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Sweet Eva!

CHAPTER XXX.
She leaned her chin in the palm of her hand and looked into the glowing heart of the fire.

Something in the leaping flames and the silence made her think of that last night at the Highway House when she had left the note for Philip. That night had seemed like the first decided step leading on to the final tragedy. Even now she winced as she thought of that moment when she had waited for him and waited in vain.

It had been humiliation upon humiliation until that last terrible night . . . and since! Well, he had not bothered sufficiently about her since to be anything but indifferently courteous.

The outer door of the flat banged, and she started up.

Peter already! Then he could not have seen Kitty!

But the man taking off his coat in the hall was Philip.

She smiled rather grimly. His wife looked at him, and her heart began to race in the old, traitorous fashion.

"I thought you were Peter," she faltered.

"I did not flatter myself that you were waiting up for me," he said.

CHAPTER XXXI.
Philip followed his wife into the drawing-room; he looked round it quickly.

"Calligan gone?" he asked.

"Yes—he went some time ago with Peter."

"Peter!"

"Yes—Kitty was out when he called before dinner, so he has gone again."

There was a little silence; Eva stooped and began picking up the music which strewed the floor.

She had not been alone with Philip since the night she went to the theatre with Calligan, and she felt painfully nervous.

She wondered why he had come home so early; as a rule it was long past midnight when she heard him let himself into the flat.

Philip stood with his shoulders against the mantelshelf staring up at the ceiling.

"I've been with Faulkner to-night," he said.

"Faulkner!" Eva echoed the name vaguely.

"Yes," Philip brought his eyes down to her face. "Perhaps you don't remember him—he came to Aspley for the wedding; big man with grey hair . . ."

"Oh yes." She did not remember him in the least, and it did not seem to matter, but she rose to her feet; somehow she felt that something that did matter was to follow.

"He has a lot of property abroad," Philip went on. "In Rhodesia—chiefly . . . he wants a man to go out and look after it for him." Eva put out a hand and steadied herself against the piano; she knew now what was coming.

"You mean that he has asked you to go," she said with stiff lips.

"Yes."

"And you—are going?"

He frowned.

"I haven't decided. It takes consideration, of course. If you would rather that I refused . . ."

"You must do as you please. I should not care to influence you."

There was a chair close to where she stood, and she sat down with an overwhelming feeling of weakness.

The firelit room and Philip seemed a long, long way off; but she could hear his voice with painful distinctness. It seemed almost as if he were shouting at her.

"It amounts to this," he was saying in a hard voice. "I can't spend the rest of my life hanging round town doing nothing. I've had enough of it already. I'm getting stale and flabby. There's nothing to keep me in England, except . . . except the matter, and she'll agree to my going if I—"

I explain things to her. Faulkner has made me a generous offer—possibly because he doesn't know my incapacities. He doesn't want me for another six weeks or two months, so I can get some hunting in . . ."

He turned his head suddenly and looked down at her. "Well?"

She raised her eyes.

"There seems nothing left for me to say."

Her voice was so quick that it would have taken a more shrewd man than Philip Winterdick to have guessed what she was really feeling; to know that her heart was one wounded, unanswered question:—

"And what about me—what about me?"

"It's not as if you were depending on me," Philip went on grimly.

"Faulkner!" Eva echoed the name vaguely.

"You've got this place—and you can

always go to the Highway House—if you care to—mother would be glad to have you."

"Yes." The little monosyllable sounded to him like an indifferent acquiescence, and a wave of uncontrollable bitterness swept through his heart.

"You've no objection," he asked presently.

She laughed faintly.

"I've no right to object—we've agreed to go our own way—you must do as you please."

"Very tactfully put," he submitted dryly; then, with a sudden burst of passion: "Why can't you speak the truth and say you'll be damned glad to be rid of me?"

There was an excited flush in his face; he controlled himself with an effort.

"I beg your pardon," he said, after a moment. "I seem to have no manners, no common decency at all in these days . . ." He drew a long breath. "Are you going to wait up for Peter?" he asked with a sudden change of tune.

"Yes."

"Do you mind if I don't? I'm tired . . ." he snatched at any excuse which would take him away; he dreaded another scene, but he felt that if he stayed he would say or do something which he would repent for the rest of his life.

"No—please go."

Eva listened to his step in the hall desolately. How much more did he think she could bear, she wondered. She grasped the sides of the chair with both hands and rocked herself to and fro.

He was going away—he was going to Rhodesia and she would be left behind.

She might as well have refused to listen to Calligan. She might as well have carried out her intention and snapped the farcical tie of her marriage that bitter morning.

There would be an added humiliation now to bear. People would say that Philip had left her, that he had either never cared for her or that he had soon grown tired.

She did not know how long she sat there by the dying fire; did not know that the minutes had crawled away into hours, or that it was nearly one o'clock when Peter came in. She had given him a latchkey, and he was in the hall before she could go to meet him.

She tried to chase the shadows from her eyes—tried to smile as she went towards him, but the smile was frozen stiffly on her lips when she saw his face.

"Peter," she said with a catch in her voice.

He did not seem to hear. He hung up his hat and coat and stood for a moment aimlessly in the hall, as if he had forgotten where he was.

"Peter," said Eva again. She went over and touched his arm. "Peter—is anything the matter?"

He roused himself with a start.

"No, oh no . . . Have you waited up? You must be dead tired."

He went back with her to the drawing-room. He stooped over the fire and held his hands to the dying warmth.

Eva watched him apprehensively. She saw how pale he was, and heard the strain in his voice. She tried to speak naturally:

"And Kitty? I hope Kitty is well?"

He did not answer for a moment; then he said hoarsely: "I only saw her for a moment. She didn't come in till past twelve. I waited up and down the street for her—I couldn't come home till I'd seen her."

"And wasn't she surprised to see you? What did she say, Peter?"

He laughed grimly.

"She certainly seemed surprised. She said—his voice broke, but he controlled it fiercely—"she said, 'How dare you follow me and spy on me like this?' He caught his sister's hand in a hard grip. 'I've got to tell someone—I've got to tell you.'"

"But you won't ever tell anyone else know, will you, Bonnie? Promise me—promise."

"Peter, of course, not—but—"

"She wasn't glad to see me; she was angry," he went on despairingly. "She said I had no right to come. She said that she supposed I was just spying on her to see what she was doing. And that fellow stood there—that brute Featherstone, or whatever his name is, and laughed. I could have killed him," he added, between clenched teeth.

(To be continued.)

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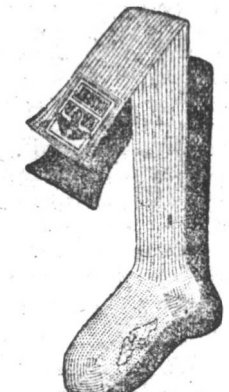
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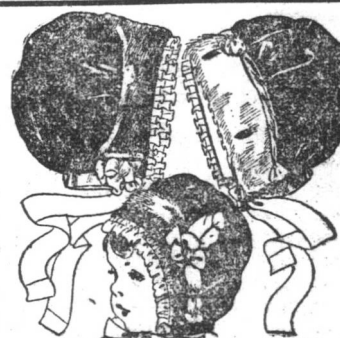
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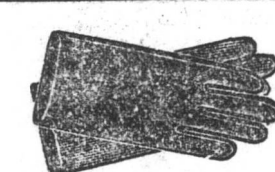
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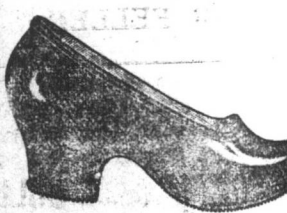
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