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# THE INFANT TENDERNESS

(Continued from page 30)

telling the truth. I put him in the garage."
As I spoke Mother's face changed from sternness to amazement. "I might have known you were in this, Barbara!" She sank into a chair. Conrad let go of V. Z. V.'s collar and stared at me. "He did kick all the varnish off, ma'am," he gurgled weakly.
V. Z. V. shook himself like a dog coming out of the water, and pulled down his sleeves. I cannot say that his expression, as he looked at me, was that supposed to be used by an engaged man toward his fiancee. But of course, he didn't know I was his fiancee.
"Conrad has made a hideous mistake," I

"Conrad has made a hideous mistake," I stated to Mother. "This man is my chosen husband. I am engaged to him." And I held out to her the hand with my diamond ring on it.

MOTHER covered her face with her hands. "What—what have I done to deserve this?" she muttered, brokenly. She had done a great deal, but no use to tell her. "Who is this man?" "I don't have the same of the same

"I don't know his name. But his initials—" was interrupted by another groan from Mother, a louder one.

Mother, a louder one.

"She cannot be speaking the truth!" Mother turned to Elizabeth.

"Just like her," Elizabeth said.
But I paid no more attention to them. I turned to V. Z. V. "I am Barbara Vane," I explained smiling explained, smiling.

turned to V. Z. V. "I am Barbara Vane," I explained, smiling.

My fiancee was struggling with all kinds of emotions at once. He hardly knew what to say. But finally he roared, hoarsely, "Where did you get that ring?"

"It's the one you sent me," I smiled.

At his next words my belief in the Infant Tenderness began to crumble. He was positively disrespectful to me.

"Good gracious! Engaged to that—chit? I never saw her before to-day, when for some unaccountable reason she shut me in the garage. I don't know what the matter is, but she has stolen Miss Vane's ring—"

It was just at this moment that my Aunt Barbara's voice was heard in the hall. "Mercia," she was calling to Mother, "where are you? Victor didn't come! I don't know what to think. We waited for the other train, but he didn't—" She came to the portieres and paused. "Why, have you are!" she cried. "Why, what's the matter?"

"Nothing is the matter now you're here," Victor—it seemed that was his name—sighed in relief. "But I've had the deuce of a mess."

There is no use for me to try to tell the following events in order, for every one spoke at once, and in such loud and un-Christian tones that I shouldn't care to repeat what they said, anyway. I tried to explain about the Infant Tenderness, but they would not, or could not, understand. Aunt Barbara fairly tore the ring off my finger.

I tried to explain about the Infant Tenderness, but they would not, or could not, understand. Aunt Barbara fairly tore the ring off my finger. She claimed that it was her engagement ring which she had left to be cleaned, and that she had been going to call up about it that very day because it hadn't come. She also claimed that Victor was the civil engineer she was going to marry. Well, she was welcome to him. I only hope he will not ruin her life.

"Barbara," Mother said at last, "take off your coat. You are not going to Miss Field's party."

"Not going to the the dansant?"

"Surely you did not expect to after this, did

"Surely you did not expect to after this, did ou?" Mother's voice was cruel and cutting. "Take off your coat and sit down. I want you to try to explain—"

Her words poised in midair. I had removed the coat. She saw the pink dress. "Where—where—" she stammered.
"There!" I cried. "This will prove it!
This is one of the things the Infant Tenderness gave me."

gave me."

"Oh, Barbara, how can you tell such dreadful — That is the dress I bought for Elizabeth, Mercia. You know I've been fussing because it hadn't come." It was my Aunt Barbara speaking. At her words I saw that there was no faith

ing. At her words restar that the analymere.
"Barbara," spoke Mother, wearily, "go to your room. Your father must attend to this. I cannot cope with you."

ASI turned to go, Elizabeth, stepped forward.
"Since you're not going to wear your coat,
I'll just take it," she said, and, before I could
make a motion, she had slipped it off of my
arm. I turned to her fiercely, but a look from
Mother told me it was no use. And as I left the Mother told me it was no use. room I heard the last blow fall.

"You were right, Mercia," my Aunt Barbara was saying, "about that child's being too young for a dinner dance. I'll countermand the order for the invitations this afternoon."

From my up-stairs window I have watched Elizabeth go down the street with Paul. My coat rippled and flared around her. It was a dream. It made even Elizabeth good-looking. A vision of how I should have been starting out came over me and I could not help throwing myself down on the bed and weeping bitter tears. I rose up a changed woman. Life will never be the same to me again since that halfhour. I have learned something I shall never forget. There is no justice in the world. forget. There is no justice After this I am an unbeliever.

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## CROWDED OUT

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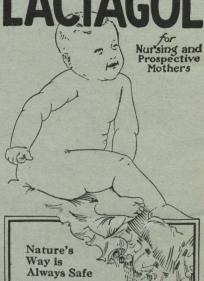
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