

The LAST of HIS FAMILY

by
FLORIDA PIER

THE comtessa put down her knitting and lighted a fresh cigarette. Her eyes became even more prominent than usual, and shooting a stray bit of tobacco into space, she spoke.

"Paolo, you're a fool."

Her son, who had been sprawling elegantly on the lounge, straightened up, making his body curve with the wide-seated piece of furniture on which he sat. Unfortunately, this action made it impossible for his feet to touch the floor. His mother looked at his projecting legs, and the smoke issuing from her nostrils curled furiously.

"In Heaven's name," she breathed, "sit on something suited to your size. It is not a pleasant thing for me to see your feet protruding in that infantile manner."

The comte laughed faintly and lounged over to the piano stool, on which he twirled idly.

"You are not very gracious, mamma," he smiled. "Your temper is uncommonly sharp, and you are smoking my last cigarette."

The knitting needles stopped and the cigarette was quickly taken from the stone window ledge.

"Am I to understand that you are too lazy to keep yourself properly supplied, or that you lacked the money wherewith to buy a decent number?"

She luxuriously inhaled, and with half-closed eyes waited an answer. Her son squirmed, shrugged his shoulders, and jerking one end of his mustache perilously near his eye, gazed out of the window.

"I am to understand, then, that you are too poor even to buy cigarettes? A disgusting thing to confess. It brings us back to my opening remark, that you are a fool."

"Oh, mamma," the young man sulked. "This conversation bores me quite as much as it does you, Paolo. Let me assure you that you are not alone in finding yourself a slightly trying subject."

The comtessa's scorn was so fine that her son threw back his head and laughed.

"Your bad humor is a work of art, mamma. I am forced to admire it even when I am its cause. You are, with your usual stimulating fireworks, leading up to the question of my marriage. I really can't propose to another girl. Four refusals have made me a fatalist. The family will have to end with me."

The knitting needles bristled. "Don't dare to speak of your stupid bungling in my presence. Have the pride to consider

those incidents as never having happened. You will leave for Rome to-morrow, you will become betrothed to that young American person, and then never again let me hear you speak of our family ending. "Dio mio," there were tears in the speaker's voice, "you would prophesy the Day of Judgment with calm!"

The young man's grin relaxed into a querulous frown. He eyed his radiant boots and jangled his sword viciously. "If the pretty Ripley says no, it will be the last. I'm not going to attempt every hurdle you put me at."

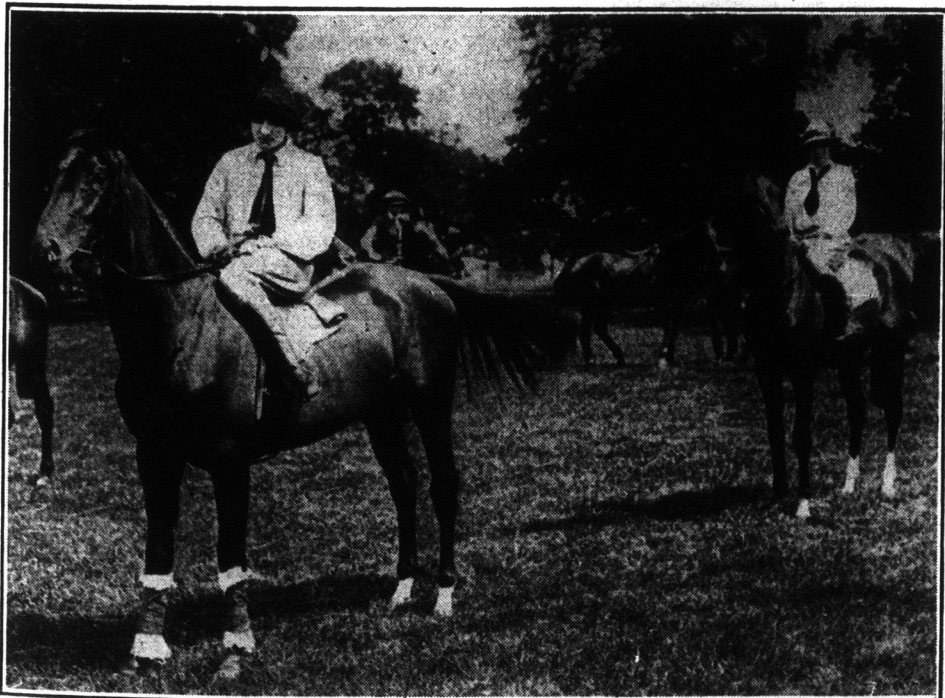
Out of the cloud of smoke enveloping his mother came her voice: "She must not say no. Neither your creditors nor mine will permit her to say no. She must, as proof of her 'yes,' be brought here and exhibited. By the twentieth at the latest."

"The twentieth. Per Bacco!"

As her son clanked from the room, the comtessa slipped her feet out of her slippers and dusted the steel beads with her sleeve. The pretty Ripley's "yes" was altogether too uncertain a matter to permit of slippers being worn when no one was present. These conversations with her son were becoming more and more of a burden. They were always on the same subject, they were for this very reason infrequent, and they saddened the comtessa anew with a sense of gathering, threatening futility. Her personal wants, which she rigorously controlled, the vital need that the family should be carried on, the demands of the creditors—and these last were in danger of being looked after by the creatures themselves—all depended for fulfillment on a young man who, when seated on an ordinarily wide sofa, could not make his feet touch the ground.

The comtessa blamed herself for this sharply. She thought of her tall brothers and imposing father, and with a tear of gratitude remembered that Paolo had been still in skirts when her husband died. "He would never have forgiven me," she murmured and made a feint of not looking toward the piece of furniture which had so failed in loyalty to the family. She continued to think of her son and he became more and more the vanishing point for an entire scheme of things. Was it worth while planning for the future of a tag end? Paolo always seemed so on the point of being snuffed out, and if he went she would not dream of refusing a simultaneously extinguishment.

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A NEW RAID ON MAN'S PRESERVE. STABLE LADS MUST HUNT NEW JOBS

Men in England must watch their step and walk fast to beat the lady folk of the land. A young gentlewoman recently advertised in a British sporting paper for a position as stable lad or riding mistress. This work is essentially a man's work, but the fair ones are not to be deterred in anything these days. Sir Robert Willmot's two daughters have the fever and have been very successful in the work of exercising race horses. The trainer of the stables speaks of them in terms of highest praise. Photo shows Miss Kathleen Willmot (left) and her sister Muriel exercising their dad's horses.



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