

with adorable gaucherie as he handed her the flat leather case that he had drawn from his pocket. She opened it and drew back at its exquisite elegance, for it was a dog collar of pearls.

"Spendthrift," she exclaimed, "and who might this be for?"

"For you," he stammered, suddenly knowing that he had done the wrong thing, for the girl had frowned on the instant.

"Never," she returned coldly. "I wear no jewels and I never accept jewels from anybody, man or woman."

He flushed. "You will take these," he pleaded.

She shrugged her shoulders. "No," she answered, shortly.

"I want to give you something," he insisted. "I'm a little crude—uncouth about it. What can I give you?" he inquired.

A GAIN she shrugged her shoulders and was silent for an instant. Then she held out her hand. "We are friends," she said, with gentle pressure, "good friends, are we not? Is not that enough?"

Monroe held her hand for one instant. "Flowers, then," he remarked. "I can bring you those."

But again she shook her head. "I never take flowers," she returned. "Gifts—what are gifts to me?"

He stepped toward her. "Do you mean to tell me," he demanded, "that you never let anybody give you anything—not your best friends?"

The girl closed her eyes as though thinking hard, as though uncertain what to say next. Suddenly she opened them and glanced into his with a cool and calculating glance.

"There is only one thing that I ever take from any one," she told him, quite in a matter-of-fact tone of voice, "and that is—money."

He drew back. "Money?" he demanded, staggered by the coolness of her tone and by the mental attitude of a girl who is too squeamish to accept a dog collar of pearls, and yet who was ready and willing to receive their value in hard coin.

She noted the recoil and his sudden mental and physical retreat, and, as though to make amends, she followed him, talking volubly the while.

"You think me strange, do you not," she went on in the same matter-of-fact tone of voice.

"Perhaps I am—perhaps there is not another woman in New York of my—," she drew herself unconsciously to her full height—"of my social standing, who would say things like this to you. But I am practical, intensely practical—" She stopped here, and, as though to offset the calculating character of her words, she cast toward him a glance of bewildering allurements that belied them. "You like my voice?" she went on, switching off to something else.

"Like it," he answered, enthusiastically. "Haven't I told you already?"

"Exactly," she continued. "And my voice, some day, shall be my fortune—possibly. But now, I am under contract. Oh, he took advantage of me, that big, fat, vulgar Ellenbogen of a manager. He knew three years ago that I had a voice and that I had no money, and so I tied my voice to him for almost nothing, for the advertising almost. For seven long years. What then? I am ambitious. I love society. I must live, and I love to live well, and to meet

people, not like Bellamy, people like you. It takes money, does it not? Well, then, if my good friends want to give, let them give me money." She held up her hands as if in warning. "Let them give it in the right spirit and I shall receive it the same way."

The whole thing staggered Wainwright Monroe. It shocked him. And yet there was that other side of the girl's nature that he could not shake from him. Something that held him in its grip. He felt different toward this girl than he had felt toward every other woman he had known. What was it in her that stirred him to the depths? He had been in love before, so he assured himself, and love had been a mighty pleasant thing to him, no more, but this was something more. If it were love, it was a love that seared and burned him as though with a white hot iron. He could not grapple with it—he could not understand it, only, as he left Jocelyn Jeffreys that evening, he stretched out his arms toward her and pleaded silently for a second kiss, but Jocelyn Jeffreys eluded him

an embarrassed way at first, without noting the slightest trace of embarrassment upon her part. Gave it to her freely, because it seemed to please her, but never once did he try again to kiss her, and she seemed to like him the better for it. And yet, through it all, there was something in her eyes that was leading him on—leading him on. She seemed, somehow, a Siren in real life as well as on the stage.

As time went on apace, she asked him for money, asked it freely, and always with the same phrase upon her lips. "I take it in the spirit that you give it, my good friend," she told him.

These were gay days for Wainwright Monroe. He lived as in a constant round of pleasure. Food seemed like manna to him—the wine he drank like nectar of the Gods. And it was all due to Jocelyn Jeffreys. He was with her most of the time—they ate together—rode together. He waited for her at the stage door of the Gaiety, and all the while New York snickered and laughed in its sleeve. Even

Bellamy confided to his friends that "Jocelyn Jeffreys had got Rightie Monroe by the nose and was leading him a merry life."

Once Monroe proposed to her, but, with that calm little shrug of the shoulders, she rejected him immediately.

"There's one thing, at any rate, I'd like to know," blurted out Wainwright. "Is there anybody else out there in the future waiting for you?" For truth to tell, Bellamy's tongue, piqued as Bellamy was with jealousy, had wagged a bit lightly in Monroe's presence, and Bellamy had insinuated, in his coarse and elegant way, that Wainwright's gifts of money were supporting some more congenial gentleman. It was not enough that Monroe had forcibly ejected Bellamy from his room at the Barristers in a fit of passion—Bellamy's insinuations still rankled, but Wainwright felt, somehow, that the girl, in the long run, would tell him the truth.

"Is there anybody else?" he kept repeating.

SHE shook her head. "There is something else, though," she told him. "Something, as you say, out there in the future." She clasped her hands behind her head and gazed on past him into the vistas. "My career," she whispered. "The big life that waits for me." She drew her hand suddenly and wearily across her face. "And it is so hard—so hard," she wailed, "here in New York."

This was the beginning of an idea that had been smouldering in Wainwright's breast. He knew nothing of music, except that it pleased him, and knew nothing of the comparative values of the voices of the Metropolitan singers, but in the voice of Jocelyn Jeffreys there was some vibrant melody that had ever stirred his soul, and he felt that she was one of those artists, who in time would be called "big." Monroe, in truth, was a spendthrift, but he had at least half of his fortune left. The spending of the other half had been a wonderfully pleasant exercise, but now a new object presented itself, an object that was as definite and helpful, as it was pleasing to him. He would "make" Jocelyn Jeffreys—he would make her the best singer, the most talked of woman in New York. He told her about it breathlessly—hopefully. He hardly noted that she had clutched him by the hand as he went on with his recital, but when he finished the girl sprang to him and laid both hands upon his shoulders

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"This is our Christmas dinner, and this is my Christmas present."

with ten times more energy than did the Siren flee from the unwelcome kisses of the bald-headed row.

"No, no," she exclaimed. "Why should I kiss you?"

"Why did you kiss me?" he demanded.

A GAIN she shrugged her shoulders. "That was an accident at Bellamy's dinner," she exclaimed. "I was beside myself with fear, but now—listen, my friend." She placed her hand lightly on his arm. "Some day a man will come to me and say: 'Jocelyn, I want you for my wife.' How then shall I explain to him all these kisses, if there are to be kisses?"

Again Wainwright was staggered, but he came boldly to the front. "How will you explain that kiss of the other night?" he asked. But she only smiled.

"That, somehow, was different," she assured him. "That is our secret, yours and mine."

Monroe gave her money after that, gave it in