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Paid-up Capital, \$1,500,000.

Reserve - - \$1,500,000.

## A Complacent Little God

(Continued from page 8.)

was able to inveigle Marjorie into a game of tennis. When he finally had her to himself on the court, he made love to her shamelessly, both during and between the sets. He had a shrewd idea that her engagement to Peter Bush was attributable to Mr. Lyndon, rather than to Marjorie herself. Therefore, he felt no compunction in undertaking to overthrow the arrangement and to put himself in the absent Peter's place.

The meetings on the tennis court became a daily occurrence. Robert felt that he was gaining ground. It was becoming harder and harder for Marjorie invariably to meet his serious remarks with her light badinage. On occasion, he found himself breaking through her prettily impersonal manner, and striking fire beneath it. The proverbial drop of water was at work on its hollowing process.

One afternoon, after a hard set that Robert had won with difficulty, they were bandying words across the net. Little by little, the raillery died out of their voices. The doctor's thoughts turned to his neglected work, to the termination of this unwonted playtime.

"I'm leaving soon," he announced abruptly.

Marjorie came close to him. Unconsciously, her face assumed a wistful expression. Corliss leaned across the net.

"Marjorie," he said—it was the first time he had used her name—"Marjorie, when are you going to marry me?"

HER face went very white. She swayed slightly as she stood before him. In the eyes that she raised to his was a look of bewilderment—and something else.

"How can I?" she murmured piteously. The words were barely audible.

"I love you," continued Corliss doggedly. "And what is more"—he paused—"you love me!"

There came no denial from her white lips; they were locked in mute misery. Silently, she struggled with herself, and won. There remained, however, the dominant, masterful personality of her impetuous wooer to combat, and she felt herself being swept off her feet. She rushed into speech.

"Oh, we're not playing fair!" she cried passionately. "We're not playing fair! And I always have, so far!" She clenched her small hands, and stiffened with a sudden resolve. "Good-by," she said, in a hard, calm voice. Then, "Good-by, Doctor Corliss!" she choked.

Without giving him her hand, she turned, and walked toward the house with a listless step.

Corliss stood gazing after her. The light seemed to go out of his life, leaving his face hard and grim. He could not lose her after all! She was his! There must be some way to enforce the claim of his new-found love. Suddenly, his face lost its expression of hardness; a whimsical smile tugged at the corners of his mouth.

"Marjorie!" he called. "Wait!"

She turned, and came slowly back. "No need of any good-bys between us!" he exulted. "And you may still play fair." He emphasized the pronoun strongly. "Suppose Bush were to give you up of his own free will?"

"Ah, supposing's no good," she said, shaking her head sadly. "My engagement is an incontrovertible fact—and I must—I must play fair!" Then, catching the spirit of excitement that showed in Robert's manner, she demanded: "Why should he give me up? What do you mean?"

"Did you know that Peter had arrived this afternoon?" he asked banteringly.

The vivid flush that dyed her cheeks answered him.

"I should have gone to greet him," she stammered. "I'm going now—I—"

"Wait!" implored Robert tensely. "Before you smash our two lives all to bits, give me just half an hour more. Wait for me here until I come back. Will you promise?" he asked eagerly. She nodded, a question in her eyes.

Robert strode across the lawns in a fever of impatience, his shoulders braced back, his chin thrust forward aggressively. In the hall he encountered a servant, of whom he inquired where he could find the latest arrival. The man directed him to the billiard room.

Peter Bush was knocking the balls about in a precise, puttery way. He was a slight, little man, with a good-natured, round face, and thin hair, graying slightly at the temples. His chief characteristic was the air of being excessively well dressed. One noticed his clothes first; afterward came a realization of the discrepancy between his rather vacuous face and his shrewd, restless eyes. He looked toward the door expectantly, his expression changing as Robert crossed the threshold.

"Hello, Doctor! You here to put Mr. Lyndon in shape?" he said, a nuance of patronage in his tone.

"That's what I came for, but it seems I wasn't needed. I've been promoted to the status of a guest," said Corliss dryly. "By the way, Bush, I want to speak to you about Marjorie."

The other started and frowned slightly. "Ah, yes! Miss Lyndon," he said in a detached voice. "It's not announced yet; but evidently she has told you. I presume you wish to congratulate me?" he ended, a trifle fatuously.

"Not so that you'd notice it," cut in Corliss with his almost brutal curt-ness. "Fact is, you can't have her."

"Bless my soul! Why?" sputtered Bush. Feeling that his remark had been inadequate, he sputtered further: "Why? What do you mean? Why can't I have her?"

"Because I want her myself," said Robert, with an air of finality.

"But—but—I never heard of such a thing!" protested the abused fiancé. "She's promised to me! She—"

"No such thing. There is merely a tentative arrangement between her father and you."

"But, I'm fond of her!" wailed Peter.

"Fond of her!" rasped Corliss. "Fond of her! Why, man, dear! I could imagine myself being fond of the dog she pats, or the dress she wears, or the earth she treads on; but when it comes to my feeling for her own adorable self—well—I shouldn't exactly describe it as being fond of her!"

BUSH stirred uneasily. His round face betrayed his embarrassment; he was plainly out of his depth. As he offered no remark, Robert went on:

"I feel no enmity toward you, Bush, so long as you keep out of my way. It's mighty lucky for you, though, that we're in the twentieth century instead of the eighteenth."

"Why?" asked Peter dispiritedly. "Because I'd probably shoot you up."

"Bless my soul, Corliss! You have a nasty way of putting things." The little man tried to laugh, but his effort was abortive. He cleared his throat, and said, a trifle more aggressively: "The fact that you happen to be fond of her—or—to have fallen in love—does not appeal to me as being sufficient reason for my calmly giving up Marjorie."

"It's not. There's a better reason."

"What, may I ask?"

"She loves me."

Peter moistened his dry lips, and winced perceptibly.

"You see," declared Robert, "my claim is just as good as yours—better, even." He pondered a moment; then, as if the inspiration had been born that instant, he added: "There's just one way of settling it."

"How?" asked Peter, against his will.

"We'll throw a cold hand to see which of us gets Marjorie. Just one hand—no draw. High hand wins."

Peter's shrewd eyes lighted with a momentary gleam. Robert had spoken truly when he dubbed him a gambler. Behind his mask of respectability lay all the cold-blooded passions of the gamester. It was his predominant trait. The gleam in his eyes died quickly, however; convention inter-