoarse. He dragged her across the threshold, and banged to the door. Still holding her, he went on, jerkily, breathlessly:

"Lee! I had to see you! Oh, girl! It may be—there 's just a bare chance—of finding the truth of—of Chrissie's murder! . . ."

He stopped abruptly as Lee drew a quick breath, recoiling. Some of the light faded out of his face; he released her hands and stood back. For a moment he was silent, regarding her intently. Then he went on more quietly.

"I 've—never spoken of that to you. Not directly. Somehow, I 've never *dared* to.

I 've dreaded breaking the magic spell. . . . Only, after the way you helped me that night it seemed to me that—that you might have found it in your heart to—to give me the benefit of the doubt. I 'm—innocent, Lee!”

“Don't!” Lee made a half-appealing, peremptory gesture. Her face was white. “I—have hardly thought about that, save in connection with the danger of your position. I—have only remembered that you are *you*—”

Her voice caught. With a quick movement he gripped her shoulders and swung her round to face him.

“Oh, girl! But you believe me?”

She lifted wide, troubled eyes to his, searched them deeply, earnestly, then gave a tired, half-sobbing sigh.

“I think—” she said, with a twisted, rather pitiful smile—“that I should believe anything that you told me.”

Carson drew a long breath and let her go. For a while he did not speak. Then he went on, the note of excitement creeping into his voice again.

“You know the wretched story. My marriage was a failure from the beginning. I was a quixotic young fool, or I would never

have allowed myself to be led into it. There was no question of love! Chrissie was not, never could have been, the sort of woman I could love. . . . Afterwards, in the ghastly days that stretched to years I made a dream-woman to love. Lee . . . the dream-woman materialised that night on Ruff's Island—with the first touch of your hand, the first glance into your eyes."

Lee stirred, but she did not speak. From the bracken without there came a faint sound. Each glanced at the narrow window, but the sound was not repeated, and Carson went on.

"That night on Ruff's Island! I shall never forget it, Lee! All the starved heart of me became awake and ravenous for the love it had been denied, then! I sat that night, while you slept and the grey dawn came, thinking—thinking—thinking. I'd laughed at men who loved at sight before. I knew that night that there was nothing to laugh at. There was fire in my blood—every pulse ached for you—I don't know how I let you go!"

Again the bracken whispered and stirred beneath a passing wind—the branch of a tree cracked, but neither heeded now.

The sound came again, fainter, more dis-

tant. Back towards the upper road, through the bracken and the tree-trunks a figure moved, shadowy, indistinct, and finally disappeared.

In the silence of the hut Carson's voice rose again. He smiled.

"I'm letting memories carry me away . . . forgetting the future! Lee, you've seen the papers—you've seen the discovery of a man's broken cuff-link? Its description?" Again, as she nodded, his nervous brown hand gripped her arm. "Lee—those cuff-links were Roland Gish's!" He jerked to a stop, hesitated, and went on. "Don't ask me how I know. I *do* know! And Roland Gish was the man who was instrumental in taking my—in taking Chrissie from my home, in bringing scandal on our name. Roland Gish fascinated her as I could never have done. He made her love him as he had made a dozen other women love him—and cast her aside as he had cast the others. Or—was about to. I warned her of that, that night when I was there—I tried to show her the true character of the man. I did not know how far things had gone between them—I did not ask. But she would not listen—she raged at me like a tigress. I guessed

then, if I had never guessed before, how utterly and completely the man held sway over her—that it was too late to hope for even an outward semblance of reconciliation between us. I left her then.”

He paused and took a few strides the length of the narrow room, speaking again as he did so.

“It’s funny—but I never thought of Gish in connection with her death. Like the world I only connected him with her inasmuch as he was getting her talked about—and as only one of the reasons for our quarrel. Until last night, when I learned that the cuff-link was his—”

“Last night?—” Lee looked startled, but he brushed the interruption aside.

“Gish had assumed no greater importance in the ghastly affair. But now—now”—he halted before her again, and his breath came quickly—“I’ve begun to wonder. Gish must have been there in the apartment with her at some time—he might even have been there, in hiding, during our interview and quarrel. If so—if so, Lee, why should they not have quarrelled too? God knows, it’s only a surmise—but a drowning man clutches at straws, however frail!—”

Lee's eyes widened in horror, and something of his own excitement. "You—mean? . . ."

"That the blow that killed Chrissie was struck brutally, without deliberation, in the heat of ungoverned passion. I did not strike that blow. There was only one other with whom she could have quarrelled violently. That other was Gish. I know more of him now—through hearsay—than I did five years ago. His methods—with women, and otherwise—have become notorious. They have always been brutal."

Lee drew a brief mental picture of her erstwhile guest—suave, debonair, altogether charming. She remembered her impression of the lines about his mouth, the look in his eyes, and shuddered. She waited silently for Carson to go on.

"Even now," he proceeded, "no suspicion of him would have crossed my mind, if it had not been for Harry—"

He stopped short. Lee looked at him again searchingly, questioningly. He met her glance and smiled faintly.

"It does n't matter now—but he 's one of the two truest friends a man ever had! He, and one other, gave up five years of their

lives in working for my liberty. . . ." Again his lips twitched. "But for those two I should never have gained it, or kept it a day! I owe everything to them."

Lee moistened lips that had become a little dry.

"But—Gish!" she whispered. "How—what grounds—" She broke off.

Carson shrugged and then squared his shoulders. His eyes looked tired suddenly, a little bleak.

"I don't know. I've got to leave the rest in Harry's hands. The waiting—suspense—will be damnable, of course." His eyes met hers, deepened and glowed. "Were it not for *you*," he whispered, "I'd give myself up again—risk all for the chance of voicing my own suspicions. But—for your sake—for the sake of our joint happiness—I dare n't!"

He swung away from her again, and stood staring out of the window. She heard him speaking presently, just above his breath.

"I've been a fool! Worse than a fool! I'd no right to do what I have done—no right to involve you in this—no right to take from you what I have. I've been a selfish, unthinking brute . . . but, my God! Lee! If this



means freedom—permanent, unshadowed freedom—*think!* Think what it means to you—to me! Think of the happiness that lies ahead of us!”

He faced her again and came towards her, but with a cry Lee drew back. There was bewilderment in her eyes, shrinking—something of fear.

“Don’t!” she said just above her breath. “Oh—you don’t know what you are saying! You have forgotten—”

“I have forgotten *nothing!*” His hands were on her shoulders again, he drew her close, and his touch seemed to burn. “Oh, sweetheart—it ’s just come to us so strangely—that made of me the mad, reckless fool that I have become, and the happiest man on God’s earth! I can’t give it up—I can’t—I can’t!”

He held her close, his lips very near to hers, but with a smothered cry she pressed her hands against him, thrusting him from her.

“You don’t know what you are saying!” Her face looked suddenly white and pinched, her lips were trembling. “You have forgotten! . . . Whatever the future holds for you—it can make no difference! Our ways have got to part—and soon.”

His hands went out to her again, but she evaded them, trembling, but holding him away with a piteous courage.

“Denham! It ’s got to be. I ’ve known it from the beginning. I ’ve hated myself for coming here—for taking your love—for giving you mine!” The red flamed in her cheeks and died again. “I could not help that—loving you, and being loved, I mean. But I ought to have been stronger—I ought never to have yielded; I ought to have put you utterly out of my life. Oh, I ’ve been wrong—disloyal—a traitor—”

“Lee!” Distressed, infinitely gentle, his voice quieted the torrent of her words. She met his eyes for a flickering moment—eyes remorseful, troubled—and looked away in a blinding rush of tears. “Lee! It has been my fault—all of it. Oh, child—I ’ve scarcely thought what it must have meant for you. I ’ve remembered only that I love you—that you love me—that you are *mine*—”

“No—no!” There was desperation in Lee’s voice. With an immense effort she steadied it, facing him now, her hands against her breast, very still. “We ’ve got to say ‘good-bye ’—to-night. It—it is—has been wrong from the

beginning. It can't go on—we 're neither of us strong enough—”

She choked and stopped. Carson took a step nearer.

“Is anything in life,” he asked, “stronger than—love?”

For a long moment she met his eyes, piteously, yet steadfastly. Then she flung her hands wide.

“Only—fidelity!” she said. And then: “Oh, don't you understand? That old man—that poor old man! He loves me—in his way. He believes in me. He gave his honour into my hands—he trusts me! *Trusts* me—oh, God!”

Her voice broke on a storm of tears. Carson caught her hands and held them against his breast. The light in his eyes was strange, very wonderful.

“*Lee!*”

Through the rain of her tears Lee looked up at him.

“You 'll let me go?” she said. “Oh—my dear! It 's not that I do not care—more than ever words of mine can say! But you 'll forget—you *must* forget. . . .”

She stopped. The man drew her nearer.

The look in his eyes calmed her suddenly.

“ I ’ll let you go,” he answered. “ But I ’ll not forget. I never *could* forget, because—oh, Lee! I love you more to-night than ever before! . . .”

He released her and stepped back. Blindly she turned to the door. He did not move, and with her hand on the latch she paused and looked back.

“ Good-bye!” she whispered.

Carson smiled. It was an oddly radiant, very wonderful smile. But he answered gravely:

“ God bless you!”

## CHAPTER XXVI

TERRY stirred among unaccustomed coverings, coughed, and sat upright. There was a singing in her ears and her head ached heavily. She felt a little sick, and utterly bewildered. Then, as her vision cleared, she gasped. She was in a rather stuffy room, in which the odours of coffee, wood, and oil mingled a little suffocatingly. Matting was upon the floor, beaded curtains covered the absurd windows. Before a fire of damp logs Haines squatted, trying to make toast.

For a moment Terry stared at him dazedly. Then, as recollection dawned upon her, she flung aside her coverings and sprang to her feet. Giddy, she caught at a chair, and Haines, dropping the toasting-fork, leaped up.

Through the hazy mingling of smoke and oil fumes they stared at each other. Terry tried to speak and coughed instead. Her face looked pinched and small in the lamplight, and Haines turned abruptly to where a coffee-

pot was steaming, caught up a cup, and, filling it, handed it to her.

“ Drink it as it is,” he ordered. “ It ’ll pull you round.”

Almost mechanically she obeyed, giving the cup back into his hands with a little grimace. Then she straightened herself.

“ Where am I?” she demanded, and Haines, gathering up the toast and fork, and settling himself on his heels again, answered:

“ Island—down Thames. One of those fashionable places in the summer-time—bungalows and all that. Just at present quite deserted. Towing path on one bank closed temporarily to the public owing to damage by floods. Other side private woods of an estate—all tangled vegetation lately uncultivated. Might easily be in mid-Pacific. Have some more coffee?”

Terry steadied herself and let go of the chair. Her face was still white, but her bewildered eyes had begun to burn.

“ You brought me here?” She spoke low, but her voice rasped on the silence.

Haines carefully turned the toast.

“ Yep.” His tone was nonchalant.

Terry’s teeth clicked.

“How?”

Haines grinned, but there was no accompanying amusement in his eyes. Under their lowered lids they were shadowed, as if with faint shame, yet unwavering.

“Brute force, in the beginning—aided by a little chloroform and a woollen scarf. Afterwards it was n’t difficult to administer the right sort of dope, enough to keep you quiet on the run down here. And, by the way, we ’re not likely to be traced or followed. I parked a car ready for emergencies in the coppice back of the inn at Brookbridge. Trespassing, of course, but could n’t help that. Pretty dark when we got that far, and most of the village congregated at the bar. . . . It only took a minute to lift you from one car to the other. Ran yours down to the village garage—ran back to the inn and had a drink—then came along on here. Very simple, really, though, of course, a bit melodramatic—rather like a movie stunt!—” He did not look round.

Terry was quivering with rising anger, but she had heard him in grim silence. She asked now:

“Why?”

Haines set the slice of toast on a plate,

battered it, and brought it to her. He filled her cup with coffee, added milk and sugar, and pulled up a chair.

“You ’d better eat before I tell you. It ’s midnight, and you missed tea and dinner. You ’ll be feeling a bit shaky.”

Terry sat down. Her limbs were trembling and she still felt sick. She swallowed the toast at first with difficulty, but ate the second piece he gave her. With renewed strength her anger flamed higher.

“*Why?*” she said for the second time.

Haines looked at her, and away again. He opened a packet of cigarettes, selected one, and leaned forward to put the packet on her knee. Then he tilted his head back into shadow and spoke.

“There ’s a parson about half a mile from here. I ’ve got a marriage licence in my pocket. I love you. I ’ve wanted you. It seemed to me there was only one way of making sure of saving you from that—from Gish! As I say, I love you—a lot more than you can ever understand. It seemed to me—even with the odds against me—I could make you—care a little too.”

Terry gave vent to an exclamation so pas-



sionately scornful that he winced, but he went on imperturbably:

“ You see, you ’re not quite the ordinary, conventional girl. There ’s a heap more in you. And, as a consequence, you need handling differently. And ”—he drew a slow breath—“ I ’m thinking you could love mighty wonderfully.”

He paused. Terry sat speechless. Haines relighted his cigarette and went on.

“ Even if you loved Gish, I should have acted just the same. But you don’t—thank God!” He stirred suddenly and sat upright. “ My first intention—when I began to plan this—was to bring you here, and to keep you here until you consented to marry me. It ’s not such a far-fetched notion as it sounds, you know. I may be just a chauffeur, Terry—a servant—in your eyes. But I ’m not exactly poor—I could keep a wife in a fair amount of comfort, even luxury ”—he grinned for a moment in the shadows—“ and I ’m as decently bred as most of the men you accept as equals. Even if I were not, I ’m a man—and I ’ve got a clean record—and my love for you is the biggest thing that has ever happened in my life.”

His voice shook for an instant. He got rather abruptly to his feet and stood above her. In spite of herself, something in his tone impressed Terry, held her silent.

“It seemed to me that, even if you hated me at first for what I ’ve done, once you belonged to me—once I had a right to guard you and look after you—I could teach you differently. I hoped it ’d be that way, anyhow.”

The girl stirred, opened her lips, and closed them again.

“You see, I figured it out that you ’d have no choice but to marry me. Folks ’ll all know you came away with me. At least, they will by to-morrow evening. I sent a wire to Brook-bridge from a village we passed on our way here, saying so. And I meant to keep you here until you realised you ’d have to consent.”

“You utter *cad!*” Terry’s voice rose shrilly on a hysterical note; she sprang to her feet and stood facing him. “Oh, you cad! I ’d never consent. Compromised or not, I ’d never consent. I ’d rather go through life with my reputation in tatters than consent! What then?”

Haines’s face whitened, his nostrils were

dilated. He was still quiet, but there was a rising note of passion, fiercely controlled, in his voice—a passion overwhelming, inexorable, before which Terry involuntarily recoiled. He spoke without trying to soften the brutality of his words.

“ I ’d keep you here, say, two weeks to try and persuade you. After that—well, I ’ve resorted to primitive methods in metaphorically knocking you on the head and carrying you off. I don’t suppose, if you tried me far enough, and since I mean to have you, I ’d hesitate to resort to a primitive form of marriage ceremony!”

Terry stood suddenly very still. Her face burned red, then went white. Of a sudden, beneath that which she saw in his eyes her high courage deserted her. With a sound half a sob, half a moan, she dropped into her chair and sat huddled.

Haines waited for a minute, then went on:

“ But something has happened which has made me decide to drive a bargain with you. Listen. You ’ve heard of the Carson murder. Well, something has just come to light which has given me a jolt that I can lay my hand on the *real* murderer. I can’t take my suspicions

to the police. They 'd probably laugh at me, the evidence is so slender. Or, if they investigated, the murderer would get wise and clear out. It 's clearly a case for bluff. And it came to me, driving you here, that *you* are the one to work that bluff."

He reached out suddenly and caught her wrist. "See here, kid. If you 'll come with me as soon as we can get going to-morrow, to Roland Gish, *and say to him what I tell you to say*—I 'll take you safe back to Brook-bridge afterwards, and no one will be the wiser about to-night. Now—listen some more."

Steadily, clearly, while she stared, he spoke a few sentences. As he finished, she sprang to her feet, catching her hands over her mouth to stifle a scream.

"No—*no!* Oh—it is n't true—I *could n't* —" she stopped.

Haines's eyes were merciless.

"We 'll soon have proof of the truth," he said. "And—you know the alternative! You 'll come?"

Terry let her hands fall and drew a deep breath. Her face was deadly pale.

"Yes," she said weakly, "I 'll come."

## CHAPTER XXVII

TERRY found herself driving into London by noon the next day. She was large-eyed, very quiet, and utterly subdued. For the first time in her inconsequent life she had been forced face to face with reality in the raw—with something of tragedy—and, incidentally, with the fact that life is not always merely a game.

She was palpably nervous. She had been badly frightened—there is nothing more utterly terrifying than a sense of one's own utter weakness in the hands of either Fate or man—and she was still suffering from the effects of shock.

Once or twice, under her lashes, she looked at Haines, sitting unresponsive and grimlipped at the wheel. He had given her no explanation of his part in the Carson affair—she was altogether bewildered, and nearer, at moments, to tears than she had ever been in her life. But what perplexed her most was that she was not nearly so angry with Haines as she ought to be.

It puzzled her. It set her thinking. Not long ago, she decided, she had liked Haines, quite a good deal—distinctly more than she was in the habit of liking servants; indeed, more than she generally liked most people. He had seemed such a very mild-mannered, obliging person. . . .

She looked at him again, and a little flame of colour rose in her cheeks. Now, she decided, with a complete change of mood, she hated him! Then she became subdued again, a little sick, more than a little frightened.

Haines forced her to have lunch in a pleasant, unpretentious restaurant. He sent innumerable telephone messages, and got up once from the table to join a couple of very ordinary neatly dressed men who had taken a seat, halfway through the meal, at a neighbouring table.

When he came back to her, he ordered wine and forced her to drink a glass. He had not spoken throughout the meal, except to ask her what food she would like.

While she ate, Terry was asking herself where her spirit had gone, why she did not spring up and rush out of the restaurant, and make her own way back to Brookbridge.

Perhaps it was the occasional flicker she saw in Haines's eyes when he looked at her—perhaps that in her heart of hearts she knew a greater respect for him than she had known for any man in her life, that prevented her.

And when at last she found herself entering the hotel in which Roland Gish was staying, she turned to him piteously, appealingly, her lips moving mutely. He laid a hand over hers then, holding it fast, and the look in his eyes was oddly warm.

“It's all right,” he said. “You're thinking me a brute—a beast—I know. It's a cruel ordeal. . . . But it's for your own good, kid. And for the whitest man who ever walked. . . . Go to it, kid, and don't funk. We shall all three be in the anteroom—quite close.”

He indicated two men who stood near by, the same men who had come into the restaurant a little while previously. Then he urged her towards the lift. The two men went on up the stairs.

Terry passed in to the tiny anteroom that separated the sleeping-apartments from the others, and knocked at one of the doors. Roland Gish himself answered it, stared for

an instant unbelievably, then, with a cry of delight, drew her inside and shut the door.

Haines went into the anteroom immediately; the two men, entering the corridor from the stairway, hurried to follow him. Within the room, Gish was shaking Terry's hands up and down delightedly.

"Oh, girl! What a surprise! You wicked kid—what does it mean? Just had a frantic letter from your mamma saying you 'd disappeared—was just preparing to come racing down to Brookbridge to join in the search. What 's the big idea, baby? And where 's my kiss?"

Unexpectedly Terry had recovered her poise and her courage. A curious excitation was flowing through her, strengthening her. She looked at Gish with new eyes, calculatingly, questioningly—and wondered at her own lack of emotion.

Then she drew her hands from his and stepped back.

"I came," she told him levelly, repeating, in her own words, the substance of what Haines had told her she was to utter, "to tell you—I am not going to marry you!"

For a moment Gish stared. Then he gasped.



“For the love of Mike!” he uttered.  
 “*Why?*”

Terry put out the tip of a pink tongue and moistened her lips. She returned his astonished gaze levelly.

“Because,” she said, mechanically, almost parrot-wise, “I know you for what you are—*because I know that you are a murderer! The murderer of Chrissie Carson!*”

She never forgot the look that leaped into Gish’s eyes. Horror, dread, something bestial in its fear. She recoiled from it shuddering, and cried out as she found his hands upon her wrists.

“You—” Gish’s voice was thick. He was utterly off his guard; he had lost his head and his nerve alike. He shook the girl furiously.  
 “*How* do you know?—”

He choked. Terry looked down at her bruised wrists, and up into his eyes. Oddly enough she was no longer afraid, only sick to the soul of her with the horror of a creeping certainty.

“Everybody knows—or will know. They ’ve discovered that the broken cuff-link was yours—they ’ve been making inquiries. You were seen going into her apartment that

night—coming out—*after* Denham Carson left. . . .”

In the anteroom Haines breathed hard. She had learned her lesson well, was playing her part as he had never hoped she would do. With sudden violence Gish flung her hands from him. His lips were twisted back over his teeth in a snarl.

“That ’s a lie! No one could have seen me! . . . I was there when she came in. I got out through the window—by the fire-escape. It was pitch-dark, and there was n’t a soul about. Besides, I did n’t kill her! She nagged at me, stormed—raved—said that Denham Carson had told her I ’d be through with her. I only hit out at her and she fell! God! You little she-devil! Who are you—what are you—what ’s been your game all this time? . . .”

Again in the anteroom Haines drew a deep breath. One of the men ceased writing in a flappy notebook with a very stumpy and blunt pencil. The other opened the door.

Haines caught Terry as she stumbled towards him. Without looking back, he lifted her, carried her down the stairs, past the startled groups in the vestibule, and out to

the car. As it slid away through the traffic, he held her, limp, half fainting, very close to him.

“Oh,” he whispered, almost sobbingly, “but it was an inspiration! Seventh sense—second sight—anything you like! Oh, baby! But you’ve got pluck! You pulled it through! Oh, kiddy—*kiddy!* How I love you!”

The culminating excitement had been too much for Terry. Unresisting, with Haines’s cheek against hers, she burst into a storm of tears.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

LEE was in a far too restless mood when she left Carson to go immediately home. When she did, she went directly to her own rooms. It was close upon the dinner hour, and, too weary to dress, she sent her maid with an apology to Mrs. Dorice, and ordered a light meal to be brought to her.

She scarcely tasted it, however, and sat before the uncurtained windows staring out towards the woods. A little later her maid brought her a message. Mr. Smithers had dined, and would like to see her in his own rooms for coffee. For a moment Lee hesitated, an excuse hovering on her lips. Then she changed her mind, slipped from her wrapper into a long black tea-gown, and went softly along the corridors to where her husband awaited her.

There was an ache in her heart when she thought of him, an almost passionate desire to make up to him for her failing in allegiance

towards him . . . and yet she dreaded the touch of his hand.

She went to him across the candlelit, luxurious room with shadowed eyes, that met his with an effort, and dropped immediately. But while he greeted her with his customary kindness, his manner was absent and he was restlessly fidgety.

“ I thought you ’d be wondering if I had taken root here!” he observed with a faint chuckle. “ I ’m afraid I ’m getting lazy—make a touch of gout an excuse for shirking my duties. . . . Frost, who the devil is that knocking at the door?”

The manservant moved quickly across the room. Lee watched him with a vague consciousness that there was something unwontedly restless in his manner, too, and dropped into a chair at Smithers’s side.

Frost came back.

“ A message from Mrs. Dorice, sir. She has had a message from Miss Terry—she wishes to speak to madam at once. . . .”

He looked at Lee. She half rose, and sat down again as Smithers made a gesture. But before he could speak, the door was pushed wide, and Teresa stood on the threshold. In

her hand was an orange envelope; her pretty face was suffused with unbecoming colour, and she was breathing jerkily.

Her eyes sought Lee's, and grew venomous.

"This came hours ago!" she announced. She flourished a pink slip of paper almost wildly, adding: "That fool of a maid of yours forgot to give it to me until now. . . . Read it!"

Lee took it mechanically; read mechanically.

Terry came away with me. Quite safe.

HAINES

She opened her lips and closed them again, crushing the paper in her hand. Her husband sat upright. Mrs. Dorice laughed hysterically. With a vicious movement she slammed the door to behind her and advanced into the room. She did not glance at Smithers, her eyes were on Lee.

"That 's your doing!" she said tensely. "Oh, don't deny it! You 've had a hand in this all along—have been against Terry's marriage all along! And I suppose you think you 've won. Perhaps you have, but mark you this! it 's not going to benefit you any. I

told you I 'd be even with you if you interfered—that I 'd make you smart. . . .”

She gulped, gasped, and flashed a look past the girl at Smithers.

“So I will!” she went on thickly. “I 'll make you sorry, Jason Smithers, that you were ever fool enough to marry her—trust her—believe in her!”

Lee half rose. Her face was white, she had caught an unsteady lower lip between her teeth. Smithers's hand on her arm restrained her. He sat upright in a curious, effortless way and leaned towards Mrs. Dorice.

“I think,” he said mildly, “that you are over-excited—forgetting yourself. . . .”

He did not finish. Teresa's rage broke bounds. She advanced upon them, a quivering little figure with clenched hands and burning cheeks.

“Forgetting myself! . . . It 's your wife who has been forgetting herself, Jason Smithers! You may be blind, but I 'm not! I 've watched her—watched her model visits to the village that have ended in wanderings in the woods yonder. . . . I 've seen her meetings with her lover in that keeper's hut of yours. . . . I 've heard their love-making

—listened to their reminiscences of other meetings. . . .”

“*Teresa!*”

Lee’s voice was a choked cry. Teresa looked at her and laughed.

“*Ruff’s Island!*” she mocked brutally. “So that ’s where you were that night—months ago—before you joined Patty Clay! With this man who has followed you here . . . who—”

She stopped short. Jason Smithers had risen. With a gesture of his hand he dismissed Frost to the inner apartment. Then he laid it on Lee’s arm. At his touch she swung round, facing him, her head flung back, her face deadly white, her lips quivering piteously.

“Oh—” she whispered. “Oh—it ’s true! I can’t hope to make you understand. I can never hope to make you understand anything but that! That it ’s *true!* I—oh, please believe this—I ’m sorry, sorry, sorry! Not so much for myself, for what I ’ve done—but for *you!* Because I ’ve failed you—failed you miserably, pitiably—after your trust in me—”

Her voice broke. Upon her arm Jason Smithers’s hand tightened its grip. Before she could open her lips again, he spoke.



“I know!” he said very gently. “Oh, my dear, I know. I have known all along. . . .” He was standing above her, unusually upright, the stoop gone from his shoulders, the hesitancy from his voice. He went on, very quietly: “I know everything—your temptations—your pluck—above all, I know the depths of your loyalty to myself!”

He laid his other hand upon her shoulder, and turned her about to face him, holding her fast.

“Oh, Lee! If there is any one to blame—any one who should feel shame—it is I! I think—knowing you as well as I do—I ought to have been honest with you. And yet—I *dared* not! For your own peace of mind I *dared* not.”

He stopped. Upon the panels of the door there came a faint rap. Mechanically, staring from one to the other, Teresa Dorice opened it. A servant handed her a telegram. Lee was conscious of the sudden stiffening of Smithers’s body—as Mrs. Dorice held the orange envelope towards him he advanced with outstretched hand, no longer halting, no longer bent.

He, too, read the message aloud.

Gish confessed to Chrissie's murder this morning. Arrested. Bringing Terry straight back to Brookbridge.

HARRY

"My God!" Smithers's lips were twitching. He turned to the bedroom door. "Frost—" he called, shakily, yet with a strength in his voice, a depth and warmth and vibrant clarity that held Lee dumb where she stood. "*Frost—*"

Lee saw the old servant run forward, saw the meeting of his hand and his master's, and put her hands for a moment against her temples. She felt shaken, dazed, utterly bewildered. The voice that had spoken a moment ago was a voice long grown familiar to her—familiar, and dear. Fascinated, swaying a little, she stood watching. Jason Smithers was pumping Frost's arm up and down with the energy of a schoolboy.

"Frost!" she heard him say again, "I 'm free! Oh—God! I 'm *free!* . . ."

And then he turned suddenly and looked at her. He took a step nearer and his hands went out to her. His voice when he spoke was very deep, not quite steady, infinitely tender.

“Oh—sweetheart!” he whispered; and, shutting her eyes with a strangled, frightened sob, Lee saw a narrow, smoky, wooden room—a pair of vividly blue, passionate eyes—a brown, eager face. She heard the whisper of the bracken in the wind, the occasional snapping of a twig. . . .

“Sweetheart!” Strong arms gathered her suddenly close. “Don’t you understand? It has all been a masquerade—a mad, cruel masquerade. . . . *I am Denham Carson!*”

## CHAPTER XXIX

It seemed to Lee hours before that loved voice—Denham Carson's voice—spoke again. Weakly she struggled back from the dark mists that had suddenly enveloped her. Teresa had disappeared. Beyond closed doors she heard the sound of Frost's agitated footsteps, pattering up and down.

Reluctantly she lifted her eyes. Strong arms were round her still—as she stirred, Carson's vivid blue gaze met hers. As she struggled to free herself, he held her close, pressing her head with one strong hand against his shoulder.

The room was still shadowy, with shaded candles and faint firelight to illuminate it, but she could see him clearly. His face was no longer deeply brown, but white—palely, almost tiredly white, as Jason Smithers's had been. Her bewildered glance, straying past him, went to a little heap upon the floor beside him—a lot of white hair, a pair of smoked, horn-rimmed glasses—a long cane. . . .

With a sudden movement she withdrew

herself from his hold and pushed him away from her, her eyes searching his, unbelieving still.

“Denham! . . .”

Her voice broke. There was almost terror in the pitifully bewildered gaze.

The man caught her hands close and held them against his mouth.

“Little girl!” he whispered. “Oh—little girl! . . .” His own voice caught. “Will you let me tell you everything—from the beginning?” he asked.

He went on, not waiting for her reply, still kneeling beside her:

“It has all been extraordinarily simple—after the first. And yet the difficulties have at times seemed insurmountable. . . . You called me a madman once, Lee. I think I have been a madman—ever since the day that, after five years of prison, I tasted freedom. And—after I first met you!”

He was silent a moment. Lee did not move. She was asking herself, rather dazedly, if she herself was quite sane.

“Harry Haines—he ’s my cousin, you know—managed my escape; at least, as far as outside influences were concerned. Money—

enough of it—can work wonders, sometimes. But it took five years! And all through those five years he stuck to it—he and Frost. I'd never hoped. . . . But one day I found myself free. . . . We went half round the world on a tramp steamer chartered by Harry and picked up at San Francisco before we touched an English port. And then I had to lie low. It was suspected that I had come to England. We had not thought of a suitable or adequate disguise. We discovered Ruff's Island—or, rather, Harry did—by a fluke, and I hid there. And then—you came."

He paused for a moment, kissed her hands, and went on slowly.

"You told me all about yourself—your life. And—as you know—I loved you from the very first minute. I suppose I was mad. Frost said I was—Harry railed at me. But I had my way. I could n't lose sight of you. . . . I became Mr. Jason Smithers, and—again through Harry's influence, unguessed—made acquaintance with your stepmother. . . . My intention then was just to see something of you, to be near you, to make life easier if I could. I had no idea how long my disguise would go unchallenged, unsuspected. When

*you* did not penetrate it, I began to really hope! And yet I was afraid—of a slip—a mistake.” Again he paused, his lips twitched suddenly, humorously: “I ’ve never heard of any insanity in my family, but I think I must have been insane when I conceived the idea of marrying you—Harry nearly had hysterics, and Frost fairly foamed at the mouth. I saw the danger and the folly of the thing myself, but I could n’t resist. I had to have you—be sure of you! I utterly forgot what it would mean to you if I should be found out—caught! I ’ve been a brute, Lee, all round—a brute.”

Lee stirred, but she did not speak. He went on:

“You were so sweet. . . . The game was damnably difficult to play, sometimes. I had not realised what being under the same roof would mean! I had to sham illness most of the time—to contrive to talk to you in shadowed rooms—to avoid the sunlight and the open day. It would not have been so bad if you had not found me downstairs upon the first night. . . .”

Again Lee stirred. Her wide eyes asked a bewildered question. He answered it, half

laughing, yet with a shadow of recollection in his eyes.

“ I had to be seen in London—the whole thing was a huge bluff to keep suspicion from me as Jason Smithers. I let myself be seen a few hours before the wedding. When I told you that I had journeyed here to Brookbridge in your car it was, of course, true—only it was as Jason Smithers. And, while Jason Smithers was here, at Brookbridge, able to prove an alibi, I had to keep up the bluff by being seen again in London at night. Haines drove Terry back. I was hidden under the rugs in the back of the car. I had a nasty moment in Richmond when Terry wanted to stop, but it was all right, and we went on. I slipped out while Harry Haines was unloading her at Mrs. Dorice’s flat. . . . He picked me up in a different car later and exceeded the speed limit getting me back here. I had to get in by the window as Frost had left the door locked—and you caught me. . . . I ’ll never forget that night, Lee!”

Lee put her hands over her eyes. “ It ’s all like some mad, fantastic fairy tale,” she whispered, “ —a nightmare movie show. Is it true?”



“ True enough. I recognised the truth when I had to live near you and never touch you, feel your tenderness, and dare no answering caress! . . . I had to love you, make you love me. And so—I made you come to me, there in the woods. . . .”

He rose slowly, lifting her to her feet.

“ It was a brutal thing to do. . . . The whole thing was cruel, to you; madness for myself. It could not have lasted. You would have had to find out the truth sometime—my own strength would not have been great enough to go on with the deception. And then Gish came. . . . *Gish!* . . . and Frost had recognised those cuff-links! God! What I don't owe him—and Harry! . . .”

Lee put her hands to her eyes again, and let them fall. He drew her close, bending his face against her hair.

“ Frost's ‘ brown ’ make-up was difficult to get off, sometimes,” he laughed. “ Do you remember when you asked the other day if I had knocked my head? But it helped in the disguise—prison life leaves the skin bleached—like that of an old man. . . .”

He drew her still closer.

“ But I 'm not old!” he whispered vibrantly,

eagerly. "I 'm not old, thank God! I don't know how this will end, Lee. There 'll be a little while of parting—publicity—talk! But—Harry says Gish has confessed, has been arrested. It will mean—in the end—freedom." He turned her face suddenly up to his. "And *love!*" he added.

Lee drew a long breath.

"Is it real? . . ." she asked again doubting, dazed.

The man laughed suddenly, clearly, boyishly, and in the bedroom old Frost stopped walking frenziedly up and down and smiled.

"It 's *real* enough!" Denham Carson said. He lifted her hand and touched the slender band of her wedding ring. "You married Jason Smithers, sweetheart. But does it occur to you that"—he watched the flame of red that swept her face and laughed again, tenderly this time—"that you 're *my* wife!"

. . . . .

Perhaps an hour later the throb of a motor sounded from without. His arm about her, Carson drew Lee to the window. There was a full moon, and the lights of the house illuminated the drive.

They saw Haines jump down from the

driver's seat and lift Terry out. Toby, shrieking joyous welcome, raced to meet them. They stooped to pat him, and Terry's body swayed towards Haines's. He drew her steadily to her feet, and for a moment it seemed as if her head rested against his shoulder.

Carson's grip tightened upon Lee. He chuckled.

"Good old Haines," he said. "He 's scored another win!"

THE END







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