

The Race

(By W. L. W.)

And curiously enough they had no premonition of what was coming.

Psychically the preparations for the drama seemed woefully incomplete.

The sun-set of a calm beneficent English country Sunday type was obviously past its best sometime before the boat reached the wharf of the little mining town.

The woman, no longer young, was racked with headache. The man was calm, placid with contented anticipations of a pleasant week-end, in an attractive country-house—with her.

No—to the casual observer—to the actors themselves, the conditions were not propitious.

The environment at the beginning was worse even.

A mining town, on a Saturday evening—lights and noise and foolish empty laughter—the purposeless loitering of men and women, workers who seemed hardly to know how to use the few leisure hours the approaching Sunday was bringing.

A sense of sordidness, a suggestion of latent evil made the woman more acutely conscious of the pain in her head, and with an involuntary sigh of relief she swung her car out of the streets of the town onto the long country road. Anything, even twenty miles of hazardous driving was better than the banal glare of the shops.

The man moved to her, an imperceptible movement save to the woman who loved him—an arm now lay along the back of her seat—but he did not speak—even his great strength was tired to the uttermost by her evident pain and weariness. But after all, she was to be the man's hostess—she must say something. "See, that wonderful shimmer of cream up there is all dogwood! Oh, but you ought to know it, it is the fleur de luxe of our Island." It was a pathetic attempt, and she never spoke again.

The wind of the earlier hours had dropped—the moving car seemed the only living thing.

Mile after mile was covered in silence, as strange as the sudden halt in Nature.

The man's strong dark face was often turned to her with an obvious question that was never spoken. Her small thin face with its folds of flat gold hair was strained and set.

Suddenly the dense bush on either side was swept aside by invisible hands. The Waters covered the earth—cold grey—blue against the rocky shore and islands, sinister of silhouette the firs loomed—there was no sense of growing—all life seemed suspended—cold and hard and inflexible the waters, menacing and unflinching the trees.

The sky still held some of the sunset lights, but had no effect on the coldness below, and very quickly gave up the unequal fight.

The man shuddered—and then was soothed momentarily by a glint of rose color that still refused to yield all to the domination of the cruel waters below.

On and on sped the car, sometimes the road was obvious, then down and down it rushed, heading straight for the waters, but always, at the last possible moment it seemed to the man, it was turned into safety by the woman.

For what tragedy was this stage set? Were the waters calling his love—why should they want her? She was his, his woman from the very beginning.

Suddenly a new menace, down again to the waters and now mountains backed them up—were they helping in this strange fight—did they want her too?

Now the road was at the edge of the cliff, and involuntarily the man's grasp tightened on the woman's steering arm—a faint smile showed for an instant—was it gratitude? On and on, now the difference between sky and waters was blotted out, but that only meant that a sense of waters was

above as well as beyond and around.

"How long, my woman, how long?"

"Soon the end," came the whisper.

The car swept over a raging river. Once the bridge was crossed a softer look came subtly over the woman's face.

"Thank God! the bush again." And a few minutes later the car swung through gates and pulled up before the house.

Slowly the woman turned, "Beloved, take me, tonight. We have fought the evil things of my life. I am yours forever, for we won, only—take me NOW."

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