

THE TRUE WIFE

BY F. FRANKFORT MOORE



IT had come at last. Her three years of ill-treatment by that husband of hers had culminated in a blow—an actual blow—not an accidental one which may be the result of an impatient push. There was nothing unintentional in the manner of its delivery. There was nothing hot-blooded about it. He was quite sober when he struck her. There was something of a smile on his face as his right hand shot out and caught her on the side of her head, sending her reeling upon the arm of the sofa and thence to the floor. And he had stood over her in the attitude of the threatening bully, with his hand still clenched, as if he were waiting for her to rise, when he would knock her down again.

She felt sure that he would have knocked her down again if she had made an attempt to rise. She expected to receive a kick from him as she lay half stunned before him; it would have been like him to kick her as she had seen him kick one of his dogs that had failed to obey him. But she was spared that, for the door opened and the butler entered with a letter for which an answer was needed, and he pretended that she was looking for something on the carpet.

He did it very adroitly.

"Don't come near, Simonds," he said before the man had time to deliver his message. "Don't come near, Mrs. Lacon has lost a diamond out of one of her rings, and you may tread on it. Fetch a hand-brush and I'll sweep for it."

"Yes, sir," the butler said, laying the letter that was in his hand on the table. "Mr. Clayton's compliments, sir, and he would be much obliged by a reply by his messenger."

"All right, I'll see what it's about," said her husband. Then turning to her, still on the floor, he asked her if she was sure that she had looked under the sofa.

This was before the butler had left the room. But the moment the sound of the door being closed was heard he said in a very different tone of voice:

"Get up and go out by the other door—quick, before he comes back. I don't want to tell any more lies than can be helped. I hope I've taught you a lesson that perhaps you'll not forget."

He did not even help her to get upon her feet. He tore open the cover of the letter which he had just received, and walked to the door through which the butler had gone. He opened it, and called out:

"Never mind that brush, Simonds; the thing is found."

She had got upon her feet. She was dazed for some moments and found it necessary to grasp very hard the back of the nearest chair for support.

But in another minute she felt strong.

She looked across the room at him and said:

"Yes; you have taught me a lesson that I shall not forget."

He gave a little start and turned half way round as she spoke.

"What do you mean by that?" he cried.