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# LOVE DIDN'T LAST

BY

*Deirdre  
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# WHAT DID YOU DREAM?

To dream that you are wearing a new hat is a good sign.

**ABROAD.**—To dream that you are in a foreign country indicates some change in your life and removal to another locality.

**ACORNS.**—To dream of acorns is a good sign, for it betokens health and strength and a comfortable, happy married life.

**ANGER.**—If you dream that your lover is angry with you, it is a sign that his love for you is deep and sincere, and that he will make you happy.

**BATS.**—Should you dream of seeing a bat flying in the air, it is a sign that you have an enemy. Should a girl in love dream of a bat, it denotes that she has a rival.

**BEEES.**—This is a good dream, denoting a successful business life. To lovers it indicates a happy marriage.

**BELLS.**—To dream of hearing bells ring is a sign of coming good news.

**CAB.**—To dream of riding in a taxi denotes a short illness and a speedy recovery. It also indicates a change for the better in your present circumstances.

## A MARRIAGE

**CANARY.**—To dream of hearing a canary sing denotes a marriage.

**CATS.**—This is an unfavourable dream, denoting false friends against whom you must guard.

**DESERT.**—To dream of being in the desert indicates difficulties to come. If, however, you see the sun shining, all will end well.

**DISASTER.**—To dream of some disaster is not a bad omen, for it is a dream of contrary. It foretells that you will hear good news concerning someone in whom you are very interested.

**DOGS.**—Should you dream that you are fondling a dog, it is a sign that you will always have faithful friends. But if the dog bites you it denotes a quarrel.

**EGGS.**—To dream of seeing a number of eggs indicates success in love and business. To dream that the eggs prove bad is a sign of unfaithful friends.

**ELEPHANT.**—To dream of an elephant denotes health and strength, and that you will always be surrounded by a circle of loyal friends.

**FIGHTING.**—This dream portends misunderstandings among lovers.

**FLOWERS.**—To dream that you are picking flowers indicates that you will be fortunate in your undertakings.

## HAPPINESS

**FROGS.**—This is a favourable dream, denoting happiness and success.

**GRAPES.**—Denote happiness in marriage and success in business.

**HAT.**—To dream you are wearing a new hat is a good sign, for it portends success in something you have undertaken.

**HONEY.**—To dream that you are eating honey indicates good health, a long life and social enjoyment. Your lover is sincere.

**HORSE.**—This is a good dream, denoting happiness and comfort. To dream of white horses denotes a marriage.

# LOVE DIDN'T LAST

By  
DEIRDRE LAZELLE

## CHAPTER I. Newspaper Notice

THERE were tears in Elise Branson's eyes as, with dragging steps, she made her way towards her lodgings. Another day of fruitless searching for work was ended, and it looked as though she had now reached the end of her tether.

Elise shivered as, turning a corner, a chill gust of wind seemed to go right through her. She badly needed a new winter coat, but what use thinking of that when what little money she had was needed for food and shelter?

And it looked as though even that would be denied her before very long, unless Jerry—

The thought that came to her then caused her to hurry her steps, and presently she was letting herself into her lodgings.

As she closed the front door there was a movement at the end of the passage, and her landlady, Mrs. Conley, came from the kitchen.

"Good-evening, Miss Branson." The greeting was coldly formal. "Have you had any luck to-day? You've been out of work nearly a month now, haven't you?"

Elise forced a smile and shook her head, and the landlady's expression hardened.

"Your board and lodgings are due to-day," she reminded the girl, "and, of course, you can't expect me to let you get behind, especially as things are. I'm sorry, Miss Branson, but—"

Elise made an impulsive gesture of protest. For three years she had paid Mrs. Conley regularly, and for nearly a month it had been out of her frugal savings, now almost gone. But she knew Mrs. Conley too well to expect consideration on that account.



"There is no need to remind me of that," she interrupted quietly. "I shall pay my bill and leave to-morrow, Mrs. Conley. I—I quite understand."

The other smiled with obvious relief, and became almost apologetic.

"I'm glad you see my position, Miss Branson, and I'm really terribly sorry, but with all my expenses I must make sure of getting the money regularly from my lodgers."

Elise nodded, and then a sudden desperate eagerness lighted her eyes.

"I have been expecting a letter," she faltered, but Mrs. Conley shook her head.

"No letter has come for you, Miss Branson, but the evening post is just about due, and— Oh, there it is!"

Elise's heart leapt as there came a sharp double knock at the front door. Mrs. Conley went in answer to it, and returned with a letter in her hands.

"Here it is," she said. "From Canada, too. I hope it brings good news."

She stood watching hopefully while Elise's trembling fingers ripped open the envelope and she began to read the letter it contained. But the landlady's chief concern was not so much about the girl who had lost her job over a month ago through a reduction of staff, and had since been bravely striving to find another while her meagre savings drained to nothing. Mrs. Conley felt quite sure that Elise had written for help to her boy friend in Canada, and fervently hoped it might mean that one of her best-paying lodgers would stay on a little longer.

She was dismayed when she saw the colour slowly ebb from Elise's cheeks as she read on. Then, swaying slightly, and with the light gone from her eyes, Elise turned and spoke in a low, strained voice. "There is nothing to tell you, Mrs. Conley. I shall be leaving to-morrow."

Slowly Elise turned and went up to her room, sinking wearily on to the edge of her bed and staring dully at the letter in her hand.

Mrs. Conley had been right; the letter was from Jerry. But she had not written asking for help, despite the passionate way in which he had insisted she should do so in any emergency before he had gone off to Canada a year ago. She had been too proud, and she loved him too much to do that.

She had written keeping another promise instead. She had offered, whatever hardships it might mean sharing, to go out to Jerry at once and marry him. It had seemed the one way of salvation for herself and happiness for them both, and never for a moment had she really doubted how eagerly he would accept, as she had never doubted his love for her.

But Jerry had jibbed. This brief, evasive, cruel letter was the final blow.

"I would love to have you, Elise." Through mists of tears she read the curt, evasive sentences again. "Unfortunately, it is impossible. The task of a farmer here is heartbreaking. I could not possibly support us both. I'm terribly sorry to hear you've lost your job, but I'm sure you'll have found another

by now, and with things as they are, much as I love you, Elise, I do feel I have no right to stand in your way, to even allow myself to hope for the day when I can ask you here and offer you a home that will be good enough—"

There was more than that, but Elise did not again read on. She put the letter away and moved slowly to the window, gazing out over the drab wilderness of roofs to where the fussing tugs moved like flies on the broad bosom of the distant River Mersey.

A bitter little laugh broke from her lips, and she shrugged fatalistically. So that was that. Jerry didn't care. She might have judged that by the growing infrequency of his letters, and their cooling terms.

But even now she would not allow herself to blame him, even if another girl had been the reason for that cruel letter. Rather did she feel disgust with herself for having written to him as she had in a moment of overwhelming loneliness and despair.

Only she did love him, and this was the worst blow that fate could deal her, after years of heart-breaking, persistent blows. It almost seemed as if her father's embittered words had been true—that the Bransons were a cursed family from the beginning.

Three years after Elise's birth in London, her mother had run away with another man, and an embittered father had brought her north to Liverpool. Here, leaving Elise in charge of a nurse, he had started a grocery business, failed, and tried again in a different line.

Once more he had failed, and from Elise's earliest memories their life together had been one continual series of failures, one endless struggle with poverty.

At fourteen she had been taken away from school to look after the house, and this existence had been little better than slavery. Her father, a weakling who lost heart at the slightest reverse and threw up job after job on the least excuse, was content to blame his divorced wife for all his troubles, and to regard his daughter as no more than a housekeeper. He showed no affection, begrudged her every penny, and condemned her to imprisonment in their shabby home, while he was always either out at work or at his club.

It had been chiefly to relieve the mono-



tony, when other girls of her age were living joyously, fully, that Elise had taught herself shorthand and typing. Then quite suddenly, when she was nineteen, her father had died after a short illness.

Penniless and alone, Elise had faced the situation bravely and found a job. This shabby bed-sitting-room had seemed a haven of happiness after her loveless home. She enjoyed her work in a Liverpool broker's office, spent almost every evening out with some of her many friends, and at last seemed safely on the road to happiness.

Then she had met Jerry Fraser, and six joyous months had been packed with romance and dreams. Jerry loved her, was going to do great things. Her faith in him was blindly complete, and nothing seemed more certain than that soon they would marry and settle down in a little home of their own, and poverty and loneliness would be things of the past.

But once again fate had conspired to cheat her of happiness. Jerry had lost his job and decided, all in a moment, to go and try his luck in Canada. Elise had hidden her dismay, thrilled by his confidence of success in the Dominion, loyally professing her willingness to wait.

He had not been able to afford to give her an engagement-ring, but Elise had not allowed herself to mind that. She had even spent most of her necessarily small savings in buying Jerry things he would need for his comfort on the long journey and in the new land to which he was going, had smiled through her tears and refused to admit the fears in her heart when she had waved good-bye to him at the Liverpool docks that chill March day when he had sailed.

A year had passed, with Jerry's confident, cheerful letters pointing her spells of natural loneliness without him. He had been so sure of sending for her within a year.

Instead, his letters had become increasingly infrequent. He was not doing well, but worse than that, his latest letters had been different in a way that had made her afraid.

But she had chided herself for doubting him, writing with all the passionate devotion of her heart to encourage him and cheer him up, dreaming undaunted of the day when she would receive his letter asking her to join him.

Once again fate had struck. She had

lost her job at a time when securing another was almost an impossibility, when thousands of others were being dismissed for the same reason of bad trade.

But it was only after ten days of dauntless effort that Elise, remembering Jerry's insistence on her promise, and with an employer's disillusioning words still ringing in her ears, had written telling him something of the truth and offering to go to him, whatever hardships she might have to share with him.

For nearly three weeks she had waited, her love and trust in Jerry had kept her going, while her precious store of money had dwindled. And now this was the end, the final blow. Jerry didn't want her. His letter hardly attempted to conceal anything of the cruel truth. He had hardly troubled to send his love in the hurried reply. He was content to think she would secure another job.

His brief letter had knocked the very last plank from under her feet.

Elise reflected bitterly, as she laid a frugal supper, that her father's oft-repeated words had come true again. Failure and unhappiness seemed the destined lot of the Bransons. Only a miracle could help her now, and miracles didn't happen to the Bransons.

He had blamed her mother, yet it was always of her mother of whom Elise thought at such times as this. She scarcely remembered her, except that there had persisted from babyhood a vague remembrance of kindness and tenderness her father had never shown her.

And during her father's frequent outbursts against her, Elise had sometimes wondered if it hadn't been the persecution of a domineering and selfish man that had driven her mother to seek refuge and tenderness elsewhere. Her father had often spoken sneeringly of her mother's vain fight for her child, and at such times Elise had almost hated him.

Longing for that mother's sympathy and companionship she had never known, Elise had pictured her mother very differently. And to-night, again, she wondered where her mother was, what she was like, and her aching heart refused denial of its longings.

How easy it would be to laugh at trouble if only she had this mother of her dreams! If only she had someone to care, someone to whom she mattered!

Elise checked herself as the door opened

and Mrs. Conley came in with tea and boiling water, and after supper she faced up to the immediate situation with a calm born of bitter experience. She laid aside clothes and other personal belongings that must be sold, wrestled with the pitifully diminutive figures her post office account showed, and then went to bed.

It was no use torturing herself by thinking—no use hoping that some miracle would flash across the horizon to-morrow. She must find the cheapest possible lodgings, and somehow make her money last another few weeks. In that time something must turn up, and if it didn't—

Elise closed her burning eyes and slept off of sheer weariness and exhaustion.

She was already up and packing next morning when Mrs. Conley came in with the usual cup of tea, and rather apologetically laid the morning newspaper on the table.

"I thought maybe you'd like to look at the 'situations vacant,' Miss Branson," she said. "I still can't believe that things are going to turn out as bad as they seem."

Elise thanked her and picked up the paper as the landlady went away. She knew where to find the meagre column of advertisements. She had searched the newspapers during the past four weeks until her very senses had become dazed with the dancing lines of small print.

Here they were. Situations vacant. Three of them. Two were advertisements for business training colleges, and the third for a man willing to invest fifty pounds in a "small but growing concern."

Elise smiled sadly as she put down the paper and remembered her hopeless reflections of the previous night.

"Only a miracle—and miracles don't happen to a Branson."

And then her spirit flamed as she picked up her cup of tea and looked down again at the newspaper.

"Oh, well, if I hurry along to the public library—"

And then, with a cry, she put down her cup and snatched up the paper again as her gaze caught the first words of the solitary notice under a brief heading:

"Solicitors' Notices."

It began with her name, and her brain reeled as she read the rest of that unbelievable, breath-taking notice:

"Elise Branson—Born Edmonton, 1918. Daughter of John Branson and Mary Branson. Now believed to be living in or near Liverpool. The mother of the above-named is lonely and anxious to meet her only child, after receiving news of father's death. If Elise Branson is alive, and will communicate with Withnall & Arnold, Solicitors, Gray's Inn Chambers, London, W.C., she will learn of something to her advantage."

Elise's lips parted in a cry as her incredulous eyes flew again over the amazing words.

"Mother!"

At last! At long, long last! The miracle had happened! Her mother was alive and wanted her!

## CHAPTER 2.

### The House in Mayfair.

NESTLING in a corner of an empty compartment of the London bound express next afternoon, Elise gazed with shining eyes upon the barren countryside and gave herself up to the thrill of dreams and reflections that in the last six hours had become so vitally real and true. Her heart sang joyously to the rhythmic beat of the wheels on the iron way.

At long, long last she was going to find her mother!

What magic there was in that thought when you had never known the blessings that some people held so lightly. After years of loneliness and weeks of desperate struggle, when all that mattered was being cruelly torn from her hands, she felt like a child suddenly plunged into fairyland.

Elise laughed happily now as she unfolded the precious paper and re-read the advertisement for perhaps the hundredth time. There could be no mistake, and even Mrs. Conley had been willing to allow her small amount to stand over so that Elise might pay her fare and still have money in her pocket, no doubt feeling assured of a generous present later on.

But Elise thought only of her mother now. Within a few hours they would be together. What would this lonely woman, who had not forgotten and who wanted her, be like? As stately and beautiful as the silver-haired woman of her dreams? Rich?

But money didn't matter. And now that the future seemed so wonderfully certain.

Elise's excited mind went back over past memories, and she wondered, as she had done so often, just what had been the reason of her mother's flight so long ago.

Her father had said many cruel things, but somehow—and perhaps he was chiefly the reason—she could not believe them. It had been far easier to think that his selfishness and egotism had driven her from him to the arms of another man, who could give her love, sympathy, companionship—all John Branson had denied even his own daughter.

But all that was over now. Her mother was alive and lonely, too, and now they were going to be together and make up for all the empty years.

At last the train drew into Euston, and Elise alighted, to join the stream of passengers on the platform. It was too late to go searching for an advertisement address, so she hailed a taxi and drove to the office of the solicitors whose advertisement had brought her to London.

There she was met by old Mr. Arnold, the senior partner. Her birth certificate and other identifying papers in his hands, he smiled approvingly across at his pretty caller and nodded.

"You are very like your mother," he said slowly. "You have her clear, brown eyes and many of her manners, too. And"—with another smile—"you are a very fortunate young lady."

Elise's eyes shone as she listened, and then made a little gesture of pleading.

"But haven't you a photograph that I may see before I meet her?" she asked. "I scarcely remember anything about her, and—"

Mr. Arnold laughed reassuringly.

"You will see for yourself quite soon," he replied. "But I can tell you this: Your mother is a rich woman, and a very popular hostess. You—er—know that your father divorced her and she married again? Her second husband seems to have left her very comfortably off, though I have only recently had the privilege of handling her affairs."

A doubtful look came into his eyes, though Elise was far too excited to notice so slight a thing. Then he reached for the telephone, and a moment later he was speaking to her mother.

"Yes, Mrs. Thornton, we have found her. She has just arrived from Liverpool, and, of course, is anxious to see you." He

chuckled. "I'll send her along to you at once."

He rang off, scribbled an address, and got to his feet.

"Your mother wishes you to take a taxi and go to her at once," he said, offering his hand. "The driver will know where to find this address. Good-bye, Miss Branson, and good luck."

Not until she was in the taxi did Elise look at the address the solicitor had given her:

"19, Ashley Gardens, Mayfair, W."

The word Mayfair held magic for Elise, but even that did not prepare her for the surprise that awaited her when the taxi drew up in front of a row of tall, imposing mansions.

She got down and stared up in amazement at the lofty face of No. 19.

"That's the place, miss," the driver assured her, and a second later Elise was alone.

She continued to stare up at the house. To think that this magnificent place should be her home, after years of poverty in drab streets and tiny houses!

She was moving slowly forward when the door of the house opened and a butler bowed out a caller—a tall, white-bearded man of about seventy, attired in immaculate morning clothes. He did not notice the girl he passed on his way to a long, gleaming Rolls-Royce at the kerb. A chauffeur sprang from the wheel to open the door for him, and Elise stared after the car as it drove away.

"A very popular hostess."

Elise recalled the solicitor's words as she passed nervously up the wide steps and rang the bell.

The butler opened the door and regarded her with cold, appraising eyes, but he stepped alertly back and bowed her into a lofty, luxuriously furnished reception-hall when she asked for Mrs. Thornton, and his aloofness vanished.

"You are Miss Elise Branson?" he asked. "Will you please wait here a moment?"

He closed the door, and was crossing to another set in one of the lofty walls when it opened, a tall woman in a silvery afternoon gown emerged, and Elise and her mother were face to face.

The girl caught her breath in that

moment of revelation, for the woman who was already moving slowly towards her was all and more than the woman of her dreams. She was beautiful, despite her years.

She stopped a few paces away from Elise, her large brown eyes glowing behind a gathering mist. Their recognition was deeper than of the eyes; it was from the heart. Years of separation and loneliness seemed to swell up between them and then to vanish for ever into eternity.

Mrs. Thornton smiled faintly, and then a low, hysterically happy laugh broke from her lips.

"Elise—my child!"

"Mother!"

A moment more and Elise was in her arms, and it was in the ecstasy of that first embrace that she knew beyond all shadow of doubt that this woman was her mother—the mother for whom she had longed in a desolate childhood and an unhappy youth.

In the minutes that followed both behaved a little hysterically. Mrs. Thornton's hands pressed convulsively about Elise's arms as, holding her a little away, she studied her, quite unashamed of the tears upon her pale cheeks.

Then impatiently she dashed them aside and laughed again.

"So you are Elise. And even more beautiful than I dreamed you to be. But come," she urged, slipping an arm round the girl, "let us go into the drawing-room, where we can talk."

In the huge, beautifully furnished drawing-room she led Elise to a long divan by the curtained windows, still holding the girl's hands as she sat down at her side, studying her again with a mother's emotional joy and pride.

"I can hardly believe it's true, Elise!" she cried at length. "For years I've longed for this moment, and not dared to hope for it. While your father was alive"—for a second her voice dropped—"I knew he would never consent to me even seeing you. Then, through a firm of inquiry agents, I learned he had died. But we couldn't find out where you had gone, and I hardly dared hope my advertisement would bring you to me so soon. You—you won't mind if I behave rather foolishly just once more, will you?"

Impulsively she lifted Elise's hands to her lips, dropping them only to gaze still more joyously into her eyes.

And now, the warmth of human contact penetrating the exciting unreality of everything and filling her heart with a new, joyous confidence, Elise smiled back. Her nervousness and embarrassment fled. This beautiful, adorable woman was her mother!

She was speaking again now.

"You've been lonely, too, Elise?"

"Yes—terribly."

"And poor?"

"Yes, mother." Oh, the thrill of that word on her lips, the knowledge of all it meant! "You see, poor father had such bad luck, whatever he tried to do, and—"

She faltered, suddenly realising that she did not want to talk of her father just now. But her mother was speaking again, with a very real anxiety.

"But he was kind to you, dear?"

And then, at the look Elise could not keep from her eyes, her hands tightened again about her own.

"Never mind!" she cried impulsively.

"We are going to forget all that, you and I. We are going to be happy. And if only you can forget some of the bitter things your father must have said about me, dear, if only you will give me a chance to prove how much I've loved you and wanted you—"

She went on talking happily, sometimes hysterically, while Elise listened.

And in those moments the question of years was answered. Elise knew that it was not this gracious and beautiful woman, trying so earnestly to put Elise at her ease and to reassure her about the future, who was to blame for what had happened when she was a child. It was the man who had taken her away from her mother, the father who had never tired of taking her name in vain and blaming her for all their adversities.

Tea was brought, after Elise had taken off her hat and coat, and every barrier of awkwardness had fled before their first happy hour together had passed. And when her mother anxiously asked if she liked her new home, Elise laughed helplessly.

"I never dreamed you were so wealthy as this, mother," she confessed. "I could hardly believe my eyes when the taxi pulled up outside this wonderful house. Why, it's like a palace!"

Mrs. Thornton smiled happily.

"It is yours, Elise, to share with me if you will."

And now it was Elise who reached for her mother's hands and drew them to her breast.

"It's more wonderful even than the dreams I used to think so wildly impossible, mother. And it's going to take me quite a while to get back my breath, you know," she went on. "Outside just now, for instance, while the taxi-driver was trying to convince me he hadn't brought me to the wrong address, the door opened and that aristocratic-looking old gentleman came out and drove away in a magnificent car—a Rolls-Royce, wasn't it? Who was he, mother? He looked a duke at least. He is a friend of yours? You see, Mr. Arnold told me—"

She stopped suddenly, for a sudden frightened look crept into Mrs. Thornton's eyes.

"That man has nothing whatever to do with you, Elise—you understand that?" she said swiftly, passionately. "You are mine—you belong to me, and nobody in this world is going to take you away from me again. That man is—"

But as suddenly as the outburst had come, so the confused and embarrassed woman recovered herself. For a moment she seemed on the verge of tears. Then she smiled and stammered an apology. It was one of the few occasions when Elise ever saw her mother off her guard.

"I'm sorry, dear. I didn't mean to startle you, but your question took me rather by surprise. Yes, that gentleman is a very close friend. But wait a moment, the maid will be wanting to clear away."

She rose hurriedly and moved to the bell, leaving Elise staring after her in bewildered amazement.

Why had her innocent question startled her mother so alarmingly? For some reason she had seemed afraid.

Of what?

Then Elise crushed her apprehensions as her mother came back to her, and the door opened to admit the maid who had brought in their tea. Mrs. Thornton was addressing her again.

"You must come upstairs and see your room, Elise dear," she said. "I've had it ready for quite a time, since I dared begin to hope that one day you would use it."

Her agitation of a moment ago now completely gone, she smiled and led the way to the door.

### CHAPTER 3.

"If only—"

IT was a long, white, sunny bed-room on the first floor to which Mrs. Thornton took her daughter. A room more beautiful than any Elise had seen, with its huge divan bed, its dressing-table with a sunken centre fitted with silver-backed brushes and other articles of toilette, and its thick pile carpet, into which her feet sank luxuriously.

"We dine early, my dear," she heard her mother say. "In exactly one hour. I am expecting some guests this evening, but you won't have to worry about them. Just come down into the library when you are ready."

The door closed and Elise was alone, free to explore this palatial apartment at her leisure.

In an awed fashion she approached the huge wardrobe opposite the windows. One of its three compartments contained three expensive and beautiful, if simply designed, evening frocks which she thought, for a moment, must belong to her mother.

She took one down and held it to her slim figure. It would fit her exactly, and was too small for her mother. How, then—

Still baffled, Elise turned to the next compartment, which was composed of wide, shallow drawers, and opening them she found them packed with all kinds of dainty, expensive undies. Her bewilderment increased.

Finally, she opened the third compartment, and an exclamation broke from her lips. Hanging from its shining holder she saw a fur coat—mink—and three hats of slightly varying sizes on the shelf above.

Then, in a flash, she realised the truth. She remembered what her mother had said about the room she had prepared in the hope of her daughter's coming. These beautiful clothes were for her!

A lump rose in Elise's throat as she slipped the luxurious coat about her shoulders and stared at the reflection in the long mirror by the dressing-table.

Half an hour later she was gazing at a still more intriguing reflection, for the plainly dressed girl of that morning had been transformed by the beautiful clothes Mrs. Thornton had put here for her.

Elise had bathed in the luxurious bathroom adjoining the bed-room, and, trem-

bling with excitement, had slipped on the silk undies and one of the frocks—a shimmering, silvery thing that must have been terrifically expensive, despite its simple design.

The girl who smiled back at her from the mirror might have been one of those wealthy Society girls whose photographs appeared in the weekly papers.

Well, it wasn't a dream. And already Elise was impatient to show herself to the woman who would be waiting downstairs.

She hurried out into the wide corridor to the broad staircase leading down to the hall, and was descending when she caught sight of her mother at the telephone.

"Yes, of course I will be careful with him," she was saying impatiently. "A Canadian? Very well, I shall be here when he comes."

She replaced the receiver and turned, starting slightly when she saw the girl on the stairs. Then, with a cry of something more than admiration, she advanced to meet her, her brown eyes shining proudly.

"My dear," she cried, "you are even more lovely than I dreamed! And that frock fits you perfectly."

Elise laughed as she ran into the older woman's arms and hugged her.

"Everything fits, mother!" she exclaimed. "How on earth did you manage to guess? I shan't be able to rest, either, until I've worn that marvellous mink coat. You're an angel, and I—I'm so happy."

Mrs. Thornton held her close for a moment.

"Perhaps I didn't have to guess, Elise," she smiled. "You see, I've watched you growing up for so long, in my heart, that I must have known even the colours that would suit you. But come, dear, we'll have dinner quietly on our own, before my guests begin to arrive."

So her mother was going to entertain that evening—her first at home. Elise forced back her disappointment, however, and a moment later they were taking their places at the long table in the dining-room at the back of the house.

Mrs. Thornton's chair was at the other end of the shining white cloth and the array of silvery cutlery, but there was something thrilling to Elise even in the formality with which the butler served that meal, and nothing could dim her mother's happiness or her own. Mrs. Thornton talked of all sorts of plans for their future.

"We must go shopping to-morrow, and complete your wardrobe, Elise," she said towards the end of the meal, "and you'll find heaps of entertainments in London to amuse you. To-night, for instance," she went on hesitantly, "I've telephoned and booked you a front stall for the revue at the Standard. I've seen it myself, so I know you'll enjoy it."

Elise started.

"But, mother," she protested, "I'm not sure I want to go out this evening. I just want to be with you, to meet your friends."

Again came that intuitive feeling that something was wrong, when Mrs. Thornton bit her lip before she laughed reassuringly.

"You would only be bewildered by the people who are coming here, Elise, and probably bored into the bargain. Please, I want you to go to the theatre, and when you come home we'll have an hour together—just you and me—before bed."

As if apprehensive of further protest, she got to her feet, and, picking up something from the table at her side, brought it to Elise.

"Here is another little present, darling. I don't want you ever to go short of money."

She pressed a little black evening-bag into Elise's hands, and, opening it, the girl saw that it was stuffed with notes.

"But, mother—" she began, and Mrs. Thornton laughed again and bent to kiss her.

"You needn't spend it because you have it, dear. Now run up and slip into that fur coat you like so much, and I'll have Martin call you a taxi. You'll be in plenty of time for the show."

It seemed to Elise that she was smuggling warmly into a corner of her cab before she realised what had happened. Some of her mother's smart guests had begun to arrive before she had left, and Mrs. Thornton had been plainly impatient to get her away. It seemed so disappointing, when all she had wanted was to be with her mother on this first night of her homecoming.

She dismissed her qualms, however, as disloyal, though she could not explain away her mother's agitation at mention of the man she had seen leaving the house that afternoon, and the strange anxiety to get her out of the house to-night.

Perhaps, after all, it was just that her mother felt she would be happier at the

theatre, and to mingle with hosts of well-dressed people, to see one of the latest and most expensive shows from the stalls and to be able to laugh at the gay humour of it all without a care in your heart, was an experience certainly worth while.

It was wonderful, but when it was over Elise was only the more eager to get back to her mother, and at last she managed to find a cab to take her.

A car was just drawing away from the house as she alighted, and when Martin admitted her into the brightly lit hall she hesitated rather nervously.

The door of the drawing-room was open, and a number of people in evening dress were standing about sipping drinks and chatting, and moving in and out of another room beyond the drawing-room, the door of which she had noticed that afternoon.

But there was no sign of her mother, and Elise was about to question the butler when the door of the library opened and Mrs. Thornton came out. She was laughing and chatting to a tall man at her side. A man of thirty-five, Elise judged, tanned and certainly handsome, and he talked loudly, with a noticeable accent.

"A Canadian," Elise thought at once, and could not help remembering what she had heard her mother saying over the telephone that evening.

But she remembered someone else, too, with rather a start. Jerry Fraser was in Canada.

Mrs. Thornton had seen her now, and stopped suddenly, the laughter dying on her lips. She seemed confused, and then looked up at her companion, noting with obvious disapproval that he also had seen Elise, and that his grey eyes were alight with admiration.

He turned to Mrs. Thornton as Elise advanced.

"Your daughter, surely?" he suggested, and Mrs. Thornton had no option but to introduce them.

"This is Mr. Mark Farrell, my dear," she smiled, "and this is my daughter, Elise, Mr. Farrell. You are both strangers to London."

Elise held out a slender hand, which the Canadian took, the admiration deepening in his eyes.

"Sure, I hardly even know my way about yet, Miss Thornton," he said, retaining her hand an unnecessary length of time. "I've only recently come from Canada, you know, and I hope we shall

be seeing some more of each other. I'd no idea, Mrs. Thornton, that you had such a charming daughter."

Elise's feeling of dislike was instinctive and quickly gone, for Mrs. Thornton had taken control of the situation.

"Elise doesn't go a great deal into Society, Mr. Farrell," she said coldly, and bade Elise wait while she accompanied her companion to the door.

She came back just as several other people, emerging from the drawing-room, were eyeing the girl curiously, and hurried Elise away into the library, which was empty, though an aroma of tobacco hung about it.

Mrs. Thornton sighed as she closed the door.

"Have a good time, Elise?" she asked. "Now, darling, just take off your things and make yourself comfortable. I'll come and join you just as soon as I can get rid of my guests."

She looked tired, exhausted, but hastened away before Elise had time to comment on the fact. The sphinx-like butler presently appeared with a tray of sandwiches and coffee, and rather helplessly Elise questioned him.

"It's nearly midnight," she said. "Do my mother's guests stay long after this?"

Martin smiled queerly as he put down the tray and looked across at her, but instantly the smile was gone.

"Sometimes, Miss Elise, and sometimes not. Is there anything else I can get for you?"

Elise flushed at the pointedly evasive reply, and shook her head, staring after his retreating figure as he moved to the door. What a queer person he was; and why had he answered her in that tone of rebuke, plainly suggesting that she should mind her own business?

Elise shrugged, picked up a sandwich and a cup of coffee, and made herself comfortable before the bright fire. No wonder she was bewildered. It was all too wonderful. She had known nothing of a world like this before, and though this house frightened her a little, as well as thrilled her, she would soon accustom herself to her new surroundings.

An hour passed before her mother came in, looking more tired out than ever, and Elise jumped to her feet.

"Mother," she exclaimed, "you're absolutely tired out. Let me get you some coffee and sandwiches."

But Mrs. Thornton shook her head, sank wearily on to the settee and reached for a cigarette.

"I'll just smoke, that's all," she sighed. "Come and tell me how you enjoyed this evening, my dear."

She brightened considerably while Elise talked about the show. The look of weariness fell from her face, to which new colour returned. She seemed to have forgotten her departed guests, and to be completely wrapped up in her child.

"It's wonderful to realise that you are here with me, Elise, after all these years," she said. "I want you to do exactly what you like, dear, and ask for anything you want at any time. I've waited ages for the chance to make you happy. You don't know what it means to me to know that my dreams have at long last come true."

Elise smiled happily.

"It means just as much to me, mother. I used to dream about you, too, especially when I was lonely and unhappy. But I never thought I should find you here, mistress of this beautiful house and wealthy. Mother," she went on anxiously, "do you have to tire yourself like this, entertaining so many people?"

Again there was that biting of the lip, that momentary agitation, and then a smile.

"Yes, dear, I—I have my position to maintain. But you mustn't worry about that. I'm sorry you had to amuse yourself to-night, but to-morrow I'll take you shopping, and we'll have lunch at a little place I know in Soho. You're tired, too, now, after all the excitement of to-day. I'm going to put you to bed, just as I've longed to do. You don't mind?"

"Mind? Oh, mother, of course not!"

A moment later they went upstairs together, and it was not until Elise's head was on her pillow that Mrs. Thornton came down again into the hall, where Martin was waiting.

"Everyone gone?" she asked shortly, and the butler nodded.

"Very well," Mrs. Thornton went on. "Now, listen, Martin. Before you go to bed I want to give you an order—a most important order—about my daughter. I do not wish her to mingle with my guests on any account. She is not to come into contact with them, you understand? I don't want anything to happen again like this to-night, and when she comes in you

must see that she either goes to her room or the library, until I can go to her. Is that clear?"

Martin bowed.

"Perfectly, madam. I will do what I can, but—"

"You will do what you are told to do," she snapped, dismissing him.

But it was a curtness forced to hide a real anxiety, and when he had departed she turned and entered the empty drawing-room, frowning for a moment at the litter of glasses on the polished tables, and even the grand piano, then passing to the half-open door of the room beyond.

This was in darkness, but she closed the drawing-room door before she went in. Ten minutes later, coming out, she locked the door and thrust the key into the bosom of her gown.

She stood for a moment thinking, a look of something like despair clouding her face, and then she sighed.

"If only I could be sure that she need never know," she murmured unhappily. "I was wrong in bringing her here like this. I shall have to think of some other way."

With a shake of her head she crossed the room, turned off the lights, and began to mount the stairs.

Elise was still awake, but not very far from sleep, when she heard the door of her mother's room close. Her heart was a mingling of many emotions, and though happiness was dominant, she was also puzzled and anxious about her mother.

She could not get rid of the feeling that there was something here in this house which her mother was hiding from her, and doing so desperately. She thought of the immaculate guests her mother had not wished her to meet, recalling the only one she had spoken to—Mark Farrell. A handsome man, but rather too charming in his manner. Why had her mother spoken over the telephone, about being careful with him? Was it for business reasons she entertained?

Elise took herself to task. She had no right to be thinking these things, and she was probably worrying about nothing at all.

With a deep sigh she closed her eyes. One couldn't have everything, and if Fate had stolen Jerry away—perhaps he was in the arms of some other girl at this very



moment—it had given her tremendously much in exchange.

She was going to be happy, Elise told herself as she fell asleep.

#### CHAPTER 4.

##### Dance-Club Meeting.

MRS. THORNTON seemed a changed woman next morning, and as excited as Elise about the forthcoming shopping expedition.

Elise saw her mother's car—a Rolls-Royce—for the first time. It looked so smooth and shining that she wanted to run her fingers over the gleaming body, and he laughingly confessed as much as she sank back among the cushions and then looked adoringly at the elegantly dressed woman at her side.

"You must be terribly rich, mother."

Mrs. Thornton's smile faded, and, completely misunderstanding, Elise leaned towards her.

"But I should be just as happy if you hadn't a penny," she said. "I'm happy because we're together for always."

There was no misunderstanding how much that meant to her mother.

They drove into the heart of the West-End shopping district, visiting some of the most famous and exclusive stores. It was no use Elise protesting at the number of things her mother wanted to buy for her.

"You're a Society girl now, dear," Mrs. Thornton laughed, "and I know exactly what you need."

It was like a dream. Frocks and undies, furs and hats. Elise had begun to wonder whether she was a single girl or a company before they had finished and driven to Delaney's, a quiet restaurant in Soho, for lunch.

Elise was thrilled to notice, during that morning, how many people knew her mother, particularly the smart women out shopping like themselves, and the heads of the departments in the stores they visited.

Mrs. Thornton laughed a little ironically when Elise remarked as much, and sighed as she looked round the half-deserted restaurant.

"Let's talk about what you'd like to do for the rest of the day, Elise," she said. "We must run home for a minute or two, but we could do a matinee."

Elise felt breathless already, but she listened excitedly to her mother's plans, and it was while Mrs. Thornton was talking about a new dance club that had opened recently, "where you should meet heaps of nice young people like yourself, dear," that the swing-doors of the restaurant opened and a young man came in.

Elise noticed him casually, and then with real interest, which was more than returned. The newcomer was tall, dark, very handsome in a boyish way, and remarkably well dressed. Yet his air of "class" was unassuming, and she liked the ring of his voice when he returned the head waiter's respectful "Good-morning, sir."

"All the others here, Taunton?" he asked cheerfully, passing a casual hand over his glossy hair, and, in turning, he saw Elise.

He stared almost rudely for an instant. His eyes said quite plainly: "Good heavens. I didn't know there was anyone like you in all London." Then, as a tinge of colour stole into Elise's cheeks, he passed on to a table across the restaurant, where he joined a group of young people awaiting him.

"Thank goodness Roger has come at last! Now we can eat!" came the fervent remark from feminine lips that further intrigued Elise. So much, in fact, that she had forgotten to listen to her mother.

"You know the latest dances, I suppose, Elise?" she had asked, and looked up from her bag when Elise failed to reply.

Half-amused, she followed her daughter's gaze, and a second later Elise's eyes flashed to her mother's face.

Mrs. Thornton had started. Elise reached out and touched her hand.

"Why, mother, you know him!"

The challenge came eagerly, and Mrs. Thornton stiffened as she turned.

"Who, my dear?"

"That awfully nice-looking young man who came in just now. Who is he?"

Mrs. Thornton looked confused.

"I'm sure I don't know, my dear," she protested rather weakly. "I saw you looking at him, and for a moment I thought he resembled somebody I knew. But it's quite unlikely, of course. I was asking you if you know the latest dances," she added.

Elise brought her thoughts back to the matter in hand, but faltered a little in her answer. For one thing, the young man

named Roger was looking interestedly across again.

"Why, yes, mother, I think I do," she answered. "Then we're really going to this smart club?"

"This evening, after dinner. Now, darling, what would you like to follow the fish?"

More than once during the meal Elise stole a glance at the neighbouring table. More than once, too, she scrupulously ignored a smile from the young man who interested her. But she carried the memory of that smile with her when they left and drove back to Mayfair, where Mrs. Thornton was busy for a few moments in the library.

They went off to a matinee and returned to change, then off to dinner at the Criterion—where other smart people bowed acknowledgment to her mother—and then on to the new dance club. It opened in the afternoon and closed at two in the morning, and was crowded with dancing couples when they entered and went to one of the little tables along the walls.

Mrs. Thornton ordered champagne, and as they sat there seemed to be looking for someone to whom to introduce her daughter. One or two young men came up, and Elise danced with them, forgetting them almost at once.

And then her mother began to be nervous for some reason. She asked if Elise would like to go to a theatre, and Elise laughingly shook her head.

"My dear mother, you'll make me dizzy if you spoil me like this every day," she said. "I'm enjoying this immensely—do let's stay."

Mrs. Thornton smiled, and then bit her lip, as she did in moments of nervousness.

"Stay, by all means, Elise, but I'm afraid I shall have to leave you. I have some friends to see at home, dear."

"Oh, then I'll—"

"No, please." She gestured Elise back into her chair. "I want you to stay and enjoy yourself. Don't come home too early, and when you do we'll have supper together again, shall we?"

"But—"

"I insist, Elise," Mrs. Thornton said, rising and drawing on her cloak. "And I'm sure you'll meet quite a lot of nice young men."

She moved away, and Elise felt both bewildered and lost. One of her previous

partners came up and claimed a dance, and then Elise was alone again.

But she was saved from unpleasant reflections by the sound of a voice at her side. A voice she had heard once before that day—a voice that thrilled her.

"May I have the pleasure?"

She looked up, her eyes shining, to find Roger of the Soho restaurant smiling down at her, and a Roger looking more fresh and immaculate than ever in evening-dress.

Elise hesitated only a moment, and then she was in his arms. He danced divinely, but that was only one thing she liked about him in the few moments that followed, when they chatted gaily.

"We've met before," he smiled. "Did you recognise me as the young man from Delaney's?"

She nodded frankly.

"I also know your first name," she told him. "Roger, isn't it?"

His dark eyes lighted with obvious pleasure.

"You remembered that? I think it was Mabs Grey who shouted that now they could eat. And I forget what we had, because I was looking at you and wondering if you were real."

Elise laughed, not displeased at the flattery, and then grimaced as somebody trod on her foot.

"That gentleman doesn't seem to think so, evidently," she commented, and then returned her partner's admiring gaze. "Do you usually stare at young women in restaurants, Mr.—"

He shook his head, his arm tightening about her waist.

"Stick to Roger," he begged. "I like it. And I don't usually stare at anybody. I hope I'm much too good-mannered. Let me see if I can guess your name."

He tried a dozen times, much to her amusement, but he was far from disappointed when she confessed the truth.

"Elise? Why, that's a lovely name." A tender look came to his face. "I used to have a sister named Elise, and—"

But this was no time for sadness. They talked on, danced on, returning to her table only for a brief rest. It seemed to Elise that they had only just begun to know each other when she realised, with something of a shock, that it was nearly midnight.

"I must go now," she said. "Mother will be expecting me. But I have enjoyed

myself immensely, thanks to you. We've been dancing together for nearly three hours."

His hand closed over and held her own. She felt a warm thrill go round her heart as she looked up at him, and his voice was like a caress.

"It seemed only three minutes, each more wonderful than the last," he answered. "May I see you home?"

She nodded. Her mother could not possibly object. Roger had a two-seater parked near the premises, and he seemed pleasantly surprised when she gave him her address.

"Mayfair? Why, we're quite close to each other!" he exclaimed.

Side by side they drove through the seething traffic and the twinkling lights, both loath to come to the end of their brief journey.

Roger pulled up in front of Mrs. Thornton's imposing residence just as the door opened and three people—two men and a woman—came out and down the steps into a waiting car.

"Your mother must be entertaining," said Roger, "and I've kept you out."

Elise protested, wondering why she felt half-ashamed at her confession of the truth. And was it her fancy, or did Roger look a little surprised at the way she put it?

"I've got to see you again," he pleaded. "Shall it be at the club where we met to-night?"

She hesitated.

"Perhaps."

"To-morrow night?"

"If—if mother has no other plans."

"At nine," he said, and then was gone.

Elise watched the tail light of his car out of sight, then slowly climbed the steps to her home. The hall was empty when she went in, but she heard voices in the drawing-room.

"Mrs. Thornton is still engaged, Miss Elise," Martin told her. "Will you have your supper in the library?"

She nodded.

"I'll run up and take off my things first."

Her mother was waiting for her when she came down into the library, eager to know if she had enjoyed herself.

"Wonderfully," Elise admitted, "and with the most adorable boy. His name is Roger." She laughed at a memory. "We really forgot to tell each other our surnames."

Mrs. Thornton looked just a little doubtful until Elise succeeded in convincing her that Roger was really thoroughly nice.

"Well, I want you to have nice friends, dear, and all the freedom you want—and all the fun." She smiled. "I'm pretty certain already that my little girl has a sound head on her shoulders. You are seeing this Roger again?"

"He said he would be at the club to-morrow," Elise replied, colouring a little, "but if you have any other plans—"

Mrs. Thornton laughed.

"You shall go, my dear, and some time I must meet the young man for myself. Now run along to bed. It's past one."

It was only when she was on the verge of sleep that Elise realised she had not mentioned that Roger had been in the restaurant that morning. She wondered, too, why her mother had been so pleased to hear of her making friends, yet so loath to introduce her to her own.

Elise would have wondered a great deal more, too, in the fortnight that followed, but for the advent of Roger Gaynor.

Mrs. Thornton could not do enough for her comfort and happiness, yet never once was Elise allowed to mingle with the guests that filled her drawing-room each evening. She might go and do whatever else she pleased, and her mother was ready for her gentle protest when she made it.

"Of course you want to meet my friends, darling," she said, "but they don't really count. You see, I have to entertain, and I can't explain just now. But I'm tired of it all, too, and very soon I hope it will end. Elise, how would you like a much tinier place, a flat just big enough for us two and a couple of servants? And a long holiday, too—for that's one of my plans. I want you to see the world just as soon as I can manage it."

It was always the same. Anything but that Elise should be allowed to meet her mother's friends. It was almost as if she was ashamed of her daughter, but that couldn't be.

Elise gave it up, and really, she had quite enough to fill her thoughts just now. She met Roger somewhere or other almost every night. They danced, they went to theatres, they went for moonlight drives in his car, and both fell swiftly and deeply in love.

Roger talked little about himself, but he confessed that he came of influential

Society parents, and was studying for the law. They seemed to forget everything in each other's company.

Mrs. Thornton seemed terrifically busy and very worried at this time, and Elise had little opportunity to tell her about her new friend. She wanted her mother to meet Roger, and said as much, and her mother promised to do so just as soon as she could.

"You like him very much, Elise?" she asked, and Elise, who had just returned from a moonlight drive, nodded happily.

"He's splendid, mother, and I would love to ask him here one day to meet you."

"So you shall, my dear, but not just yet. Very soon I shall be able to give you more time."

Elise had promised to spend the whole of the next day, a Saturday, with Roger. He called for her in the morning, and neither knew that Mrs. Thornton was watching from the window as they drove away, and that though she did not see Roger closely, she smiled approvingly as they drove away.

"A nice-looking boy," she mused, "and for Elise's sake I'm glad. But—oh, if only I hadn't to keep up this pretence! I'm so afraid of her guessing, so afraid of trouble."

#### CHAPTER 5.

##### Under a Full Moon.

THAT day was the happiest day Elise had ever known.

Roger drove her out into the country. They lunched at Oxford, and then went on through the rugged Cotswold country, turning towards London again after having tea in an old-world inn near Banbury.

A full moon beamed down upon them as they drove back, and it was after a long silence that Roger drew the car up at the side of the road and turned, his eyes alight, to take Elise impulsively into his arms.

It was not a surprise. There had been a glowing awareness in her heart for days, and to-day a certainty that Roger loved her. But in that magic moment, when she felt his arms about her and his lips upon her own, time itself seemed to stand still, and a wild ecstasy surged through her heart.

He smothered her mouth, her cheeks, her white, quivering throat with kisses, the

while he held her so fiercely close as almost to crush the breath from her body.

Nothing else in the world mattered but Roger in the wonder of that space of time when, as from a distance, she heard his impassioned words.

"I adore you, Elise! I've been longing for this moment ever since that night we danced together at the club. Elise darling, do you understand?" He had drawn back his head and was looking down at her. "I want you more than I want anything else in the world. Will you marry me, Elise?"

She lay trembling with ecstasy for a long moment after that, staring up at him. Roger loved her, and she loved him as she had never loved Jerry Fraser, as she had never known love before. Her heart was aching for love of him. This was the most wonderful of all the wonderful things that had happened to her lately, and yet—

"Elise," he pleaded huskily, "don't you love me, dearest?"

"Love you? Oh, Roger!"

She put her arms about his neck, pressing her lips to his, and with a cry he strained her to him once more.

"Oh, Roger," she whispered presently, "I'd give everything in the world to be able to prove to you just how much I do love you. But you know nothing about me, dear. I—"

Roger laughed scornfully.

"I know you're the dearest woman in the world, and that's all that matters."

But Elise shook her head, and simply, truthfully, she told him the story of her life. That her mother had left her father to go to another man, and that she, Elise, was the child of divorced parents.

Roger, after listening sympathetically, looked down at her the more proudly and tenderly.

"It's a wonderful story, Elise," he said, "and it makes me all the prouder to think that I'm going to look after you and help make up for all you've suffered. Your mother must be a very fine woman, too. Can't I meet her, dear? Can't I come to-morrow and ask her for her consent to our marriage?"

"But your people, Roger?" she asked anxiously.

He looked troubled for an instant, and then laughed.

"They're dears, really. You'll soon win their love, Elise, when they get to know you," he said confidently. "And listen.

I'll come and see your mother at seven o'clock to-morrow evening, then later I'll take you round and introduce you to my people, and everything will be settled."

She snuggled close into his arms, happier than she had ever been. Her mother would be glad, too, because she wanted her to be happy. And it shouldn't mean their parting. Roger promised that as they drove back in the waning moonlight.

She kissed him good-night outside her home, and then ran eagerly up to the door. Bursting with excitement, she glanced at the clock in the hall—it was past midnight—then turned to Martin, who had admitted her.

"Has everyone gone?" she asked. "Where is my mother?"

Martin gave one of his stiff little bows. "There have been very few guests this evening, Miss Elise, and your mother is at present in the library, though I wouldn't interrupt her just now if I were you. She is engaged with a gentleman."

Elise frowned slightly, and was about to move to the stairs to go up to her room when the library door opened and her mother came out with the tall, white-bearded man she had seen leaving the house on the afternoon when she had first come.

Mrs. Thornton saw her before she could hurry upstairs, and when Elise hesitated she smiled and beckoned her, though with some embarrassment. The man had stopped, and was frowning towards her.

"This is my daughter, Sir James," Mrs. Thornton murmured, slipping an arm through Elise's. "My dear, I want you to meet Sir James Gaynor, a great friend of mine."

Gaynor! That was Roger's name.

Elise checked her surprise—it was only a coincidence, of course, she told herself, and smiled as she held out her hand to the aloof figure of the baronet. Then a feeling of apprehension assailed her as he ignored it, bowing stiffly.

"I am pleased to meet you."

He turned almost at once and continued talking to her mother, who walked with him to the door, and Elise, feeling snubbed, gave a little shrug and passed on to the library. She saw a cheque lying on the big desk by the fire, but merely glanced towards it, turning just in time to see that her mother had followed her.

Elise hurried towards her and looked happily up into her face.

"Oh, mother, I'm so glad you didn't keep me waiting long. I'm simply bursting with news—the grandest news in the world!"

"News, dear?" Mrs. Thornton echoed. "You don't mean you—"

Elise nodded.

"I'm in love with the dearest man in the world, and I've promised to marry him."

Mrs. Thornton was silent for a moment before she drew her daughter over to the divan by the fire and sat down at her side.

"My dear, this is a surprise, of course," she began. "It quite takes my breath away. It's this young man Roger?" she questioned, and Elise nodded.

"Yes. I haven't had much chance to talk to you about him yet, but—"

Mrs. Thornton passed a hand across her brow.

"No, dear, I've been busy." She pressed Elise's hands in her own. "But of course, I'm glad, and I want to know all about it. Just think, my little Elise hasn't been with me two weeks before she goes and falls in love."

"Oh, but it isn't going to mean losing me, mother!" Elise protested. "No one is ever going to take me away from you again. And Roger is the last man in the world to want to. Mother, he's a lawyer, or starting out to be one, and his people are just like you—wealthy, in Society, that kind of thing. He wants to come here to-morrow evening at seven to be approved of. May he?"

"Why, of course. But who is he, Elise? What is his name?"

Elise smiled wistfully.

"He is the one man in the world for me, mother, and his name—it's quite a coincidence, of course—is the same as that stiff old gentleman's who has just gone. Gaynor—Roger Gaynor—and he lives in Melstock Drive, not very far away. He—"

She broke off. "Why, mother, what's the matter? Are you ill?"

For Mrs. Thornton had drawn away, her lips parted in a soundless cry, every vestige of colour draining from her cheeks and something like horror burning in her eyes as she rose unsteadily to her feet.

Elise followed, utterly bewildered and fearing that her mother was going to faint. She caught at her swaying figure and held her.

"Mother, what is the matter?"

The lapse was only temporary. Mrs.

Thornton pulled herself together and forced a smile, pushing Elise away.

"It's nothing, my dear. Just a sudden faintness. It had nothing to do with what we were talking about." Again she drew her hand across her forehead, and then sat down again. "I've been overdoing it. Elise. I'm afraid I nearly made a fool of myself. I'd like a sip of brandy, if you don't mind. There is some in the cabinet over there."

Elise went to get it, and the eyes that followed her were haunted and shadowed. It was only with an effort that the older woman composed herself by the time the girl returned.

The burning spirit did her good. She was almost herself when she handed back the glass.

"That's better," she said. "Now tell me about this—Roger Gaynor, didn't you say?"

Elise was both relieved and worried as she sat down and told her mother the rest.

"Don't you remember that day we lunched at Delaney's? Roger came in while you were asking me about dancing." She laughed. "I think I almost fell in love with him even then, and Roger with me. It all seems so wonderful, and yet it matches all the rest of this wonderful two weeks. I can hardly believe that once I was living alone in a cheerless room, terrified in case I couldn't find another job."

Mrs. Thornton listened while she talked on.

"So you want me to see him here tomorrow evening, dear," she commented at last. "Well, I will, of course. But you won't want to get married straight-away, will you, Elise? I'm going to have you to myself a little more yet?" She looked away with a sigh. "I'd been planning all sorts of happy things, too. A smaller place, a holiday."

"Let's have the holiday together, the three of us," Elise suggested. "And please don't worry, mother. I owe you too much already, love you too much to ever leave you. Only I'm so happy to-night that I just can't talk about anyone else but Roger."

Mrs. Thornton got to her feet and drew Elise with her.

"I understand, my dear. And I only want to be sure of your happiness." Her hands tightened impulsively about Elise's arms, and something akin to passion

flamed in her eyes. "You know that, don't you, dear? You do believe that I only want your happiness? You'll never let anything blind you to that, Elise?"

She gave the bewildered girl no time to reply, but kissed her and led her towards the door.

"Leave me now, dear," she said. "I'm tired, and have one or two things to do before I follow you upstairs. I know what you're going to say," she went on almost jocularly. "I'm entertaining too much." She sighed. "And don't I know it! But it won't be for always. I'll be better tomorrow. Good-night, Elise darling. Don't let yourself be too excited to sleep, and whatever you do don't worry about me."

She closed the door upon the girl, and, coming back to the fire, the mask of cheerfulness fell from her face.

"To think that of all men she should have had to choose his son—James Gaynor's son!" Her hands clenched in her lap. "There can be no mistake. I saw the likeness, and the address puts it beyond all doubt. His son—oh, heavens!"

She closed her eyes, as if in pain. "If only it had been later on, when I was free—when I had enough put by!"

Unsteadily she got to her feet again and went over to the desk, picking up the cheque that lay there—a cheque bearing Sir James Gaynor's signature under the sum of two hundred guineas.

There was defiance in her eyes when she turned, folding the cheque and slipping it into the neck of her frock.

"Why should this end by breaking her heart?" she demanded. "If the boy loves her, then nothing in the world could make any difference."

Then she shook her head, smiling sadly. "If only I could be sure of that. Poor Elise! To come to me after all these years and suffer—this!"

Again she sighed. There was no use worrying. She could only wait.

She moved to the door and switched off the lights. In the hall she dismissed Martin, and then went slowly upstairs to her room.

## CHAPTER 6. Dreams Fade.

AT one o'clock next day Elise met Roger for lunch, and told him that her mother would be pleased to see him that evening at seven,

"She has some friends this afternoon," she added, "so I promised to ring her to see that everything is all right. You are not to change, but dine with us just as you are. And, Roger darling, can't we leave my visit to your people until to-morrow? I'd hate you to rush away. Have you told them? I'm so terribly afraid they won't think me good enough for their son."

Roger laughed reassuringly.

"No, I haven't told them, but I know they'll fall for you, Elise. They won't be able to help themselves. And to-morrow will do splendidly. My father said at breakfast that he'd be out this evening."

Elise gave a deep sigh of relief.

"Then that gives me twenty-four hours of grace, at least," she laughed. "But you're going to love my mother, Roger. And mother is going to love you, too. I told her all about everything last night. And such a queer coincidence happened," she went on innocently. "A very snuffy old gentleman who calls sometimes was there when I got back last night. His name is Sir James Gaynor, the same as yours, and—"

Elise stopped short as Roger jumped.

"But, Elise," he gasped, "he is my father! I never dreamed he and your mother were acquainted. You say he was there last night?"

Her confusion changed to relief when he laughed.

"Why, the sly old dog! Then that makes everything easier than ever," he exclaimed. "He's sure to approve, since he and your mother are friends."

"Yes, of course."

But Elise, remembering, was worried. Roger saw as much, chaffed her gaily about the "snuffy old gentleman," and then brought forward the question of what to do with the afternoon. They voted for a matinee, and went to the Frivolity.

It was past six when they came out, and spent the next hour dancing at the club where they had first really met one another.

It was just past seven when Elise went to the telephone and told her mother she was bringing Roger along.

"Have all your guests gone, mother?" she asked eagerly.

"Well, dear, they haven't, as a matter of fact," Mrs. Thornton faltered, "but they won't be long now, though I'm afraid I can't hurry them without being rude.

Bring Roger along here at eight o'clock, will you, and then I'll have dinner ready and the whole evening in front of us."

Elise promised, then went back to Roger with the news. They danced for another hour, and the clock in a nearby church was striking the hour when they pulled up in front of Elise's home.

One car was just driving away, and another pulling up, when they alighted.

"Must be just going," Roger said.

Elise nodded as she rang the bell.

Martin admitted them. Elise waited until he had closed the door, and then asked for her mother.

"Have the guests all gone?" she began, stopping as the sound of muffled voices came from the drawing-room.

Martin confronted her, a worried look in his eyes.

"I think perhaps you and the gentleman had better wait in the library, Miss Elise," he suggested.

Conscious of Roger's puzzled stare, Elise coloured. It did seem incongruous to be addressed like that by a servant in her own home. She fought with a momentary resentment, and at that moment the door of the library opened and Mrs. Thornton came out.

Martin vanished suddenly at a signal from another manservant who had appeared from the back regions; but Mrs. Thornton saw only the young couple by the door, hesitated, then came towards them with outstretched hands.

"Hallo, Elise," she beamed, and then turned slowly towards the young man. "So this is Mr. Roger Gaynor? I—I am more than pleased to meet you."

"And me, Mrs. Thornton," Roger answered instantly. "Elise and I have been—"

Muffled sounds of a commotion came from the rear of the hall, behind the wooden partition cutting off the servants' quarters. The trio by the door swung round, and alarm leapt into Mrs. Thornton's eyes when Martin appeared, stopped short, and gesticulated.

Pale, Mrs. Thornton turned to the lovers.

"I'm terribly sorry, Elise dear, but my guests still haven't all gone, and now there seems to be some trouble among the servants. If you two will just run along to the library and wait for me—"

"Of course, Mrs. Thornton."

Roger slipped his arm through the bewildered Elise's, and they were following

Mrs. Thornton towards the library when the commotion at the back of the house changed alarmingly to sheer pandemonium. Someone was knocking thunderously on a door, and muffled voices were exchanging exclamations of alarm.

Elise and Roger turned to Mrs. Thornton in amazement, and Martin, who was in a real panic, could wait no longer. A cry escaped him as, with a backward glance, he strode towards his mistress.

"Mrs. Thornton," he cried huskily, "I tell you—"

Elise's mother was white to the lips, but she stopped him with a wild gesture and a rebuke before she turned to Elise and Roger, pushing open the library door.

"Please don't be alarmed, but go in and wait," she begged.

It was too late, however. The sound of footsteps at the back of the house heralded the appearance of six burly policemen, who, seeing the group, made a concerted rush towards them. Martin was seized by the foremost, and Elise cried out when the second advanced on her mother, catching her by the arm.

"You are Mrs. Thornton, aren't you, the keeper of this place?" he demanded roughly.

With a distracted cry Elise ran to her mother's side, but the stricken woman, who was beyond the power of speech, shook her head and then seemed to be on the verge of fainting.

The front door was open now. The place seemed alive with police, some of whom were pressing into the drawing-room, where a score of indignant guests were arguing with them.

Terrified and helpless, Elise shrank into the arms of her lover as her mother was led away and other police advanced upon them.

Roger was too dazed and bewildered to do anything for a moment, but the sight of the half-fainting Mrs. Thornton in the hands of the police, and an attempt to wrest Elise from him, was the last straw.

Planting himself in front of her, he squared up to the advancing sergeant, his eyes blazing, his cheeks flushed.

"Look here," he cried, "you fellows must be mad! What's the idea of barging in here and arresting everybody? This house belongs to Mrs. Thornton. This young lady is her daughter, and I demand to know what all this is about, sergeant."

The sergeant was obviously impressed by

the sincerity of the outbursts. He pulled up and listened, and then a laugh broke from his lips as he laid a hand on the shoulder of each and shouted an order to the men behind.

"So you want to know what it's all about?" he snapped. "Well, if you're not just pretending ignorance—and that isn't going to do you any good—this place is a gambling den we've been watching for months, and your precious Mrs. Thornton"—he nodded to the front doorway, through which Elise's mother had already been taken away to the vans that had drawn up before the house—"is the woman who has been running it. She's gone to gaol, and you'd better come across with your names pretty quick, or that's where you're going, too!"

The next hour was a nightmare.

Every person discovered in the house was taken to the police-station, where an inspector questioned each one individually and took particulars.

"You will appear in court to-morrow," he snapped to each of the harried guests when he had done with them.

Elise was brought before him at last. She hardly knew what replies she gave to his questions. He looked ominously surprised when she revealed her identity.

"Mrs. Thornton's daughter, eh?"

A police officer stepped forward in the silence of the bare charge-room.

"Mrs. Thornton is anxious to have a word with the young lady, inspector," he said. "She has been protesting that her daughter knew nothing of what was going on in the house."

The inspector grunted, but his manner softened a little as he studied Elise's pale, drawn face.

"That is for the magistrates to decide," he said at length. "But she may see her mother for a few minutes. I take it that Mrs. Thornton isn't asking for bail?"

"No, sir."

Elise turned and looked helplessly towards where Roger was standing, almost as pale as herself, but much more comprehending. A constable laid a hand on her arm, however, and led her away down a narrow, stone-floored corridor to one of the cells.

Behind the bars, Mrs. Thornton was sitting on the edge of a plain bed, her hands clasped in her lap, staring unseeingly in



front of her. She started up at Elise's cry. The door opened, and Elise went in.

Mrs. Thornton stared at her wildly for a long moment, and then, with a sobbing cry, flung her arms about her.

"Oh, my dear, what have I done to you?" she cried.

Elise all but shrank from her. She was very slowly awakening to a full sense of reality.

"Elise, don't!"

Mrs. Thornton moved back a step, but still held Elise's hands. She realised that for the girl's sake she must compose herself. This was a thousand times worse for Elise than herself. And, indeed, she was thinking only of Elise; she had brought her home to this.

Their eyes met and held.

"Elise," Mrs. Thornton whispered, "tell me, what are you thinking?"

The girl shook her head, trying vainly several times before she could speak.

"I don't know, mother," she confessed at length. "It's all so horrible. You, my mother, here in this cell!" She looked around, shuddered again, and then continued to stare at her mother. "You, a common criminal. I can't—"

Mrs. Thornton could bear it no longer. She caught Elise to her.

"Don't, Elise—don't try now," she pleaded. "I would have given my life to have spared you this. I was planning to alter everything. In a little while—"

Elise was rigid in her arms. Mrs. Thornton laughed bitterly, and moved slowly back, letting her hands drop to her sides.

"But what's the use?" she murmured. "It has happened now."

Elise seemed to drag herself to life with an effort.

"But, mother," she faltered, "you can't stay here. There must be some way." She remembered the talk of bail, and went on with desperate eagerness. "Someone must come here and put up some money. We must get you out."

Mrs. Thornton shook her head, a queer, grim smile playing about her lips.

"No, Elise," she said tonelessly. "I can't do that. There are reasons why I can't ask anyone to help me."

Elise's eyes flashed to the drawn face again, and she began to understand a little more. And now it was she who went to her mother, put her arms about her and pleaded with her.

"You mean that—that there is someone behind you in this dreadful business, mother?" she asked. "Someone who was paying you to keep up that house and entertain all those people?"

Mrs. Thornton seemed to be struggling to reply, but could not. And now the door was opening, the gaoler coming in. Desperately Mrs. Thornton clung to her daughter again.

"I can't explain, Elise," she whispered. "You mustn't ask me to. I must have time to think, and you must go. You'll be all right at home to-night. They shan't harm you for this. I'll tell the truth and see to that."

The gaoler intervened.

"I'm sorry, but time's up. The young lady must go."

Elise looked up once more at her mother, and, hardly knowing what she did, caught her close and kissed her.

"Good-night, mother dear," she managed to say.

Then blindly she turned and moved out into the passage and up the stone steps to the charge-room above.

Roger was waiting there. He had already done his best to explain his own presence at her mother's house that evening, and it tallied with the explanation Mrs. Thornton had already given. The inspector had taken his name and address, and intimated that no charge would be made against him. They had believed Mrs. Thornton.

In silence, but very gently, he led Elise down to the street and hailed a taxi. He held her in his arms during the drive back to the house, the door of which was open, with a constable on guard. He touched his helmet as they entered the silent hall.

"We've concluded the search and removed all we want," he told them, not unpleasantly. "I'm just waiting for some of the servants to come back."

Roger led the girl into the library, where a bright fire was still burning. She sank weakly on to the divan, while Roger closed the door and went to the wine cabinet.

"Drink this, Elise."

She took the glass of water he was holding out to her. Then, as she sipped it, her eyes went to his face. A sudden fear and another realisation had assailed her. She saw that Roger's features were set, his eyes showing mingled tenderness and suspicion. She felt a sudden choking sensa-

tion as she put down her glass and got slowly to her feet.

"Roger," she cried, moving unsteadily towards him and catching at his arms, "you don't think that I knew my mother was—"

She began to cry. It was a natural reaction after the blow that had kept her dazed for upwards of an hour.

Roger held her close while the outburst had its way; then he put her gently from him, though he held her so that she could look up into his eyes. He was still dazed, but there were more poignant emotions than that in his heart. He was hurt badly. He was angry and baffled, and not above suspicion.

"Listen, Elise," he said in a voice that was strange to her. "I'm terribly sorry, and I can guess what you must be feeling. I'd like to believe that you knew no more of this than I did, but—"

"Roger!" She flung herself free and stared at him with deeper incredulity and horror. "You mean that you think I did know?" she faltered.

They were both very badly unnerved. It was an unfortunate time for any such taking of accounts between them.

"I don't know," Roger confessed huskily, after a moment. "I wish I did. It seems impossible that you couldn't know, or at least have guessed."

Blind to the look of horror in her eyes, he drew her roughly back into his arms and made a fatal, magnanimous gesture.

"Oh, Elise, let's not talk like this," he pleaded. "I don't care what's happened, dear. I love you; nothing can alter that. But this business is terrible. It means that your mother is nothing more nor less than a criminal, running a gambling den for people who are fools enough to be lured here and fleeced of their money."

He shrugged his shoulders in distaste.

"It's horrible—worse than being a thief. It's as bad as blackmail, and just as heartless. There's no excuse for your mother, either. An officer told me at the station just now that it's not the first time. Your mother was fined before, when she ran another house for this purpose."

He released her and moved away.

"It means prison for her this time, Elise. That's why I'm so desperately sorry for you. She must have been using you as a—sort of catspaw. I don't even know that I wasn't to be one of her intended victims."

"Roger!" she cried, aghast at the terrible things he was saying.

For some reason that cry seemed to stiffen his purpose and steal a little of his pity.

"Listen, Elise," he said. "I meant what I said. I love you, and I'm willing to try to forget. We'll go away and be married at once, and nothing like this shall ever touch you again. But it's on one condition. Your mother went into this with her eyes open. She's a crook, heartless and shameless. You've got to have done with all this, Elise, to-night and for always. You've got to promise never to see or communicate with your mother again, and—"

"Stop!"

Her eyes flaming, Elise crossed the hearthrug to where he was standing, and her left hand struck fiercely and savagely at his cheek. A choking cry broke from her when she realised what she had done, and Roger, shaken and stunned, backed away and put his hand to the scarlet mark on his cheek.

She cut in on his gasping protest.

"I don't care! I'm glad I struck you! Do you realise that you're talking about my mother, Roger? That I love her, whatever she has done, and that she needs me more than ever before? What sort of a daughter do you think I'd be to desert her now?"

She was suddenly seized with just one desire—to send him away and be alone in her agony. That Roger, the man she loved, could talk like that about her mother—could repeat his offer of marriage on those hypocritical terms!

She pointed tremblingly to the door.

"Get out! Get out and stay out! I hate you for speaking like that. I never want to see you again!"

He shrank from the thought of leaving her like this, but it was not easy for him to see where he had blundered.

"Elise," he pleaded, "you don't understand. I do love you, and what I say—"

"Get out! Can't you see that I don't want to talk to you another moment? I hate you!"

It was her agony of heart that made her speak like that, but his own pride was slowly hardening, and she had unwittingly turned suspicion into certainty. She had known—she must have known!

He shrugged and bent to pick up his hat. "Very well, Elise," he said, "you have

made your choice. You prefer living in doubtful luxury on criminal gains to marrying me."

Another cry broke from her lips, but a moment later he had gone.

All Elise's hysterical anger and bitterness dropped from her when she found herself staring at the closed door, and cold reality surrounded her once more. Roger had gone, and her mother was in prison for a crime every whit as horrible as Roger had said. She was here alone in this house, every part of which—even the clothes she was wearing—had been bought with tainted money.

Slowly, relentlessly, her mind marched painfully back over the last two weeks, collecting memories that bore out the certainty of the present truth. She must have been blind not to have suspected before. And yet she realised now that she actually had suspected, but she had been so happy that she hadn't thought it possible that her mother could do anything so vile as this—anything even dishonest.

But what could she do? It was no use standing here helplessly. She must find some way of helping her mother, of keeping her from prison at all costs. She must find money.

Someone knocked at the door, and Martin, hat in hand, came slowly into the room. There was a semblance of pity in his grey eyes. The sphinx-like features had relaxed a little. Perhaps Mrs. Thornton had been talking to him.

"Is there anything I can get for you, Miss Elise?" he asked. "The policeman has gone now."

Elise shook her head.

"Nothing, thank you. But—"

Martin waited, but she could not say what was in her mind. She wanted to find somewhere else to stay to-night, and that was impossible. Then a dull kind of hope stirred somewhere in her heart, and she looked at the butler again.

"Is it true, all they are saying about my mother?" she asked. "She has been punished before?"

Martin nodded.

"I'm afraid so, miss. It was a fine before, but now it means—"

"Imprisonment?"

"It is certain to be."

"How—how long?"

"Six months, perhaps longer. It is difficult to tell. They're pretty severe on this sort of thing nowadays, and I wouldn't be

surprised if they didn't give me more than a fine, too, though Mrs. Thornton will look after that."

A short silence followed. Then:  
"Martin, money can do a lot, can't it?"  
Elise said. "Has my mother much money?"

He shook his head.

"This sort of thing is going to be costly. She will be fined as well as imprisoned. I—I feel you want to know the truth, miss, so I'm telling you. Your mother trusted me, I know. She lost a lot in investments some while back. You see, she wanted to have enough to get out of this sort of thing. If she has enough to pay the fines and costs, that'll be about all."

Elise let him go then, directing him to close up the house and get to bed. She sat staring into the fire again, clinging pathetically to the one thing Martin had said that mattered.

"She wanted to get out of this sort of thing."

Elise could see it all now. Her mother had been unhappy, too, and trapped into earning her living like this as the victim of someone behind the scenes—someone whom she dared not ask for help. That was probably part of the bargain. Her mother would pay, and whoever was behind her would escape scot-free.

The future was clear, stark clear now. Nothing in this beautiful house belonged to them. It was all tainted, and they could not keep it.

Roger had gone. His love hadn't lasted. She would never see him again, and she would never really see her mother again until—

Bleak prison walls loomed up in her vision. An opening door, after many months. Her stricken mother coming out—branded!

Elise buried her face in her hands.

## CHAPTER 7.

### Mary Thornton Goes to Prison.

A DRAMATIC silence overhung the sunless court when, after the lengthy trial, the judge shuffled his papers and turned his gaze to the woman standing in the dock. There was no pity in the judge's grey eyes, and the prisoner's record, lying before him, was far too damning evidence of persistent crime to justify even a leaning towards a merciful sentence.

Appraising her again, the judge saw only the tight-set lips, the pallid face, the enigmatical eyes that did not waver from his own. He did not see the hands so fiercely clenched at her sides to stem the misery racking her like a demon.

Throughout the hearing Mrs. Thornton had seemed almost aloof from emotion. She seemed resigned to and prepared to meet the punishment her wrong-doing merited.

The judge's eyes moved to a seat a little behind the dock, where a white-faced girl was sitting, staring across at him with plain terror shining in her eyes. The judge's expression softened momentarily, for a little of the truth had come out in this court. He had seen this girl suffering acutely and in silence while she had listened to the sordid story of her mother's past.

Elise grew a little more rigid as the judge began to speak to her mother. For two days she had occupied this seat, a silent spectator of the drama now ending. She had seen, bit by bit, dreams and longings turned to dust again. She had seen the almost complete collapse of a world that had been—well, too wonderful to be true.

She had looked in vain yesterday and to-day for a glimpse of Robert Gaynor, whom she knew now she loved as she would never love any other man. Roger had not relented. He had not even tried to get in touch with her. He had finished with her, and how could she blame him?

Her eyes turned again to the woman in the dock. The dream mother who had materialised in a blaze of rich, warm colour, only to make her suffer as she had never suffered before. For she hadn't loved Jerry Fraser as she loved Roger Gaynor, and she had never known any depth of feeling for her father such as Mrs. Thornton had awakened and fostered so easily and so swiftly.

Three weeks of heaven—and all for this!

Dazedly she listened to the judge's words, dropping like leaden weights upon her brain.

"Mary Thornton, there are no extenuating circumstances that I can see to influence me to any leniency in sentencing you for the crime of which you have been found guilty. It is quite impossible for me even to consider merely fining you this time. Fines do not seem to deter women of your type from persistently and

callously preying upon society. While there are foolish men and women with more money than they ought to have, I suppose there will always be parasites to help them get rid of it. For their own sakes, the foolish must be protected, and the parasites must be punished.

"You have been fined nearly two thousand pounds already, on previous occasions, and the only effect of that has been to drive you to another lair, where you can continue your nefarious trade as gaming-house keeper, enriching yourself by inducing foolish people to lose their money, to put the mildest aspect upon this form of illegal practice. Fines having failed to deter you, I shall do more than fine you on this occasion, though you will pay all the costs of this trial and conviction and a penalty of five hundred pounds besides. I further sentence you to imprisonment for a period of eighteen months, with hard labour."

The woman in the dock swayed slightly as all eyes were turned to her—this beautiful and popular Society hostess, who, until now, had played her part with at least an outward scorn of convictions and fines. Mary Thornton was going to prison, to labour for eighteen months with the criminals with whom she had been ranked.

Elise shuddered at the sight of many of the faces turned towards her mother, at the expressions upon them. Hardly one bore sympathy. Many, who must have lost their money in one or other of her houses, were openly sneering, triumphant.

The crowded court scraped to its feet as the judge rose and retired to his room. Elise stood rigid and helpless, hardly conscious of her mother's indescribable glance in her direction, while a wardress touched Mrs. Thornton on the arm and led her below.

Counsel and officials passed to the lobby beyond the swing doors. The smartly-dressed people in the public part of the court also went away, chattering excitedly, impatient to broadcast the news they had come here to gather.

Elise, seemingly alone at last in the silent court, was capable only of two thoughts that mattered. Her mother was going to prison, and Roger had not even sent a word of sympathy or even a hint that he ever wanted to see her again.

She was turning wearily to follow the others to the door, when she felt a hand

on her arm, stopped, and looked up at the man who had detained her.

She recognised him at once as Mark Farrell, the Canadian to whom her mother had introduced her in the Mayfair house. He was smiling sympathetically, and pushed a slip of pasteboard into her hand. "I didn't like to intrude before, Miss Thornton," he said, "but I want to say how sorry I am. Will you take my card? If there is anything I can do, just drop me a line or use the telephone."

His eyes dwelt upon her face for a moment, then he bowed and went away.

Elise pushed the card into her bag, wondering why this man should have gone out of his way to offer to help. Then, at the approach of a kindly-faced sergeant, she forgot all about him.

"You can see your mother for a moment, miss, if you would like to," the policeman was saying. "She is waiting downstairs, but she'll have to leave in a few minutes."

Elise nodded and followed him down a flight of stone stairs to an even darker room, where, accompanied only by a wardress, her mother was waiting for her. The mask had dropped from her beautiful, pallid face. Agony and heart-broken despair were at last revealed as she held out her arms and Elise went into them.

"Elise," she whispered brokenly, "what is there that I can say? Oh, my dear, I would have done anything to have spared you this, after all I had planned and all I had meant to give you!"

She looked down into the girl's eyes, tried to speak again, but couldn't.

It was Elise who, driven hard by despair and a loyalty that even this terrible disillusion had not destroyed, burst out rather hopelessly:

"Never mind, mother. This isn't the end. We belong to each other, and nothing is ever going to alter that. I—I love you, and you are going to need me more now than ever. But, mother, all this—it's so horribly unfair. They've no right to send you to prison like this for what you've done. You couldn't be the sort of woman the judge said you were.

"Oh, I know what's happened," she went on. "But you hinted that you were only the tool of the real criminal, the one who ought to have taken your place in that dock—the man or woman who paid you to run the gambling-room as you did. Mother, you've got to speak—for your own sake, for mine! Why can't you tell them

that you were no more than a paid servant, just like Martin was? They only fined him. Why can't you speak for yourself and let the real criminal—"

The distracted words succeeded in inspiring a passionate longing in Mrs. Thornton as she held Elise close, but it died almost instantly.

"I can't, my dear, not even for you." She looked intently at Elise again. "What about Roger?" she whispered. "Did he —"

Elise looked away, and bit her lip as she nodded.

"I can't blame him," she replied bitterly, and the last ray of hope died from her mother's face. "But after a little time we'll have one another," Elise went on loyally. "I'll find a cosy little place to have ready when you come out. I'll find a job. You're not to worry. Nothing is ever going to make any difference between us. I'll be waiting, mother dear."

Mrs. Thornton broke down completely then. She was still weeping when they took her away, and Elise found her way out to the street and hailed a taxi, which took her back to Mayfair for almost the last time.

Her heart seemed numbed, dead. She could not even be sure of herself, or, what was worse, just what she had felt about her mother during and after the trial. It was almost as if this awful disillusionment had killed the love that had come to life on such beautiful happenings, and only an inherent loyalty had remained to help her during that painful interview.

Back in the big house more shame and humiliation awaited her during the few following days.

With fierce decision in her heart, Elise searched high and low for some scrap of evidence that might reveal the identity of the person her mother had shielded so blindly, the one who had reaped most of the profits from the gambling-rooms, while her mother had taken all the risk and was paying the penalty.

She found none, and in a daze watched all sorts of officials coming and going. Furniture was taken away and sold. Papers were searched and destroyed. And finally there came the day when an elderly official summoned Elise to his office.

"I have received instructions from your mother to place some money at your disposal," he said. "Her entire effects have been sold, costs and fines paid, and I am

afraid that this is all that is left. Your mother wishes you to use it for your immediate needs."

He passed across a little wad of notes. Twenty-five in all. Elise took them and thrust them into her bag, and the official then pushed over a somewhat bulky envelope.

"She also wished you to have this, Miss Thornton. You may have until to-night to remove your personal belongings from the house in Mayfair, and the caretaker we have installed will take the key. That is all."

He rose in dismissal.

With a sense almost of relief, Elise went back to the empty house, where she had her luggage taken down to the waiting taxi and gave the driver the address of a tiny two-roomed flat in Tottenham Court Road she had rented for the time being.

The taxi was moving away when Elise took one last look back at the building that had once, and so recently, seemed like a palace. A tall, immaculately dressed man was walking slowly by, and she started slightly as she saw him pause, look up at the windows, and then move on.

It was Sir James Gaynor, Roger's father and a friend of her mother's. Elise was too far away to catch the expression on his face as he passed the house, and for a moment unbidden emotions and bewilderment taxed her.

Roger's father could not possibly have come there, that time she had seen him, to gamble like the rest. What other interest could he have had in her mother?

She shook her head. If what had happened had driven Roger from her, how much more must it have shocked his father, who had looked upon her mother, no doubt, as a respectable and wealthy woman.

Even if Roger had wanted her back, the gulf between them was now impassable. His people would be scandalised if they even suspected that their son had loved and intended marrying the daughter of Mary Thornton.

It was not until that evening, when she had put the tiny flat to rights, that Elise sat down and opened the letter her mother had been permitted to send her. It contained another which, to her amazement, her mother had addressed to Sir James Gaynor.

She read Mrs. Thornton's message.

"My Darling.—There is so little left that I am afraid. That is why I am sending you this other letter, written to Sir James Gaynor, Roger's father. We were great friends, and though he can scarcely have anything to do with me after this, he is the one person from whom I could hope for any personal help.

"Keep this letter, dear, and if you are in trouble and cannot otherwise find a job, take it to him. I think that, for the sake of the past, he will do something to help you. Meanwhile, I shall count the days until you are allowed to visit me. Try hard to forgive me, Elise. All is not over if you can.—Your MOTHER."

Elise's cheeks burned as she picked up the unopened letter and read the address. For a moment she experienced a wild resentment at what her mother had asked her to do. Go to Roger's father for charity, after Roger had treated her as he had!

Impulsively, and almost before she knew what she was doing, she tore the letter into pieces and dropped them into the fire. How could her mother have ever thought she would do such a thing?

Yet when she read her mother's message again, she understood and forgave. Her mother had forgotten her pride in her anxiety for her daughter's future.

But she would find a job, and she would, she must, forget Roger. At all costs she must brace herself and get over her heart-ache before her mother came out of prison. They would make a fresh beginning and try to forget.

After all, hadn't she still the mother for whom she had longed? Wasn't there still a big chance for them to be happy?

But Elise did not find a job, and she could not put Roger out of her mind and heart. Their last painful interview remained to haunt her and torment her. It was all so unfair that Roger, who had so often protested that only their love mattered, could have forgotten and put her entirely out of his life.

Her youth's idealism flamed in defiance against the seemingly inevitable. In the lonely evenings, after vain searching for work while her small store of money steadily dwindled, came fear out of hope. What if Roger had relented, after getting over the shock of that night and of the trial afterwards? What if he had been ill, or had to go away, and returned too

late to find her before she had left the Mayfair house? And now he did not even know her address.

She could not bring herself to write to him; her pride would not let her, and the memory of that last night together loomed too ominously. But she did hope desperately that they might meet again.

She loved him still. She would go on loving him always, whatever happened, and she would never know real happiness without him, even if he had not cared as she had cared for him.

### CHAPTER 8.

#### At the Dance Club.

THE days dragged into weeks, and Elise found it was getting more and more difficult to write cheerfully and encouragingly to her mother.

There was no work. London was even more hopeless than Liverpool in that direction, and the twenty-five pounds was almost gone.

Elise was clearing out her bag one day when she came upon the forgotten visiting-card bearing Mark Farrell's name. He had offered to help her, for her mother's sake.

Elise fought the matter out with herself. She must find a job, and beggars couldn't be choosers.

One morning, swallowing her pride, she went to Kensington and rang the bell of the Canadian's flat, and his valet ushered her into a luxurious sitting-room, where Farrell, still in his dressing-gown and slippers, was smoking and glancing through the papers. His eyes lighted with surprise as he leapt to his feet and strode across to greet her.

"Why, Miss Thornton, the very pleasure I've been hoping against hope would be mine!" he exclaimed with an enthusiasm that took her aback a little. But she smiled as she accepted the cosy chair he drew up for her. "I thought perhaps you had left London and forgotten all about me."

He returned to his seat and gazed admiringly—too admiringly, if she could have known—across at her slim figure and pale, lovely young face.

"How are things shaping with you?" he wanted to know.

Mastering her embarrassment, Elise blurted out what was in her mind.

"Mr. Farrell, what made you make me that generous offer on the day my mother was sent to prison?"

A barely perceptible smile flickered across his face before he answered.

"I liked your mother immensely," he answered, "and, if I may say so, I admired you the moment we were introduced. Beyond that"—he shrugged—"what can I say? Except, Miss Thornton, that my interest is thoroughly friendly and real, and I should take the greatest pleasure in doing anything to help you. Now, can't we be friends? I'm a bit lonely myself here in London, you know, and your mother was very kind to me."

"Yet you knew she—" Elise faltered.

"Why not? I was assured of company and amusement at her house, and I am rich enough to pay for my entertainments."

Elise was reassured but helpless. She accepted this Canadian at his own estimation—a lonely man who liked to do kind things—and already she felt she had been mistaken in her first impression of him.

"Mr. Farrell, I want a job," she confessed.

Farrell laughed.

"Can you do shorthand and typing? Splendid," he said when she nodded. "As a matter of fact, I've just bought a brokerage business here in London. I find I can't simply laze away the rest of my life on the money I made in Canada, so I've started a business, and need a confidential secretary. How will five pounds a week suit you, as a trial? And could you start first thing to-morrow morning?"

Elise could hardly credit her good fortune. It blinded her to Farrell's excessively direct appraisal of her when she got to her feet and stammered her thanks.

He held her hands perhaps overlong in the doorway before she took her leave with the address of the office at which she was to present herself next morning.

Once again the tide seemed to have turned. She would have written telling her mother the good news that evening if she could, but only a certain number of letters were allowed, and her first visit was to take place next week.

Five pounds a week would be salvation, enabling her not only to pay her way but to save—a store of money that should mean increasing safety for her mother and herself.

She went to her work next morning to find Mark Farrell installed in a luxurious suite of offices in the City. She was to work with him in his private office, and from the start she found the work simple and easy, and her employer disarmingly charming.

She would have had to have more than human insight to suspect that Farrell was, at heart, a savage. A veneer of culture, acquired since his wealth, served as a cloak to disarm those on whom he had designs.

He believed that all pretty women could be bought, and from the moment he had first seen Elise he had thought of her as a rare prize to be claimed for himself, as he had claimed others.

But he had both cunning and patience, and during the first two weeks Elise worked for him he disarmed her suspicions by behaving as a discreet and charming employer and friend.

He asked her out to dinner one evening, and though she accepted because she didn't like to refuse, she said good-night to him feeling rather dazzled by his discreet gallantry and pretended interest in her affairs.

The day of Elise's first visit to her mother was not a happy one.

There was, first of all, the shock of seeing her mother in rude prison attire, and to see how she had wasted. Her cheeks were sunken, her eyes dull and lifeless, though a pathetic new brilliance leapt into them when Elise entered the little room where they met.

Mrs. Thornton had suffered more, mentally and in her heart, than she would allow herself to admit. Eagerly she asked Elise for news of her own faring, and as eagerly Elise told her. She had found a job, a marvellous job. Mrs. Thornton was delighted.

Then Elise told her the rest, and her mother started as if at a physical blow.

"You are working for Mark Farrell?" she faltered. "But you've only met him once. Oh, Elise, he's the last man I—"

"Mr. Farrell has proved himself a thorough gentleman and a true friend, mother," Elise protested. "And at least he was more sympathetic than many of those people who came to gloat in court that day."

Then, impulsively, she put her arms about the suffering woman.

"Don't worry, mother, I can look after

myself, and I'm sure you're mistaken about Mark Farrell. He hasn't even attempted to treat me as anything but an employee. And my salary is enabling me to do all sorts of things for us both. Oh, mother, won't it be wonderful when we are together again?"

Elise left the prison feeling that things weren't so bad, after all. And if only there wasn't always that ache in her heart, because Roger hadn't cared enough!

That evening she went to dinner and a dance with Mark Farrell, because she had promised to tell him about her mother.

He listened sympathetically and attentively to the slight news she had to give, and she felt a little thrill as he put his hand on her own in the quiet restaurant where they were dining, and held her gaze for a moment.

"You're marvellous, Elise," he said, "to have stuck to Mrs. Thornton like this."

Her eyes shone wistfully in reply.

"She is my mother, Mr. Farrell, and I love her. It is terribly lonely sometimes without her."

Eagerly he fastened on her words, his fingers pressing about her own.

"And you are far too charming a girl to be lonely even for an hour," he protested. "Why don't you get about more, Elise, my dear? I'm lonely, too. Let's explore some of the interesting places in London together in the evenings, shall we? It would make me happier than you know."

She was taken aback by his words. Perhaps that was why she sought to laugh them aside by expressing amazement that, with his money and position, he could be lonely.

"Money and position aren't everything, Elise," he answered. "And you don't know how much these days of working with you have meant to me."

It was then she saw, for the first time, something of the burning passion in his eyes. His hand was like fire upon her own, and momentarily her mother's words came back to alarm her. But he had proved himself too good a friend for her to suspect him of having any ulterior motives in helping her.

"Elise," he said suddenly, "have you ever been in love?"

Love! That word brought the colour to her cheeks, intensifying the ache in her heart.

He saw the truth when her gaze



dropped. He removed his hand, an ugly gleam coming into his eyes for a second. He had been patient, but he had planned something for to-night that was now impossible. He must be wary.

"Who was it, Elise?" he asked softly.

"It was someone I'm afraid I shall never see again," she answered, and reached for her wine. "Please let's not talk of that again, Mr. Farrell."

He had unsettled her more than she cared to admit, but she was grateful for the way he changed the subject and presently escorted her out to his car.

He suggested they should go to a dance club, and she started when, alighting, she found they had arrived at a familiar building. It was the club where she had first spoken to Roger.

Farrell saw her confusion, and frowned.

"Don't you like this place, Elise?" he asked.

For a second she did not answer. Then she forced a smile to her lips.

"Why, of course," she assured him, and together they passed through the door a commissionaire held open for them.

Elise reflected a little bitterly that she was worrying needlessly. This was surely the last place Roger would visit now. But, oh, if only she saw him for a moment!

Her heart beat faster as they passed into the glittering hall, half-filled with dancers. She refused a cocktail and went into her partner's arms as the band struck up a fox-trot. But her restless gaze, moving around, saw no sign of the man for whom, despite all that had happened, her heart seemed for ever searching.

They danced several times before they went to one of the little tables and ordered champagne. Farrell's dark eyes dwelt upon her as he leaned over to pour some of the sparkling liquid into her glass.

"A smart crowd here this evening," he remarked.

As he spoke three expensively dressed women passed them and sat down at the adjoining table. Elise saw them start slightly at the sight of her, and coloured as a remark came plainly to her ears.

"Look, there's the Thornton girl—the daughter of that gambling-house woman who went to prison some weeks ago."

Elise glanced swiftly up at her companion. Farrell had heard, but he only smiled as he reached across and pressed her hand.

"Let them talk, Elise," he murmured

scornfully, and she was grateful to him for that.

She did not know that two thoughts were burning in Farrell's mind as they sat and sipped their wine. That he was enraged to discover that she was in love with another man, and was wondering how he could find out the truth and use it to his own advantage.

It irked him to think of this new difficulty, for he knew his task had not been easy from the start. To get Elise the way he wanted her he must have her completely in his power, and if she had a lover

"Dance again?" he asked presently, and they rose and joined the throng on the polished floor.

Barely a minute later there was the sound of a disturbance by the door, and they saw a young man in evening dress struggling with an attendant.

"Let me go!" he shouted, dragging himself free and glaring at the attendant as he swayed unsteadily on his feet. "What if I am drunk? I can take care of myself without assistance. Get out of my way! I want a drink."

The manager checked the attendant from following the young man as the latter slouched across to the bar and ordered a drink quietly enough. Clearly the manager had decided to leave the newcomer alone in preference to a disturbance at this hour.

Farrell's curiosity was mildly aroused, in common with that of several others in the vicinity, and noticing that Elise had stopped dancing, he turned to her with a sneer and half-impatient frown.

"Only a young puppy forgetting his manners," he began. "Don't—"

He stopped, staring in bewilderment, for Elise had turned white. There was horror and something else in her eyes as, unconscious of her partner, she stared across towards the bar, where the young man was already lifting a glass to his lips.

Then, as he half-turned, to glance scornfully around before he put down his glass, Elise's hand stole to her breast and a low cry escaped her.

"Roger!" she whispered.

Farrell scowled, and at his muttered challenge she looked up at him. He started slightly, and his fingers closed over her arm. A sudden colour infusing his features, he looked beyond her at the swaying figure at the bar.

It was then he heard Elise say softly:

"Excuse me, please. I must speak to that gentleman."

She moved away, and Farrell's eyes narrowed as they followed her.

So that was the fellow she was crazy about, was it? Young Roger Gaynor.

Mark Farrell laughed softly and unpleasantly at the memory of something he had learned that day.

### CHAPTER 9.

#### The Schemer.

"ROGER!"

The girl's low voice came softly and distinctly to the ears of the intoxicated man, who for a moment only stiffened and stared intently at his glass.

"Roger."

He started now, and began to turn. Then he was staring at her blankly, incredulously.

She need hardly have asked for more proof of what she meant to him. The fever of intoxication faded slowly from his face as he passed a trembling hand before his eyes. He made an effort to pull himself up.

"Elise," he whispered huskily. "Elise!"

Her eyes lit up. Her smile was sheer radiance as she caught one of his hands in her own. She had forgotten Farrell, forgotten everything but the magic of this moment. But one had to say something. She faltered into words.

"I'm glad to see you again, Roger." She had forgotten, too, to be afraid he might be angry and rebuke her. "I've thought an awful lot about you."

He listened while she continued speaking, and the sound of her voice, the sight of that lovely young face, unsettled him again in a different way. He was fighting with bitterness and thrill at once.

He saw that she was beautiful and expensively dressed. Her very happiness at this meeting had given her a false air of gaiety. And what was she doing here, dancing, with her mother in prison?

Roger had suffered deeply. It was not easy to believe all she wanted him to know. In his distraction it seemed to him that she was brazen, and mocking him. And there was another reason, too, why Roger should be other than normal to-night.

Suddenly he lost control of himself, and his short laugh stopped her while she was speaking. He had seen the scowling Farrell glaring across at them, and pulled himself up with an exaggerated air of mockery. A faint sneer twisted his lips, and his hand went out towards his glass.

"So you haven't forgotten the old haunts, Elise," he said lightly, and the girl started back in dismay. He nodded towards Farrell. "Still with the same crowd? What stunt are you working this time?"

His words were like a knife in her heart, but she did not let them defeat her. She loved him too much for that. She shook her head, all the love of her heart in her eyes.

"That isn't true, Roger," she cried. "You know it isn't true. Every word I told you about myself and my mother was the truth, and if only we hadn't both been so worked up that evening, and you hadn't

His hands clenched as he interrupted her. "Mark Farrell is getting impatient," he said, and Elise stiffened a little.

"Mr. Farrell is my employer," she said quietly. "I work in his office as his secretary, and it was to please him that I came here this evening. Oh, Roger, please don't think—"

The battle was suddenly and gloriously won. A saner light came into his eyes at the pleading and anguish he saw upon her face. He shook himself, as if only then emerging from the drugging effect of drink and his own bitterness, and impulsively he reached out and caught her hands in his own.

"Elise, forgive me!" he cried huskily. "I've been behaving like a brute. I didn't mean that—I swear I didn't. I've been drinking to-night. I've been drinking every night for a long time now."

"Roger!"

He laughed bitterly.

"It's true, but you're not responsible, Elise. I guess it's because I'm losing my self-respect."

"You missed me, Roger?" she whispered, and his hands tightened upon her own.

"Missed you!" he echoed. "I've looked for you everywhere, Elise. I was blind, and I wanted to tell you so. I had to go away next day, and at first I was glad. Then, when I came back, you had gone. I wanted to ask your forgiveness for doubting you."

Again, but this time defiantly, he cast a glance over the glittering scene around them.

"Elise," he pleaded, "we've got to meet somewhere and talk, so that—"

He stopped short, and blank dismay flashed into his eyes. He released her and stepped back, a bitter laugh coming to his lips.

"Sorry, Elise," he said in a strained voice, "but that's no use, either, now. You can't understand, and I couldn't explain. I've treated you rottenly, and now it's too late. Forget me."

He spoke the last words almost fiercely, and reached for and drained his glass. Then, ignoring her cry of protest, he strode across to the door and was gone.

Elise took only a step or two to follow him. Something warned her that it wouldn't have been any use. She was too dazed to realise what had happened for a moment, too.

First this unexpected meeting with Roger, his confession of the truth; in a flash, he had dashed her happiness into despair, told her to forget him, and had gone.

What did it mean? Why had he acted so strangely? What else had happened to widen the gulf between them, just when it might have been so gloriously bridged?

She turned at the sound of Farrell's voice and went mechanically to his side. It was he who spoke first, and with an apparent sincerity that disarmed her.

"So young Roger Gaynor is the man you love, Elise?"

She started, but did not try to hide the truth.

"We were going to be married," she whispered, "and then the trouble came."

Farrell smiled grimly.

"He let you down, Elise?"

Her eyes flashed defiantly.

"There was a misunderstanding," she replied, "but Roger was not to blame. He tried to find me, and then, just now—"

Farrell laid a hand on her arm.

"Perhaps I can explain," he said. "Young Gaynor is in no position to marry anybody just now. I heard the news in the City to-day. His father has suddenly gone bankrupt, lost every penny he had in the world, and can't even meet his debts."

He shrugged as the girl stared at him in horror.

"So you see, my dear, to-night is probably Gaynor's last fling. To-morrow he'll have to go out and look for work, since his father can no longer afford to pay for his legal tuition."

Elise looked away, stifling a cry of understanding and dismay. Roger loved her; he wanted her as much as ever he had done, and a moment ago he had left her because he was no longer in a position to marry!

The wild joy and relief in her heart was undimmed by the tragic news that mattered little or nothing at all to her love. She wanted to laugh and cry at the realisation of why Roger had acted like that. He had gone because he could no longer offer her the luxuries of the world in which they had met.

But he loved her!

That was the song in her heart when she drove back with Mark Farrell an hour later. It was the wonderful reflection that kept her awake far into the night, when at last she lay in her bed in the tiny flat.

Once again life was glowing in all its fine colours. She felt the onrush of a happiness more real even than the bewildering existence in the Mayfair mansion.

For now everything was plain. Her mother would come home to share this little flat, and it would be a wonderful task helping her to forget and be happy. And Roger would come here, too, just as soon as he got himself on his feet and she could make him understand that even poverty would be heaven with him now.

There was a new light in Elise's eyes when she went to the office next morning, and Mark Farrell was not blind to it. He was consumed with fury at this new difficulty to be surmounted before he could win this girl for himself, but he did not make the mistake of trying to rush things.

He even pretended to be anxious for Elise and Roger to meet again, and warmed her heart by offering to help Roger find a job if it would make her happier.

"That's splendid of you, Mr. Farrell," she cried, "but I—I don't even know when I'm going to see him again, and I'm sure he'll be able to make good on his own."

Farrell smiled queerly.

"He knows you work here? Then he'll come, if he wants to badly enough."

He was standing by her desk, and his

hands dropped to her shoulder for a moment.

"I'm jealous, all the same, Elise," he told her. "I'd give a great deal to have you feel that way about me."

He turned away with a sigh, while Elise, with a faint smile and added colour in her cheeks, went on with her work. Farrell's confession gave her no real concern. He was too good a friend to wish her unhappiness, and every day now she hoped she would see Roger again.

A week passed. She wrote to her mother telling her the good news and shyly confessing all she dared to hope.

"It's going to be wonderful for us all, mother dear," she wrote. "We'll be so happy together in our tiny home—a thousand times happier than was possible before. And if it wasn't for all you've been through, I'd be glad we aren't rich any longer. I'm just longing to have you all to myself, to help you forget all that you have suffered."

It was exactly a fortnight after the meeting at the club that they met. Roger, looking very manly in a plain brown suit, was waiting for Elise when she came out to lunch. There was a confident, determined light in his eyes that thrilled her, and she knew before he told her why he had come.

He took her off to a neighbouring restaurant for lunch, and they found a corner table where they could talk.

"Yes, I'm making headway," he said proudly, "though I almost crumpled up under the blow at first. I couldn't explain that night at the club, Elise," he went on tenderly. "I'm afraid I wasn't myself, and pretty justifiably ashamed—sort of knocked flat by what had happened."

He smiled, and his hand stole across the table to her own.

"But meeting you worked the miracle, Elise. I went straight home and pulled myself together, and next day started out after a job. It was pretty rotten for my people. I'm afraid it's finished them. But my father was jolly decent. He gave me enough to put down on a small business. I bought a garage, and I'm working like the dickens to make it go." He glanced at the clock. "Got to get back in less than an hour. But I'm enjoying it, Elise. You're glad?"

She dropped her gaze to his hand, already roughened by toil. When she

looked up a moment later there was in her eyes a look that went straight to his heart, momentarily changing his whole expression.

"Glad, Roger? You don't know how glad I am," she whispered. "You're going to make good, and then—"

She couldn't help giving him that lead. His fingers tightened about her own. She felt the passion rising with him. But it was controlled. He longed to speak, and she loved him a little more because he didn't.

"I'd like to write to you, Elise," he said, "and let you know how things go on. And perhaps I could take you to the pictures some time."

Back in the office she dwelt on those words, hugging them to her heart.

Poor Roger! So used to luxury and position, he was still too dazed to be sure of himself in the harder world where he must make his way. Just for an instant, too, it had seemed he was finding it hard to be sure even of her.

But she wasn't afraid, and she wasn't going to be impatient. Roger's love was too precious a possession to be wanted impulsively. He would win through.

At long last Elise felt that life was changing, that the future was destined to be safe and happy.

She suspected nothing of what was going on under the surface in that very office. Knew nothing of the burning passion that Farrell was nursing in his heart, the plans he was weaving for his own ends.

She suspected nothing even when one morning a rather shabbily dressed man called, and Farrell asked her to leave them alone in his room—which was unusual.

The caller was a private inquiry agent, and he came to report news of Roger Gaynor.

"He's working quite alone in his business, you say?" Farrell asked, with narrowed eyes.

When the man nodded he gave him detailed instructions, and he laughed to himself when the detective had gone.

"It'll work like a charm," he chuckled. "Just one more shock from the daughter of Mary Thornton, and the young fool won't even believe in a woman again. Then she'll be mine. She won't dare risk being thrown out into the streets again."

## CHAPTER 10.

## Cottage in the country.

FOR a fortnight Farrell played a subtle game. On the pretence of entertaining business acquaintances, he persuaded Elise to go about with him quite a lot, and with money and influence he saw that certain items of news got into the papers.

"Mark Farrell, the rich Canadian who is making such a stir in the City." "A picture of Mark Farrell and his charming secretary" at this and that night haunt in the West End, etc.

That was a sure way of reaching Roger, and it was the way Farrell loved to play a game.

Elise, a little wearied by this round of "duty" entertainments, was too loyal and grateful to her employer to suspect or complain, especially when he pointed out that her company was valuable to him.

She heard from Roger once in that fortnight, telling her that he was doing well, yet—it was as if he felt shy of the truth—still not mentioning details of his business.

One paragraph in his letter puzzled her. "I see you're going about a lot with Mark Farrell. I'm glad you've got such a good job, Elise, but be careful."

And then she laughed at his concern, for immediately following was a suggestion that they should meet the following Sunday.

She wrote at once, accepting, and began to count the days until they met again. She planned to get all the work in the flat done on the Saturday afternoon, and on the morning of that day Farrell played his subtle card.

"Oh, Elise," he said, when he came into the office just after eleven o'clock, "I wonder if you would come on just one more trip with me this afternoon? I've bought a cottage down in the country—for week-ends, you know—and I want a woman's opinion concerning it. Will you come out to an early lunch with me, and motor down there for an hour?"

Elise hesitated, but could not very well refuse, and after lunch she took her place at his side in his powerful sports car, and they set off westwards, Farrell talking as they went.

"London's tiring me," he said, with a significant glance down at her. "I want to get away and rest after my work, and this cottage ought to be the very place."

Unsuspecting, she laughed as she looked up at him.

"You ought to get married, Mr. Farrell," she suggested, "and have a woman there to look after you. Why don't you?"

She spoke seriously, for she was genuinely anxious about him. His interest in herself made her feel concerned.

He shook his head as he looked away, treading a little more firmly on the accelerator. Then he laughed.

"I might," he replied, "if I could have the right woman, Elise."

It was an hour later when they pulled up at the rambling old-world house just past the pretty village of Gransley, in Buckinghamshire, and he took her arm and led her up the winding path through the garden.

Elise was astonished.

"But you told me it was a cottage!" she protested, staring at the dozen airy windows patterning the greystone front of the house. "This is a mansion."

Farrell only laughed, however.

"Wait until you see the inside," he said. "This place cost me, with the estate, eighteen thousand pounds."

Elise gasped, and her second surprise was to find a Chinese manservant already installed. After that she was bewildered with surprises, for every room through which Farrell led her was not only furnished, but beautifully so.

When at length they returned to the exquisite library, where a bright fire was burning and the manservant had laid tea for them, she turned to her employer.

"I can suggest nothing more lovely than this!" she exclaimed. "Every room is gorgeous. Don't you realise, Mr. Farrell, that any woman must say the same? That this is the sort of home all women dream of?"

She had hardly spoken the words before she realised her mistake.

Farrell turned from closing the door and came slowly towards her, his eyes upon her face. Then he was at her side, his hands groping for her own.

"Is it, Elise? That's what I'd hoped," he cried. "This is the most beautiful place I've found in England. I had an expert to furnish it without regard to expense, and I hoped that you would approve of it. You are the one woman in this world who must like it."

She was taken utterly by surprise. His arm went round her, drawing her close.

She realised, with a sense of fear, the passion of which this man was capable.

"Elise," he cried, "this is a trap. I confess it openly and without shame. I've loved you ever since that first time we met at your mother's house in Mayfair. I've been able to think of no other woman since. I'd give every penny of my fortune to bring one dream true—that's why I found this lovely old house and made it as beautiful as money can make it.

"You love it, Elise. Why not come here to stay, as its mistress?" he pleaded hoarsely.

"All I have is yours for the asking. My home, my heart, my fortune. I'm mad about you, Elise. Won't you stay here, darling, as the mistress of this wonderful old place?"

She was startled, panic-stricken. She found herself struggling in his arms as he tried to reach her lips with his own. The charming, friendly, self-possessed man of a moment since was like a madman. Through the girl's mind flashed the memory of their first meeting, that instant and inherent feeling of mistrust and hostility, and now a feeling of loathing passed over her.

"Elise," he panted, "don't struggle like that! I love you. I want you more than anything in the world!"

"Don't! Let me go!"

Somehow the words came. They flashed him a warning he heeded just in time. He had hoped to dazzle her and win her this way, to satisfy his own enormous vanity. He had failed, because money and glamour meant nothing to her.

He released her, and was amazingly penitent as he gazed across at her, stammering an apology.

Trembling, shaken, she tried to soothe herself with this realisation as she faltered the only answer she could give.

"I can't, Mr. Farrell. I don't love you. I appreciate the honour you have done me, but you don't understand. There is only one man whose love I could accept."

She was relieved when he pulled himself together and nodded, to veil the savage resentment he felt at her refusal. His voice was husky when he answered.

"I beg your pardon, Elise. I suppose I deserve this." He made a gesture of helplessness about the room. "I was building a fool's paradise, wasn't I? I hoped to offer you something you couldn't resist, even if you didn't love me. It's Gaynor, of course?"

He came towards her, reached for her hand and lifted it to his lips.

"Let's have tea and forget all about it," he said.

She watched him while he pushed up her chair and then went to his own. A wave of pity went through her for this lonely man who had so mastered his passion at her refusal. But even then there remained something else; a sense of fear, repulsion, she could not wipe out.

He talked cheerfully enough during the light meal. It was even as if he had already forgotten all that had happened. The servant came to clear away, and Farrell asked permission to smoke a cigar before they set out on the homeward journey.

He talked of his business, but hardly once did his burning eyes leave her face, and with each moment her fear of him became more real. She tried in vain to shake it off, to tell herself that she should be feeling sorry for him, sympathising because she could not make him happy.

His cigar half-finished, Farrell rose to his feet and went over to draw the curtains. It was already dark, and a wind was rising. Elise wondered how much longer she must stay, yet hesitated to suggest they should be going.

She could not analyse nor justify the fear that was growing within her as she watched her companion pouring out two glasses of wine. He handed her one, without asking whether she wanted it or not. He seemed to be talking mechanically, his mind elsewhere.

She took the glass, thanked him, and sipped a little of the wine. He lifted his own glass to his lips and made to pass behind her chair, and as he did so his hand knocked against her shoulder. The contents of the glass splashed down over her frock. Elise jumped to her feet, and to her ears his ejaculation of dismay seemed almost a laugh. Then he was apologising and dabbing at the thin frock with his handkerchief.

"I'm terribly sorry, Elise." He stared at the soaking material. "You must have that dried at once, before it soaks through."

Before she could stop him he had rung the bell, and gave an imperative order to the manservant who appeared.

"Fetch me a dressing-gown at once, and then take this lady's frock away and dry

it. See if a hot iron will remove the stain."

Elise protested, but Farrell would not listen.

"You must certainly do as I say," he said soothingly, "and I'll go out and switch on the lights of the car while you change. Surely you're not afraid of me, Elise?"

She shook her head, feeling all sorts of a fool in the face of his reassuring smile, and when the servant had brought a long silk dressing-gown, and the two men had gone, she slipped out of her frock and into the other garment, rang the bell and reluctantly yielded up the frock.

"Please don't be long," she begged. "Mr. Farrell and I must be getting back to Town."

The wind was whistling outside the windows as she waited for her employer to return. What was the matter with her, shaking like this? Why had Farrell frightened her so strangely by merely telling her of his love?

At last she heard his step on the gravel outside. He came into the room, and her heart jumped at the anxious look she saw on his face.

"I'm afraid we shall have to wait awhile," he said. "Someone has been tampering with the car. Two plugs are missing, and I've no spares. But don't worry," he went on, moving to the telephone standing on a little table in the shadows, "there is a garage down the road—one we passed on our way here, you remember. I'll get them to send a man along."

He got through and gave the order.

"Please put the plugs in, and then come up to the house for your money."

He left the door ajar, and joined the girl, looking admiringly down at her as she stood with the loose, thin silk dressing-gown about her.

"You've quite forgiven me, Elise?" he said.

She smiled, accepting a cigarette he offered. And again and again, as they stood and talked and waited for the mechanic from the garage and the return of her frock, Elise took herself to task for being afraid.

But each time the effort failed, because of the incessant appraisal of Farrell's burning eyes. He was talking casually enough, yet his eyes were caressing her in a frightening way.

She tried to think of to-morrow and Roger. She wanted only to be out of this house into the clear night air. Mark Farrell was strange to-night.

At last they heard steps on the gravel path, a knock at the door.

Farrell turned slowly and flung away his cigar, reaching deliberately for her hands.

"So we've got to go, Elise, and all this has gone for nothing?" he sighed, drawing her towards him despite her resistance. "You prefer a poor man to being the mistress of a beautiful place like this?"

"I have told you," she stammered impatiently. "I can't marry you, Mr. Farrell, and—"

Her words were drowned in the sudden, harsh laugh that came from the man. Fierce colour leapt into his face, and in a flash his arms went round her, dragging her into an embrace against which her own strength was futile.

"Marry me?" he echoed harshly, and laughed again, though both words and laugh were too low to carry beyond the door of that room. "Why, you little fool, what made you think I wanted to make a present of my freedom to any woman? I want you, Elise—isn't that enough?"

Her strangled cry was choked back as his lips closed fiercely upon her own. His arms crushed her to him, and the folds of her dressing-gown fell back, revealing a shoulder that gleamed in the light from the overhanging lamp.

She was too terrified, too revolted even to struggle for a moment. Then suddenly she was conscious that Farrell had released her and, with an exclamation of annoyance, had turned to glare in the direction of the doorway.

"What the deuce do you mean by butting in here like this?" he began, and then appeared to control himself at the sight of the young man in mechanic's overalls who was staring towards them through the shadows.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Farrell, but your servant told me to come right along. Your car is ready now."

The answer came in a dazed voice, but one charged with cynicism and bitterness. It was a voice all too familiar to the girl who, white to the lips, suddenly swung round and stared at the newcomer.

She was in time to meet the burning intensity of his eyes before he turned on

his heel and abruptly left them, after eloquently noting the dishevelled state of her hair and the significance of her attire.

It was Roger Gaynor who had seen her like that in Farrell's arms.

## CHAPTER 11.

### The Choice.

**T**ENSE seconds went by before the distracted girl could realise what had happened. Then, as understanding flooded her mind, she cast a wild glance at the silent Farrell and, crying Roger's name, darted to the door.

But the front door slammed, and they heard the crunch of swift feet on the gravel outside the house before she reached it.

Dazedly she turned and stared at her companion.

That Roger Gaynor of all men should have blundered into this room at that moment! The vision of his startled, dismayed, bitter expression would remain in her memory for all time.

She had seen that look that had leapt into his eyes. Something ten times as bitter as that which she had seen that other night in the Mayfair house after they had returned from the police-station and their separate prides had driven them both to say and do things they had regretted.

Roger would seek no explanation to this. To-morrow night, when she might have been in his arms again, he would be thinking of her as a callous butterfly who had tricked him, and only sought a return of his love to please her own vanity.

However it had come about, whatever horrible coincidence had brought him here at that moment, everything was over between Roger and herself. Her hopes and plans were ruined finally. He would never want to see her again.

Elise's gaze went to Farrell, who was waiting coolly for her to make the next move, and in that instant full realisation came to her. There was no sympathy nor even regret in Farrell's hard eyes, but there was something that looked like triumph.

She saw that what had happened was no coincidence at all, but a deliberate, cruel plan of Farrell's to part her from Roger. She remembered that night at the club, and the look she had seen on Farrell's face

when she had confessed that it was Roger she loved, recalled the gradual revelation of his feelings, to which she had blinded herself.

This brute had taken this house near Roger's garage, planned the incident of the wine and the frock, deliberately waited until Roger was approaching this room to take her into his arms and make her an unwilling actress in a scene that Roger couldn't help misunderstanding.

Farrell had to-night revealed himself in his true colours.

Her first wild impulse was to strike with all her strength at that mask of a face in which two triumphant eyes burned so fiercely. She checked herself only with a desperate effort as other realisations came to her.

She was at his mercy. She had only obtained a job by his good graces, the significance of which she saw now. He had only to lift a finger to drive her back to poverty, and perhaps worse. His influence would make it impossible for her to secure a job with any of his business acquaintances, and her mother was helpless in prison.

It seemed to Elise that in that moment she learned the lesson that Fate had been trying to teach her for so long. It was no use playing a straight game and hoping for the real things of life that way. Her weapons were futile against men like Mark Farrell, and her very livelihood lay with him.

Her lips tightened. She could save herself only by playing the game his way, and she would, knowing his passion for her was a vital weakness in his armour, knowing that to pretend was the only way to save herself.

A slow smile began to play about her lips, while scorn brightened her eyes. It was not easy, but she somehow managed to convey more of that scorn in her low-spoken words.

"You don't do things by halves, do you?" she challenged.

Farrell started. He had expected hysteria, pleading, even abuse. He was so startled that he even began a denial, discarding all his plans for an unyielding role.

"My dear Elise," he protested weakly, "I swear—"

She stopped him with a hard laugh.

"You would swear to anything that suited your purpose," she scoffed.



"Haven't I shown more intelligence as your secretary than for you to think I could be deceived into believing all this was mere coincidence? The beautiful house near Roger's garage, the spilt wine when your hand is always so steady, the neatly planned tableau which you brought about at the very moment when he was approaching a door you had purposely left open. Well, it worked, didn't it? I hope you're satisfied."

Farrell had made few mistakes with women, but he began to see he had made a disastrous one with Elise. And after this evening, when he had held her in his arms and crushed his lips upon hers, his longing to possess her had become almost a craving.

Fear of losing her, as well perhaps as his own vanity, drove him finally to discard pretence. To show, instead, more of his real feelings towards her.

He shrugged, flung away the cigarette he had taken up, and came towards her, catching her roughly to him.

"All right, then, it was a plan, and it did work, Elise!" he cried. "I was mad with jealousy when I realised that you loved him—a penniless young nobody now."

She stiffened, but did not resist him.

"Why should you think that if I did lose Roger Gaynor I should have to come to you?" she demanded.

"Because I'm mad about you, and there's nothing I wouldn't do to win you for myself, Elise. I've wanted nothing so much since the first time we met. And I'm rich. I can give you everything, as I will give you everything it pleases you to ask for."

"Except marriage," she reminded him, and felt a thrill of bitter triumph when he hesitated only for an instant.

"After to-day," he cried, "I'm not sure I wouldn't even sacrifice my freedom for you, Elise!"

She slipped from his arms and faced him calmly.

"Let us be quite frank about that, Mr. Farrell," she said. "I should listen to no other proposal than marriage from any man." She smiled faintly. "Perhaps you may make me such an offer, and then, too, perhaps I shall refuse you. Now, will you please send for my frock and let us be going?"

He saw it was useless to press his cause

further at this juncture. He knew, too, that nothing would induce him to give her up. He was that kind of man. The more unreachable the prize, the deeper his longing to possess it.

He went to do her bidding.

The manservant returned with her frock, into which she changed. Farrell was waiting in the car when she left the house, and the drive back to London was accomplished almost in silence. She did not encourage his efforts to melt the ice between them, but she did not definitely rebuke them.

"Forgive me, Elise," he pleaded when he put her down at her destination. "I was driven to do what I did to-day. Young Gaynor is no husband for a girl like you, with all the chances you have for the asking."

Her only answer was a tantalising smile as she went up the steps to the house. Only in the sitting-room of her tiny flat did she begin to give way, leaning weakly against the closed door.

Her eyes moved to the telephone, which for business reasons she had had to have installed. She thought of Roger alone now in his modest quarters over the garage, brooding over his bitterness.

Impulsively she ran to the instrument and seized a directory at the same time. Then her hands fell slowly away as she drew back and shook her head, her lips trembling.

What was the use? It was finished. There would be no third chance with Roger. His own sufferings had made that doubly impossible. He wouldn't even listen to her if she did call him up.

Elise broke down then. Once again her life was in ruins about her. Once again a nearly-grasped happiness had proved a mirage, and eager hands had touched the burning reality of hot sand.

She got to her feet. What was the use of trying to attain the impossible? Her heart was broken, and Roger had gone for ever.

Well, she would accept life at its own valuation. But she wouldn't accept defeat, poverty, misery for her mother and herself at the hands of a man like Mark Farrell.

He had hinted at marriage. He had lied. He would go on scheming, to tighten the net about her. He would wait, and perhaps it would be through her mother he would try to strike her to submission next time.

Her lips parted in a bitter, tragic little laugh, and she dashed away her tears.

"All right, I'll play the game his way. I'll be a gold-digger, asking for everything and giving nothing that matters."

She was fighting for her mother—the only person she cared about now—and herself.

And, to begin with, she would find a way of escaping from Farrell's clutches, a way of hitting back at him and benefiting herself at the same time.

To Farrell's relief, Elise was outwardly more charming than ever at the office next day, more eager to accompany him to his semi-business festivities in the West End.

Farrell trusted her implicitly. She had done nothing to make it otherwise. Elise was doubly anxious now that this should be so. His financial operations were spreading fast, and already he was a power in the City, his favours sought by men who counted.

Delighted in Elise's efficiency, he gave her more and more important work to do, even to interviewing some of his clients and lunching with some of his business friends when he could not do so himself.

Among financiers Elise became immensely popular, and she played her advantage with subtle skill and grace. She dined alone with one or two—discreetly, but to give the half-impression that she did not belong entirely to her employer.

She laughed lightly at Farrell's jealous protests when he discovered these appointments.

"But these men are your rivals," she scoffed. "Making friends with them may be useful to you, surely?"

Her innocent surprise deceived Farrell completely.

"You're a wonder, Elise," he declared. "Go ahead. We've some big schemes in hand now. But be careful."

A rush of business kept him from having much time to worry her with his attentions for some weeks then. Elise made it her business to learn every detail of his plans whenever she could.

The chance she had been hoping for came when, lacking the immense capital necessary for one of his biggest financial operations, Farrell made peace with a powerful rival, Philip Preston, and fixed a date to dine with him and discuss the

dual project that was to enrich them both to an incredible extent.

Elise—whose letters and visits had transformed a lonely and anxious woman in prison to a happy and hopeful mother looking eagerly forward to their happiness together—knew all about this deal, and was thoughtful. She had dined twice with Preston, a plump, good-natured but amorous man of middle-age, whose shrewdness in business was almost unanny.

She herself fixed the dinner appointment between him and Farrell, and she knew exactly how much depended on the issue, so far as Farrell was concerned. His commitments were terrific, but this deal, with Preston's support, would not only enable him to meet them, but would make him a millionaire twice over.

She knew what it would mean, on the other hand, if the wily Philip Preston let him down. And if Preston knew how heavy were his rival's commitments, knew exactly where they were placed, he could not only pull off the new project himself with outside money, but very nearly ruin Farrell into the bargain.

Which was what, as a rival, he naturally wanted to do.

On the morning of the day fixed for the dinner and discussion between the two men, Farrell had to go to the Midlands on urgent business. He was furious and worried when he knew this, and he would have taken a chance and stayed in London if Elise had not assured him that he could catch a certain train back that would enable him to meet Preston at the appointed time.

Late that afternoon she waited anxiously, and a hoped-for trunk call came through. She had made Farrell miss the train by an inaccuracy in her statement of the time it left the Midlands. A small inaccuracy, but sufficient.

"However, I've chartered a plane, and I'll be rushing south in half an hour," Farrell explained. "Go and meet Preston and explain, will you? I know he's a stickler for punctuality, but he's sentimental about you, Elise. Keep him humoured until I come."

Elise promised. Her eyes were glowing as she turned away from the telephone and slipped into an empty room to change into evening clothes she always kept there against emergencies like this.

She was sitting at the secluded table which Farrell had reserved at a West

End restaurant when Preston arrived. He was both pleased and suspicious, and even annoyed with Farrell until she explained.

But the idea of Farrell's racing back by plane appeased him, and Elise was charming. He was, as Farrell had said, sentimental about her.

She got him into a jovial mood, and deftly drew the talk round to the big deal impending. Preston hung back for a while, then laughed and patted her hand with his own podgy fingers.

"All right, let's talk about the deal," he said. "Farrell trusts you, doesn't he?"

He spoke freely then, revealed himself as thinking exactly along the lines she had imagined. He did not like sharing with a rival he wanted to see beaten out of existence. He wanted everything for himself.

"It's his idea, of course," he admitted, "but he couldn't pull it off without my money and what else I can do."

Elise laughed softly.

"Money's a heartless game," she remarked, "but I'm well schooled in it by now."

Something in her tone made him look at her keenly.

"Sure it is," he replied carefully, his narrowed eyes watching every movement of her face. "Can't afford to be sentimental. It's either you or the other fellow—even if you're a woman, Miss Cranson."

For business reasons Elise had gone back to her father's name.

Preston's plump hand touched her own again, and he leaned towards her.

"You're out for the biggest reward, too?" he asked.

Elise studied him with faintly pretended surprise, then shrugged.

"I naturally serve one master at a time, and serve him loyally," she answered.

"But," he persisted, "if someone else came and made it worth your while to be disloyal?"

"Exactly what do you mean by that, Mr. Preston?"

Preston took the bull by the horns and told her. He could easily deny everything if necessary, and Farrell couldn't hurt him. On the other hand, this girl might enable him to bring true his greatest ambition.

"This project Farrell wants me to come in on," he said keenly. "I've a shrewd idea he's offering to share because his commitments are so heavy elsewhere that he

can't handle this alone. Now if I knew everything about his position, and this was so, I'd bust him. I can get the money to handle this project alone if I know all the details, and if I could discover Farrell's exact position I could smash him like that."

His hand moved from her own and struck the table.

Elise laughed protestingly, and straightened the cloth, but her eyes did not move from his own.

"Yes," she said after a moment, "I could tell you everything you want to know." She checked Preston's exclamation of triumph and added: "But what would it be worth to me?"

He thought for a moment. Then:

"Two thousand cash when the business was through and your information proved correct—and a job in my office at twice your present salary, starting from tomorrow, if you wish."

It was an almost mean offer, in view of what she could do for him.

She shook her head.

"Two thousand and treble my present salary," she offered, and Preston nodded.

"Done!" he exclaimed, and drew forth a gold pencil and a small writing-pad.

She made him put them away, however.

"I will report for business first thing in the morning," she said pleasantly, "and we can talk then. I must go home now, if you don't mind, Mr. Preston."

He was disappointed, but too elated to protest.

"All right." He laughed. "I'll leave a message for Farrell tantamount to telling him to go to the dickens. May I drive you home?"

She accepted, after a moment's thought, and ten minutes later he set her down outside the flat.

"At nine-thirty to-morrow, then, at your office?" she said at parting.

He nodded.

"You know the address?" he asked, and she laughed.

"I know everything. Good-night."

She waited until his car was out of sight, then turned and went in. But the laughter had died from her eyes, and her expression was hard.

She had chosen, and to-night had embarked on this other road that was going to lead to wealth and safety. But although she might be rich a year from now, she

knew that in her heart would always be a longing for a home in a little country garage that not all the money in the world could buy for her.

#### CHAPTER 12.

##### Day of Release.

MARY THORNTON had grown almost young again. The miracle had been wrought, it seemed, in that moment when she stepped from the chill corridor into the warm comfort of the prison governor's office. Her face was almost radiant, her eyes bright with hope and happiness.

This was her last day in prison. In a few moments now she would be outside the grim building, back into the world of hope and happiness again, where she could look after Elise and make up for all the parting had meant to her.

The governor frowned as he studied the file in front of him. He looked up reluctantly, as if trying to assume an optimism he did not feel.

"You are leaving us now, Mrs. Thornton," he said, addressing her by a name instead of a number. "I am glad to be able to say that your behaviour has been excellent in every way."

Mrs. Thornton smiled, though she was hardly thinking of the past, but of the girl who would be waiting outside the prison.

"Thank you, sir," she said.

The governor leaned forward.

"I hope this has been sufficient lesson to you," he said quietly, "and that in future you will have nothing whatever to do with such resorts as—"

"You need have no worry about that, sir," was the confident reply. "I have finished with gambling dens and anything like them for ever." Her face hardened for a second. "I was forced into it. I can say that now. But that is ended. It is going to be forgotten by my daughter and myself. She visited me here regularly, you know, and I'm proud to say she is doing well, and we may move to the country and open a little business together."

"Your daughter?"

The governor's gaze dropped to the file, and then returned to her face in a way that made Mrs. Thornton start momentarily.

"Why, yes," she said, and then smiled again. "Elise has done wonders, and now I am going to look after her and make her happy."

The governor exchanged a significant glance with the clerk at his side, but closed the file and, getting up, held out his hand.

"Go and change into your outside clothes now," he said. "Good-bye, and good luck."

Mrs. Thornton took the friendly hand and went away smiling, still puzzled and faintly amused by the strange look the governor had given her when she had mentioned Elise.

Just for an instant, as she followed the warden down a long, bleak corridor to the changing-rooms, she remembered something else—something that had worried her. A feeling she had had sometimes that Elise was withholding something about herself and her work, especially during the last eight or nine months.

But that was ridiculous; just fancy. She would soon lose all her foolish fears.

A door opened and she followed the warden into a plain room where, on a long table, a complete outfit of smart and expensive clothes was lying.

Mrs. Thornton eyed them in astonishment.

"But these are not mine," she faltered.

The warden nodded.

"Your daughter sent them," she said.

"Don't be too long. She is waiting outside."

Left alone, Mrs. Thornton touched the clothes with trembling hands. Dear Elise! But she should not have spent so much, lovely though it would be to feel the soft touch of expensive clothes once again.

Changing into the new attire was an adventure. Mrs. Thornton could hardly believe her eyes when she saw her reflection in the mirror. This ultra-smart woman was No. 4403 of the months now gone.

She laughed softly, running her fingers up and down the brown costume coat, fingering the edging of the jumper-b blouse.

It seemed as if, in that moment of transition, the silent and obedient prison nonentity vanished into the shadows, Mrs. Thornton fell into her proud poise again.

With growing excitement she left the room, and her step was lighter during the walk through other corridors to the broad drive in front of the prison. She drew herself more erect while she waited for the turnkey to open one of the heavy doors.

Then, holding her breath but unable to stop the wild beating of her heart, she stepped out into the quiet street, now in half-darkness.

"Mother!"

"Elise darling!"

She saw the smartly dressed girl standing a yard or two from the great gates. She saw the lovely young face alight with joy and tenderness. She stumbled towards her and into her arms.

"Oh, my darling!"

"At last, mother!"

They just looked at one another for a moment or two, and then Elise caught her arm.

"Come, dear, let's get home at once and postpone everything until we've had tea and are cosy in front of a fire."

She led her mother down the street a little way to where a long, gleaming car was waiting, a chauffeur at the open door.

Mrs. Thornton stared in astonishment, and then turned half-chidingly to her daughter when they were both installed among the cushions and the car was gliding silently away with them.

"Elise dear, you shouldn't have gone to all this expense. First these clothes, and then hiring this car."

Just for an instant Elise's adoring eyes hardened, and she bit her lip. Then, with a laugh, she reached for her mother's hands and kissed them.

"I could easily afford it; you haven't had half the surprises yet, mother. And the car is mine."

"Yours? But—"

Mrs. Thornton looked helpless.

"I'm doing wonderfully well, making any amount of money," Elise went on. "You shall know all about it later. But now, mother," she went on a little desperately, "let's just be happy. And before we get home let's make each other a promise—not to speak of the past again if we can possibly help it. Let's pretend you've just come back from a holiday and we're going to plan the future all over afresh. Will you?"

"Will I?" Mrs. Thornton's eyes brimmed with sudden tears. "Elise," she whispered, "to forget and start again with you will be heaven!"

Elise held her mother close for a while, and then gently pushed her away.

"Now, dry those eyes, mother. We are nearly there."

Mrs. Thornton smiled and obeyed. Then

she looked curiously out into the well-lighted streets.

"The West End, my dear," she laughed. "You have a flat in this expensive quarter?"

"Yes. Not too big, and delightfully comfortable. Just wait until you see the bed-room I've furnished for you."

"But, my dear, you must have made an awful lot of money."

For a second Mrs. Thornton was anxious, remembering her own price for luxury. Then, almost ashamed of the thought, she dismissed it. Elise would explain everything in good time.

The car drew up in front of a huge new building overlooking Hyde Park. It had been in process of construction when Mrs. Thornton had seen it last, but she knew what these flats must cost, and laughingly remarked as much when she and Elise stood in the lift that took them up to the fifth floor.

At the end of a carpeted corridor they came to the door of the flat. Elise opened it with a latchkey, and a trim maid appeared as they stepped into the entrance lounge.

It was all wonderful to Mrs. Thornton, who felt a lump in her throat as she went with Elise into the gorgeously appointed sitting-room.

"It's like fairyland, Elise," she said proudly. "And to think my little daughter has done all this by her own efforts."

Elise helped her off with her things.

"Tea first," she insisted, "and then you shall see my room."

The maid wheeled in the tray, and Mrs. Thornton went to warm her toil-worn hands at the fire. Presently she and Elise were sitting together, and Mrs. Thornton put the question she had been longing to ask.

"Elise," she began, "I am impatient to know how you've been successful. You remember how you've said so little in your letters about your own doings. It was always"—her voice dropped—"how often you thought about me, how hard you were working to assure the future for us both, and how happy we were going to be when I came out. Always concern for me, to help me and cheer me. Elise, my dear, I could die with shame when I look at you."

"But I promised not to talk of the past," she ended, forcing a faint smile when Elise frowned. "so tell me about the present, Elise. What sort of a job you have to

earn all this money. I knew when you left Mr. Farrell for another stockbroker." She laughed. "You haven't been investing and making a lot that way, have you?"

Elise shook her head. She was smiling, yet queerly in earnest, and her brown eyes were faintly troubled.

"I have my own business, mother, and a very well paying business."

"That sounds wonderful, my dear. What is it?"

Elise put down her cup and came across to her mother.

"Business can wait," she said. "I want to talk about what you'd like to do and where you would like to live."

Mrs. Thornton's hands went to Elise's shoulders, and she looked pleadingly into her eyes.

"Tell me, Elise. I made up my mind not to ask until this day when we were together again. Where is Roger Gaynor? I was allowed a newspaper now and again. I read"—her voice dropped again—"his parents had lost all their money. I had hoped that that might have brought you two together again. You loved him so much, Elise."

Elise's face paled, and no power within her could hide the startled surprise and pain that came into her eyes for a moment. Then, with a gesture of nonchalance that did not deceive her mother, she got to her feet and lit a cigarette.

"Roger?" She blew a cloud of smoke into the air and looked down again. "Oh, he's doing fairly well, I think. He has a garage somewhere in the country."

Mrs. Thornton was silent, but her gaze was unflinching. Finally, with a sigh, she shook her head.

"You haven't seen him for some time?" she asked. "You didn't make things up as you should have done?"

Elise began to move about the room.

"No, we didn't make things up; and anyway, mother, he has probably forgotten me by now. Let's not talk of him. Would you like me to take you to a theatre to-night?"

Mrs. Thornton, her lips faintly trembling, shook her head.

"No, Elise," she said. "I want just to stay here with you. Come and sit by me."

"Why, of course, darling," Elise replied with relief. Then the telephone rang from the next room, and she stopped, frowning. "I always answer that myself, mother. Will

you excuse me a moment or two?" she said, and hurried away.

The door admitting to the next room closed. The bell ceased ringing.

Mrs. Thornton stared into the fire. So Elise and Roger did not come together again? And she had seen the truth in Elise and Roger had not come together forgotten Roger. She loved him as she would never love another man. He had broken her heart by finishing with her.

"It was I who broke their happiness and dealt her that worst, most cruel blow of all," Mrs. Thornton murmured unhappily. "If only I could find him—bring him back."

And she, who knew nothing of what had happened between the lovers since, thought of that night at the Mayfair house—the night of the raid. Thought of someone else, and a desperate hope lit up her eyes.

"If only I could find him," she murmured.

Another bell rang. She sensed that it was the door bell, and, checking her reflections, got to her feet and moved to the window. She was a little worried, despite the wonder of to-day. She could not quite see how Elise could have done so well by her own efforts.

A door opened and a voice came to her ears. It was a man's voice, and he spoke lightly.

"All right, I'll wait for Miss Cranson in here."

Mrs. Thornton started as, very slowly, she turned and stared at the tall man in evening dress who had entered the room.

He did not see her in the shadow by the window, and, putting down his hat, he strolled across to the fireplace, plunging his hands into his pockets.

"Swell place for Mary Thornton's daughter," he mused aloud, "and I'll say she's a darned sight cleverer than her mother."

A cry brought his gaze to the left. He saw a woman standing there. For an instant she looked incredulous, and then moved slowly towards him.

"Mrs. Thornton," he stammered, flushing violently, "I—I didn't know you were here."

The astounded woman halted, her eyes moving over his immaculate attire as she recognised in this well-dressed man none other than Martin, her butler in the Mayfair house in the days gone by.

"Martin," she said unsteadily, "what are you doing in my daughter's flat?"

Martin looked surprised.

"And in those clothes," she continued before he could speak, a nameless fear coming to her. "You are not working here as a butler."

Martin was about to make some reply when another door opened and closed quickly, and he heard his name spoken again.

"Martin!"

Elise had returned, and was staring angrily across at him.

He coloured again, an expression of bewilderment and resentment in his eyes.

"I'm sorry, Miss Branson," he said, "but I hadn't the least idea your mother was here, and as I am always permitted to see you at any time—"

Mrs. Thornton turned to her daughter, who moved towards her and took her hands in her own.

"Martin is the manager of my business," she said, and the answer brought a look of horror to the mother's eyes.

"Your business?" she stammered.

"But what business, Elise?"

A defiant light came into Elise's eyes as she answered.

"The Golden Moon."

Mrs. Thornton looked across at the man who had been her butler in that gaming house in Mayfair, and then turned to her daughter again.

"The Golden Moon?" she echoed. "But that sounds like a night club or something, Elise. It can't possibly—"

Elise turned to Martin.

"Martin," she said curtly, "will you go along? I'll follow and talk to you later."

He bowed and took his departure, while Elise turned to her mother.

"You are right about my business, mother," she said. "I do own a night club, and the best-paying, most popular club of its kind in London."

#### CHAPTER 13.

##### At the Club.

**D**RAWING her mother down into a chair by the fire, Elise told her story.

Bitterly she told how she had trusted Farrell and hoped for a reunion and happiness with Roger. She told of the day at the house in the country when Farrell

had successfully carried out his caddish plan. She told, in a low, strained voice, of the proposition Farrell had made.

She saw angry indignation in her mother's eyes at that point in her story.

"I was at his mercy until I learned one lesson," she went on. "I had come to my limit. Roger had gone and wouldn't come back, and in another moment Farrell would have been telling me what would be my lot if I went against him. Poverty, no job, hopelessness again. And, oh, mother, I was so tired of all that. I couldn't face it again, with months to go before you—before you came home. And I couldn't let you come back to poverty after all you'd been through."

She went on with flashing eyes and a voice ringing with conviction.

"Then I saw that I would only be playing into Farrell's hands by showing him the truth of what I felt. There was only one way to fight him and his world and get anything out of it. I had to fight him with his weapons. So I let him think he had made a fuss about nothing—that I was to be bought, but not so cheaply as he thought. I kept my job and his admiration, and I used them to my advantage, determined to be as unscrupulous as the man I was going to punish, and who was going to serve me."

She told of Philip Preston, of the two thousand pounds and the new job at treble salary.

"I don't blame you for that, my dear," exclaimed Mrs. Thornton. "I'm glad you paid him back in his own coin. But with such a splendid job with Mr. Preston—"

Elise laughed bitterly.

"Mr. Preston wasn't long in revealing just what sort of a job it was," she retorted. "He was as bad as Mark Farrell underneath. I had branded myself, too, as a girl to be bought. In doing what I did I had dug a deeper trap for myself. Philip Preston paid me my salary for a month, and then he tried to make love to me. When I rebuffed him he laughed, and asked me where I was going to find another job. Oh, mother, don't you see how rotten they both were? A girl in my place had either to—"

"Don't, darling!" A hard, distant look came into Mrs. Thornton's eyes. "I understand only too well. It was such a man who—"

She checked herself and asked Elise to go on, and the girl did so.

"There isn't much more to it, mother. I met Martin, and he is rather a dear. He suggested that with my two thousand pounds I should start a night club. He knew the very premises, and he could bring the clientele. I refused at first. I thought of buying a business, then realised with my lack of experience I'd probably lose everything.

"I couldn't go on, mother. It was all or nothing, so I took my chance. I started the club with Martin, and in eight months we've made thousands. I hate the life, though sometimes I get a sort of vicious kick out of the influence a night-club proprietress has for the time. Men fawn on her. I see Farrell and Philip Preston in them. I feel I'm getting my own back on the men who ruined my happiness and my hopes.

"But it won't go on for long, mother. I promised Martin to stand by for one year, and I must keep my word, otherwise I'd have got out before now, and we'd have gone away and started afresh together. That's all I live for, for you and me. If only—"

She had been about to speak of Roger, but stopped herself.

Mrs. Thornton had her plans about that, however. She would sacrifice her very life to bring back the man Elise loved, for Elise was now all her life. Just now, however, it was the immediate present of which she thought.

"Elise," she said in a low tone, "you're not doing anything at this club that might bring you up against the law, are you?"

Elise laughed.

"One takes a risk now and then, but the police haven't touched me yet," she answered. "Before they start to be really interested in the Golden Moon I shall have made my money and gone. I'll have you taken away, and life shall make it up to us both."

Mrs. Thornton shook her head.

"You don't understand, dear." She told Elise about the queer way the governor had spoken that afternoon. "Heaven help me, but they know you as my daughter. If you are doing anything wrong, they will believe we were in this together. They won't be content to fine you, as they fined me at first."

Elise was silent for a moment, then she forced an air of cheerfulness. What risks she had taken had been taken with her eyes open.

"Nonsense, mother. And we don't break the law very much, anyway. This is going to mean security and comfort for us for the rest of our lives."

She got to her feet, pulling her mother with her and kissing her impulsively.

"I've got to run along to see Martin and make one or two arrangements for to-night," she said, "and then I'll be back. You just sit by the fire and rest."

All the glamour had gone out of the homecoming for Mrs. Thornton, and her expression was worried. Then she forced a smile.

"Perhaps I'm worrying about nothing, after all, dear," she said. "And I'm certainly not going to stay here alone. I'm coming to the club with you."

Elise hesitated a moment, then nodded.

"All right, mother," she answered. "Let me show you your bed-room and the gowns I bought for you to choose from."

It was an exquisite bed-room, lovely in its simplicity, furnished with painstaking care and love.

Mrs. Thornton was touched, but she could think only of two things. Elise was taking risks at this club in the hope of swift security and out of bitterness. And she could never have done this if Roger Gaynor had come back into her life.

Mary Thornton knew that at all costs she must save Elise before the inevitable overtook her.

That was why she went to the club with her, professing even to be interested in seeing how it was furnished and the people who came there. It was only in the car that, remembering what she had heard about Farrell two years ago, she asked Elise what had become of him.

Elise gave a hard little laugh.

"Mark Farrell? He's a queer man. I don't think I shall ever understand him. He didn't come hunting for me with a revolver after I'd betrayed him and Philip Preston cleared up. He grinned and bore it like—so he thought, I suppose—a gentleman. He even visits my club, and dances with me when I choose to be particularly gracious."

Mrs. Thornton sat with her hands clasped in her lap. She was not relieved at what she had heard.

The club was behind Oxford Circus, and only a few people were there when they arrived. Mrs. Thornton followed Elise through the ball-room bar to the snug office where Martin was awaiting them.



Mrs. Thornton sat apart and watched her daughter, quietly efficient, interviewing one member of the staff after another, giving orders, making requests, completing certain arrangements for the night.

Now she was discussing with Martin people not to be admitted, frowning over a list meanwhile.

"Johnny Howell is a fool, and the sort of fool to bring a notoriety we can't afford," she said. "Admit him because of his sister, but don't let him bring any friend unknown to you."

She rose and went over to her mother, pressing her hands and smiling reassuringly.

"I've got to see someone else for an instant, and then I'll be back," she said. "We'll go somewhere to dinner and return here for a moment on our way home."

She went out. Alone with Martin, Mrs. Thornton got to her feet half-angrily.

"You are sure things are safe up to now—from the police aspect, I mean?" she said.

Martin looked half-guiltily at his old mistress, wondering whether he dared explain that he had been without a penny and desperate when he had met Elise and made the suggestion to start this club.

"We have been very careful," he replied. "I think we are safe enough."

"And, of course, you didn't explain to my daughter that because of my past she would, if there were a raid—"

She stopped as the door opened and Elise returned.

"Come, mother," she said gaily, "I'm dying for dinner. Look after things, Martin, and don't forget to keep that safe and the door of this office locked. We don't want any more thefts."

Her gay spirits had returned, and were sustained as they dined together at a quiet restaurant.

But Mrs. Thornton was not deceived. Elise's laughter was unreal. At odd moments she would grow silent, a faraway look in her eyes. Mrs. Thornton knew where her thoughts had strayed.

She tried in vain to bring the discussion round to Roger Gaynor.

"But if he loves you, Elise—" she began.

Elise's eyes flashed.

"I have chosen my path, mother, and I'm not complaining. One can't have everything, I suppose."

No; and few women loved as Elise loved. Mrs. Thornton had seen right into her heart and understood her as never before in the past eighteen months.

Only one person in the world could save Elise, and that person was Roger Gaynor, from whom she had not heard for a year. And Mrs. Thornton held in her hands the means of perhaps drawing them together.

She must find Roger and, if he still cared, his love must win Elise from this embittered driving after wealth and luxury. Save her, perhaps, from worse.

She must find Roger at all costs, and tell him that what she alone could tell him—for Elise's sake. The secret must no longer be kept, even though she had promised.

They sat and listened to the orchestra for a while, and then went back to the club. It was nearly full now.

Elise's eyes hardened a little as she entered the big room where drinking and dancing were going on.

"Let's go into the office," she said, then stopped as she caught sight of a man who she had recognised and who was approaching them. "Oh, just a moment, mother!"

It was Mark Farrell, and Elise assumed her gravest role as he came up to them.

"My mother, whom you know, of course," she said, and Farrell smiled as he took the embarrassed woman's hand.

He mentioned nothing of the past. To the contrary, he spoke flatteringly of Elise and her club.

"I always say it's the jolliest place in Town, Mrs. Thornton," he remarked.

Elise had to leave them for a moment, and Mrs. Thornton, pulling herself together, conversed lightly enough with Farrell, even danced with him, the while she studied him intently.

And she saw the truth to which Elise, less experienced, was blind. She saw it in the way Farrell's eyes followed the girl about the room while she chatted and laughed with her guests. She detected it in the inflection of his voice when he spoke of her.

Mrs. Thornton knew that Farrell, even, two years ago, had a reputation of being a dangerous and unscrupulous man. They had told her that on the telephone that first day Elise had been home with her. And she knew that Farrell had only pretended to forgive what Elise had done to him. A burning hatred was in his soul.

He was only waiting, and when he struck back he would be merciless.

It sickened her to contemplate the only way in which he could strike. A way known to them both.

Her heart froze for an instant when, before she followed Elise into the office, she exchanged a final word with her companion.

"Elise ought to be making a pile of money," he said with a queer smile. "It's a great thing for her—so long as it lasts." So long as it lasts!

Mrs. Thornton went to her daughter with fear in her heart, for Farrell probably knew that Elise was giving up in four months. He could discover anything if he wanted to badly enough. And he would strike at Elise before then—through the police. That was why he was here, pretending friendship.

Elise was already putting on her things.

"Come, mother, we'll get home and have an hour to ourselves before you go to bed," she said.

Mrs. Thornton nodded. Her mind was in chaos. How soon must she act, and how to save Elise from her own fate?

Martin stopped them on the way to the door.

"Miss Elise," he whispered, "I don't quite know what to do. Young Cordwell—the stockbroker's son, you know—has turned up with a bunch of friends. They're sober enough, but Cordwell has been troublesome on occasions."

Elise, anxious to be gone, frowned impatiently.

"How many are there?" she asked.

"Five. They're having a celebration dinner or something."

Elise shrugged.

"Admit them, but watch them, and tell Williams to keep on hand. Anything else?" she asked when Martin still hesitated.

He nodded, glancing uncomfortably at her mother.

"I ought to tell you that one of the party is known to you, Miss Elise, and you might not care to have him in the club."

Elise's frown became petulant.

"By good heavens, what man can I possibly object to if it's business and he knows how to behave?" she demanded, and was about to pass on when Martin drew her back.

"He is Roger Gaynor," he said simply.

## CHAPTER 14.

### The Note.

TO Mrs. Thornton it was like an answer to prayer, but Elise was thrown completely off her guard. What was Roger doing here? And with a rich young man like Cordwell.

Conscious of Martin's gaze fixed upon her, she shrugged.

"I have told you what to do," she said.

"Come, mother."

But Mrs. Thornton, following, touched Martin's arm.

"Find out all you can about him," she whispered, and Martin nodded unwillingly.

There was only one lift, and they had to wait until it came up with the load from below. Elise, too proud to hide in her office, braced herself for the meeting.

The gates of the lift swung open, and the group of laughing young men came out. Roger Gaynor, in evening dress, emerged last of all. He was listening to what the men in front of him were saying.

"A dashed good bus, Roger, and fine for hire work. If Billy—"

It was then that Roger saw Mrs. Thornton and Elise. He stopped dead, and turned slightly pale. Then, pulling himself together, perhaps not even seeing the indescribable look in Elise's eyes—an appeal despite herself—he bowed and passed on.

Elise reached for her mother's hand and pressed it tightly, drawing her into the lift.

Mrs. Thornton said nothing as they went down, but she had read what she wanted to know from Roger's drawn face. He, too, had been suffering. These two young people were desperately in love—more desperately than they knew. But neither would ever do anything about it unless someone intervened.

Mrs. Thornton could not help mentioning the incident in the car as they drove home.

"Why didn't you speak, dear?" she said.

"Don't, mother—please!"

Elise spoke the words fiercely, and, biting her lip, looked away.

Mrs. Thornton sighed and was silent, but her brain was busy. There were two things she must do to make it up to Elise. Life wasn't going to be so simple as she dreamed, but Elise must come first and all the time.

Even the brief meeting with Roger had unsettled Elise, and Mrs. Thornton very wisely suggested going to bed. She lay

awake in her own bed for some while before something made her get up and creep to the door of her daughter's room.

Her heart ached at what she heard. Elise was weeping bitterly and without restraint.

In the morning the girl was outwardly herself again, however, and all eagerness to go shopping with her mother. She was puzzled when Mrs. Thornton gently refused.

"I wonder, dear, if I might just go out quietly on my own and wander round? There are not many things I want to buy, but there have been changes even in eighteen months, and if you don't mind

Elise came over and kissed her.

"Of course not, mother dear."

Mrs. Thornton left the flat at eleven o'clock. She walked to the end of the block, looked back, and hailed a passing taxi. The driver put her down in Gray's Inn Road, and Mrs. Thornton went straight up to the office of the solicitor through whom she had advertised for Elise two years ago.

She was there some time, and then she went to a telephone-box. She got through to Elise's club, the number of which she had discovered the night before, and spoke to Martin, who was busy with the books.

"What time did Mark Farrell leave?" she asked.

Martin was frankly puzzled.

"Just before midnight, I think it was," he answered. "There was a queer incident. He chummed up with young Cordwell's crowd, and Roger Gaynor left suddenly."

"What did you find out about Roger Gaynor?" Mrs. Thornton asked in a different tone.

"Nothing much, I'm afraid. I had the bar girl listen. Gaynor has a garage down in the country, but he didn't say where. The girl did discover, however, that he comes to Town twice a week, and has dinner at Handley's, a little restaurant off the Strand. He comes up on Thursdays and Fridays, buying and selling cars to his old friends in Society, and making a fair amount in the process, I should think."

Mrs. Thornton's eyes lighted.

"To-day is Friday," she reflected. "Did he mention any particular time?"

"Round about eight, the girl said."

"Thank you, Martin. Now listen. I have had a document prepared this morning that I want Elise to sign unknowingly. I shall drop it into the door box of the club

presently, and I want you to keep it and slip it into a sheaf of papers or letters. Elise must sign it without knowing. You understand?"

"But why?" exclaimed the bewildered manager.

"I am trusting you to help me without question," came the answer. "In return, I promise you that in no circumstances will I do anything to embarrass your own position."

She rang off and left the box, delivering the document at the club and then doing some shopping with money Elise had pressed on to her, returning to the flat in plenty of time for lunch.

Mrs. Thornton appeared suddenly to have lost her desire to rest. She wanted to draw Elise out of herself and give her no time to brood. She knew that she had been brooding that morning, for there were still lines around her eyes when she returned home.

They went to a cinema and laughed at a comedy, having tea in a cafe nearby and returning to the flat to change for dinner.

Somewhat bewildered by her mother's energy, Elise agreed to dine out.

"I know a nice quiet little place," her mother said as, just before eight o'clock, they went down in the lift.

In the street she hailed a taxi and gave the address to the driver.

A little later they drew up outside the small and inexpensive restaurant off the Strand, and Mrs. Thornton's heart beat faster as they passed through the swing-doors. Would Roger be here?

An elderly waiter came up and asked where they would like to sit. Mrs. Thornton looked round at the few occupied tables, and then pointed to one at the far end.

"That will do, I think."

Elise led the way, following the waiter, but stopped short half-way down the restaurant, where a table was half-hidden by a bunch of tall palms. Mrs. Thornton halted, too, and caught her breath as a startled young man rose from the table and stared at them.

It was Roger, his meal nearly over. From the doorway she had not been able to see him.

Instant suspicion and embarrassment leapt into the eyes of both young people. Elise cast a startled glance at her mother, and then made to pass on, when Roger, recovering himself, bowed.

"Good-evening," he said curtly, then looked down at his plate.

Elise passed on to the other table, inwardly seething when she saw that her mother had deliberately stopped to speak to Roger.

Roger was as angry as the girl when he heard Mrs. Thornton's pleasant voice and looked up to see her smiling down at him.

"You don't seem very pleased to see us, Mr. Gaynor."

He flushed violently, checking a frank and blunt reply.

Why couldn't they leave him alone? He had nothing to do with them now, nor they with him.

He still loved Elise—would always love her—but he had done with her. And she seemed to be having a good time enough with men like Mark Farrell, who last night had boasted of their intimate friendship.

Elise had embittered him against all women. He had suffered enough on her account, and this woman, who had made Elise what she was, deserved not even politeness.

Yet his own pride refused to yield in that crude fashion. He felt a pang of vague curiosity, too, about her motive in deliberately approaching him. His hardening eyes met and held her own.

"I was not expecting anyone I knew to come here," he replied curtly.

But the mere fact that he had not rebuked her encouraged Mrs. Thornton. She glanced casually towards the table where Elise was sitting, and then spoke again.

"Well, since we have met, won't you come and keep us company? Bring your coffee to our table," she suggested.

Roger flushed more deeply, and his anger and resentment grew. But before he could refuse Mrs. Thornton had beckoned a waiter, given the order, and was smiling at him again.

"Don't be long." She dropped her voice. "I have something to give you."

Completely astonished now, he stared after her as she joined her daughter. Something to give him. What on earth could she mean? What use could this woman have for him, or what interest in him?

He determined to investigate, rather than show by leaving that he was in the least perturbed by her approach. He would show Elise, too.

Elise stared askance at her mother as Mrs. Thornton sat down.

"Mother," she whispered angrily, "have you quite taken leave of your senses? What were you saying to Roger Gaynor?"

Mrs. Thornton smiled.

"I asked him to bring his coffee over here, and I think he will," she said, to the girl's amazement. "This continued prejudice is absurd, my dear. Roger misjudges you."

"I hate him!" gasped Elise in the distraction of the moment, and though she hated herself for saying it, she did not retract. Her mother had only succeeded in making things difficult for Roger and herself.

But it was too late to do anything. They had just finished their soup when a waiter brought Roger's coffee, and the young man, a mask-like expression on his face, presented himself.

Mrs. Thornton took charge with disarming tractableness. She referred casually to the surprise meeting last night, and Roger's eyes glistened as he nodded.

"I went at the invitation of my friend Cordwell," he said shortly. "I hadn't the faintest idea that Elise—"

He looked towards her defensively, and she flushed.

But Mrs. Thornton went on, undaunted and with disarming earnestness.

"I was terribly sorry to hear of your family misfortunes," she said.

For some reason this stung Roger badly, and he paled.

"The shock killed my father," he said briefly.

Despite herself, Elise turned to him with a cry of sympathy.

"Oh, I'm so sorry! I never heard that."

He shook his head, smiling a trifle sardonically.

"It happened abroad, where my parents went after the bankruptcy proceedings. It was merely mentioned in the papers. And," he added grimly, "I don't make my present position more absurd by pretending to use the family title."

Elise's eyes misted. Why had her mother done this? It was cruel. Not until now did she realize how much Roger had suffered.

Even Mrs. Thornton was disconcerted, and found it difficult to go on playing her part, though she forced the conversation to continue.

It was casual enough. Roger confessed he was doing fairly well in selling and buying cars. He had enlarged the country

garage—Elise looked away when he deliberately referred to this—and had a small staff there in permanent employment.

Mrs. Thornton had slipped her bag into her lap and written a note, which she folded and left there, returning her bag to the table.

Roger at last finished his coffee and said he must go, and it was only then she revealed just why she had asked him to join them.

"We shall meet again, I am sure," she said, smiling.

She held out her hand, and, in taking it, he saw the note.

He took it hesitantly, but without Elise suspecting, bowed to the girl and took his departure.

Elise could restrain herself no longer, but Mrs. Thornton suffered her protests and rebukes in silence. Feeling was not unnaturally a little strained between them when they departed, and Mrs. Thornton insisted on accompanying her daughter to the club.

"I want to help you as much as I can, Elise," she urged.

Elise could not understand her mother to-day. Mrs. Thornton had changed in an incomprehensible and worrying way. She seemed to be scheming something, but if it was to bring Roger and herself together again, why couldn't she see that it was impossible? Roger's heart was like steel, and she couldn't blame him. Things were over between them.

She must have this out with her mother to-night. This sort of embarrassment must not happen again. And she would be glad when the next four months were over and, without breaking her promise to Martin, she could take her mother away and perhaps forget.

Martin was waiting for them in the office when they arrived, and Mrs. Thornton caught his significant glance before he drew Elise's attention to a pile of various papers on the desk. As it happened, chance had helped him to carry out Mrs. Thornton's wishes.

"There is the rent agreement and some other things to sign, Miss Elise," he said casually. "If you could spare a moment, I could post these things to-night. The covering letters are done."

Elise had much to do, and she was in a hurry. She did not look closely at the papers to which she put her signature, for Martin was thoroughly trustworthy.

The task completed, she hurried out, and selecting one paper from the pile, Martin turned with a gesture of protest to Mrs. Thornton.

"Mrs. Thornton, what are you doing?" he asked anxiously.

With something of the old show of unapproachableness, she took the paper, noted her daughter's signature, and laid the paper open on the desk.

"Fetch one of the attendants to witness this," she ordered, and unwillingly Martin obeyed.

A waiter put his name to the paper, thinking it merely a minor agreement, and with a sigh of relief Mrs. Thornton slipped it into her bag.

"Not a word of this to Elise, remember," she warned the manager when they were alone again. "How much is she worth?"

Martin looked sheepish.

"I have drawn over a thousand myself," he began, and at that moment the door opened and Elise returned.

Mrs. Thornton left before her daughter, saying she would go home to bed.

Elise was relieved. Things seemed to be going wrong. It had all looked so easy, explaining to her mother and getting her to be patient just for another four months. But now Mrs. Thornton seemed to be attempting things that could not be done.

It was after eleven, and the fun was in full swing at the club when Elise left Martin in charge and drove back to the flat. The maid followed her into the sitting-room, which was empty, and said that Mrs. Thornton was in her room.

"Asleep, I suppose," nodded Elise.

She lit a cigarette as the maid retired, and sank on to the divan in front of the fire. Perhaps it was better for them to have a talk in the morning. But her mother must understand about things. Why should she think so much about Roger?

Roger. She had not dreamed how much her mother understood about Roger and herself. She had thought she had veiled her feelings in her letters and when she had visited the prison. Thought she had led her mother to believe that Roger didn't matter.

But he did, more than anything. He would always matter. She knew, to-night as never before, how much she had cared. She had seen the look in his eyes at their meeting last night, but to-night she had

seen more. He was hurt, lonely and unhappy. His misunderstanding was deep and inbred. Their whole story was one of misunderstanding.

Fate had dogged her as it had dogged her mother, whose story she still did not know. But it hadn't beaten her. She had wrested from life enough to give her mother and herself a chance to be happy together now.

Elise started at the ringing of the flat door-bell. She turned and glanced at the clock. It was midnight. Who could want her at this hour?

She heard the low voice of the maid, and then the door opened.

"A gentleman to see you, madam."

Next moment Roger Gaynor, looking as bewildered as herself, entered the room.

#### CHAPTER 15.

##### Mrs. Thornton's Story.

**G**ETTING to her feet, Elise stared at Roger as though he were a ghost. He stared behind him as the maid closed the door, and then looked around the room. Only with reluctance, it seemed, did his eyes come to rest upon her face.

It was Elise who spoke first.

"Roger! What are you doing here?"

Colour crept into his face.

"You mean that you didn't expect me?" he said stiffly.

Elise forced a low, incredulous laugh.

"Expect you? But, good heavens, why should I expect to see you here at this hour?"

"Where is your mother?" he asked abruptly, and it was then she understood.

"My mother? You mean—"

"Yes, Elise dear, I gave Roger a note that you did not see, a summons that could hardly fail to bring him here. I promise you both that when I have explained you will understand."

She turned to Roger.

"Won't you sit down?" she said. "Let me take your hat and coat. I give you my word that my message was absolutely genuine."

Dazedly he allowed her to take his things and sat down in the chair opposite Elise. At a gesture from her mother, Elise, too, sat down.

Mrs. Thornton smiled upon them for a moment, and then she drew up a chair.

"I had better explain in detail, to begin

with, Elise," she said. "I knew that nothing but deception would bring you two young people together. I planned that we should visit the restaurant where Roger was expected to dine to-night."

Roger half-rose to his feet, his eyes flashing angrily, and Mrs. Thornton turned to him again.

"I only ask that you will be patient and give me an opportunity of justifying my action. Please sit down."

Elise could not stand this. That Roger should not only have been tricked into coming here, but persuaded to stay against his will!

"Mother, I don't—" she began.

"I asked Roger to come here so that he might know something vital about his father," Mrs. Thornton interrupted. "That is the reason he came, I suppose." For a second the faintest of smiles played about her lips, and then was gone. "I am going to keep my promise, and this interview is going to be hardest for me, not you."

For the first time the eyes of the two young people met, with something mutual in their depths.

"I came out of prison hoping against hope that I should find you two very close together," Mrs. Thornton began after a moment. "I am afraid it wasn't a very strong hope, and it was doomed to a speedy disillusionment. I found you apart—needlessly apart—and that is why I have brought Roger here."

Again she had to silence the indignant girl.

"More than a year and a half ago, Roger," Mrs. Thornton went on, speaking now to him, "you horribly misjudged my daughter for something with which she had nothing whatever to do. Every word she told you about herself was true. Until the police were in my house she did not even dream by what means I was able to keep up such an appearance of wealth and such an expensive establishment."

Roger flushed again.

"I don't know what all this means, Mrs. Thornton," he protested, "and my only reason in coming here was because you chose to suggest that my father was somehow involved."

Mrs. Thornton nodded.

"That is true."

She paused for a second, as if gathering courage.

"Elise sacrificed her happiness that night

of the raid," she told Roger then, "because she had to choose between you and me, and her loyalty to an unworthy mother won. No, you didn't tell me, Elise," she added, when a cry came from the girl, "but I love you, and I wasn't blind. There could have been no other reason, if my reading of Roger, in the little I saw of him, was right.

"Afterwards, Roger, Elise was almost penniless. The only man who offered her work was Mark Farrell, who deceived her into believing that he was disinterested and a friend. I tried to tell Elise differently, yet there was so little I could prove that my protests were useless. Elise took the chance he offered, because she was fighting for me and herself. She wanted to make sure of a home for us both when I came out of prison.

"Mark Farrell was crazy to get Elise for himself, and he learned that, though you had gone and she could not hope to see you again, she still loved you. Neither of you two know what sort of a man Farrell is. That evening when he summoned you to his house in the country, Roger, to remedy some defect he himself had caused in his car, you entered a trap that was designed to put Elise in a false light, part you both, and leave Elise completely at Mark Farrell's mercy."

"Mother!"

Mrs. Thornton pressed Elise's hand, while Roger's startled but incredulous eyes sought the girl. Again he would have spoken had Mrs. Thornton not stopped him.

"You are both imagining this is merely the effort of a sentimental mother to bring together two people who are best able to manage their own affairs, aren't you?" she went on. "But I have brought you together to put right an injustice to my daughter and to tell you, Roger, something which you must know, for your own sake as well as for Elise's.

"It is a long story. Perhaps you know, Roger, that Elise's father divorced me when she was a baby, and took her away to Liverpool. They were very poor then, and Elise was very lonely and unhappy. Then her father died, leaving her quite alone. What you must know, both of you, is what happened to me."

She leaned forward, while both stared at her in growing wonder, dominated by her sincerity.

"The only man I ever loved was Elise's father, but soon after our marriage I ceased to love him. I never told Elise, but he was a brute. He ill-treated me until I could stand it no longer. He was a tyrant, thinking only of himself, but because he did not drink, and because he could bring any number of neighbours to testify to his public good character, he had little difficulty in keeping Elise, our child, when the divorce came.

"It came because there are limits to a woman's endurance. A man of wealth and position, whose name was Thornton, offered to take me away and marry me after the divorce. I met him in a theatre where I worked as an attendant—I worked because, among his other cruelties, my husband refused to give me enough for food and clothing for my baby daughter and myself."

Elise's eyes were wide with growing understanding. So that was the truth? Oh, how easy it was for her to believe it—she who had suffered so much of the same sort of thing from her father, and had excused him because of his vaunted tenderness!

But her mother was speaking again now, her voice low and charged with earnestness.

"I did not love the man with whom I ran away, taking my baby with me. I went to him because I wanted a home and comfort for my child and myself. This other man did not help me to fight the case and to keep Elise. When she was taken from me by the law—and my husband only wanted her to satisfy his vanity. I am sure—he revealed himself for what he was.

"He married me, but he wanted no children about his imposing West End house. He wanted me for the beauty I was then, and he worshipped me as such until the end—making my life a misery by his jealousies, forbidding me even to attempt to find Elise, and literally crushing me with his selfish love. And then, not so very long ago, he was found dead in his bed. The doctors and the coroner pronounced it an accident. He took a sleeping draught every night, and by mistake took a fatal dose.

"I never believed that," she went on, her voice now little more than a whisper. "I knew he was in terrible trouble, which he had never confided in me. Only on his death did I discover its nature.

He had not the fortune I had always believed. He made his money by floating bogus companies, as the catspaw of cleverer and even more unscrupulous men who financed him."

"Oh, mother, how you——" began Elise, but Mrs. Thornton held up her hand.

"Let me go on with my story, dear," she said. "One of these men came to me when I was dazed and frightened by the discovery of the truth. My husband was not only penniless, but he had left debts, to pay which meant that our beautiful home—my only happiness—must be sold.

"These debts were owed mostly to one man, for whom my husband had made scores of thousands of pounds. This man came to me and demanded payment. Distracted, I begged for mercy. I hadn't a penny besides what the house and furniture and my personal belongings would fetch.

"This man, however, was pitiless. He was not interested in what happened to me—until he saw a way of using me, too, for his own ends. And then he made me a proposition. For my husband's benefit I had had to entertain. I was known as a popular Society hostess. This man pointed out the great advantage my position would be to his scheme.

"He suggested that I should quietly begin to organise, with expert assistance, a gambling house. The profits, apart from an allowance for me, were to go to him. I was to take all the risk, and any punishment that might come with discovery. His name was not to come into it, though he was to have the reward. In return, he offered me the chance of remaining in my home, of retaining my position in Society, of securing an ample living."

Mrs. Thornton paused, glancing wistfully at her audience. Both were staring into the fire, both impressed and even horrified by the story she was telling.

"What was I to do? I was tired, frightened. I could not face being put out into the street, which was my only alternative. I accepted this man's offer, believing his assurance that I should be safe and could make money, and in a little time find a secure and comfortable place for myself away from the London I hated. I became his servant. Bit by bit I attracted wealthy people to my house to gamble. The profits were great and my patron was more than pleased.

"He only came near me each fortnight to collect his profits, and success dazzled me into believing that the game was safe, after all, much as I despised it. I lived for the time when I should have made enough for my patron and he would give me a promised sum of money, so that I might slip away and seek peace for the rest of my life—might even find the baby I had had torn from my arms.

"Then came the first police raid. I was fined. I begged my patron to give me money and let me go, being content with what he had. He laughed in my face, and then confessed not only that he was depending on my gambling profits as his sole income—his family estates had dwindled years ago—but that he had even mortgaged his house, through a second person, to obtain funds to start the gambling enterprise."

Mrs. Thornton's hands clenched in her lap, while Elise and Roger remained silent, waiting for her to go on, which she did after a moment.

"I was trapped. I was completely in his power, and I hadn't even the spirit to seek my freedom. He rented another house, and once again I was installed as the hostess. But now my patron was indirectly employing people to frequent hotels in London, looking for likely victims to direct to my establishment. Oh, how I loathed it! And yet I could do nothing. I went on blindly from one house to another as prosecution and fine followed each successive raid.

"And then, at last, I came to the house in Mayfair that you both know. We were careful for a time, and at last it seemed the police were either deceived or had decided to leave me alone. My patron began to be a little generous, and I began to save. It was then, with my dreams of freedom and safety seeming at last near reality, that I learned of my first husband's death in Liverpool. For years I had dreamed of my child—and those dreams had become my only happiness.

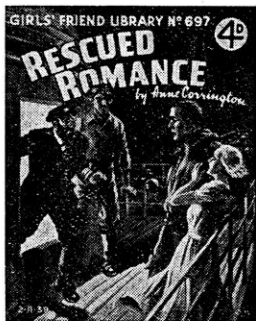
"I thought of her now, alone and poor, and I did not hesitate a moment. I advertised, and"—her hand stole out to Elise's—"she came to me. I had made up my mind to make every possible penny I could in the next few months, and then to take my daughter away. Oh, the happiness her coming meant to me—when I saw her for the beautiful, lovable girl she is!"

"Mother!"



# WHY SHE RAN AWAY

*It  
Happened  
in London.*



*Told by  
ANNE  
CORRINGTON*

Anne Hope's father tried to force her into marriage with a man she hated, but rather than submit to his wishes Anne ran away to London. There she met David, and lost her heart to him. But though David cared for her, he did not declare his love. Once already a woman had let him down, embittering him, and Anne despaired of ever breaking down this barrier between them.

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Elise turned half-protestingly, but Mrs. Thornton shook her head.

"I must finish, dear. You know, both of you, that my dreams didn't come true. I was mad to think it was possible to keep Elise with me without her suspecting. I had already begun arrangements to live with her in a small flat near the house when the police came—the night that you, Elise, brought Roger to the place you thought was your home."

Roger stirred at last, and there was bewilderment as well as sympathy in his eyes as he turned to the woman who had told all this for his sake as well as Elise's. Her confession had melted some of the hardness about his heart.

He had misjudged Elise like that through her mother! And even after relenting his first cruel offer to her—to choose between her mother and himself—he had been blind enough to let a man like Farrell complete his confusion.

"It was too late to do anything then," Mrs. Thornton ended. "I was ruined, disgraced, perhaps undeserving of my daughter's loyalty. I had meant to bring her happiness, to make up to her for all the misery I had, for my part, caused her. I brought her only fresh misery, disgrace, shame."

Her eyes went to Roger, whose lips parted in a cry of indignant protest.

"It wasn't you who should have gone to prison, Mrs. Thornton," he exclaimed, "but the cur who was battenning on your suffering. Yet you even went to prison without even mentioning his name."

Mrs. Thornton's eyes were dull as she nodded. Her hand went out to touch his own, pressing it.

"That man was your father, Roger," she said. "To no one else have I told the truth."

#### CHAPTER 16.

##### The Marriage—And After.

ROGER got slowly to his feet. "My—my father?" he echoed. There was no indignation in his tone, no anger; just a sort of slow, dazed realisation.

Mrs. Thornton had risen; so had Elise. The girl was looking at the young man almost as if the blow had been struck at her, too.

Mrs. Thornton had slipped a paper from

her gown, and she opened it and held it out to Roger.

"This is a letter I made your father write to me, which reveals the truth. He wrote it under protest, even though he knew he could trust me. It will prove what I have said, Roger."

He took it, dazed rather than disbelieving. He read it, and his hand shook as he did so.

"Yes," he said in a strained tone, "that is my father's writing, Mrs. Thornton."

He stared at Elise, whose eyes were liquid with sympathy. Then he turned to Mrs. Thornton again.

"This explains everything—the mystery of where he got the money to carry on, the mystery that his bankruptcy never explained. It was from you, his victim." His face had turned deathly pale. "My father, not you, should have stood in the dock and gone to prison. And I thought that Elise—"

He turned away, his hands clenching and unclenching at his sides.

Mrs. Thornton turned slowly to Elise, who was staring at her with an understanding of her own.

"That was why you gave me that letter to Lord Gaynor, in case I should need it," the girl whispered. "Oh, mother, how could you have done that?"

But Mrs. Thornton did not regret. She pressed Elise's arm and nodded towards Roger. Her task was done. It was for these two now to work out their own salvation. She herself had cleared away the barrier of pride and misunderstanding.

She left them, moving silently to the door. But out in the passage she lingered in closing it. Perhaps it was her longing for some tangible evidence that she had succeeded, that there was now nothing to keep them apart. She waited there in the darkness, the door almost closed.

Soon—although it seemed an age—her reward came. She heard Roger's broken voice.

"And to think, Elise, that I told you to choose between that wonderful mother and me, when my father—"

"Roger, please don't talk like that!" Elise interrupted.

Mrs. Thornton had heard enough. She closed the door and went away to her own room. Undressing, she slipped into bed and lay there waiting for her reward. She knew it would come.

An hour passed, then the silence of the flat was broken by the sound of a latch. Then, after a while, the closing of another door.

At last came the sound for which she had waited—the cautious opening of her own door, followed by soft footfalls across the carpet. Then came Elise's low voice.

"Mummy!"

Mrs. Thornton's heart leapt with joy at that word. She had never before heard it from Elise's lips. Tears rushed into her eyes, but her answer was gentle, undisturbed.

"Has he gone, dear?"

A burning face was pressed against her cheek. Elise was both laughing and crying as she broke the news for which her mother had waited.

"Oh, mummy, he's gone, but he's coming back to marry me! It was wonderful, the way our prides just broke down and nothing mattered, after you had said all there was to say. And to think I misunderstood why you sent for him! To think I could even have begun to be angry with you!"

A gentle hand caressed the girl's tumbled hair.

"It has all been misunderstanding, darling, but it's over now. Roger took it like the man he is. He loves you dearly, Elise. I saw it last night at the club and again to-night in that restaurant."

"Yes, he loves me, mother." Elise hugged her. "He was even ashamed because of his father and wanted me to forgive him. As if there was any need for that. We are going to be married by special licence the day after to-morrow. Roger has to go to Paris about an agency for some cars, and we're going to make that our honeymoon. It can't be too soon for me, mother. You don't mind?"

The sweetness of this moment seemed something beyond all Mrs. Thornton had ever dreamed of knowing.

"Mind, darling?" she echoed. "It's what I want more than anything else. And I'll take care of the club for you, finish everything up just as soon as I can. You and Roger can go to Paris and forget all about everything but yourselves. I think I'm really happy to-night, Elise, for the first time in my life!"

She put her arms about the girl and kissed her, then gently pushed her away.

"Now go to bed. You'll need rest, because these next two days are going to be very full ones for you."

Elise nodded happily and slipped away. The door closed, and Mrs. Thornton sank contentedly back among the pillows.

But not to sleep yet. She wanted to revel in this new happiness that was flooding her heart. Elise and Roger were happy. They were all happy and almost safe.

Unwillingly she let her mind drift back. Only the club remained. Well, that was easy. She would see Martin and make him a gift of the place. Elise would agree only too willingly to that. In a week they would have finished with the business and finished with that side of life for ever.

But even to think of the club next day was impossible, beyond ringing up Martin and telling him the news. Mrs. Thornton was busy helping Elise to be even more busy in arranging for the wedding. And on the following morning, by virtue of the special licence Roger had bought, the lovers were married at a West End register office.

Mrs. Thornton was the only other person present, and she looked ten years younger than she was that morning. The three of them lunched together in Elise's flat, and then the mother saw them off on the Continental express.

Elise's last act was to jump from the carriage before the train departed and fling her arms about her mother.

"We've got you to thank for this, mummy, and we're going to, for the rest of our lives. We're so happy. You won't be lonely? And don't worry about the club, either. Martin will manage, and just as soon as our honeymoon is over and we're back I'll conclude the whole business, so far as I'm concerned."

Mrs. Thornton laughed through her tears of happiness.

"There isn't a thing in the world for either of you to worry about," she said.

She stood waving to them until the train had vanished, then turned away.

She went back to the flat and rested for a few hours, then dined and changed into an evening gown and drove to the club. In the little office, within sound of the music, she told Martin the details of the wedding and the honeymoon, and then made her offer. He was to have the club to himself at once and take all the profits.

He was surprised and delighted, but doubtful. This seemed too good to be true.

"But the two thousand that re-

daughter spent on the furnishings and rent?" he asked.

"Elise wants not a penny more," Mrs. Thornton replied shortly. "But you understand, Martin, you will come to the solicitor in the morning and sign a paper taking over the full responsibility from that date."

Martin was elated.

"I'll sign all right!" he exclaimed. "My only reason in making your daughter promise to stay with me was because I was afraid she would want to get out and demand her money back."

Mrs. Thornton nodded and took her leave.

Back at the flat, just after midnight, she sent the maid to bed, and sat down for a little time before the fire, smoking a cigarette and dreaming herself into a consciousness of happiness.

It was so wonderful, after all the years of loneliness, heartache, and disillusionment. Yet those years were worth it now they had brought their final reward. There were three of them now—Elise, Roger and herself.

Her children. She would love them both equally. She would be more than content just to slip into the background to watch them and love them as they lived their lives. The happiness that was theirs had passed her by, but there still remained that other happiness—to grow old with those who belonged to her.

She got to her feet at last and sighed. After all, what did the years that were over and done with matter? They were safe at last—all three of them. And to-morrow, after she and Martin had parted, the last cloud would be far behind.

She was on her way to the door when the telephone rang in the next room. Mrs. Thornton paused, frowning. It was after one o'clock in the morning. Who could be ringing at this hour?

Then, as she hastened into the next room and towards the telephone, an eager light dawned in her eyes. It was perhaps a call from Paris. Her children surprising her, to wish her good-night on their wedding night.

Eagerly she lifted the receiver.

"Yes, who is that?" she asked.

"Hallo, hallo! Is that Mrs. Thornton?"

It was Martin, speaking from the club, and as he continued speaking her agitation increased and her lips tightened. Finally she said:

"All right, I'll come at once. It is no use my staying here."

She replaced the receiver, turned and passed into the other room in search of her coat. Finding it, she pulled it on, turned off the light, and went from the flat.

Down in the empty street she waited for a taxi. When it came she gave the address of Elise's club, and she did not return to the flat that night.

#### CHAPTER 17. Court Scene.

**A**N open car drew up outside the Hotel de Versailles the following evening, and, the lights of Paris twinkling behind them, Roger and Elise ran up the steps to the great glass doors and passed into the entrance-hall.

"I wonder," said a radiant Elise, pausing by the booking desk, "if there is anything from mother?"

Roger laughed.

"A wire, perhaps, but hardly a letter, dear."

She asked, and there was a wire. They carried it up to their bed-room, where, while Roger began to change for dinner, Elise opened the wire. As she had hoped, it was from her mother, and it both pleased and puzzled her.

"Hope everything going well. Don't worry about anything here. Why not explore the country for a day or two? Will write to-morrow.—MOTHER."

"Roger."

Her husband looked up from a stubborn shoelace.

"What's the matter, dear? Isn't it from your mother?"

She nodded, and handed it to him as he came to her side.

"Yes, Roger, and it reads somehow funny."

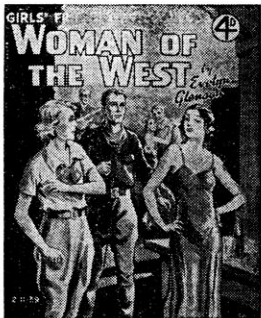
Roger perused the message, hesitated an instant, and then drew the girl into his arms.

"Nonsense, sweetheart," he said. "What's funny about it? Your mother is just anxious for our happiness, and doesn't want us to worry about anything."

"But what does she mean about exploring the country for a day or two? She knows you have business here, dear."

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Roger kissed her tenderly. "Now, now," he chided, looking adoringly into her upturned face, "this won't do at all. There can be nothing wrong, and you mustn't start imagining things. I expect your mother thought she was making a good suggestion."

Elise nodded as she slipped from his arms. Of course, she was foolish. It was just that she was so wonderfully happy that she was afraid something might happen to spoil it all.

Brushing her hair in front of the dressing-table mirror, she looked proudly across to where Roger was struggling with his bow tie. What a dear he had been to her since they had left London, only twenty-four hours ago! They had been married just one day and one night.

A swift thrill went through her at the memory. After a lifetime of loneliness and heartache—this! Happiness with the dearest man in all the world, and unbroken happiness all the way along the road ahead.

Difficulties had seemed to vanish when she and Roger talked about them. She would give up the expensive flat, of course. They would take a modest house convenient for Roger's business, and Mrs. Thornton would live with them.

They were ready now, except that Roger had made a bad job of his bow tie. Laughing, she insisted on retying it herself, thereby tempting Roger to take her in his arms again and kiss her at least a dozen times.

"Darling," she protested breathlessly, "you'll spoil my hair and ruin my make-up if you go on like that."

"You've practically no make-up, darling, and your hair is unspoilable," he answered. "Oh, Elise, if only you knew how happy you've made me! It seems unbelievable that the world can have changed so much in two short days. It seems impossible that you are mine at last. And you won't mind, sweetheart, if we have to live carefully for a bit?" he asked anxiously.

Impulsively she flung her arms about his neck and kissed him.

"I'll love it, dearest. And don't you know that I've already got everything in the world that I want?"

"Bless you!"

He held her close for a moment, and then they went down to the dining-room for dinner. There were not many guests

staying at the hotel, and the big room was half-empty, only a small orchestra playing at the far end when they sat down.

They were idling away half an hour over their coffee when a girl in uniform came round with a tray of cigarettes and the evening papers. Roger purchased a paper, and was offering it to Elise when she stopped him with a laugh.

"I can hardly read a word of French—what a thing for a wife to have to tell her husband! Nearly as bad as asking me if I take sugar! You read me the news, dear," she suggested, her brown eyes dancing.

He chuckled as he opened the paper and began a resume of what he read.

"A notorious crook was arrested in Paris this afternoon."

"Poor man! I feel like giving every crook a free pardon on this wonderful day, Roger."

He smiled.

"You'd turn an intending suicide into some sort of humour to-night, sweetheart. Now how's this from London? 'Notorious Gambling-Den Queen—'"

He stopped short, his face paling as he continued to read swiftly but in silence.

Elise started at the words he had uttered unthinkingly. She reached across and clasped his hand.

"Roger, what is that you are reading? Who is this woman?"

Only after what seemed an eternity did Roger put down the paper and meet her gaze. He knew it would be futile to attempt to deceive her.

"Elise," he said quietly, "you'd better know. The police raided the Golden Moon at one o'clock this morning."

"Raided it? But—"

"They found drink being served, and, as you know, the club's license for that sort of thing expires at midnight. Also, gambling had been going on, though the people taking part managed to escape the police, who were given information by one of the visitors to the club. His name is given." Roger's lips tightened. "Mark Farrell."

Elise's hands were clutching the edges of the cloth.

"Mark Farrell?" she echoed. "Then mother was right. He must have persuaded Martin to take the risk of selling drinks after hours, though I can't believe that gambling was taking place. But

mother," she went on. "What about her? She wasn't there."

"Your mother and Martin have both been arrested, Elise, and appeared in the dock together this morning. Your mother was remanded in custody."

Elise started to her feet.

"But this is impossible, Roger! Mother had nothing to do with the club! Martin had only to explain that he and I were the owners, and they wouldn't have dared to lay a hand on her. Oh, Roger," she faltered, "this must be righted. Mother won't speak. She is shielding me in the hope of taking my punishment. Don't you see now why she sent that wire to try to get us away from Paris, so that we wouldn't see the papers and know what had happened? Roger, we've got to get back to-night. I must appear and tell the magistrates the truth. I'll go alone. There is no reason why you should be dragged into this."

Roger flushed indignantly as he took her arm and led her towards the doors. They had already attracted some curious attention, and it was not until they were in the privacy of their bed-room that he took her into his arms and tried to console her.

"Now, listen, beloved, this isn't going to be half so bad as you imagine," he said. "And, of course, I'm coming with you. As if I could let you go through this alone. That fool Martin has kicked over the traces, that's all, and your mother must have been at the club at the time. She's trying to take the blame for you, but we'll soon put things right. If we hurry, we can catch the night train to the coast, and be back in time for the court proceedings to-morrow."

She lay in his arms for a moment, bracing herself.

"Oh, Roger, I've blundered into hurting you again!" she cried.

He pressed his lips to hers. Then, despite his own feelings, he laughed in protest and to reassure her.

"Nonsense, darling. They're only going to fine you, and then we'll come back and go on with our honeymoon. Dry those eyes now, and change."

She went to obey, almost reassured by what he had said.

But, changing his own clothes, Roger watched her anxiously. Would they merely fine her? Or, believing Elise had been running the club for her mother during

Mrs. Thornton's imprisonment, would they sentence her to a term of imprisonment?

"They shan't—they can't," he told himself fiercely.

They left Paris within the hour, and went back to England via Dieppe. But sleep was impossible on the train or on the boat that came within sight of Newhaven just as dawn was breaking to herald in a day that was to be far more distressing than they imagined.

They paced the deck of the steamer side by side, Roger trying to distract his young wife's mind.

"Nothing matters now we are together, dear," he whispered.

Meanwhile, throughout that night, Mrs. Thornton paced up and down a prison cell, praying that a kindly providence would keep Elise and Roger away, ignorant of what was happening, until it was over.

The little court, presided over by one of London's most severe magistrates, was crowded half an hour before the resumed case against Mrs. Thornton and Martin was heard.

There seemed little doubt that even from prison Mary Thornton had schemed through her daughter—a mere catpaw, whose present whereabouts were unknown, since by a freak not even the Press had yet learned of the register office wedding—to continue her illegal activities.

She had come out of prison to go to the night club for which she must have furnished the money. She had taken control immediately on her release, and after a few days of freedom she was back in the dock again.

But there were other sides to the affair. It was not merely an organised police raid, but one in which a famous Canadian stock-broker, Mark Farrell, had played a leading part and come forward to testify to what had gone on in the club.

It was he who, professing disgust, had assisted the police in their investigations for days past, introducing more than one plain-clothes detective as a friend. But what the police did not know was that he himself had sent some of his friends to a room at the back of the club to gamble on the night of the raid, and had seen to it that they escaped arrest, leaving plenty of evidence as to the gambling.

Martin was entirely innocent there, but he could not deny that, persuaded by

Farrell, he had served drinks after hours. Mark Farrell, immaculate and smiling, yet looking a trifle anxious, was now seated with his own solicitor, engaged to watch the stockbroker's interests.

"But I understood that the girl Elise was a joint owner of the club," Farrell was saying in a low tone. "It was her I wanted here in this dock."

His solicitor shrugged.

"Probably vanished deliberately," he answered. "There is legal proof that the club is owned and carried on by Mrs. Thornton and Martin, therefore we can't put anyone else in the dock."

But Farrell wasn't satisfied. He had been balked. He still knew nothing of what had happened to Elise, despite his inquiries. It was she whom he had felt certain would be arrested either at the club or her flat after the raid.

Where was she? How had she slipped through his fingers again?

The court rose when, heralded by an official, the magistrate took his place on the Bench. An expectant silence fell while the names of the prisoners were called. All eyes turned to the dock as Mrs. Thornton and Martin were ushered up from below.

The woman, dressed in plain clothes for which she had sent, was pale, but calm. Martin, however, seemed nervous and baffled. More than once during the opening of the proceedings he looked towards his companion in half-protest. More than once she rebuked him with a cold, insistent stare.

The resumed hearing began when Mark Farrell was called to the witness-box. He took the oath, then looked towards the Bench.

Farrell was a shameless and exquisite liar. He posed from the start as a man of certain principles who like gaiety yet could not stand licence or excess.

He said he had first gone to the Golden Moon to please a friend. What he had seen there had caused him to consult the police, to whom he had offered to supply information. This information was read over to him.

He agreed with it, and the only protest came from the angry Martin, who, infuriated by the false reports, attempted to interrupt.

"He's a liar! We never permitted that sort of thing!"

The magistrate frowned upon him.

"You will have your opportunity to speak!" he snapped. "Go on, please."

Martin fumed. He felt a cold, detaining hand on his wrist, and glanced helplessly at Mrs. Thornton, whose eyes held pleading and appeal.

"You can do yourself no good that way. Be silent, and remember your promise," she whispered.

Farrell, feeling more vicious because it was not Elise who was in the dock, did his best in his evidence to drag in her name.

"I understand that Miss Thornton—or Branson, as she called herself—was the proprietress of the club."

The magistrate frowned again.

"That is hardly your affair," he reprovved. "Confine yourself to evidence, please."

Farrell shrugged and told of the happenings on the night of the raid. There had been drinking after hours, and gambling.

"The gambling took place in a small room at the back of the club," he continued, "and went on all night."

"That's a lie! The whole thing's a frame-up!" Martin shouted. "He knows it's a frame-up! I admit to serving drinks after hours, but we have never allowed gambling at the club. This man has a grudge, your Honour, and he—"

"Silence!"

This second outburst was stopped, and Farrell continued his damning evidence. When he had finished, all eyes turned to the dock. Mrs. Thornton's face was expressionless. Martin's demeanour was a mingling of fury and helplessness. It was only of him that Mr. Thornton was afraid, lest he should give things away before the case was over and sentence given.

It was at this juncture that the magistrate recalled a remark made by Farrell.

"The question as to the prisoner Thornton's daughter," he frowned. "I trust there is no mistake, and that we have here all those jointly owning the club."

The inspector who was appearing for the police rose.

"There can be no mistake, your Worship. We have evidence that though Thornton's daughter acted for her during the time she was in prison, she—Thornton—took complete control on her release. The club is jointly owned by herself and



# DREAMS FADE—

*In  
His  
Power.*



*This is by  
SHEILA M.  
GRENVILLE.*

Betty Smith longed for the day when she and Peter Cowdray would be married, and all her dreams of happiness fulfilled. But Fate, it seemed, was against them. Peter suddenly found himself penniless, and in trying to help him Betty placed herself in the power of a man who wanted her for himself.

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Martin, who is also manager. These two are legally responsible."

Then came a sudden, unexpected interruption. A girl's voice rang through the court. Elise, pale but indignant, had broken from Roger's detaining arms and was hurrying forward into the court.

"That is not true! My mother has nothing whatever to do with the club. I, Elise Branson, am jointly responsible, and it is I—not my mother—who should be in that dock!"

## CHAPTER 18.

### Triumph.

**E**VERY eye was turned towards the girl who had walked right up to the Bench and stood facing the astonished magistrate, while Roger, about to follow, was detained by a police-sergeant.

The magistrate, after silencing the outburst of excitement in the public gallery, turned coldly to the girl.

"Who did you say you are?"

Elise recovered herself a little, cast a glance backwards to where her mother was gripping the edge of the dock and staring at her in horrified surprise, and then turned to the magistrate again.

"I am Elise Branson, Mrs. Thornton's daughter," she said, "and on hearing of this case I came back immediately to clear my mother from all blame."

She swung round on the police inspector.

"It is absurd to implicate my mother. There are papers of agreement proving that Martin and I are owners of the club."

The inspector frowned, consulted a colleague, and then looked at the magistrate.

"Your Worship, this intrusion can be explained as a misguided and hysterical attempt on the part of a daughter to shield her mother."

"That isn't true!" Elise cried. "It is not a question of shielding."

"We have already admitted," the inspector went on, "that during her imprisonment Mrs. Thornton induced her daughter to act for her. We have also proved that immediately on her release she dismissed her daughter and, by agreement, took entire control."

Elise gasped. She turned to look at her mother, who met her daughter's gaze for an instant, and then, with an effort at indifference, nodded.

"My daughter is trying to shield me," she agreed. "I alone am responsible. She was my servant, and an unwilling servant. There is proof."

"Mother!"

Elise had no chance to say more before the magistrate ordered her to be silent. He consulted some papers he was given, then addressed her again.

"Your mother has had the decency to admit the truth," he snapped, lifting a document in his hands. "Your intrusion is evidently because you think you can save her from imprisonment and escape with a fine if you were in her place. This document is a transfer signed by your mother, the man Martin and yourself, in which you unconditionally make over to your mother all rights previously held by you in the Golden Moon."

His words seemed to rob Elise of the power of speech. She stared at him as though unable to believe her ears.

But Martin, remembering Farrell's testimony, saw in this happening a shred of hope. His lips parted, and he was about to speak when again Mrs. Thornton's fingers gripped his wrist.

"Be silent!" she whispered fiercely.

She dared not look towards Elise again. Roger had joined her, and was pulling her down into a seat by the solicitor he had engaged that morning and who had just arrived.

Solicitor for the defence rose and addressed the magistrate.

"The prisoner Thornton has no defence to offer. She admits her guilt without reserve. The prisoner Martin has also decided to plead guilty, but we take strong exception to the evidence given by Mr. Mark Farrell, and Martin wishes to give evidence in that respect, if your Worship will permit him to do this."

"I want to give evidence! I insist!"

It was Elise who spoke, getting to her feet again.

The magistrate turned to her, his eyes angry.

"Sit down," he ordered, "or leave this court. You can do nothing to help your mother."

He turned to the defending solicitor.

"In the circumstances," he said, "I will hear the man Martin, but he must speak from the dock." He looked at Mrs. Thornton. "You have nothing to say?"

She shook her head.

"Nothing," she answered.

Elise was crying now, for already she had realised what had happened the night she had signed those papers for Martin, when Mrs. Thornton had been waiting for her.

Her mother was going to prison to save her, and there was nothing she could do to stop this sacrifice. Her mother was going back to prison that she and Roger might be free and untouched.

She controlled herself with an effort, and her burning eyes turned to where Mark Farrell was sitting. He returned her stare with a cynical smile.

Martin's sense of loyalty to Mrs. Thornton was deep, but it was not unshakable. Two or three times already he had changed his mind on whether he should remain silent or speak out.

He appreciated her motives in sacrificing herself for Elise, and that, so long as it did not prejudice himself, was her business. But it was obvious now that he was condemning himself by keeping silent as Mrs. Thornton had made him promise. But if the truth came out about Elise, and doubts could thus be thrust upon Farrell's testimony, a motive shown for his spying, the whole thing would be different.

Martin fed the fires of this determination until, unknown to the silent woman at his side, they obsessed him. And he began the series of revelations when, presently, the magistrate turned to him.

"Now, Martin, you may speak," he said. "I will listen to anything you may see fit to say in your own defence, though, because of your plea, you cannot go into the box to say it."

Martin drew himself up and spoke fiercely.

"I do not deny the charge of allowing drink to be served at the club after hours, your Worship, though that has never happened before. But there are other things to be told, and it is time I broke silence."

"Martin!"

Mrs. Thornton cried his name, and the magistrate's eyes turned to her. He saw at once—this woman had betrayed it—that here was something important.

"Go on," he commanded, and Martin did so.

"To begin with, your Worship, the documents in your hands prove that the transfer of ownership of the club was

signed four days ago. But you are all wrong about the reason. Mrs. Thornton knew nothing of the existence of this club when she came out of prison. She hated the idea of her daughter making a living that way, and it was she who brought me that drafted transfer and ordered me to get Miss Elise to sign it without knowing. And there's more to it than that. Evidence can be called to prove why Miss Elise agreed to my suggestion to start a night club.

"She'd get into the clutches of that man there—Mark Farrell—and had either to trick him or be ruined at his hands. She told me all this herself a year and more ago. That man tried to get her into his power. She escaped him, and tricked him to save herself, and ever since—I realise it now—he has been waiting his chance to hit back.

"But I didn't believe that until too late. He was too charming, too good a patron at the club. But I know it now, because he framed us. He got those people to go into that room and gamble without my knowledge or consent, and it was to please him that I foolishly served a few drinks after hours."

Mark Farrell, white and furious, was on his feet.

"Your Worship—" he began.

But the magistrate bade him sit down, turning to Martin.

"An ingenious story, but quite incredible," he said. "Now, if nobody else wishes to interfere—"

He stopped as Roger jumped to his feet. "Yes, your Worship, I do," he said, "and in the interests of justice I demand to be heard."

The magistrate turned towards him with hardly controlled anger. But there was something in Roger's face, flushed with sincerity, that checked his rebuke.

"Who are you?" he asked sharply. "And why should we hear what you have to say?"

Roger's answer came in a ringing voice.

"Because I can testify to the truth of what Martin has said. I am the husband of Mary Thornton's daughter. My father, and not Mrs. Thornton, should have been sent to prison eighteen months ago. And because I know that that man"—he swung round—"Mark Farrell, is a liar. I myself have suffered at his hands."

"Wait." Utterly astounded, the magistrate stopped him. "You say your father was guilty of the crime for which Mrs. Thornton was sentenced? How can you prove that, and who is your father?"

Roger braced himself to the confession.

"I am the only son of the late Lord Gaynor, who went bankrupt and died a short time ago," he said in a clear voice. "My father, my mother and I were all living on the profits of the gaming-house which my father owned, and in running which Mrs. Thornton was a victim and a tool."

A cry came from the woman in the dock, and Elise looked towards her encouragingly. Roger had risen wonderfully to the occasion. He had drawn a paper from his pocket now, the letter in his father's handwriting that Mrs. Thornton had given him and which told the truth.

"That is my father's writing. It is his letter, your Worship," Roger said, handing the sheet up to the astonished magistrate. "It brands him as responsible for Mrs. Thornton's shame, and, indirectly, it puts upon him part of the blame for the trouble my wife must face now. I know everything, and I want to tell the truth."

The magistrate looked at him again, and now his tone and his manner were different.

"Go into the witness-box," he said quietly. "There can be no doubting that I must allow you to speak."

In a dead silence Roger stepped into the witness-box, took the oath and told the whole truth.

It was a hard task for him. He told of the night the police raided the gaming-house, and his harshness in offering Elise a choice he regretted almost instantly, of their meeting again, and the dastardly misunderstanding that Farrell had caused at the house he had taken near Roger's garage.

He told of the scene, only a few days ago, in Elise's flat, when Mrs. Thornton had broken silence at last to bring the two lovers together. And fearlessly striving to get at the right, Roger added incalculable weight to that story by pointing to the fact that the source of his father's wealth had never hitherto been explained.

And Mark Farrell, self-possessed until now, more than once broke into an exclamation that did him no good in the

eyes of the magistrate, who could not help believing the story he was being told.

Roger came to the end.

"You would not believe my wife, and her mother's past makes things black for her," he said. "But you must believe me, sir, the son of the man who, if he were living, should have been in that dock in their place. And, Heaven help me, I loved my father."

All eyes followed him as, still erect, he returned to his place by his wife's side.

After a long silence the magistrate spoke, and he said only a formal thing. "I remand the prisoners for seven days," he said, "to give an opportunity for Lord Gaynor's evidence to be investigated. I grant both prisoners bail."

There was little doubting what his words meant. If Roger's story was true, Mrs. Thornton was free and Elise Gaynor would escape with a fine.

Elise and Martin were fined fairly heavily, Mrs. Thornton was dismissed. That was how it ended.

Three tired people hurried from the court into a waiting car and were driven to Dover, from where they caught the boat to Calais and took train to Paris.

They only spoke of the past once more, and that was in the compartment of the Calais-Paris express late in the evening of the day they left England. Mrs. Thornton, leaning back in her corner, smiled happily as she looked across at the two young people.

"Why did you do it, Roger?" she asked.

Elise's eyes opened and went to her husband's face.

"Because it was right, mother, and because I owed it to you as well as to Elise," he answered. "Aren't you glad?"

"Glad!"

Mrs. Thornton echoed the word as, still smiling, she closed her eyes and gave herself up to the first safe dreams of her checkered life. Glad! When at last there was not a cloud on their horizon. When Elise was happy, and with a man like Roger.

No, she reflected, long after the two across the compartment had fallen asleep in each other's arms, it wasn't so much a question of being glad. It was heaven, and all that heaven could mean on earth.

She was in love with him, and he—well, he believed  
she knew all the tricks from A to Z and merely wanted  
another broken heart to add to her collection.

## SPOILT DARLING

By JOHN ARDEN

### Pretty as Paint.

**S**HE had always had everything she wanted—everything that money could buy.

By rights she ought to have been a boy. Both Mr. and Mrs. West had been sure it would be an heir. They had settled on Peter for his name.

Fate smiled secretly, and sent them a cherub with enormous blue eyes, dark hair, and a rose-petal skin. The Wests took a deep breath—and called her Peta.

At twenty Peta had added a slimly curved, ravishing figure and a dimple to her collection of charms. Do dimples sound Victorian? Try one on a breathlessly up-to-the-minute modern with her exquisite grooming. One tiny dimple at the corner of a smoothly lip-sticked mouth. The result is pretty thrilling.

I haven't mentioned her clothes. Peta had long ago taken for granted that the way to get clothes was to slither from her scarlet runabout into the best shops in Durlstone and order what she liked, giving her father's name.

She wasn't in Durlstone now. She was in one of the best rooms of the best hotel in Coronal Bay.

She had been invited to join friends on a yacht later in the summer—that would have more of a kick in it. But dad and mother religiously came to an hotel at Coronal Bay every year, and liked Peta to spend at least a week with them.

Coronal Bay was select and—yes, dull. Duller than ever this year, in contrast to Sea Sands, which had suddenly sprung into popularity a mile farther along the coast. Sea Sands. Peta leaned out of the window and giggled as she looked at the new pier in the distance, the new white pavilion, the new amusement park. How indignant her parents had been at the idea of such things going up in the neighbourhood of Coronal Bay.

Peta strolled down to the heavily furnished gilt lounge of the hotel and found her parents settled in basket chairs, reading.

"Where are you going, dear?" asked Mrs. West.

"For a walk, darling," answered Peta.

She thrust her hands into the pockets of her beautifully cut navy slacks and wandered out of the hotel. The inch-soled cork sandals which she wore displayed tinted toe-nails. A navy ribbon was tied round her curled hair.

If Coronal Bay was so select that it was half empty, Sea Sands was crowded to the limit. Peta walked slowly along the beach, watching the shouting, laughing groups playing games or running into the sea, splashing each other and shrieking with mirth.

Peta felt curiously lonely. Last year there had been several young people at their hotel, so things hadn't been too bad. This year all the inhabitants seemed to be middle-aged.

Gosh, it was hot! Peta looked round for a café where she could have an ice or some lemonade. They were all crowded. She went on to the promenade, and presently spied an attractive-looking place built in Oriental style, with a wide veranda running all round and flowers and greenery trained over the supports.

She went inside. There was a long white bar, with a barman in a green jacket in attendance. Also an inviting list of drinks pinned up on the wall.

"Teed orange-squash," ordered Peta, and drank it gratefully.

She put her hand in her pocket to pay for the drink and encountered a handkerchief, a key, a powder compact. Nothing else.

She froze with horror. She hadn't brought any money with her!

You never bother about it somehow

when you are used to plenty. Peta was so accustomed to having everything put down on dad's account.

She began to stammer out explanations. The pleasant barman grew rather unpleasant. Grew, in fact, distinctly awkward. No doubt she would come along this afternoon and pay up. They all said that.

"How much does the lady owe?" asked a quiet voice behind Peta.

She swung round. She hadn't noticed the long, lean young man at a table in the corner. He had risen and was coming to the counter. He put down a sixpence.

"It's frightfully nice of you," stammered Peta. "But I must pay you back, of course. Where are you staying? Or perhaps you would walk back with me to my hotel?"

"That sounds a good idea," he smiled.

Like a white flash in a brown mask, his smile. He was incredibly bronzed, his eyes steel-blue under straight brows. They walked along to Coronal Bay. In the space of one mile, Peta had, by the simple expedient of asking candid questions, found out that his name was Alan Bridie, that he was home for the first time after four years abroad, that he had come to Sea Sands because a pal of his had mentioned it as being a cheery place, and he had thought he might as well come here as anywhere.

In return, Peta told him she was the daughter of the Wests of Durlstone, that she much preferred Sea Sands to Coronal Bay, and that she would fetch his sixpence in a minute.

Which she did. Alan Bridie put it in his pocket, thanked her gravely, said: "Not at all, it was a pleasure," and began to stride back towards Sea Sands.

Peta stood on the steps of the Coronal Bay Hotel, gazing after him with a light in her eyes which no man had ever lit there before.

They were sitting on the veranda of the Oriental. Peta in a white evening dress which showed the lovely contours of her slim body, her hair brushed into a froth of shining curls. She looked enchanting.

Alan leaned back in a long cane chair watching the sea. Peta watched Alan.

Her heart beat with unbearable excitement. They had known each other a week—and to her it seemed a lifetime. Six

madly happy days for her spent at Sea Sands. Alan had come to Coronal Bay once because Peta wanted him to meet her parents, who had been asking mild questions about her constant dates in Sea Sands.

Her parents had liked him, especially Mr. West, who secretly saw in him some of the characteristics he had dreamed of finding in that son and heir Fate had denied him.

And now the dates were coming to an end for Peta.

It was a little later, when they were dancing, that she said:

"Alan, I'm going home to-morrow. Have I told you?"

"You have," he answered, with a fleeting smile at her. "This makes the seventh time to-day."

Peta felt a queer little pang of desperation stab through her. What was the matter with him to-night? For a week they had been friends—gone about together quite a lot.

Peta had turned up at Sea Sands nearly every day, usually brimming with plans. It had been fun making the tall, bronzed young man do things—go riding and rowing and swimming and driving in her scarlet runabout.

"You do this kind of thing all the year round, don't you?" Alan had asked yesterday.

"Of course!" Peta had replied gaily.

"What's the use of being the daughter of Wests of Durlstone if one can't enjoy oneself?"

Alan had caught her hand—nearly crushed it.

"Are you enjoying yourself—with me?" he had gone on.

"Of course," she had whispered, and had run into the hotel, starry with happiness. She had believed that something would happen to-morrow evening—something rather marvellous.

Well, it was "to-morrow" now, and nothing was happening, nothing at all. Only Alan looking down at her, somehow a little grimly, a studiously polite Alan.

The dance finished they went on to the veranda again. She sat on the broad arm of his chair, a defiant tilt to her small chin.

"Alan," she said, "for the eighth time. I'm going away to-morrow. Don't you

understand? We may never see each other again. What has happened—why are you so strange and unfriendly to-night?"

"Am I?" He looked up at her, threw away his hair-smoked cigarette. Suddenly he put his arms round her and held her tightly.

"Oh, Alan!" Peta clung to him, torn between laughing and crying. "I thought you were never going to—darling!"

His arms stiffened. Then he rose and put her gently down on her feet.

"Isn't it time you were getting back?" he asked very quietly.

For a long moment Peta stood transfixed.

"I don't understand," she said at last. "I—I thought you were going to say something quite different."

"Did you?" His voice was cool. "So I was. Something about holiday friendships, and all that."

Peta's eyes were glowing pools of tears.

"What are you made of—ice—granite?" she asked at last in a quivering voice.

"Oh, I think I hate you! Hate you for making me give myself away like that!"

Alan's face tightened.

"You expected me to make love to you," he said. "I'm sorry to disappoint you. It would have finished up our little interlude in a proper romantic way, wouldn't it? But I'm afraid I'm no good at that particular game."

"I don't know what you mean," she whispered.

"You're telling me," he mocked relentlessly. "You know it all from A to Z—the whole bag of tricks. How to amuse yourself, how to get what you want. You found it dull down here with only your parents, so you decided you wanted me—for an interlude. But you had to have an appropriate ending, too; a broken heart to hang on your bangle. You're as pretty as paint and the daughter of Wests of Durlstone, so why not? You consider it your due. You've been spoilt all your life, and every man you meet continues the good work."

He broke off, breathing hard. Peta caught up her wran.

"Do you mind if I don't wait to hear any more?" she asked politely. "I'm getting a headache. And I've got quite a lot to do at the hotel. In spite of being the

spoilt daughter of Wests of Durlstone I've got to do my own packing. Such a bore!"

With which gallant, final thrust she fled.

The West family were comfortably settled in a first-class carriage of the morning express.

Mr. West was deep in the newspaper. Mrs. West was reading a magazine. Peta, her face hidden behind a book, stared at the blurred lines in front of her nose and blinked and blinked.

She did not see the tall form which ran down the corridor, plunging its head into every compartment in turn. Then she heard her name called:

"Peta! Thank heaven!"

The entire West family laid down its reading matter. Alan Bridie, after a glance of agonised relief at Peta for having found her in time, sat down beside the astonished Mr. West.

"I've only just looked at yesterday's paper, sir," he said quickly. "I'm often a day behind. I've seen the news. I didn't know last night." He looked at Peta, his face stricken. But her eyes were like sapphires. As blue—and as remote.

"Would you," said Mr. West mildly, "tell me what the nation you are talking about?"

Alan pulled a newspaper out of his pocket and pointed to a paragraph.

"About your going smash, sir," he said. "It says here that Messrs. West of Durlstone have gone bankrupt. I had no idea you were returning from your holiday to face ruin. Please don't think it cheek on my part, Mr. West, but—I've got a thousand or two saved up. If it's any use to you to make another start, I'd be awfully glad if you would make use of it."

Mr. West looked at him for a moment.

"I appreciate your splendid offer more than I can say," he said, his eyes very bright. "But I don't think I will accept it—just yet."

He held up the paper he had been reading, and he, too, pointed to a paragraph.

"This is to-day's paper," he said twinkling.

Alan read the paragraph which the other indicated. It ran:

"We wish to apologise for a misprint in a notice yesterday of bankruptcy proceed-

(Continued on page iv of cover.)

(Continued from page in of cover)

ing against Messrs. Best of Durlstone. This was inadvertently given as Messrs. West of Durlstone. We beg to tender our deepest apologies to Messrs. West, who are, of course, the well-known manufacturers. Messrs. West, we understand, are enlarging their premises in the near future."

"My solicitor didn't waste much time in getting that put in," chuckled Mr. West. "And you young man, thank you again for wanting to help. I shan't forget it. Neither, I am sure, will Peta."

"On the contrary," said Peta distinctly. "I intend to forget everything about Mr. Bridie as soon as possible. And I'm sure he feels the same way about me. He told me last night exactly what he thought of me."

"That's where you are wrong." Alan dropped down on the seat opposite to her, his face strained. "I said a lot of things—and a darned fool I made of myself. But when you've fallen hard for a girl, and

she keeps rubbing into you that she's the daughter of a rich man—"

"I didn't," Peta interrupted, choking.

"At least, I didn't mean to—"

"Peta happens to be very proud of me," interposed Mr. West above the storm.

Then they all broke off suddenly. The train had begun to move, gathering speed. Alan, hatless, luggageless, was being taken away with them.

And then Mrs. West spoke for the first time. Smiling-eyed, beaming, she looked from her daughter's quivering face to Alan.

"I think there is an empty compartment next door," she said. "Wouldn't you like to take Peta in there, Alan, and tell her what you really think of her? She has never been interested in any young man before, and now that she is—well, you do see what I mean, don't you?"

Alan saw all right. He caught Peta up with him. Found the empty compartment, closed the door.

Mr. and Mrs. West, after a delighted smile at each other, went on reading.

THE

END





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