

PRESENTED FREE WITH PEARSON'S WEEKLY.



LONDON NOVELS



No. 15.

THE WOMAN HATER

PUBLISHED EVERY SATURDAY.

SUPPLEMENT TO PEARSON'S WEEKLY. 12/5/28.



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LONDON NOVELS

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THE WOMAN HATER.

The story of a man who hated all women . .
because of one.

— TOLD BY —
MURIEL NELSON.



"*Café de Paris.*"

The small electric lamps flashed in and out, crimson, blue and green by turns; fluttered and flashed and chased each other round and round eternally, to the gaping admiration of the burnoused Arabs moving so gravely through the narrow streets of the little white Algerian sea-coast town, bringing a sharp pang of home-sickness to the French soldiers in their horizon-blue uniforms.

"*Café de Paris!*" How the name drew them with all the glamour of the boulevards, the lights and laughter, the glances, demure and provocative, of the exquisite girls of Paris—so far away!

Here in this Africa the *Café de Paris* kept alive the memory of other things. Strangely incongruous were the tall white French buildings almost jostling the native bazaars, and every night the soldiers crowded beneath that flashing sign into the café with its red plush seats and marble-topped tables, its walls adorned with tarnished gilt and dingy mirrors.

Cabaret.

Picked out in letters of blue and green and scarlet fire, that alluring word beckoned its invitation nightly under the sign of the *Café de Paris*. Hard-faced women, their first youth far behind them, sang impudent songs in harsh and raucous voices, gave travesties of alluring dances. Nothing very young or fresh or innocent ever came to the little white town that bathed its feet in the blue waters of the Mediterranean, but to-night there was a new attraction—"Miss Ray," an English "mees," young and beautiful, so the bald-headed *patron* had whispered about her for a week amongst his clients.



He regretted now that he had made her suffer.

They did not believe him. What would such a girl be doing there? But all the same, every seat was occupied to-night. Outside a cool breeze brought a breath of freshness from the sea, but inside the café the atmosphere was thick with smoke and the fumes of wine.

They had crowded in—swarthy Spaniards, grave-faced Arabs, giant Spahis in khaki uniform, and tall, crimson fez, Frenchmen homesick for Paris, and at a table, reserved at the side of the space where the artistes danced, sat Pedro Renault, part French, part Spanish, wholly vile, whom they called partly in mockery, partly in awe, King of Algeria. The wealthiest man in the north of Africa and the most influential, he was the most feared and fawned upon and dreaded, with dark hair and a heavy brutal face.

Pedro Renault! The *patron* rubbed his hands seeing the other man. It would mean something if Ray should please him!

At last her number went up, the orchestra broke into a lilting melody, and suddenly she was amongst them!

THE ENGLISHMAN'S WARNING.

SHE was young, her figure slim and supple, like a piece of thistledown floating on the air. Soft, silken hair like a corn-gold helmet was round her head, while a skin of milk and roses set off deep violet eyes heavily curtained with dusky lashes.

A rustle of excitement ran round the crowded room. Ah, the *patron* had been right! She was beautiful as a spring morning. The men leaned forward, lips parted, glasses forgotten beside them.

Where had the *patron* got hold of her? Paris itself could produce nothing so fresh, so young!

Ray Fenning danced and she was happy, and for the moment that was enough. To dance was her only pleasure—one she had indulged in by herself in remote and lonely places, when she might snatch an hour's respite from her labour as unpaid servant at the café.

And then one day, a week ago, the *patron* had come upon her, watching her for nearly half an hour before she became aware of him. She had expected reprimands, perhaps blows, for such waste of time. Instead, he had smiled upon her, patted her arm, and told her that henceforth she might dance before his customers instead of washing up their dishes.

She had been hardly able to believe in her luck. For the first time since

her mother had died six years ago, leaving her alone and friendless in this foreign hotel in an alien land, Ray had known a gleam of happiness and hope. Perhaps one day she might dance herself to fame and fortune! Perhaps one day she might dance herself over the seas, back to her own and her mother's country that remained a vague but treasured memory deep in her heart, back to the relations who dwelt in the shadows of the past, but whose very names she did not know!

Her dance ended and a tumult of applause broke out. She danced again, and once again she bowed her thanks. The audience ceased to be an indiscriminate blur. They were men now, men with smouldering eyes.

A shiver of fear ran through the girl, a sudden sense of something evil about her. Panic-stricken she turned and ran from the café.

But at the door the smiling *patron* gripped her arm.

"Splendid!" he whispered. "Splendid! You have done even better than I expected, my little one. And now there are those who wish to thank you, to speak with you. Remember, it is part of your duty to be charming and amiable to those who order largely of my best champagne! Here is a great man who would drink with you—Pedro Renault himself. Come!"

And before the girl could realise what was happening, he had drawn her across the space of floor to the table at which sat the man of whom he had spoken.

Ray shrank back. Even in the kitchens of the Café de Paris, she had heard talk of Pedro Renault, had glimpsed him from afar. But close at hand he was more repellent than ever she had imagined.

The *patron* had returned and already there were two bottles of the most expensive champagne in the ice pail on the table.

"You will drink with me—yes?" Renault's voice was hoarse. His hand shook a little as he poured out two glasses of the wine. "Where have they hidden you all this time?" he demanded. "It is a wicked shame to hide so much beauty from Pedro Renault, who knows how to appreciate it. You shall dance for me—alone! Is it not so? Come, drink, my little English beauty!"

Obediently she took the glass of wine the man put into her hand. It was her duty to drink with customers. One glass of champagne and then she would go.

Suddenly the man threw his arm about

her and pulled her down roughly on to his knees.

A wave of nausea swept over the girl, and with a swift turn of her wrist she dashed her glass of champagne up into his face, so that with an oath he loosened his grasp.

She darted across the floor. Escape! She must get away to her own little room at the top of the house!

She was in the passage outside when, for the second time that evening, the *patron's* arm gripped her shoulder. His face, distorted with rage, lowered above her.

"So," he snarled, "you would insult the richest man in Algeria in my café!"

His voice mounted higher and higher with fury, then suddenly he seized from the wall a leathern thong, and brought it down across her bare shoulders, once, twice—three times—

But not a fourth! The whip was snatched out of his hand, and Ray was aware of another man who wielded it with great effect about the *patron's* body. Again and again that lash fell, each blow followed by a shrill whine from the victim. A moment later he was writhing on the floor. A contemptuous kick followed, and then two scared and white-faced waiters came and carried him away.

Ray turned, scared and trembling, to see her rescuer coolly arranging his displaced cuff. He was tall and muscular with lean, tanned features, thin lips round which were lines deeply cut, and he wore a white duck yachting suit. She had seen him in the café with another man watching her dance with interest, but he had not invited her to sit at his table.

"How can I thank you?" she said in a trembling voice.

"Are you English?" The man raised his eyebrows as he heard her speech, and she caught a glimpse of strong white teeth between his thin lips. "Then I'm sorry I didn't kill the brute while I was about it! Take my advice and get out of this."

He turned nonchalantly upon his heel, walking away to where his friend was waiting for him, and together they disappeared into the street outside.

Ray leaned against the wall, trembling in every limb, sick from the ordeal through which she had passed and the stinging pain of the blows that marked her shoulders.

She glanced towards the swing door through which she had passed. Go back to the café? No, a thousand times!

Blindly she stumbled up the steep stairs to the little attic cupboard that she called her own, and locking the door behind her flung herself down upon her hard bed,

while a paroxysm of dry sobs rent her slim body.

Fear and terror filled her. Never, never again could she bear to dance in that terrible place, to face the eyes of men, wolfish and cruel as she had seen them to-night. Again she felt the hands of Pedro Renault upon her, that revulsion of horror as his lips so nearly touched hers.

She could not face that again! "Get out of this," the Englishman had said, but where could she go? What was she to do? Who was there to help her? And when the *patron* was a little recovered—

She shuddered at the thought of the anger that would fall upon her, from the man or from his hard-faced wife. More than once, for some trifling carelessness, Madame had beaten her mercilessly.

Well, they might thrash her within an inch of her life, but she would not endure



RAY FENNING, who danced her way into Bruce Rivers' heart.

the kisses of Pedro Renault! She would not dance again! Gone was the hope of fame and fortune, gone the hope of returning to her own passionately loved country! Without money or passport, what could she do?

Despair gripped her. Why had her mother left England to travel about the world with herself, a small child? Why had she come to this place, where English faces were hardly ever seen? Why—oh, why had she died without telling her about her relatives, leaving her no papers? But that wasn't fair! Her mother had been stricken down suddenly. At her death she had tried to speak to her daughter and failed.

Ray's hands clutched at the bed. What was she to do? What was she to do?

A light tap came at the door of her room, and instantly the girl was alert and rigid. Was this Madame come to execute punishment?

"Ray—Ray, it is I—Pierre," came a low, cautious voice from the other side of the door.

Pierre—her only friend!

The girl jumped to her feet to admit the crippled son of the house, Pierre with the sensitive mouth and burning, intelligent eyes, the twisted leg that caused him to swing himself about on crutches. Through these long and dreary years they had consoled each other. She had taught him English, and from his shabby violin he had drawn the music to which she had danced.

The boy laid his finger on his lips as silently he closed the door behind him. Then he swung himself towards her.

"Ray, dear, you must go!" he said gravely.

She gave a cry as she looked at the boy's sombre face.

"But where, Pierre? Where can I go?"

He shook his head.

"Whatever happens you must get away from here to-night. Listen, Ray, I have heard my father and Renault talking. It seems that Renault is angry, but he means to get hold of you. He has given my father a large sum of money. They are to buy you clothes and to send you out to his villa to-morrow. His great car, of which everyone talks, will come for you, and they will get you there by trick or by force. If you would escape, it must be to-night while my mother is still engaged tending my father's wounds."

Ray drew her hand across her mouth to stifle a cry of fear.

"But where shall I go?" she repeated tearfully. "I have no money, I have no friends. Oh!" And her hands clenched

convulsively while the tears rolled down her cheeks.

The boy produced a soiled envelope from his pocket and thrust it into her hand.

"Here is money," he answered in a low voice. "It is yours. I—Pierre—give it to you. And you must go to the Englishman who thrashed my father to-night. Already he has interfered on your behalf. He is your countryman and will help you."

Ray's tears checked in their flow and a light leapt to her eyes.

"The Englishman!" she repeated softly. "Ah, yes, Pierre! But where does he stay? Will he be strong enough to protect me from Renault?"

"He will protect you," returned the boy curtly. "He has come here on a grand yacht of his own. It is lying in the harbour. I will row you out and put you aboard. But hurry, Ray, for at any moment my mother may come after you. See, I go now, and will meet you on the seashore by the breakwater. It is your only chance of escape."

Again he laid his finger on his lips and hobbled through the door noiselessly. For a moment Ray stood motionless, but a new light was in her face, like a lamp shining from within, and her violet eyes were like stars.

The Englishman, that knight errant of chivalry who had saved her! Hastily she gathered together a few tiny treasures, relics of her mother, threw a cloak round her shoulders and followed Pierre silently down the steep, dark stairs.

A DASH FOR LIBERTY.

SNATCHES of jazz music still came from the café as Ray crept past, and the electric lights still chased each other tirelessly round, blue and crimson and green. She breathed more freely as she turned from the narrow street and met the breeze, cool and invigorating from the sea. Hastily she picked her way over the rocky beach to where, in the shadow of the quayside, Pierre was awaiting her with a small skiff already drawn down to the water's edge.

Without a word he helped her into the boat and pushed off with long, silent strokes. The luminous, scented African night scattered the diamond dust of a myriad stars over the violet sky. An honey-coloured moon threw a silver flood of light over the town, touching the white cliffs of the mountains in the distance. The Mediterranean was deep and darkly blue around them, and Pierre rowed with swift, graceful strokes, his crutches in the bottom of the boat.

They were half way across the stretch of water that separated them from the shining yacht before he spoke huskily.

"You are going away for ever. I shall never see you again."

The girl gave a little cry.

"Don't say that, Pierre! You are my best, my only friend."

"I shall never see you again," he repeated in a dogged voice. "You are going to a new life, across the seas to England—your own country. You will find happiness and—love!"

"Pierre!" she cried at the sadness in his voice.

Brusquely the boy shipped his oars and leaned towards her.

"Ray, I have one thing to ask of you," he said huskily, and she could see his eyes burning like stars in his face. "All my life I have loved you," he went on, his voice shaking with emotion, "ever since you came with your mother, a little child. I too was a child then, but I am a man now although I am a cripple. I love you, I would give my life for you. Will you give me one kiss, dear Ray, before we part for ever?"

"Of course!"

Pity gripped her by the throat, and she leaned towards him. Never had she thought of Pierre like this!

He caught her hands and kissed her fingers one after the other, then drew her towards him and kissed her on the lips with all the admiration of a boy mingled with the passion of a man.

A gush of tears rose to the girl's eyes. Suddenly she sensed the tragedy of this chivalrous, generous-hearted boy. She was all he had in the world, and deliberately he was sending her away, for her own safety, without a thought of his own loneliness.

"Pierre, come with me!" she begged.

But the boy only shook his head and loosened his arms from about her. Without a word he picked up his oars again and the little craft shot forward until the

white bulk of the Englishman's yacht loomed high above them, and he was within reach of a rope ladder that hung over the side.

From the fore of the yacht came the sounds of a ukulele and a flute mingled with men's voices.

"The Englishman is not yet back," whispered the boy. "You must hide—do not let them see you until he returns, lest they should wish to send you back again. Here you will be safe. Climb up this ladder—see, I will hold it steady for you. And good-bye, Ray. Think sometimes of Pierre who loves you, who will pray always for your happiness."

A hasty hand-clasp and she had swung up on to the white and shining deck with its awnings, its luxurious chairs, its banks of sweet-scented flowers. A light splash in the dark water below, and she knew that already Pierre's little



Miss Nell St. John Montague, photographed with her mascot "Judy."

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skiff was headed for the harbour once again. She was on the yacht of the stranger Englishman!

She was conscious of the tumultuous beating of her heart as she looked about her. In so short a time, so much had happened! Her life of drudgery in the Café de Paris—the only home that she had known for so many years—was behind her. He would not send her back to that again, this man who had interfered on her behalf! And Pierre, her one friend—he too was gone! Her eyes misted over. All that behind her—and what lay ahead?

For the present her future was wrapped up in the Englishman. In his hands everything rested. She had staked all upon this throw. She saw again vividly in her imagination the lean, lined face with its thin lips and contemptuous expression, the tall, white-clad, long-limbed body. He was like no man she had ever seen before . . . like a god amongst mortals, and he had interfered on her behalf!

There was a smile upon her lips as she looked about her for a hiding-place and her heart beat high with a sense of adventure opening out before her. Down here, in a dark corner behind a chair, she would await him, that rug drawn over her to hide her bare legs and the light dancing frock that her cloak did not cover entirely.

She snuggled down. The yacht swayed very slightly upon the heaving tide, the velvet darkness wrapped her in a warm and scented mantle. She was safe now! Her tension relaxed. Her eyes closed, and soon she was sleeping soundly and untroubled as a little child. . . .

It was broad daylight when she awoke and the morning sun was shining into her eyes. Someone was standing beside her, a man in white ducks who had jerked aside the rug with which she had covered herself.

He gave a low, expressive whistle as she rubbed her eyes into wakefulness.

"Who the dickens—!" he began. "Where in Heaven's name did you drop from, I'd like to know?" He groaned aloud. "There'll be the very deuce to pay!"

Ray jumped to her feet, a little stiff from her cramped position.

"I wanted to see the Englishman who owns this yacht," she said firmly. "Has he come aboard yet?"

"Aboard? I should say so! We should hardly move without him!"

Move! At the same moment Ray became conscious of the crisp sound of rushing water.

She looked about her. On every side

the blue waters of the Mediterranean turned to molten gold in the sun. Gone was the little white Algerian seaport, the glittering slopes of the mountains. Nothing but sea, and a white haze on the horizon behind which there might be land!

She gave a little cry of dismay, and then her heart leapt within her. The die was cast. Africa lay behind her! Now he could not send her back!

"I want to see your owner," she repeated. "Please take me to him at once."

The man made a grimace.

"Not on your life!" he returned grimly. "It is as much as my job is worth to wake Mr. Rivers when he is asleep. There'll be a row anyway when he discovers you here, young lady! Perhaps you don't know it, but Mr. Rivers hasn't any use for your charming sex. He was let down pretty badly once by one of them, they say, and scores it up against the rest of you. I've heard him swear that no woman should ever set foot on this yacht—and the girls plagued him at the different ports we've called at, I can tell you!"

Ray had gone very white.

"Don't send me back!" she pleaded.

"Not likely, my dear!" The first officer made another grimace. "I wouldn't care to face the owner if we put back when once he had given sailing orders. No, here you are, and here you'll have to stay until Mr. Rivers decides what is to be done with you. As likely as not you'll have got us all the sack for letting you get on board," he added grimly. "Anyway, you had best come down to a cabin now and keep out of sight, and I'll choose my time to let Mr. Rivers know you're here!"

He took her by the arm and guided her down below, showing her into a white-painted cabin, luxuriously upholstered in blue brocade.

"I'll get you something to eat," he added abruptly, and left the cabin, turning the key in the door behind him.

"YOU ARE MINE—MINE!"

ALL day long Ray remained a prisoner in her cabin, her solitude undisturbed except by the entrance of a steward with her meals to show that she was not forgotten.

But a sense of excitement and adventure possessed her. Whatever the future held, it could not be worse than the past. And in her pocket was the little store of money that Pierre had thrust upon her. Two thousand francs in all—nearly twenty pounds! How had he

managed to become possessed of so large an amount—Pierre, who had no money of his own? She felt a twinge of fear. Could it be that he had stolen it from his father in order to help her to escape? If so, pray Heaven he would not be found out!

The day passed, and the sun, a molten ball of metal, fell to the opaline surface of the sea. Then abruptly her door was opened.

"Mr. Rivers wishes to see you," announced the first officer in an expressionless voice. Since the morning he had become an automaton. Perhaps he was regretting his expansiveness of the morning. Had the "row" happened?

She was ushered up on deck again to where, under a striped awning, Bruce Rivers lounged in a chair with a table beside him on which stood whisky and a siphon, the very chair behind which she had slept last night with banks of flowers close at hand as though the yacht were decked for a carnival.

"The young lady, sir."

The first officer saluted and withdrew.

This part of the deck was private, completely screened from the quarters of the crew. She was alone with this man who seemed to her grateful imagination like a god above his fellows.

He did not rise to greet her.

"So," he said curtly, "you have thrust yourself uninvited aboard my yacht!"

She winced beneath the words, but she held out her hands with a little pleading gesture.

"You were so good to me last night," she faltered. "Believe me, Mr. Rivers, I meant no harm. I did not know that the yacht would be sailing. I thought you would protect me—help me perhaps to get back to my own country."

He gave a harsh laugh.

"Just because I interfered last night when that Frenchman was whipping you, you think that gives you a claim upon my charity? I was a fool to interfere. When a man thrashes a woman, she generally deserves it!"

"No, no!" Ray's voice rose in a cry of genuine distress. "I have no claim upon you—I never meant that. I see now I ought never to have come. Send me back if you will, or put me ashore——"

"You think," he interrupted roughly, "that I am going to alter my plans for you—a stowaway, an uninvited guest? Now that you have thrust yourself upon me, you will stay until it suits my convenience to set you ashore. I have made my plans and I shall not depart from them. It will be some time before we

call at our next port. Meantime, since you are here, you will follow your profession. Since you are a dancing girl who exists only for the amusement of others, you shall dance to amuse me. That at least you can hardly refuse!"

She stood before him with bowed head and clasped hands. Was this the man who had so chivalrously rescued her last night?

"If you wish it I will dance for you," she answered in a low voice.

"I do wish it. You shall dance to my music—that perhaps will underline your position more clearly!"

The man stretched out his hand and took a violin from an open case lying near. Lovingly he thrust the instrument beneath his chin and tuned it, then taking up the bow, he drew it across the strings. A note of lovely music sounded like a human soul in distress, and then he plunged into a wild and lilting Hungarian dance.

Ray waited for a moment to pick up the rhythm, then, throwing aside her cloak, she began to dance.

The music grew wilder, more fantastic with a low, throbbing undernote of passion that wailed and sobbed through the vibrating strings, and as the girl danced, the violin threw its spell upon her. She forgot everything except the music and the soft and luminous southern night. Her eyes shone like stars, the colour glowed in her cheeks. She danced as she had never danced before.

The man too seemed inspired. He rose to his feet, moving and swaying in unison with that wild and haunting rhythm.

Then the music ended on a crashing, wailing chord, and abruptly he laid down his instrument.

As Ray ceased, radiant but exhausted, he caught her suddenly in his arms, crushing her against him until it seemed as though her slim body must break, crushing the golden helmet of her hair against his shoulder, his lips on hers.

A stifled cry came from her, but she did not struggle.

Something wild and sweet leapt up to meet his kisses, held



her relaxed and languorous in his arms. . . . Love! This at last was love!

"You beautiful thing!" whispered the man's husky voice in her ear. "You've come to me. You're mine—all mine!"

A MAD MARRIAGE.

THE world stood still while the white, graceful yacht swiftly cleft her path through the phosphorescent waters, through the luminous violet of the night, gold-dusted with moon and starlight. The world stood still and fell away while Cinderella, rapt away to fairyland, surrendered herself to the arms of her newly discovered prince!

"I love you—I love you!" whispered Bruce Rivers hungrily.

"Love—love—love!" sang all the stars in the heavens, and all the little wandering breezes that rippled the purple velvet night.

An answering something broke into joyous song in Ray's heart. In her little attic bedroom at the Café de Paris, she had often lain at night and thought and dreamed of love, but never, never had she imagined such rapture as it meant to be clasped in Bruce Rivers' arms, the gallant, chivalrous knight-errant who had delivered her from the *patron* and from Pedro Renault.

He kissed her again, on hair and eyes and lips and neck, kissed each finger-tip and her bare, satiny arms, until she could bear the shivering ecstasy no longer and slipped from him, holding him away with her hands against his breast, something like a sob in her throat.

The man's glance lingered hungrily on the shining helmet of her hair, all pale gold like a halo in the moonlight, and pin-points of red light glowed within his eyes.

Roughly he caught her arm again.

"Why do you hold me off?" he asked hoarsely. "Didn't you come here to me to ask for my help? I was angry when you came, for I had sworn that no woman should ever come on board, but now I'm going to keep you with me. I want you—you lovely thing! You're not frightened of my love?" and he broke into a disconcerting laugh that caused her to shrink away from him.

"No, no!" she breathed, her eyes soft and shining as the stars above. "Not frightened—only it is all so strange, so wonderful! I think I loved you the first moment I saw you in the café last night. I knew then that you were good and splendid, even before—before you saved me. But I never dreamed that anything so wonderful could ever happen to me in

the world as staying with you, being married to you!"

"Married to me!"

Bruce Rivers dropped her hands suddenly and he looked at her with a queer smile. Almost automatically he reached out for the champagne bottle that stood in an ice-pail on a small table close at hand, and drained off a glass. Then a swift gust of laughter shook him.

"Married to me?" he repeated. "Why yes, you shall be married to me!" he cried boisterously. "Married this very night! You must drink with me to our marriage, little Ray of Moonlight! Now, at once—at once!"

His manner was odd, but then, everything was so strange and wonderful to-night. Life was vibrating about her in a whirl of unreality. She seemed to see his dark and handsome face through a haze, all touched with shifting lights of rose and gold. The champagne he made her drink but added to the sense of unreality.

To marry him at once—to-night! Something within her shrank back aghast—and yet, after all, why not? She loved him, once and for ever. Though she lived for ever, she knew that she would never change. At that moment when he had rescued her from the *patron's* lash, she had given her heart and soul into his keeping. Why, then, should she not give herself?

He had rung a bell that was on the table, laughing silently to himself.

"Send Mr. Rendle," he commanded the steward who appeared, "and come back yourself."

A moment later and the officer who had first discovered her presence on board stepped forward, saluting. He cast a swift glance in Ray's direction. The row that he had prophesied that morning had occurred earlier in the evening. Was this girl going to get him into further trouble?

But this time the owner greeted him with a genial laugh and a slap on the back.

"I've got a job of work for you, Mr. Rendle," he cried boisterously. "It is not reckoned in a first mate's certificate, but it is something better. I'm told you were a clergyman before you took to the water, and that the men call you 'Parson Bill.' That so?"

The man flushed a little nervously and bowed.

"Yes, I was an ordained clergyman, but I ceased——"

"I'm not interested in your reasons for changing your profession," Rivers

curtly interrupted, then he broke into his sardonic laugh again. "All I demanded when I engaged you was that you should be properly qualified, and swear never to let a woman come on board my yacht. That promise you've broken. But I'll give you a chance to wipe out your fault. If you haven't forgotten how to spell the marriage service, you can marry me to this young lady—here and now!"

A startled exclamation broke from the lips of the ex-clergyman officer.

"But, sir——" he protested, "a marriage is a matter for the captain——"

Bruce Rivers whirled round on him.

"It is a matter for whom I choose," he snapped, "and as you have been a clergyman, I choose that you shall do it." He turned round on Ray with a queer smile. "Wouldn't you rather be married by a parson even if he doesn't wear the uniform?" he demanded.

She shrank a little, scarlet in her embarrassment. Why was he behaving so oddly?

"Wouldn't you?" he persisted with a grim smile. "Come, don't be shy, it's too late for that, my beautiful. Good heavens! you're blushing!" he ended in amazement.

For a second he stood staring at the embarrassed girl, his brows drawn together in a puzzled frown, then abruptly he shook himself as though casting away some burden of uncertainty, and laughed again.

"Come on, Rendle, we're waiting."

He placed himself beside the girl and took her hand in his.

Again the other man hesitated.

"I've no book, sir," he said sullenly.

"Well, haven't you got a memory?" Rivers barked at him. "Pull yourself together, Mr.



They had been married only one day, yet a mysterious telegram called him from her.

Rendle, and go ahead. There are two stewards as witnesses."

He beckoned towards the two white-coated men who hovered in the background and came forward at his nod.

"Very good, sir."

The first officer swallowed hard, then standing up very stiffly, he began to say the words of the marriage service.

Ray stood there, transfixed, hardly breathing as the unfamiliar words fell upon her ears. Again that sense of unreality gripped her. This was a dream, a beautiful, mocking dream—and presently, she would awake to find herself once more in her hard attic bed in the Café de Paris. . . .

The first officer was asking Bruce Rivers: "Wilt thou take this woman to be thy lawful wedded wife?" and his resonant voice with a note of grim amusement in it responded: "I will!" Inaudibly, she herself was stammering words that were repeated to her. There was a ring belonging to Bruce Rivers upon her finger, and then it was over. She was his wife!

There was silence. The first officer's eyes were fixed accusingly upon his chief. Rivers bit his lips, and then once more he laughed.

"Splendid!" he cried. "We really are much obliged to you, Mr. Rendle. Couldn't have done it better if you were marrying people every day. Steward, serve champagne all round. Let them all drink the health of—my bride!"

The two stewards vanished, silent-footed, Rendle hesitated as though about to speak, then, meeting his chief's eye, thought better of it, and stiffly saluting, walked away.

A sense of expectation caught at the girl's throat. Her hand went up to her bare neck while the man stood watching her, a peculiar smile in his dark eyes, quiet and calm like the brooding calm before a thunderstorm.

He gave a harsh and grating laugh.

"The farce is played out!" he said roughly. "I hope you're pleased!"

Before Ray had time even to ask herself the meaning of his strange words, he put out his hand and switched out the electric light that illumined that corner of the deck. Then his arms were about her and he had swung her up in her light dancing dress, holding her against him, so that she panted, breathless against his heart.

"Beautiful—beautiful!" he muttered hoarsely. "Mine!"

She quivered in his arms with a panic of swift fear that bade her break from him and run, fear that turned to a throbbing

ecstasy because she was captured and could not run.

For a moment he stood there holding her in his arms, while the soft luminous darkness surrounded them, and the scent of the exotic flowers on board swept across them in a drench of unbearable sweetness. Above, the great heavens were gemmed with stars. The arms of the man she loved were about her, his face bent over hers, his burning lips drawing nearer. . . .

In simple, unquestioning faith and love that was ready to give to the uttermost, Ray returned his kisses—then with a sudden abrupt gesture he put her from him, and turning, walked away blindly.

TORTURED BY REMORSE.

MORNING—the sea a sheet of molten gold, in front, the white villas of the Riviera coast, embowered in their groves of orange and lemon trees that wafted a breath of fragrance out to sea, in the veiled distance the mountains rearing their glittering, snow-clad crests of Monte Carlo!

But Bruce Rivers saw nothing of the beauty or the wonder as he sat staring at the dazzling gleam of sun on sea with frowning brows and lips set savagely together. Morning and remorse! The two often went together in the spinning progress of the world! Before now he had known shame for follies of the night before, had shrugged his shoulders and cast it from him.

But the emotion that was shaking him this morning, was something very different. This was shame that bowed his head.

What he had done had not been done knowingly. When on an impulse of decency he had rescued this girl from the whip of a brutal employer, he had taken it for granted that she was just what she appeared to be, in spite of her freshness and beauty, an ordinary dancing girl. Who ever dreamed of innocence or purity in a cabaret on the Algerian coast? As well expect to find white lilies growing on a muck-heap! And then, when she had followed on board his yacht, he had imagined that she had followed deliberately to try to attract him.

But that was no excuse. Last night, when she had lain in his arms, and told him the story of her life, confessing how he had come into the café like a deliverer, on whose chivalry she had felt that she might safely throw herself, something had seemed to snap within him. Suddenly he knew that she was sincere in what she said. She was all that he had thought she could not be. White flowers did sometimes bloom on muck-heaps!

From that moment a burden of agonising remorse had devoured him. Poor little innocent girl! He covered his face with his hands. In her eyes he himself was chivalrous. What a cad he had been!

That ceremony on which he had insisted out of a sense of bitter humour last night—she believed that it had made her his wife! How could she know anything about that other girl who had taken his heart and broken it, taken his money and jeered at him, taken his name and made it a byword—taken everything and finally tried several times to take his life, so that at last he had been forced to send her to a private asylum?

That girl with her cynical, mercenary, unscrupulous mother—they had both angled for him though they knew of the taint within the veins of the lovely, corrupt girl whom he had made his wife—they had broken him, destroyed his faith in the whole of their sex, and because of his hurt he had vowed in his bitterness and madness that other women should pay.

And the girl was his wife, must remain his wife, because she had given him no cause for a divorce! For the rest of his life she was tied as a burden upon his shoulders, that girl in the madhouse. . . .

He gritted his teeth and the laughing, gilded world seemed bleak and desolate about him. The glorious sunshine was without light or heat. How might he undo the wrong that he had done? When Ray discovered what she must discover, her life would be broken just as his had been broken. How would she, without a friend in the world, bear the discovery of his perfidy? He imagined the loathing with which she would recoil from him, and that he could not bear.

THE FATAL TELEGRAM.

FOR facing facts squarely now in the clear morning light, he knew that in a single night he had grown to love this girl on whom he had played so dastardly a farce.

Last night her beauty had stirred his senses, moving him to madness, but now that he had glimpsed her sweet simplicity of soul, the sweetness of her was like a draught of healing balm on his poisoned soul.

"Ray!"

She had come up behind him softly, laying her fingers from behind over his eyes. His voice was harsh with emotion as he cried out her name. He caught her hands and held them up against his lips. The contact roused an aching madness within him.

"Don't you want me here?" she asked,

her quick ear catching the harshness of his cry.

He drew her swiftly into his arms.

"I want you with me for ever and always!" he said hoarsely. "Ray, my beautiful one, I love you—love you! Tell me you'll never, never go away from me?"

He felt the sharp intake of her breath.

"I'm your wife—I belong to you!" she whispered against his shoulder.

Abruptly he put her from him and rose to his feet. His wife! How was he ever to tell her the truth? He bit his lip. He would not tell her! She must never know. Why need she know? He could not do without her now. He would not let her go—he would keep her with him, by force if necessary.

It was the only way in which he could atone for the wrong that he had done her. His dark brows drew closer together as he thrust his clenched hands deep into his pockets.

"Why do you look so stern? You're not angry with me, are you?" asked Ray timidly.

Now that some of the glamorous mists of the night had been cleared away by the clear, hard light of morning, there lurked at the back of her mind the memory of his fury when he had first seen her on board.

"No, of course not! Put that idea out of your head!" he answered curtly. "Now, if you're ready," he added, "I'm going to take you ashore to Monte Carlo, just to buy you a few clothes. You can't go about in that dancing dress, you know!"

Hastily she pulled her long, dark cloak more tightly round her.

"I'm ready," she answered in a stifled voice.

He helped her down into the launch that was waiting, and they shot out over the gilded water towards the white villas embowered in orange and lemon groves.

Presently Ray was treading the soft carpets of a world-renowned *atelier*, while an assistant welcomed them.

"I want an outfit for my wife—the very best of everything you've got in the place," Bruce Rivers announced brusquely.

Mannequins were called to display before the girl's rapt and astonished eyes the latest, most expensive creations of Paris and Vienna. Sometimes, in an awed whisper, in response to the man's questions, she indicated the dresses that pleased her best, and he smiled his approval. They were without exception the simplest, and generally, had she but known it, the most costly.

He was proud of her, and prouder yet when she emerged from the fitting room in her simple suit of beige and rose, in cobwebby silk stockings and dainty, high-heeled shoes to match, with that appealing little air so irresistible to most men, of being lost in her big collar of silky beige fox fur.

"But Madame is exquisite, an unforgettable picture!" exclaimed the saleswoman, and her admiration was not altogether roused by the enormous cheque that Bruce Rivers had just signed so casually without disputing a single franc. The rest of the order—the gossamer chiffons of the evening frocks, the gleaming satins of trim afternoon toilettes—was to be delivered at the Hotel des Anglais.

Ray seemed to be treading on air as they went out again into the blue and golden morning. It was incredible that she should be the same girl who had fled, only two nights ago from the Café de Paris. Incredible that in so short a time life should have poured out all its riches at her feet—love and wealth and happiness, a husband who adored her and whom she adored! He filled the whole world as she walked along beside him, utterly wrapped up in him so that she was unconscious of the glances that followed her.

But Bruce Rivers was conscious of the attention that she attracted, and his heart swelled with pride and love and bitterness. If only he could have taken her back with him to England, installed her as mistress of the fine old Elizabethan house that stood now, silent and deserted, amid the New Forest!

Grimly his mouth closed. Those were dreams that never could come true. Meantime, sufficient for the day was his present happiness—tortured as it was with remorse.

The day sped past on wings of gilded happiness. They spent the afternoon motoring amongst the hills. They watched the sun go down in clouds of flaming rose and mauve, with streamers of gold and purple flaunting across the amethyst sky. And then, as the chill wind of evening sprang up, they went back to the town below.

They dined in the restaurant of their hotel, one of the most famous and expensive on the Riviera. For the first time in her life Ray wore an evening dress, a dream of glistening silver lamé with pearls about her neck and arms.

Her face glowed with excitement, and Bruce Rivers watched her with eyes of brooding fire, glad that he had asked for a table in an alcove, so that she had not

to stand the cynical glances of the people about them.

After dinner they would dance together and he thrilled at the prospect. He would not take her into the sordid atmosphere of the gaming rooms. Not that he was afraid for her. After her years in that little Algerian town nothing could scathe her, but—

His thoughts were interrupted suddenly by the arrival at his table of the first officer from the yacht, who handed him a small envelope.

"A telegram just arrived, sir. Captain Macdonald thought you should have it at once."

Bruce Rivers took the dispatch and tore it open; an involuntary exclamation rose to his lips.

"Your wife has disappeared," ran the typed words. "Come back at once."

BITTER DISILLUSION.

He pushed back his chair, aware of Ray watching him with wide, concerned eyes.

"I shall have to get back to England," he said abruptly.

She gave a quick cry of joy and a flame leapt into her eyes while she clapped her hands excitedly.

"England!" she breathed. "You'll take me with you!"

"I'm afraid I can't do that," he answered slowly.

"Oh, but you must, you must!" she protested. "If you knew how I've longed to go back, to see the green fields and trees again! You can't leave me alone!" she added. "I—I couldn't bear it—now!"

He bit his lip hard. No, he could not leave her behind now. He would take her to London—leave her in an hotel there. It would be something to know that she was in the same country while he went down to that nursing home in the country and made inquiries.

He turned to his first officer.

"Go and get two sleeping berths on to-night's Paris express," he commanded.

Again Ray clapped her hands.

"Oh, I knew you couldn't leave me!" she cried softly. "It has been the dream of my life to get back to dear England—the only thing I really cared for—until I met you—wonderful you!" she ended softly.

The first officer re-appeared.

"There is nothing to be had, sir, on to-night's express," he reported. "Every berth and *couchette* is booked. I offered any sum they liked to name—I knew you would wish it, sir, but it was no use."

Bruce Rivers knit his brows.

"All the same I must go, if I have to

travel in the corridor all night," he said abruptly. He considered for a moment, then turned to Ray. "Sweetheart, you must come on to-morrow morning. I hate leaving you, but there is no other way. Rendle will look after you, and will travel with you to London to-morrow, and take you to Mulliner's Hotel in Mayfair. I shall join you there."

"I could travel with you in the corridor, too!" she put in eagerly. "Oh, let me come!"

But he shook his head determinedly.

"Impossible," he answered curtly and in a tone which showed her that argument was useless. "To-morrow you will be able to travel properly, in every comfort. You will stay the night in Paris and cross over the following day. I am not going to have you wearing yourself out by thirty-six hours of continuous, uncomfortable travel. Rendle will see that you have everything you want, and will escort you wherever you may care to go to-night. Now I'll have to rush."

He glanced at his watch, thrust a large sum of money into the hands of his first officer, and gave a few curt orders.

Then followed a swift dash to the station in a taxi, a few fierce kisses snatched, the screaming of the whistle, frenzied shouting of the guard, Bruce Rivers jumping on to the great train as it began to move out of the station. Then he was gone. Only the crimson gleam of the vanishing tail lights of the great train remained. Three whole days must pass before she would see him again—her husband whom she loved with every fibre of soul and body.

Rendle, the first officer, hovered discreetly in the background, his tanned face more anxious than usual, his disillusioned eyes wandering restlessly to and fro as he spoke.

Yes, answered Ray, she would go to the Casino since he suggested it. Nothing mattered until she should see Bruce Rivers again. It would give her something to do.

She was not tempted to linger in the painted, gilded, over-heated gaming rooms with the crowds of well-dressed men and women hovering hawk-like over the green tables and the spinning wheels with the little whirling ivory balls. Greed for money—how hateful it made them look! A thousand times better to be on the white terrace outside, fragrant



with the scent of carnations and the swaying mimosa palms that flung their scented gold dust in the breeze, and the deep purple sea splashed with the frayed gold and crimson blurs of the lights of the ships that rode at anchor, and the two toy lighthouses that guard the harbour. The Mediterranean—and over the other side—Africa, and the little Algerian seaport that bathed its feet in the blue waters, where

the coloured electric lamps of the Café de Paris fluttered and flashed and chased each other round and round eternally.

The Café de Paris and Pedro Renault and the Englishman who had saved her from the *patron's* whip. Only three nights ago . . . ah, no, it was all in another life. . . . And Bruce, her husband—her husband—speeding back towards the shores of England. . . .

She became aware that Rendle was talking excitedly beside her, and with an effort she brought her attention back to the man whom her husband had left to look after her.

"I've got to tell you," he was muttering hoarsely. "I can't keep it in any longer. It isn't right. You've got to know if he kills me for it."

Her eyes turned on him with amazement. What was he talking about?

"What is it, Mr. Rendle?" she asked gently.

"It's you," answered the man hoarsely; "you're so young. That farce of a service he made me go through last night. . . . I shouldn't have done it. I didn't properly realise. He is a devil without a heart, and he hates women—hates them, mind you! To him they're all alike—just playthings, not to be thought of seriously."

"What—what do you mean?" There was a rising note of fear in the girl's voice. "A farce? I—I don't understand. Aren't you a clergyman like he said?"

"Yes, I was at one time—I suppose I am still. I never did anything to make them unfrock me. I just drifted out of it, that is all," returned the man. "I never was a saint, and I've sunk pretty low at times, but there are things that I can't stand. And this is one of them! I'd just got to tell you. If you stick to him, you've got to do it with your eyes open."

Ray shrank back while small fingers,

deadly cold, seemed to be running down her spine.

"But—but, if it was the marriage service and you a clergyman——" she faltered.

"That was all right. It was a bit irregular, but it could have been held as a proper legal marriage, only for one thing. Honestly, I didn't know it at the time, or I should not have done it without warning you. It was Captain Macdonald told me, and that telegram he had to-night confirms it. Mr. Rivers is married! He has a legal wife in England."

The girl turned on him fiercely with a shrill cry of anger and pain.

"No, no! That is not true! I'll not believe it."

She stamped her small silver slipper, and the man was amazed at the scorching anger of the glance she turned upon him.

She put up her hands as though to ward off something evil.

"I don't believe it!" she repeated shrilly; "it is not true. A wicked lie!"

"It is true!" The man caught her hands, and somehow, deep down within her, Ray had a sickening consciousness that he was indeed speaking the truth. "I wouldn't expect you to take my bare word," he went on huskily, "but this telegram—look! here it is in black and white. That is why he has gone back to England. He let it fall in the restaurant and I managed to pick it up. Look! Do you want any other proof?"

He smoothed out the crumpled telegram and held it out before her eyes in the light of a powerful electric lamp. The printed message stood out clear and distinct.

"Your wife has disappeared. Come back at once."

It was addressed to "Bruce Rivers, Steam Yacht *Capri*, Monte Carlo, France."

THE SHADOW OF SHAME.

THE world seemed to go black before Ray's eyes. In face of this proof she could not refuse to believe. She had believed that she was Bruce Rivers' wife, and she was—nothing!

A gasping sob shook her slim body. All the life died out of her. She felt cold, cold, alone in a world from which all light and warmth had vanished.

She had thought him good—and he had done this thing to her! She had trusted him, believed in him absolutely, and he had betrayed her, not caring!

Were all men vile like this? Was Bruce Rivers just the same as Pedro Renault? No, worse, ever so much worse. Renault had been honest. He had not pretended that he wanted to marry her. But Bruce Rivers had done this thing, had won her confidence, her trust—and then abused it!

She had called him husband, told him all her inmost thoughts, while he laughed to himself, and laughed at her for a poor, simple fool!

Rendle's voice sounded in her ears now.

"Don't—don't take it like that! Don't look so frozen. I shouldn't have spoken perhaps, when it couldn't be mended. But I had to. I couldn't see you go on like that."

Her hands clenched.

"I'm his wife!" she said dully. "I am!"

"No!" he denied.

"Yes—there can never be any other man. Even if he isn't my husband. I took vows. I'm bound to him!" she cried hysterically.

With an effort she pulled herself together, passing her hand across her eyes. She had got to get this thing clear in her mind, to think it all out, decide what was to be done.

Her small hands clenched on the marble balustrade, her eyes stared unseeing at the silvered amethyst of the sea enclosed in a semicircle of rocky hills where lights flashed like great fireflies. A burst of soft music drifted towards her from the white Casino, an orange tree flung the bridal scent of its waxen blossom over her like a veil. Bruce—Bruce Rivers who had called her his wife! "An outfit for my wife—the best of everything you've got," she remembered he had told that to the saleswoman that morning. She recalled his strong arms about her, the fire, the ecstasy of his kisses. She could not, would not, believe that deliberately he had done her wrong.

With a quick haughty gesture she turned upon the man beside her.

"I do not believe a word of what you have said!" she declared proudly, though her voice held an uncomfortable little quiver. "To-morrow I shall follow my husband to England, as he wished. He will tell me the truth."

* * * * *

The journey next day was a nightmare, in spite of the luxuries with which Rendle, carrying out his employer's orders, had surrounded Ray.

A never-ending journey, with the train loitering frivolously along the sunny, flower-decked corridor of the Riviera coast, leaving the sunshine behind, advancing reluctantly through a world that grew colder and greyer with every mile, a grey pall of depression settling ever closer about Ray's heart. She shivered at the dismal prospect of wintry fields and sullen skies about her, after a lifetime of fierce heat and blue skies and the hard, bright colours of Africa.

Paris was reached in a downpour, but there were two letters waiting for her at the quiet but expensive hotel. Two letters in which Bruce Rivers poured out his love and adoration in simple yet fiery words that warmed her shivering heart. Letters that held expressions of love—"My sweetheart—my little love. . . ." Words that she devoured hungrily and cherished in her heart—but never "*my little wife*." No, he had not written that at all in either letter.

She passed a sleepless night in the luxurious bedroom, with the night about her stabbed with the shrill noises of Paris. The next day she travelled to Calais and crossed the Straits of Dover—so different from the calm sapphire of the only seas she knew.

England! This was the homecoming of which she had dreamed, for which she had longed. And every moment a deadly, numbing depression squeezed her heart with icy fingers!

HIS TERRIBLE CONFESSION.

VICTORIA STATION was reached at last and then Mulliner's Hotel and—Bruce!

His arms were about her—strong arms, whose embrace seemed to promise to hold her for ever and always against the rest of the world, his lips were on hers, draining her will, plunging her into a delicious forgetfulness.

Ah, no! Not that! She must know—before the magnetism of him swamped her powers of resistance or overcame her judgment and her scruples. She managed to struggle free.

His eyes devoured her.

"My little love—my little love!" he whispered and would have caught her up again, but she darted away and set a small table between them.

"No, no," she cried, though her heart was beating so painfully that she could hardly articulate. "Bruce, there is something I've got to know!"

"What is there to know or care about except that we love each other?" His voice was hoarse, his eyes burning yet tender.

"Bruce, you don't call me your wife!" It was out now—crying passionately for a denial.

She saw a quick change pass over his dark face, a queer, startled look.

"What do you mean?" he asked roughly.

"Am I your wife?" she asked through dry lips.

"Didn't you take vows? Didn't Bendle marry us?" The man moved nearer. "Ray," he cried sharply, "what nonsense is this? Don't we belong to each other? Don't we love each other? What else matters?"

Again she eluded him. With a trembling gesture she held out the crumpled telegram.

"What does this mean? You've got to tell me—the truth!" she cried.

He took the wire and gritted his teeth.

"Ray—" he began.

"The truth!" she cried shrilly. "The truth! Have you a wife living already?"

He crumpled the telegram and tossed it in the fire.

"Ray, you must let me explain!" he cried hoarsely. "Heaven forgive me if I've done you any harm! I'd give my life to undo it if I could. I have a wife, Ray—at least, there is a girl who bears my name—but she is no wife to me. She is insane! I was tricked into marrying her. Her treachery killed me, heart and soul. But you've brought me back to life, my little love. I'll give my whole life to you. You're mine and I'm yours—for ever!"

Yes, she was his—for ever! Ray caught her lip between her teeth. Her face was ghastly white. His magnetism was upon her, all the fierce attraction of the man to whom she had given her love. Her head was dizzy, the room was swaying about her.

A knock came at the door of the private sitting-room.

"A very urgent telephone call for you, sir," announced the waiter. "I've switched it through to the next room."

"Wait here," Bruce Rivers said curtly, and went into the communicating bedroom. The only urgent message that could come to him there would be concerning his real wife. . . . He closed the door.

For a moment Ray stood rigid, her teeth biting into her lips, her nails cutting the palms of her hands. So it was true! He had a wife—a legal wife—and she—what was she?

But she was his—every fibre of her. She loved him and she knew that she was as wax in his hands. She would never be able to fight against him if their wills clashed. He would hold her against what

she knew was right, unless she escaped from him!

She cast a glance at the closed door behind which she heard him speaking in curt, quick sentences. Unless she escaped now——!

A convulsive shudder passed through her.

It was her only chance!

She stiffened with resolution. Swiftly she darted across the room and out into the corridor. The lift was waiting, and it carried her down, down... Like a flash she was across the lounge, out into the quiet Mayfair street.

Escape was her only thought, escape from the happiness she longed for yet dare not, could not take!

* * * * *

Shivering even in her big fur coat, Ray sped onwards through the wet, deserted streets. Constantly she glanced over her shoulder, fearing pursuit. She must get away from Bruce Rivers. She must not risk seeing him again until she had fought down the fatal attraction which he held for her.

She breathed more freely when, after crossing a great square with gaunt and dripping trees and innumerable motors parked along one side, she found herself at length in a crowded, busy thoroughfare once again. Amongst these elbowing, jostling crowds of women shoppers she felt comparatively safe. He would never find her here, among these people. There was not one who looked in the least like Bruce Rivers when she glanced about her, yet somehow she had the uneasy feeling that she was being followed.

She quickened her pace as much as she was able in the loitering crowds, hurrying past the brilliantly lighted shop windows. On and on she went, though her feet were aching and her head dazed with the ceaseless booming of the traffic. And still the pain that was tearing her to pieces would not be deadened.

Bruce! How she had clung to her belief in him in face of Rendle's accusations, in spite of that telegram; blindly refused to believe the truth, stifling the clear little voice in her brain that told her she was a fool! Bruce, the chivalrous knight-errant, who had rescued her from the patron's anger, could not be what he seemed! And yet he had done this thing to her, had gone through a mockery of a marriage while his wife was alive!

It was unforgivable the wrong that he had done her—unforgivable. Her idol had clattered down to the ground, smashed into a thousand fragments. The future had shone so fair before her—love-lapped days stretching away into a pearl and golden haze. And now—now

there was no future. She was here alone in an unknown country; her own country, but terrifyingly strange and crowded and vast. Alone—a stranger.

Her breath caught in her throat in a choking sob. A mist of tears rose to her eyes and brimmed over, blurring the lights about her, making everything dance strangely all around. Alone—always alone! Was this curse of loneliness never to be lifted from her?

During the long weary years of the Café de Paris she had been alone, except for the sympathy of the crippled Pierre. And of late nothing but men with burning or disillusioned eyes who clamoured for favours she would not give.

She shivered.

Those glancing stabs of pain



in her head sent her stumbling blindly forward, heedless of where she was going, with London sunk to a dull, far-off roaring in her ears. She did not realise the crowds and the traffic all round her, and stepped off the footpath right before two huge cart-horses dragging an enormous lorry.

She awoke suddenly to the clamour of voices and tumult of warning shouts, and stood still and helpless, gazing around in sudden panic. She stepped backwards. There followed a blow that seemed to send the universe crashing and reeling about her, a gigantic horse looming above her with its huge iron-shod feet.

A cry of pain and terror was torn from her pale lips, but she did not hear it. Stunned, sunk into black unconsciousness, she sank down beneath the horses' hooves.

* * * * *

Slowly she found herself struggling up from out of that well of suffocating blackness—blackness that seemed to wash over her in choking waves, blackness



As their hands met,
Ray did not guess
how strongly she
attracted him.

that was lightened only by a red-hot pin-point of pain that seemed to swell and expand and burst until it took possession of her whole body. There was a far-off roaring in her ears that died and lightened

to the murmur of voices, an intolerable weight on the eyelids that she had to lift, had to make the effort because someone was forcing her forward. . . .

"She is coming round," said a man's voice, and this time the words were clear and intelligible.

Her eyelids fluttered, closed again and opened while she looked around her in mute bewilderment.

There were three men standing round her, none of whom she had ever seen before. She was lying on a comfortable couch in a room that seemed to be furnished mostly with books stretching from floor to ceiling, and a big fire that blazed and crackled comfortingly in the grate. Her coat had been taken from her. Something lay across her chest all swathed round in white bandages—her own arm, she realised with a vague feeling of surprise.

Her eyes moved from one face to another, round the three men and back again to the one with whom she had started.

"What has happened?" she asked drowsily.

One of them held a small glass to her lips.

"Drink this," he said quickly, and then when he had set down the glass again, he answered her question. "You met with an accident in the Strand, and were knocked down by a horse. You have cause to congratulate yourself, young lady. Your injuries don't amount to much—a dislocated elbow that we have set for you, and a few bruises. You'll soon be as right as rain if you give the arm a rest. Feeling a bit better now?"

His smile was comforting and reassuring. She found herself smiling back at him a little wanly.

"Thanks, yes, I'm feeling all right," she answered weakly.

Things were coming back to her now, confusedly, then more clearly. Of course she had run out of the hotel, away from Bruce Rivers, not knowing or caring where she was going. A sense of her loneliness and desolation sent a shivering pain through her that was twice as hard to bear as the throbbing ache in her injured arm.

A swift gush of tears rose to her eyes, trembled on her lashes and rolled down her cheeks before she could dash them away.

"It has been a shock, of course," observed the doctor, eyeing her with sympathy, "but you'll soon be all right. You must get to bed with someone to look after you. I'll give you a draught to help settle your nerves. Now

we must get in touch with your people at once, and send you home. I expect they're on the telephone?" and he looked at her questioningly.

Her people! She had no one in London—except Bruce Rivers, and she was not going back to him.

"There is no one!" she answered with a choke in her voice. "I—I haven't any people. I'm—alone."

"Alone!"

It was only the doctor who spoke, but Ray became aware that one of the other men in the room was regarding her fixedly, while the younger one in the background who had been examining the books in the tall shelves, turned round quickly.

"But you must have someone—some friends in London?" said the man who had been staring at her so fixedly, in a queer tone.

"No! None!"

There was a note of alarm in her voice. Whatever happened she was not going to let them drag the name of Bruce Rivers from her. She had left him, because she was afraid of him—of him and of herself. She was not going back.

THE MINIATURE.

"I—I ONLY arrived in England this evening," she added.

"Then you are staying at an hotel?"

The hand of her uninjured arm clenched.

"No!" she cried shrilly. "No!"

"But, my dear young lady," cut in the doctor, slightly impatiently, "you must be staying somewhere!"

She shook her head and set her feet to the ground.

"I—I must be going," she stammered with firmly set lips. "Thank you."

"You can't possibly go alone," he interrupted brusquely. "You're not in a fit state to be left," and he looked at her shrewdly, appraisingly. It was evident that the girl was trying to conceal something. "You've got money?" he demanded curtly.

She nodded.

"In my bag—French money."

Thank Heaven she had that small packet of notes which Pierre had thrust upon her, as well as Bruce Rivers' money.

"But you hadn't a bag," interposed the older of the two other men. "When I picked you up and we carried you in here I saw nothing of one. It must have been lost in the traffic. You must let me lend you some money—or better still, I'll take you home to my house. My sister lives with me. She will look after you."

We have trespassed on the doctor's hospitality enough. Carfax is my name—Peter Carfax, and I live in Uppingham Square. Dr. Randolph—" he turned eagerly with a queer, suppressed excitement in his manner towards the doctor, "isn't that the best arrangement? I can promise this young lady the best attention."

The doctor gave him a quick, suspicious glance. Peter Carfax was a man of fifty or so, with a lined but still handsome face and hair just slightly grizzled at the temples. Was it just kindness of heart that dictated this offer? But Peter Carfax had a face that inspired you with confidence somehow.

"Why—why should you do this for me?"

It was the girl who spoke before the doctor had yet made up his mind what line to take.

"Because—" Carfax's eyes swept her face again with a queer, hungry glance, "because you're exactly like someone I used to know," he answered huskily, "someone I haven't seen for years. You might be herself come back to life again—or her own daughter," and there was no mistaking the emotion in his voice. "Won't you trust me?" he added rather wistfully as the girl still hesitated.

She knew no one else in London, and she was terrified at the thought of her continued loneliness.

"You're too good, Mr. Carfax," she began in a choked little voice. "I—"

"Then that is settled!"

Almost triumphantly he cut her short. He beckoned his younger companion forward, a pleasant-looking boy with close-cropped hair and clear blue eyes.

"This is my nephew, Reggie Carfax, who helped to carry you in here," he went on. "It was he who disentangled you from the hooves of that great brute. I thought for a moment it was going to do for both of you."

"How can I thank you?"

Ray lifted violet eyes that brimmed with gratitude to the tall, embarrassed young man who seized her hand enthusiastically.

"Oh—it was nothing, really," he stammered. "You must not listen to my uncle. It is splendid, you know, to see you like this—I mean to say not hurt—at least not much."

"Won't you tell us your name now, Miss—?" Peter Carfax hesitated.

"My name is Ray Fenning," she answered slowly, then paused with open mouth at the expression on the man's face.

"Ray!" he repeated excitedly, "Ray Fenning—Fenning? Then who in Heaven's name were your people—your father? And where have you come from?"

He leant forward towards her, his eyes burning with excitement, his fingers trembling.

"I—I come from—Algeria," she faltered. "My mother died there ten years ago, when I was eight. I—I don't know anything about my father. But—but why, Mr. Carfax?"

"Have you a photograph of your mother?" he asked hoarsely.

She nodded.

"Yes—a tiny miniature," and with her uninjured hand she pulled at a very slender gold chain about her neck, and drew out a slim and rather battered blue enamelled pendant from beneath her frock.

She turned it over to display the other side, which showed the portrait of a young woman, barely more than a girl, golden-haired and violet-eyed, with her hair elaborately dressed in the fashion of nineteen hundred and eight.

"You didn't—you couldn't have known her?" she added wistfully.

"My dear!" Peter Carfax had taken her free hand now. "I was sure of it the first moment I set eyes on you," he exclaimed excitedly, "though I told myself I was mad—that it couldn't be! Ray, Ray—my dear, my dear! To think that after all these years——" and his voice broke.

"But—?" she stammered, puzzled. "I don't understand."

"You're my daughter—my own little girl!" he answered hoarsely. "Oh, my dear, it is a long story and a sad one of misunderstanding and a man's unjust suspicions. Years ago, my dear, I divorced my wife—wrongfully as I afterwards learnt. The courts took you from her—you were only three years old—and gave you to me. It was a wicked thing to separate a mother from her baby, but I was harsh and sore and bitter because of my jealousy, because I had loved her so much and thought she had deceived me, I denied her her mother's right to see her child. Then one day the baby disappeared.

We found out it was your mother who had taken you, but she had disappeared abroad. I searched and searched and never heard a word. The next year the war broke out and I had to abandon my search, though I hoped against hope that you might both be sent back to this country. I got it into my head that you must be dead. I never thought to set eyes on you again. Then to-night I saw your face suddenly under a lamp in Regent Street, and I dragged Reggie after you, though he didn't know the reason why I wanted suddenly to go down to the Strand. It was just the likeness to your mother that drew me. Of course I never really dreamed—Ray, my dear, won't you kiss your father?"

Her father! After all these years of unhappy loneliness, to belong to someone, to count with someone, to have someone to care for and to care for her. Her father! Wasn't it just a fevered dream consequent upon her accident? She wanted to laugh, to cry, both at the same time. She tried to throw her arms about him, but was drawn up by a sickening twinge of pain.

Everything was blurred and swimming, and then somehow it was Reggie Carfax who was leaning over her holding her hand.

"So you're my cousin!" his voice was saying. "It is the most stupendous piece of luck that has ever happened to me."

But his voice was coming from far, far away, and swaying, whirling with the darkness, as overwhelmed by this new excitement, Ray fainted again.

* * * * *

If Ray had ever read the "Arabian Nights," it must have seemed to her as though she had stepped into the very middle of them. For so many years the drudge of the kitchen of the Café de Paris, now she was in London, the spoilt darling of a wealthy father, with servants to wait on her and money to gratify her every whim, lonely no longer.

And yet, was that altogether true? She had the love of her father, the friendship and the constant companionship of Reggie Carfax, her cousin, who had saved her.

There were Reggie's friends, a gay and laughing crowd, whom she was meeting constantly at dances, theatres and jolly



parties. She learned to play tennis and to drive a car, to order frocks and hats and stockings, to smoke cigarettes and drink an occasional cocktail. To all outward appearance she was like the others amongst whom she mixed, with whom she laughed and danced and amused herself throughout the London season, and yet—

There were secret places in her heart from which everyone was locked out, secret places where she herself did not dare to linger. In between the Café de Paris and the house in Uppingham Square there had been a colourful, golden dream, without substance or reality, a dark and shameful dream that brought the hot colour to her cheeks if, in an unguarded moment, she allowed her memory to stray, dark, but strangely, dizzyingly sweet!

PHANTOMS FROM THE PAST.

It was one night in late April when she found herself revisiting that secret room of memories. There was a dance at the house of one of London's famous hostesses, the first really important function which she had attended. Her father had gone with her to choose her dress, for Peter Carfax was a man of unerring and fastidious taste, and he meant that his lovely daughter should make something of a sensation.

It was a silvery frock that he had chosen for her, a bubble of moonlight, with an exquisite necklace and bracelets of coral and pale moonstones like kisses mixed with dreams.

Coming down the shallow marble staircase of the house in Uppingham Square, Ray had seen herself in a long looking-glass—and something caught suddenly at her heart.

It was so exactly like the frock that Bruce Rivers had chosen for her that day in Monte Carlo. Suddenly as Ray looked at herself, she seemed to see a dark face looking over her shoulder, a face with dark eyes burning like living flames, a strong, stern mouth that softened—softened and bent to kiss her shoulder. She seemed to feel the burning contact of that kiss. It was real—real!

With a startled, muffled cry she turned to find Reggie Carfax, a little flushed and shamefaced, behind her, his clear blue eyes burning as those other eyes had burned.

"I—I beg your pardon, Ray!" he apologised in a low, shaken voice. "I oughtn't to have done that, I know. Please forgive me!"

There was no time for any more, for Peter Carfax came down the stairs at that moment. He gave a little start at

the sight of his daughter's flushed and glowing beauty.

"You're lovely, child," he said in an odd voice, and his lips quivered slightly as with pain when he turned away. His wife—he was thinking of her mother. . . . Ray slipped her hand under his arm and they went downstairs together.

She felt her breath catching in her throat that night as she danced in the great double ballroom, massed with roses and hydrangeas beneath the lights of the glittering crystal chandeliers. Something was stirring within her that had been dead since that night when she had fled from Mulliner's Hotel like a stricken, wounded animal.

During her convalescence and ever since, she had been a beautiful husk of a girl with something shrivelled and withered inside her, but now—now—somehow the blood was leaping through her veins again, the soft, warm night was calling, throbbing with mystery and promise as she had never dreamed that the night in this northern clime could throb.

She danced with Reggie Carfax several times and after a waltz he drew her out on to a balcony fragrant with carnations, looking down on to the moon-silvered gardens below. She felt that he was trembling beside her, and suddenly he laid his hand on hers as it rested on the balustrade.

"Ray—you're wonderful!" he said, and his voice shook with emotion. "I know I'm a poor sort of chap compared with you, but I love you, Ray. If you could put up with me, I—I'd give my life to make you happy."

"Oh, Reggie!"

There was dismay in her voice and a sinister phantom of the past came charging against her, making her shiver as though icy fingers had gripped her spine.

She put up her hand.

"Oh, I wish you hadn't said that!" and her voice shook unsteadily.

"Don't—don't answer me yet!" he urged hurriedly. "Think it over, Ray. I promise you you'd never regret it. I'd make you happy—I swear it. And I think Uncle Peter would be pleased."

"You—you must give me time, Reggie!" Her brain was in a whirl, her blood racing. Marriage—and that garbled ceremony upon the boat, vows that were a mockery. . . . She trembled, grew hot and cold, thrust back so suddenly upon those secret places in her heart.

"We'd better get back to the ballroom. There is someone coming," said her companion. He pulled aside the brocade curtain and the girl stepped back into the great ballroom to find herself face to face with—Bruce Rivers!

LOVE DENIED.

TIME seemed to stop for Roy for a moment. The scene about her faded out, leaving only one face that filled her vision.

There was stupefaction written in the man's eyes, then suddenly a great joy that lit up his dark features like sunshine after storm.

"Ray!"

Time went on again. Around her were swaying, dancing forms, in her ears the saxophones, the crashing of drums.

At her side Reggie was watching with a faint surprise. Something was happening to her. Waves of fever heat swept over her, icy fingers passed over her skin.

"Mr. Rivers!" She forced the words lightly to her lips. "This is a surprise! I didn't know you were in London."

Had she said that naturally, just as though they were casual acquaintances? She mustn't let him suspect the tumult into which the sight of him had thrown her.

"You didn't know—I was in London?" said the man slowly. "Did you think I should go off again before finding you?"

An abyss seemed to be opening at her feet. She must not fall into it, must not let him suspect that he had any power to move her yet. Not that she loved him any longer. She hated him—hated him! she repeated fiercely to herself. How could she not hate the man who had treated her as he had done—the man who, having a wife, had gone through that mockery of a ceremony, taking advantage of her ignorance of the world, of her youth and inexperience?

Her head was held high. At least he could not see if her fingers were tight clenched beneath the silvery foam of lace that broke all over her skirt. Would it strike him how like this frock was to the one he had bought her? Oh, why was her head whirling like this just when she wanted to be so cold and distant and remote?

"I don't know that I thought much about it!" she managed to say at last.

But he brushed her coldness on one side with a brusque gesture.

"Why did you run away from me?" he demanded in a low, hoarse tone. "Ray, I've looked everywhere for you. You had no right to go like that. It was cruel—cruel."

Reggie Carfax had moved away from her. The dancers were whirling past to the loud noise of the syncopated music. They were isolated here in this little alcove by the window, isolated in the midst of a laughing, careless crowd.

She could feel the magnetism of the

man upon her. . . . She braced her shoulders.

"Cruel—no right!" she repeated with a laugh. "Aren't you—haven't you lost your sense of humour just a little bit, Mr. Rivers?"

"What has humour got to do with this?" demanded the man through his teeth. He made a despairing, desperate gesture with his hands. "You're right," he said dully. "I've no right to reproach you, no right even to speak to you. I would give anything in the world to undo the past—anything, if only I might make some amends!"

The utter blank despair in his eyes touched something within her, but she choked back the rush of feeling. She hated him—this man who had dragged her down and treated her like a plaything of no account. She drew herself up rigidly in her frothing, shimmering silver frock and her violet eyes held a steely point of light.

"The only amends you can make is to forget the past and to keep out of my sight for ever!" she told him coldly. "I never want to see or hear or think of you again!"

Her eyes sought out her cousin standing at a little distance and beckoned him imperiously. Then, as he hurried forward to her side, she brushed past Bruce Rivers without another word or even glance, her head held high, the colour burning in two bright spots in her cheeks. With bent head he stood aside to allow her to pass, then strode blindly away out of the room.

"That was Bruce Rivers, wasn't it?" observed Reggie, as he swept her off into the dance again. "I didn't know you knew him, Ray."

"I met him—in Algiers," she forced herself to reply.

"Is that so? Yes, I remember that he went off in his yacht for a long cruise in the East. Jolly rotten luck about his marriage, and of course he has no remedy, and not a chance of getting free. It is hard lines to be tied for life to a madwoman. And her people knew about it, too—they only angled after him for his money. His wife was a rotter anyway but clever enough never to give him a handle against her. The law ought to be altered so that a man could divorce a woman like that. If he had gone to the bad altogether I wouldn't blame him much."

Ray pressed her lips together. On her mouth she still seemed to feel Bruce Rivers' kisses, hot and burning, drawing her soul through her lips.

"Reggie, do you mind if we go home?" she asked abruptly.

He guided her at once towards a doorway.

"Rather not, if you've had enough," he answered. "Too big a crowd here for my liking, anyway. You're not feeling ill, are you?" he added solicitously.

"A bit of a headache," she lied.

"Then come for a spin in my car—somewhere right out into the country. It will do you good if your head is aching," he urged her eagerly.

"It would be lovely!" It was not her head but her heart that was aching. She felt she would be glad of the rush of the fresh air against her burning forehead. Perhaps it might help to extinguish the fever that was raging in her blood since her encounter with Bruce Rivers.

Must she always be lonely, always have to keep something shut up inside herself, something that hurt and tore at her like a poisoned barb? she asked herself as the car left London behind.

TRYING TO FORGET.

SHE had tried to thrust that man out of her life and had believed she was succeeding—until to-night! But it was only because she had been numbed as the result of all she had suffered. And now, now the numbness was gone, the ice about her heart was melted. She was terrified at the torrent that was raging through her.

She had to fight against it. If she met him again, she must not be taken unawares. She must be armoured at all points to resist him. Since she could not forget, it would be better to put another in his place!

On, on through the warm and scented night rushed the car, past hedges piled high with a burden of hawthorn, like perfumed snowdrifts. Reggie Carfax was so clean and straight, the very soul of honour, and he adored her. She was very fond of him, and nothing would please her father more than that they should marry. Supposing she put Reggie like a shield between herself and Bruce Rivers? Wouldn't he be a barrier even more effective than Rivers' wife? Would it be fair to Reggie?

They had sat almost in silence during the whole of the drive, and now they were nearing London again. Somehow Reggie seemed to have understood her need for silence without her saying a word. Presently they were back again in the house in Uppingham Square. Her father had gone to bed. There were sandwiches and lemonade on a small table in the hall.

Ray tossed aside her cloak and took a sudden resolution.

"Reggie," she said slowly, "you know what you asked me earlier this evening?"

"Yes?" Quickly he put down his unfinished sandwich. "Have—have you been thinking it over, Ray?" he asked eagerly.

"I—I don't love you, not—like that!"

She had seated herself on the arm of a great carved chair and was twisting one of the floating silvery cascades of her frock between her fingers.

"I couldn't expect you to care as I do!" he answered wistfully. "How could you? You're so wonderful, dear, and I'm just an ordinary sort of chap. If only you'll marry me, Ray, I'll do the loving and take my chance that one day you may come to care for me a little in return."

"You think that would be—fair?" she asked.

"It is all I ask."

How clean and fine he looked! Ray thought, as he stood there beside her, with his fresh-coloured face, his honest blue eyes and fair hair.

"I once loved another man," she went on in a low tone, plaiting and unplaiting the chiffon between her fingers.

He gave an impatient gesture.

"I don't want to hear," he said quickly. "That is your affair, Ray. I want the future—not the past!"

Slowly she raised her lashes and there was an expression akin to gratitude in the deep, violet eyes.

"In that case, Reggie," she said with a little catch in her breath, "in that case—if you're sure you really mean it—I'll marry you!"

"Sure? Oh, my dear!"

With a queer, hoarse laugh he swept her suddenly into his arms.

She tried to steel herself to his kisses. She had given him the right. She was through with Bruce Rivers, had thrust him finally out of her life, closed down a black shutter over that episode. She had promised to give her future into Reggie's keeping. She must not refuse his kisses.

Perhaps he felt the stiffening of the slim, young figure in his arms. She did not love him. She had admitted that frankly. Well, it would not be playing the game to take advantage! He gritted his teeth. Then his embrace slackened. He raised her hand to his lips and kissed it almost reverently.

Ray looked her surprise. He had set her free now and turned away. She could see the tension of his lips. On a swift impulse she flung her arms round his neck and kissed him on the cheek.

"Reggie, you're a dear!" she whis-

pered. "I—I believe we shall be very happy together!"

Then before he could say another word she sped upstairs, waving her hand to him from the landing.

She was bound now, pledged to marry Reggie. He was such a good sort. They would be happy.

Then, gaining the shelter of her room, she flung herself down on the bed and sobbed as though her heart must break.

* * * * *

So he had found her, and having found her again had lost her—for good!

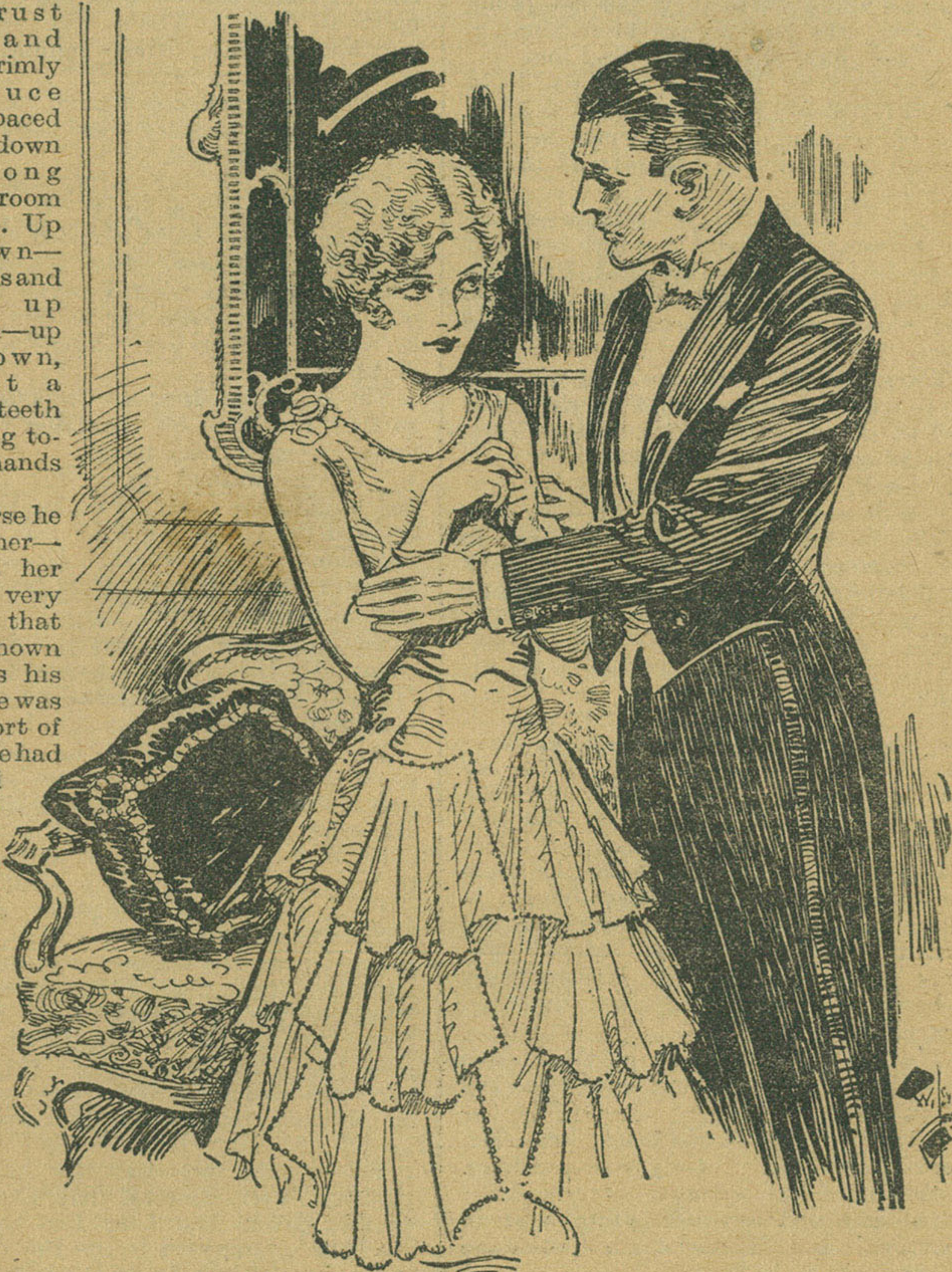
Slowly, with head thrust forward and mouth grimly set, Bruce Rivers paced up and down the long drawing-room of his flat. Up and down—backwards and forwards, up and down—up and down, without a pause, teeth gritting together, hands clenched,

Of course he had lost her—had lost her from the very moment that she had known about Iris his wife. She was not the sort of girl that he had assumed her to be at first.

His meeting with her to-night at the dance had been so utterly unexpected that it had thrown him completely off his balance. A meeting so

incredibly bitter-sweet, that his pulses were racing with the ecstasy of it, even though she had repulsed him so coldly, so haughtily.

Of course she had repulsed him! Would any girl with pride or spirit have done otherwise? And yet—and yet . . . In that first unguarded moment when they had stood face to face and recognition had been mutual, a flame had leapt up in her eyes, a starry flame such as he had seen in them that other night—such centuries ago! For a second he had looked into her soul and seen there a



Because she longed for forgetfulness she promised to be his wife, but she could never love him.

welcome that could only have been born of love—only for a second, and then a dark curtain had come down, the flames had gone out—deliberately extinguished.

Beneath her just anger, her wounded pride and shattered illusions there was love! And he could do nothing, because of the girl to whom he was irrevocably tied, because of Iris Rivers, who bore his name and who had tried three times to kill him, and who had escaped from the expensive mental home where he was having her looked after, and disappeared.

In all these weeks they had not found her yet. She had always been cunning, and one day she would find out his whereabouts in London, and no doubt would try to kill him for the fourth time, out of revenge because, when he had learned the truth, he had refused to live with her.

And she would always be there—a barrier between him and the girl he loved so madly! His lips tightened, his teeth gritted together as he resumed that endless pacing up and down and up and down.

Then suddenly came the loud whirring of the telephone bell, and at the other end of the wire the voice of the detective whom his solicitors had put upon Iris' track.

"Will you please come down to Seacombe, in Sussex, as early as you can in the morning, Mr. Rivers? I think I shall have something to tell you. I'm on the trail."

Then the trunk call was switched off, before he could get any answer to his frantic questioning.

DEATH—AND FREEDOM!

At nine o'clock the next morning, Bruce Rivers left Victoria for the tiny seaside village of Seacombe.

It was not so very far from the mental home where she had been living. If it was really Iris it was queer that she had not been discovered before. She must have covered her tracks very cleverly. Cunning, always cunning! His lips closed grimly.

The detective met him at the station with a car. He would not add any details.

"You'll have to identify her, Mr. Rivers," he said. "Only you can do it. Here we are."

The car had stopped before a small country inn. There was a policeman waiting in the hall.

"This is Mr. Rivers," the young private detective explained.

The constable nodded.

"You'll have come for purposes of identification, sir?" he asked.

He took a key from his pocket, led the way to a door concealed behind a curtain, unlocked it and closed it quickly behind the two men as they entered.

There was a long, plain deal table in the middle of the room on which was laid a mattress. On the mattress lay a figure covered with a sheet, and quickly the constable jerked away the sheet.

Bruce Rivers gave a quick exclamation and stepped back at sight of that terrible figure, distorted with the evil smile upon its face. There was something horrible, fantastic, utterly inhuman about it . . . and yet so familiar.

Quickly he turned aside.

"Do you identify the body, sir?" asked the constable.

"Yes. It is my wife, who disappeared three months ago."

"There is no doubt about it, sir?"

"None whatever. She has a cousin who will confirm what I say. There is no need to get down her mother. Spare her that! Tell me everything," he added abruptly.

The constable drew up the sheet again so that the body on the table was concealed decently once more.

"It was washed up by the tide late last night, sir. Mr. Franks here discovered the corpse when he was wandering about on the rocks. Doctor certifies that the body must have been in the water for four months."

The constable unlocked the door, and thankfully Bruce Rivers emerged into the fresh air again. Poor Iris—the victim of a tainted heritage!

His heart softened as he thought of her life foredoomed to misery and madness. Poor, poor Iris to end like this! He went and sat apart with his fingers over his eyes to try to blot out the memory of the thing which he had seen.

Poor, poor Iris! Forgotten and forgiven was all the misery which she had brought him, the deliberate trickery that had tied him to her. Forgotten were her tempers, her attempts upon his life. Something caught at his throat. Poor, poor Iris. . . .

It was not until some time later that he suddenly realised that he was free.

* * * * *

The inquest was over, the burial service was over, and all that was mortal of Iris Rivers had been laid to rest in the little churchyard in the Downs, while the man she had married sped back to London in the train.

He had been sorry for her fate, but it

would have been sheer hypocrisy to pretend grief now that he was free to go to the girl he loved and who, he believed, still loved him, and to lay his heart, his life at her little, dancing feet—his wife!

Incredible that it could be so. And yet it was! She was his wife, had become so through an irregular marriage that would have to be regularised, but his wife!

For, from all the proof that had been brought forward at the inquest, Iris must have been dead a week before that ceremony which he had insisted upon Rendle performing on board his yacht! He had not known it, but even then Iris had been dead. Poor Iris—but by her death she had at least righted a great wrong done to the living.

The shame and humiliation which Ray had suffered, had been suffered needlessly. That marriage ceremony had not been the farce she believed it. He could imagine the burden that would roll from her shoulders when she knew.

And now—now there was no longer any barrier between them. He was going to her at once. He knew a warm glow at his heart as he remembered that flame which had leapt up in her eyes at the unexpected sight of him. She would forgive him now because love forgives all.

They would have another wedding ceremony of course, because there must be nothing hidden in their love. He wanted to display her proudly before all the world as his wife.

He leapt from the train before it had stopped and hailed a taxi outside Victoria Station. Peter Carfax's daughter! Yes, of course, he had found that out from his hostess at the dance that night and the pitiful story of Ray's mother's flight with her baby girl. No doubt Peter Carfax would insist on some time elapsing before they went through that other wedding ceremony out of deference to public opinion and Iris's memory, but he would not insist on too long a wait, for every one knew about Iris. . . .

Uppingham Square at last! Yes, Miss Carfax was at home, the butler told him, and with tumultuously beating heart Bruce Rivers found himself ushered upstairs into a little sitting-room filled with the long blue shadows of dusk.

"Mr. Rivers," announced the man, and retired.

Swiftly Bruce Rivers crossed the floor to where she stood in shimmering white in a little glow of amber from the solitary lamp.

"Ray!" he began huskily. "I had to come at once. There is something—"

And then another younger man got up

from the chair in the shadow where he had been sitting.

"You must excuse me," he broke in quickly. "I'll have to be going. I'll be back in an hour's time, Ray."

He moved towards the door, but the girl made a little gesture to hold him back.

"Just before you go, let me introduce you," she said, in her sweet, slightly husky voice. "This is Mr. Rivers—my cousin and fiancé, Reggie Carfax!"

TOO LATE!

HER fiancé!

In the exquisite little room where the long blue shadows of dusk lurked amongst the delphinium blue brocades, and one lamp only splashed a pool of golden light on the shining helmet of Ray's hair, there was silence for a moment—a silence that seemed to Bruce Rivers to spin itself out into a long fine thread that wound round and round his brain, strong as silk, binding him, stifling.

"How do you do?" said Reggie Carfax politely. "I know your name, of course, though we've never happened to meet before. Sorry I'm just going." He turned to Ray. "I'll be back in an hour. Then we'll have some dancing and supper somewhere."

He did not take her hand, but a smile passed between them, a smile that betokened intimacy and understanding, and jarred Bruce Rivers' nerves. Her fiancé!

However he managed to return young Carfax's greeting, and then the door closed and he was alone with Ray.

He moved a step closer.

"Ray," he began, but with a cool little gesture she waved him back. Her expression had changed, the friendly smile had vanished. Her face looked hard; she was a proud little figure that might have been carved in ivory instead of flesh and blood.

"You had no right to come here," she said in a voice that sounded like ice. "I told you that I did not wish to see you again. You have no right to force yourself upon me in my father's house, or indeed anywhere else."

"I had to come!" answered the man hoarsely. "Ray, I've come to tell you something that could not wait. The girl who bore my name is dead. I have come to tell you that I am free to claim you as my wife!"

What had he expected her to do, to say? He hardly knew. But somehow he had not been prepared for the sudden stiffening of her features and her slim body. His arms were held out towards

her. Now they fell limply to his sides again.

"You might have spared yourself the trouble, Mr. Rivers," she answered, very clearly and deliberately. "Did you not hear me introduce Mr. Carfax as my fiancé?"

The man made an impatient gesture.

"But you can't marry him, Ray!" he told her.

"On the contrary I am going to marry him next week. Everything is settled. All arrangements are made."

A cry of pain broke from the man's grimly set lips.

"But you can't marry him, Ray. Oh, my dear, my dear, don't you understand? I am free—free to claim you before the whole world, as my wife!"

She smiled, a chilly smile.

"It is a little too late," she answered slowly. "I have given you my answer. I am going to marry my cousin next week."

"But you don't love him!"

Fiercely the words fell from his lips like an accusation.

Imperceptibly she winced, then drew herself up.

"You are quite mistaken," she answered slowly. "I love Reggie and I am going to be very happy with him."

THE WAY OUT.

For a moment they looked at each other in silence, tortured grey eyes staring into violet ones, antagonists matching their strength against each other. Bruce Rivers had the baffled, frustrated feeling that the girl had let down a black shutter between them. He could not see into her soul any longer. He was on the outside—held off.

"But you loved me!" he muttered wretchedly. "You can't deny that, Ray. That Mediterranean night. . . . Ray, you're not the girl to change so quickly. You love me still!"

She laughed and it was like the tinkle of ice.

"An innocent, ignorant girl worked upon by gratitude to a man whom she thought to be a chivalrous knight-errant! I wonder you care or dare to refer to that, Mr. Rivers! Oh!" Suddenly she stamped her foot and the violet eyes flashed with a blue flame of lightning. "Go—go at once, and leave me alone in future. I would kill myself now rather than be your wife. I hate you. Now go!"

For a moment the man stood there rigid, his mind torn with a wild seethe of emotions. So that was how she felt towards him! He could not blame her. Any girl of spirit must have felt like that. Fool

that he had been not to realise it. But she was married to him—irregularly, but married! This Reggie Carfax would make her happy according to his lights—what right had he to come between her and her happiness?

"I see," he said slowly. "I—I hope you'll be very happy, Ray. You deserve to be! Carfax is the luckiest man in all the world."

Then he bowed, turned stiffly on his heel and left the room, going out into the dusk.

It was a soft, adventurous night with a ripple of excitement in the air—little vagrant breezes stirring unexpectedly round corners, laughing, hurrying off elsewhere. And Ray was going to marry Reggie Carfax! Soon they would be dancing together, her slim, yielding body gathered in his arms. Next week they were to be married. . . .

But how could she marry him with that ceremony standing between them, that ceremony gabbled by a discredited clergyman on board a yacht in the middle of the Mediterranean?

But supposing he held his tongue about that service, let her go on and marry her cousin, since her happiness lay that way, since she had finished utterly and completely with himself?

But his own silence was not enough. Every man on board the yacht had known. But none of them knew that the service was valid, none knew that Iris had died a week before—except Rendle!

Bruce Rivers strode on, through the streets, not seeing or caring whither he was going, shaken by the strife that was raging in his own brain. Rendle had abruptly resigned from his service, refusing to take a penny of the money that was owing to him, yet he had seen the man from time to time, dogging his own footsteps sometimes, skulking in side streets, never coming near enough to speak. Was Rendle driven by a conscience that had suddenly awakened because of the great wrong which, by his co-operation, had been done to an innocent girl?

Probably he knew about Iris's death. Would he be willing to keep his mouth shut so that Ray might marry the man whom she had chosen?

Bruce Rivers gritted his teeth. He dare not risk that! That newly awakened conscience of Rendle's might play havoc with Ray's happiness in the end. For himself, he must make any sacrifice that her well-being demanded, but he could not leave it at the mercy of anyone else. Rendle might get it into his head that it was his duty to enlighten Ray. . . .

That left only one way out. If he himself were dead, then nothing could ever

threaten the happiness or the peace of mind of the girl he loved so madly, of the girl who hated him and was, so strangely, his wife!

The only way out! He squared his shoulders and his mouth set, grim with resolution. Had there been any there to see, the expression in his eyes was serene, no longer tortured.

That was the only service left that he could render her, to get out of her way! When once he was dead, then she could forget. So long as he was alive, he would always be there, an ugly shadow between the girl and her husband, a shadow that could never be explained, that might grow and grow until the very foundations of her happiness were uprooted.

A few days would suffice him to set his affairs in order. He would wait until the morning of her wedding day, next week, just in case, by some miraculous accident, she should decide that she did not want to marry the other man. Then, when he knew that there could be no possibility of her drawing back, he would end it.

With a serenity of mind to which he had been a stranger for years, Bruce Rivers returned to his own flat, seated himself at his large writing table, and methodically began to set his affairs in order.

* * * * *

Her wedding morning!

So it had come at last—after hours of wakefulness which should have been so long and which, strangely, had passed in a flash. Well, she had willed it, Ray told herself. No one had forced her to this decision. Her father had been pleased at the idea of her marrying Reggie, but had not tried to influence her in any way, even suggesting, indeed, that she should take a little longer to make up her mind. No, the decision was her own. She had no one to thank or to blame but herself.

Yet, as she lay in bed last night, she had found herself praying desperately that the morning would never come. Lying there, she had indulged wild fancies. Supposing for once the dawn had not come, supposing that another day should never break!

And even as she had tantalised her tortured brain, through her windows, across which she had forgotten to draw the curtains, she had seen that first grim, desolate lightening of the darkness which precedes the dawn, and then a cloud that



was tipped with pink, and presently the whole glory of the morning was there in her blue and white bedroom.

White-faced, a little hollowed-eyed, she stared in front of her. Her wedding morning!

Why should she feel this shrinking?

Desperately she questioned herself. She was fond of Reggie. He would be good to her. They would get on well together. They would lead a pleasant, happy life together. Reggie was a worker, not an idler, but they would not have to live on his salary. Her father was giving her a marriage settlement that made her brain reel. They would have friends—lots of them. She would have a delightful house in a fashionable street not far away from her father.

Only there were things that could not be forgotten, things that left an indelible impress on the memory. It was easy enough to tell Bruce Rivers that she never wished to see him again, and true, she told herself fiercely. She did not want to see him. She hated him. She never would forgive him so long as she lived, but—she could not forget! Set her teeth as she would, force herself to think of other things, live in an endless whirl of social life and amusement, she could not forget!

Her maid brought in breakfast, but she could not eat it, only drinking thirstily a cup of tea.

She refused all assistance in the important matter of dressing. She could not bring herself to use the services of a lady's maid. She would dress herself. And, too, she wanted to be alone—until the very last minute.

She bathed and began to dress, putting on filmy underthings of triple ninon that floated like a soft cloud about her. What exquisite pleasure she would have taken in all her beautiful things a few months, even weeks, ago! But when one came down to the things that matter, life was all the same, in satin or in rags. Money, clothes and jewels—playthings only! They could not compensate for an aching heart. That night, on the blue Mediterranean, she had had nothing but a tawdry dancing frock—and a man's love!

Or so she had believed. She smiled bitterly. Only it wasn't love—a tawdry imitation matching with the spangles on her dancing frock. Yet when he had stood and faced her in her own little

boudoir the other evening. . . . No, no, no! She must not think of things like that. That way lay madness. She had put Bruce Rivers out of her life. She did not love him. She hated him. She was going to marry Reggie. Dear Reggie! What a good sort he was!

She turned to the looking glass, brushing out her golden hair until it shone like a halo about her head. How pale she was! She must not appear like that, Brides had to smile and look happy when they were "snapped" outside the church.

Desperately she rubbed some rouge into her cheeks. That was better. She traced the curve of her lips with a stick of carmine. That would do. Now she looked more like all the other girls with their glittering, polished surface that was never streaked by tears.

Her wedding dress was of softest satin of oyster white, all sewn over with tiny seed pearls, and falling in soft straight folds almost to her feet. Cobwebby stockings and little silver shoes went with it. A girdle of pearls was about her waist, pearls were about her throat and wrists—her father's gift, lovely, shimmering with the faintest flush of rose on their milky surface.

The cloud of her veil fell about her, held by the wreath of orange blossom—real orange blossoms—that stabbed at her with their memories of warmer, more southern climates, the delicate perfume of orange blossom, so sweet yet poignant, lying lightly over the Riviera coast.

Ray swallowed something in her throat and glanced at her watch. It was almost time! She would go downstairs to wait for her father. Perhaps he would be ready and waiting for her.

But he was not in the hall. She went down the magnificent staircase and caught a glimpse of herself in that long mirror—That night when she had met Bruce Rivers again. . . . Even here, it seemed, things held memories. In her new house there would not be any. Reggie would see to that.

Her hands clenched together, and a mist of tears blinded her. She must not cry. Brides did not cry.

Someone was talking excitedly in the hall. She had mastered her tears now, and could see clearly once again. That man whom the footman was trying to keep out. . . . There was something familiar about him. He had pushed his way past the footman, and with a cry of recognition he rushed across the hall towards her.

"Miss Ray, you've got to come—at once! He is dead!"

Her heart seemed to stop beating.

"Mr. Rendle—who—what are you saying?" she gasped.

The man tugged at her wrist.

"Mr. Rivers!" he cried hoarsely. "I—I meant to kill him. But he was first and shot himself. Come!"

A cry left her lips. Dead? No, no! She could not believe that! It couldn't be! Everything was swaying and shaking about her, going black. Not possible, no! Not that!

BROKEN BARRIERS.

SHE paid no heed to the astonished footman, but allowed the demented man to drag her across the hall and down the steps to a waiting taxi. Her father's car slid up to the door as the taxi slid away. Her wedding morning, but she had forgotten all about Reggie, all about the man she was to marry. . . .

Bruce Rivers dead! Shot by his own hand. . . .!

"You're his wife!" Rendle kept repeating again and again in her ear. "His wife! Do you understand—and he has killed himself for you!"

"He can't be dead!" she moaned. "No, no! He can't!"

"Don't you understand what I'm saying?" The man had caught her wrist and was shaking it to try and force her attention. "You're his wife! You couldn't have married another man if he hadn't done this!"

"His wife? What do you mean?" she cried shrilly, her attention held at last. "I'm not his wife. You know that. It was you who told me. . . ."

"Heaven forgive me!" muttered the man through his teeth. "I thought it was the truth I was telling you then. But I didn't know. His wife—the other girl was dead all the time—she died about a week before that night. You've been his wife all the time."

"What?" Just for a second she was startled out of her grief. "Is this the truth?" she repeated in a stricken voice.

"Yes. It was an irregular marriage, but it only needed to be regularised as a marriage at sea. I'm in Orders still. That made it right."

"Thank heavens! Oh, thank heavens!"

Even at that awful moment the girl was conscious of the loosening of that burden which she had borne upon her shoulders. She had been his wife—all the time!

A strangled sob broke in her throat, shook her slim body convulsively. His wife. . . . her husband! And he was dead by his own hand!

"But why didn't he tell me?" she cried shrilly. "Why didn't you tell me before?"

"I expect he thought you hated him for what he had done," answered Rendle. "I expect he thought that you loved this other man whom you were going to marry to-day. He reckoned he had done you enough damage, and didn't want you to be bound to him when you had come to love another man! He took this way out, so that there would be no barrier between you and Mr. Carfax."

Her fingers clenched. So that was why he had come to her the other night—to tell her that she was indeed his wife! His words rang in her ears again. "I've come to claim you—my wife!" And she had repulsed him, told him she didn't care, that she hated him, never wanted to see him again!

Lies! All lies! She loved him, wanted him with every fibre of her, body and soul! She was his—his wife! Yes, she had felt it in herself. That was why she had not been able to crush out her love. And he had killed himself—killed himself that she might be happy with another man!

Rendle was speaking again.

"It was only last night I found out about it—found out that you were his wife. I thought—Heaven forgive me!—that he meant to keep his mouth shut, and let you go to a man whose wife you never could have been. I thought he meant just to let things go their way, and I swore that he shouldn't harm you again as he had harmed you once before. So this morning I went to his place, meaning to kill him. I had a revolver in my pocket. Then I saw him, sitting at his writing-table with another one in his own hand. He pointed it at his forehead and fired—just as I opened the door. I shouted to his man to get a doctor, and ran to fetch you. We're here," he ended abruptly as the taxi jolted to a sudden stop.

Blindly the girl stepped out of the cab.

Rendle seized her arm and dragged her up the stairs to the flat where she would find him dead and cold . . . the man she loved . . . her husband! Her heart was thudding against her sides, the blood sounded in her temples like hammers. The whole world was swaying about her, the sunlight was without warmth or colour.

Bruce Rivers was lying stretched out on the couch, with a doctor bending over him. The doctor stared at the sight of her pearl-sewn dress, bridal veil and orange blossom . . .

With a shrill cry she was across the room and on her knees at the man's side, her arms flung out imploring, protecting.

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"Bruce!" she cried shrilly. "Bruce, my love—my husband! Speak to me."

And then, it seemed, a miracle happened. The man's eyes opened and looked straight at her. His grim mouth relaxed into a smile.

"Ray—now I can die happy!" he whispered.

"You're not going to die!" she cried. "I can't let you go. Bruce—my husband! I've come to you. I'll never leave you. I know everything!" She turned and flung herself at the doctor's feet. "You'll not let him go?" she implored and clung to his knees.

"He is not going to die!" The astonished man unloosed her hands, helping her to her feet. "Something must have disturbed him just as he fired. The shot never entered the brain. It glanced along the bone and came out again. Already his wound is dressed. I don't think I can be of any more immediate service. I'll come back later."

And the doctor vanished from the room, taking Rendle and the manservant with him.

There was a queer silence in the room.

Bruce Rivers' eyes were opened and fixed upon the face of the girl he loved.

"So I'm not going to die!" he said, a little bitterly. "I muffed it! I heard Rendle cry out as I fired. I suppose that made me start, though I thought my hand was steady enough. But Ray, I'm not going to take advantage of what I've heard you say. You thought I was dying or dead. It wouldn't be fair. When I get better you shall get rid of me—I swear to you I'll make it easy."

"You shan't get rid of me!" she cried. "You can't! We belonged to each other from the first moment I set eyes on you in the Café de Paris. Reggie will forgive me, Daddy will forgive me, but if they don't I don't care, because I love you."

His arms went round her like muscles of steel.

"After that," he whispered, "I'll hold you against all the world!" His lips drew near to hers. "My wife—my little love—my wife!"

(You have liked this novel, I know. You can get another novel just as good as this one by asking your newsagent for the current number of LONDON NOVELS, price 2d. Please tell him to keep a copy of LONDON NOVELS for you every Saturday in future.)

A COMING ATTRACTION!

PRIMROSE FALLON drew her hand across her brow in an effort to realise what she was doing. Some unseen force was urging towards the sofa, telling her to raise the blue cushion lying on it . . . She lifted it up a few inches, felt beneath it . . . something cool was in her hand, a string of pearls.

What was she to do next? Then suddenly a voice whispered in her ear—not a voice from without, but an inner voice. It was telling her to do something, and she was afraid. It was influencing her to evil—and she was not strong enough to fight against it.

Furtively, still with the pearls in her hand, she glanced round the room, and then turned and hurried out into the passage, obeying the impulse which told her to go upstairs to her bedroom.

Once there she sat down, feeling unaccountably weary.

Her head felt strange, blurred . . . but gradually the objects in the room became clear again; she could make out the wardrobe with its gilded corners, the dressing-table.

A breath of cool air came to her from the open window, and she felt it gratefully—felt, too, something warm and smooth in her hand and looked down at it.

Then she sprang to her feet. Full consciousness was coming back now with a suddenness that was startling. It was a necklace of pearls she held—pearls that she had seen round the neck of Mrs. Richardson, the woman whom she had helped the man she feared to entertain, pearls that she had stolen at his bidding!

She was a thief and he had made her so!

She had done this at his command, and it would go on! His influence over her was too strong. She would sink lower and lower until everything was lost—honour, self-respect. How could she escape?

This is a tense situation from "WAS SHE GUILTY?" which tells of a girl who was drawn into the clutches of a hypnotist and sought to be free of his toils. It appears in next week's "LONDON NOVELS"—out on Saturday, price 2d.



DEAR

MAMIE,

I'm afraid you will be wondering what has happened to me because I haven't written to you for such a long time. I received both your letters and the wire, but I could not answer them because I was ill. Please do not be alarmed for the worst is over and I shall soon be all right again, although I am afraid it will take me some time to forget the shock and horror of all I have been through.

I can hear you saying: "Good gracious, she has been in another scrape!" but it wasn't exactly a scrape this time, Mamie. It was more like a ghastly nightmare, and I'm sure it is a miracle I am alive to write this letter.

You can understand a little of what I have suffered when I tell you I have lost over a stone in weight and that my nerves are all to pieces. Often I wake up in the night screaming, and have to get out and turn on the light before I can convince myself I am safe in my lodgings and not in that awful place from which I thought I should never come out of alive.

I can imagine your face while you are reading this, and I can picture the look of amazement in your eyes when you have come to the end. I only hope such things will never happen to you.

And now for my story.

I don't know whether I told you that recently I have been working in an office near the river. Well, not many days after-

wards I came to the conclusion that the men who employed me were nothing but a pack of rogues.

From what I could see of their business it was a kind of company in which people had shares, but there was no capital—it was just a big hoax to get money for nothing.

I did not say anything, for it was nothing to do with me, until such a nice boy named Johnson came into the office one day and invested, or rather was going to invest, a lot of money in this company.

I had overheard a conversation between two of the partners shortly before he arrived, which aroused my suspicions, and I made up my mind to warn him when he came in again.

He was only a boy, Mamie, about my age, or a little older, and I found him charming.

He began talking to me while he waited to see one of the men, and I seized my opportunity. Making sure the door was quite closed, I went up to where he sat on the edge of my table.

"Don't buy any of those shares!" I whispered.

He stared at me.

"But why not?" he asked.

"They're absolutely safe."

"They're not," I whispered again;

"this company is a fraud. I know, for I heard these men talking."

He looked at me very strangely for a minute.

"Are you sure?" he asked anxiously.

Ruth was an unsophisticated girl when first she came to London to earn her living. Little by little she began to gain knowledge of the great city and its ways, and in these letters to her friend Mamie, she tells what happened to her, and how experience taught her the dangers to avoid.

"I'm positive," I replied. "Oh, do be warned in time!"

I think I took his hands in mine as I spoke for I was so anxious to help him, and he just held them very tightly for a second.

"I'll take your word," he said at last in a grave voice. "Thank you so much. My father would have been furious with me if I had dropped money. I only did it to show him I am not so foolish about financial matters as he thinks. I say, can't I see you to-night? I'd like to—when you've finished your work here. May I call for you about six? I'm so grateful to you."

Well, I promised to see him that evening after office hours, and I went back to my typing, feeling much more happy and comfortable in my mind about him. I couldn't forget his brown eyes and crinkly hair, and the boyish smile I thought so charming.

He left the office without seeing any of my employers, and as they knew he was coming, they asked me a lot of questions. Of course I did not tell them what I had done, but one of them, a little thin-faced man, looked at me in an odd way.

"Come into the other office before you go," he said. "I want you to make a copy of a letter for me. It won't take you long."

I was glad to get rid of them and went on typing, glancing at my watch pretty often to see how the time was going. I was anxious to meet my new friend again and tell him more about the affair.

A few minutes before I was due to leave I tapped at the other office door and was told to come in. To my surprise all my employers were there—four or five of them—and one of them turned the key in the door behind me.

I thought this was peculiar, and looked at him in amazement.

"Only a precaution," he said in a threatening voice, and answering the question in my mind. "We want to know a few details which, if satisfactory, will not detain you long. What did you talk to young Johnson about when he came in to-day?"

"I—I don't remember," I stammered at last. "Nothing much—the weather, and things like that, I believe."

"Then I'll help you to remember," he said. "Did you or did you not tell him not to buy shares? Don't lie—because I heard you."

He gripped my arm as he spoke and I winced with the pain.

"Let go of my arm!" I said angrily. "What do you mean? How dare you speak to me like this? I shall go to the police when I get out and tell them all I know, you swindlers!"

Of course it was a silly thing to say, and I realised my mistake too late.

None of them spoke for a minute, then one of them got up from his chair.

"You see how it is?" he said slowly to the others. "She knows—and she means to give us away. There is only one way out of it. It answered before—it will answer now. It is a question of her—or ourselves."

I began to feel terrified then. I knew the door was locked and the offices practically deserted.

I turned to the door.

"Let me out! Open that door!" I said sharply. "You need not fear me; I never want to see this place again. I did warn young Mr. Johnson, but that is all I have told to anyone—or will tell."

One of the men laughed.

"We need a better guarantee than that," he said. "Pass me that paper, Falkner."

A piece of paper with several large seals upon it was pushed across the table, and the man who had spoken to me, picked it up and handed it to me.

"Sign your name there," he said abruptly.

"Why do you want me to sign this?" I asked. "I refuse to do so unless you explain."

Another man rose from his chair.

"You had better sign, my dear," he said, in a familiar manner, "unless you want us to take stricter measures. By signing that paper you become one of us; you draw the same dividends and share the same risk."

Then I understood. They meant to trap me so that I could not go to the police.

"I will not sign it!" I said.

One of them rose and opened a door on the other side of the room.

"Then you will stay here until you do," he said threateningly. Two of them seized hold of me, and in spite of my struggles pushed me into another room beyond and locked the door.

I heard their voices for some time in the other room; then they died away. I tried the door, but it was locked, while the window was nailed down, so

it appeared they intended me to stay there all night.

I thought of young Mr. Johnson, and wondered if he would wait long for me, but there seemed no way of letting him know where I was.

I was cold, so I curled up in an old armchair. It grew quite dark, but suddenly from near the door I saw a gleam of light. Someone was unlocking the door!

For a moment I was scared, but I gave a gasp of relief when I saw who it was. It was one of my employers who came in and switched on the light.

He came over to where I was sitting.

"Had enough of it?" he asked.

"I think you and I can settle this little matter between us."

"Have you come to let me out?" I asked.

"If you agree to my terms," he said.

"Tell me what you want me to do," I said. "I want to go home."

He patted my arm.

"I always liked you; you're a very pretty girl," he said. "Supposing you and I cry quits, and I'll let you out. Come and have dinner with me."

I jumped up. A different kind of fear took possession of me.

"I absolutely refuse," I cried, for I had always disliked him.

He sat down, facing me.

"Either that or you stay here. I'll give you ten minutes to make up your mind," he said.

Mamie, as the minutes ticked on I tried to think what I could do. I couldn't bear the man, and being locked up was preferable to having to endure his society.

"No ill feeling between us?" he asked. "I never meant to hurt you. I had to go with the rest of them but I meant to come back and let you out. Be sensible."

I shuddered. There was something

horrible about the way he was trying to ingratiate himself with me.

Perhaps it was chance which made me glance at the window, but suddenly I felt sure I saw a face looking at me through the glass, and the strange part of it was it seemed familiar.

I tried to collect my wits, feeling that help was at hand. I decided to bluff.

Putting my hand into my pocket, I faced him and smiled. I had the instinctive feeling that if I played for time help might come.

"I am not afraid of you," I said, "and——"

I never finished the sentence. All at once the door was flung open, and young Mr. Johnson and another man came into the room.

I absolutely rushed into his arms, and he held me very tightly.

"Don't be afraid," he replied. "I'll settle with him later."

Then he took me down to the street, handed me into his car and tucked me inside.

As we drove away I told him my story. He said he had waited for me for some time, but thinking I was working overtime, called back for me later.

The night watchman spoke to him and they started to talk. Afterwards they saw a light and went to investigate; and a good thing for me that they did. Mr. Johnson took me to his home, and I stayed there the night. His father was good to me, too, and is getting me a job in his office, so out of evil has come some good. Later, I heard that the promoters of the company had been arrested and sent to prison.

Lots of love
from

Ruth

Ruth's next Confession appears in next Saturday's "London Novels."

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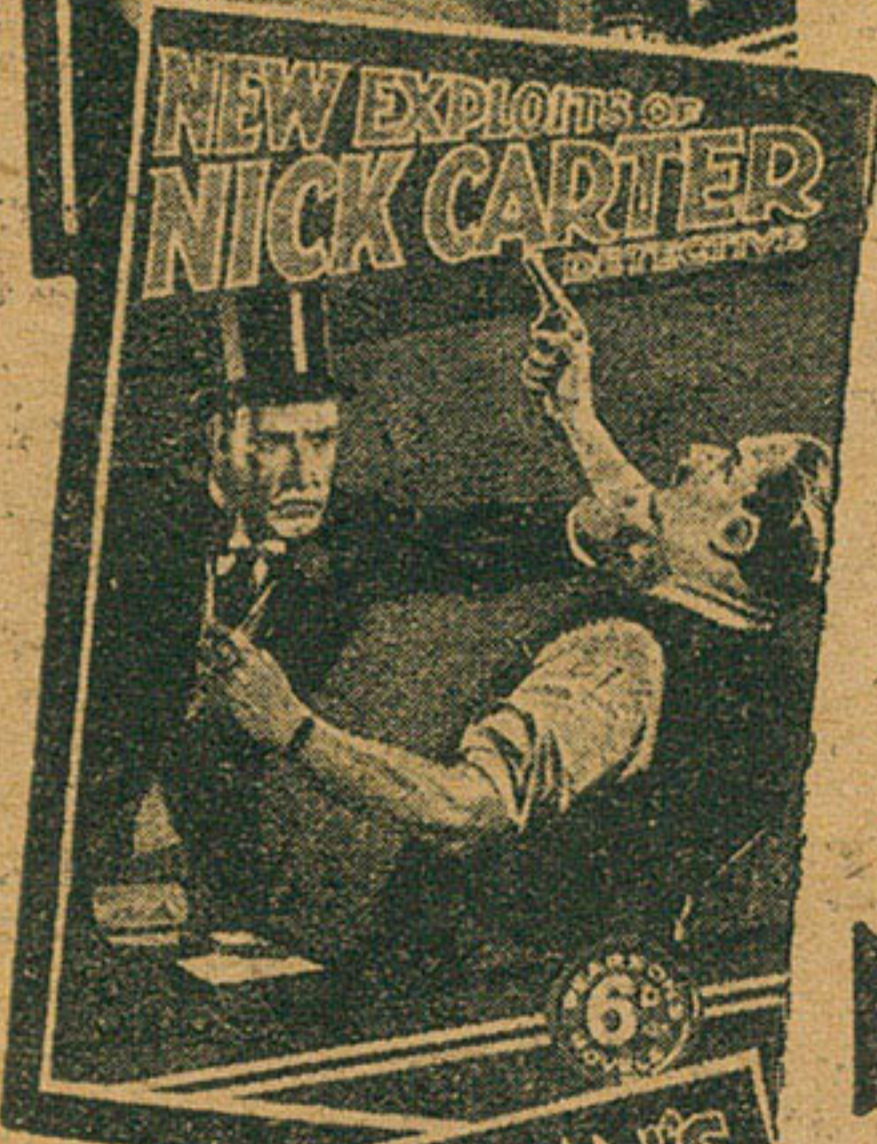
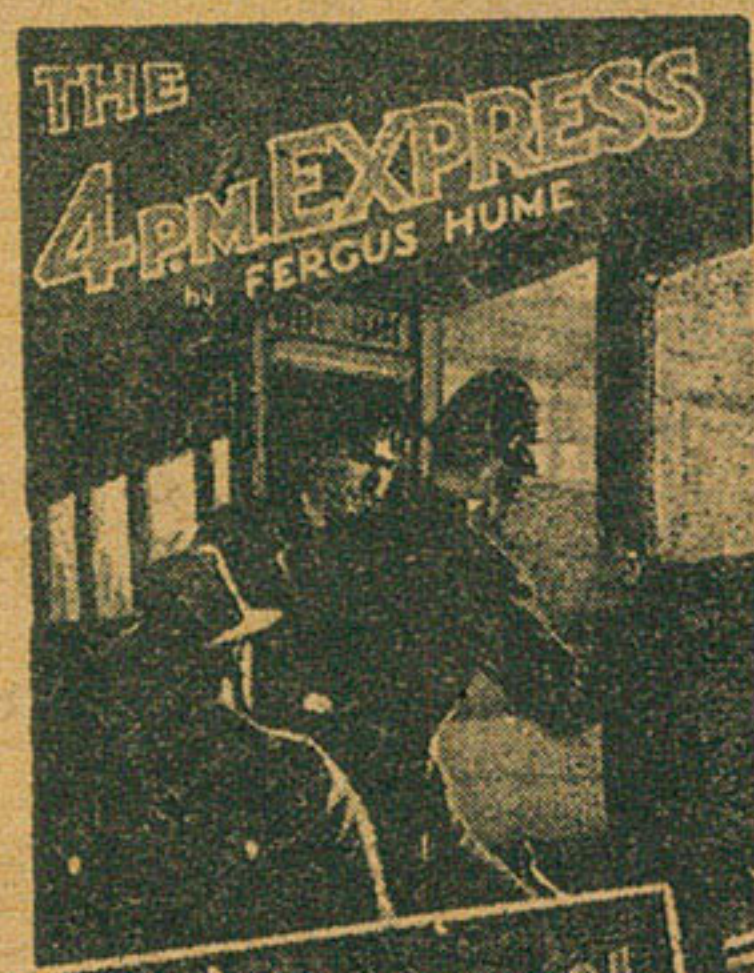
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