

BROKEN

RUBY M. AYRES

FOURTH INSTALLMENT
WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

Giles Chittenham, distressed over the suicide of his younger half-brother Rodney, returns to Europe from America, where he had made an unhappy marriage. Rodney had killed himself because a notorious woman Julie Farrow, threw him over. Giles is introduced to Julie Farrow by his friend Lombard, in Switzerland. He resolves to make her fall in love with him, then throw her over as she threw Rodney. She tells him she has made a bet with her friend "Bim" Lennox that she can drive her car to the top of the St. Bernard Pass and back. Chittenham discovers, to his amazement, that the girl beside him in the car appeals to him as no other woman has ever appealed. And something intangible convinces him that her feeling toward him is similar to his own toward her. "Do you believe in love at first sight?" he asks her, as the car toils up the mountain toward the hotel.

At the hotel, after refreshments, Chittenham and Julie found their mutual attraction so strong as to be irresistible. In the morning they returned to the town below, Julie apparently jubilantly happy. Lombard tells Chittenham that he has made a mistake, that this Julie Farrow is not the one who ruined Rodney, but her cousin of the same name. Chittenham is horrified. He calls at Julie's hotel and confesses that he had tried to win her love for purposes of revenge, believing her to be the other Julie.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

"I know it sounds a damnable insult . . . but you mustn't forget who I thought you were. A notorious woman—a woman who counted one man more or less as nothing. I wanted to make you more—to see if I could make you care for me and then treat you as you had treated my brother. You told me you had never really cared for any man and so . . . last night . . ."

He felt her sway beneath his hands. "You mean . . . it was all just a game?" she asked dazedly. Her eyes never left his flushed, agitated face. Chittenham watched her, white-

faced, tense.

Suddenly he found himself beside her, holding her unresponsive hand, pleading with her.

"Forgive me. For God's sake, say you forgive me. I shall never forgive myself. I'd give ten years of my life to wipe out the ghastly mistake. But it wasn't altogether my fault. Lombard—"

She turned her head and looked at him.

"Can you blame Mr. Lombard because you wished to behave like a cad to a woman who had never done you any harm?"

Chittenham flushed crimson.

"She sent my brother to his death. I had a right to make her pay."

"Your brother was as much of a coward as you are." The very stillness of her voice was like a knife-cut.

"Brave gentlemen both of you! The one to die and leave the stigma of his death upon a woman who never wanted him and had often told him so and the other to break a woman's whole life in order to satisfy his petty pride and the thing I suppose he calls his honour . . ."

"Julie!" Chittenham said passionately.

And then somehow without either of them being conscious of having moved, she was in his arms sobbing, her face buried on his shoulder, her arms about his neck.

"Oh say you love me . . . say you really love me—" she pleaded wildly.

"Oh, do you really love me after all?" Chittenham answered between clenched teeth.

"I do, God help me."

It was the truth; a truth of which he had never dreamed.



He turned her face up to him and kissed her lips.

"I love you—whatever happens, always remember that I love you—" he said hoarsely.

She freed herself from his arms, wiped her eyes, and pushed back her hair.

"I hope nothing else is going to happen," she said, half sobbing still.

"I think I've had enough for one day. I'm not used to crying . . . it doesn't suit me . . ."

He caught her hand, holding her fast.

"Wait . . . Julie, there's something else; something . . ."

He drew her into his arms again, holding her fast for yet another moment, then he gently released her.

"I love you with all my heart and soul—" he said hoarsely. "But you will hate me when you know all the truth—hate me more than I can ever hate myself, Julie . . . My dear, I—Julie, I'm not free to marry you, Julie . . . I—"

Then Julie said—at least her lips said it, for no sound seemed to pass them: "You mean . . . you're married already."

"Yes."

Suddenly she began to laugh; helpless hysterical laughter which she tried in vain to check or control.

"Julie . . ." Chittenham said

But she went on laughing.

It was so funny, so intensely funny that she of all people, who had never cared immoderately for any one, and who had always dreaded caring, should so suddenly have been plunged into this tragedy.

Two days ago she and Chittenham had never met, and now a whole lifetime of events bound them together. They had quarreled, loved, quarreled again, then kissed and been happy, and now the end had come.

Suddenly she spoke; she felt as if she were choking.

"Please go away."

"Not like this. I can't go like this, Julie, there must be some way out."

"I'll do anything . . . anything . . ."

She laughed with white lips.

"What can you do? I suppose you'll say that you are unhappily married, and ask me to be sorry for you? Perhaps you will even offer to divorce her?"

"She would be as glad of her freedom as I should," Chittenham said curtly.

Julie laughed in his face.

"Julie . . ." He caught hold of her so roughly that she cried out. "Do you think you're going to be the only one to suffer?" he asked savagely. "Do you think it doesn't rebound on me too? Do you think I wanted to care for you, or for any woman? I set a trap for you and I've been caught in it myself."

She flung back her head and looked at him with blazing eyes.

"I wish I could kill you. I wish I could kill you," she panted desperately and was gone.

Giles Chittenham's mother leaned back in her chair and applied an absurd lace handkerchief to her eyes.

Giles frowned and moved restlessly over to the window.

He had all a man's dislike for a scene, and for the past three days he had been treated to one every time he was in his mother's presence.

He found himself remembering the barely-furnished room at the hotel on the heights of St. Bernard—the isolated top-of-the-world room in which he had held Julie in his arms.

He had been forced to leave Switzerland without seeing her again, although he had made several attempts. He had wired Sadie the name of the hotel at which he intended to stay, and the day following his arrival a

letter came from her.

She did not even sign her name, and Chittenham burnt the letter as soon as he had read it.

A thousand times since he left Switzerland he had thought of asking Sadie to divorce him, but Chittenham knew her well enough to guess that if she thought he wished to get rid of her she would never allow him to do so.

All these thoughts were passing through his mind as his mother went on wailing and complaining.

Giles turned round.

"I thought you were too miserable to wish to go anywhere," he said harshly. "I'm hanged if I know what the devil you do want—" Then as she burst into tears he repented, and apologized remorsefully.

His mother dried her eyes and smiled faintly.

"I daresay you will be shocked," she said almost coquettishly. "But I should love to go out to dinner and then to a dance somewhere."

"Very well, we'll go out to dinner and a dance," he agreed. "Where would you like to go? The Savoy . . ."

"Oh, no! . . ." She was looking quite eager. "To a night club. I've never been to a night club, Giles, not to a real one that is open all night, and where you eat eggs and bacon at three o'clock in the morning. It would be quite all right with you, wouldn't it?"

"It would be quite all right anyway," he answered amusedly. "These places are only what you choose to make them. Very well, what time do we start?"

"What time is it now?"

"Seven o'clock."

"Call for me at nine."

So he arrived in the dull, highly expensive street where his mother lived, punctually at nine o'clock.

The door opened behind him, and his mother came in.

"I haven't kept you waiting, have I?" she asked gaily.

Giles turned round, then he rose

slowly to his feet. He felt as if he was in the presence of a perfect stranger.

"It's . . . well, it's amazing!" he said at last. "You don't look a day more than thirty-five."

"You dear thing" She stood on tip-toe and kissed him gratefully. "So you won't mind dancing with your old mother to-night, Giles?"

"And where are we going?" Mrs. Ardron asked, as they drove away.

"I'm told the Faun is the place to go to," Giles said. "If you don't like it we can go on somewhere else." But Mrs. Ardron adored it, and told him so every few minutes during the evening with varied extravagance.

Presently she saw some people she knew.

"Darling! you simply must be introduced! They're such sweet people. Doris Gardener is the girl—no, the one in the black frock and the scarlet shoes. She's twenty-two, and she's just got divorced from her husband."

Giles looked at the girl with the scarlet shoes.

"Do you dance, Mr. Chittenham?" Doris asked.

"Yes. May I have the pleasure . . . ?"

They went away together through the pillard partition to the room where the jazz band played. A sudden scream rose shrilly above the noise followed by a burst of hysterical laughter and the clatter of breaking glass.

"What on earth—" Chittenham began.

Doris Gardener laughed.

"It's only Julie Farrow. I don't know what's happened to her lately. She was quite drunk here the other night. I wonder they didn't turn her out."

"Julie Farrow!" Chittenham's voice was calm and indifferent, but he felt as if some one had tugged at his heart.

"Yes, do you know her? She used to be rather a friend of mine, but one has to draw the line somewhere. Just lately she seems to have taken leave of her senses."

Chittenham's eyes were straining across the room in the direction from which the noise had arisen, but there was too much of a crowd for him to distinguish any one face.

"You mean the famous Julie Farrow, I suppose," he submitted laconically.

Doris glanced across the room.

"There she is—" she said. "In the green frock. No—over the other side, sitting on the arm of the chair laugh-

ing . . . That's what I call a cock-tail laugh. Come along. I'm sure Essen and your mother are bored to tears with one another by this time."

But Chittenham did not move. He was looking at the girl in the green frock—a green frock of which there seemed to be so very little with which to cover her white neck and arms. Her lips were painted a vivid red, and she was laughing noisily—immoderately—laughter which died away suddenly as she met his gaze across the room, and it was his Julie—the woman who had said she loved him, and with whom he had spent that never to be forgotten night on the top of the world.

Doris Gardener tugged at Giles Chittenham's arm.

"Come along! If Julie sees me she'll want to join our party and I'm not anxious to have her. Oh, damn—I knew it would happen—"

She shrugged her shoulders resignedly as Julie suddenly detached herself from the noisy group she was with and threaded her way across the room.

Doris glanced at Chittenham. "Do you know Mr. Chittenham, Julie?" She made the introduction with obvious reluctance.

Julie had returned Chittenham's formal bow with a careless nod.

"How are you? I've heard of you," she said casually. "Rodney Ardron's half brother, aren't you? Delighted to meet you."

Chittenham's face hardened beneath its pallor. He felt as if he were in the presence of a stranger who yet looked at him with well-beloved eyes.

"I think we have met before," he said with cool deliberation.

Julie raised her brows.

"Have we? Oh, surely not. I'm so good at remembering faces. Perhaps you are mistaking me for my cousin—the other Julie!" She laughed insolently. "That does happen—sometimes I assure you," he said, turning to Doris. "Julie probably wouldn't be flattered if she knew, but all the same it happens occasionally. You may not believe me, Mr. Chittenham, if you know my cousin that is—but a man once kissed me in the most impassioned manner thinking I was the other Julie! So very awkward, especially as he was a man who I very much dislike."

"A disappointment to the man also perhaps," Chittenham said bitterly, but she only laughed.

(Continued Next Week)

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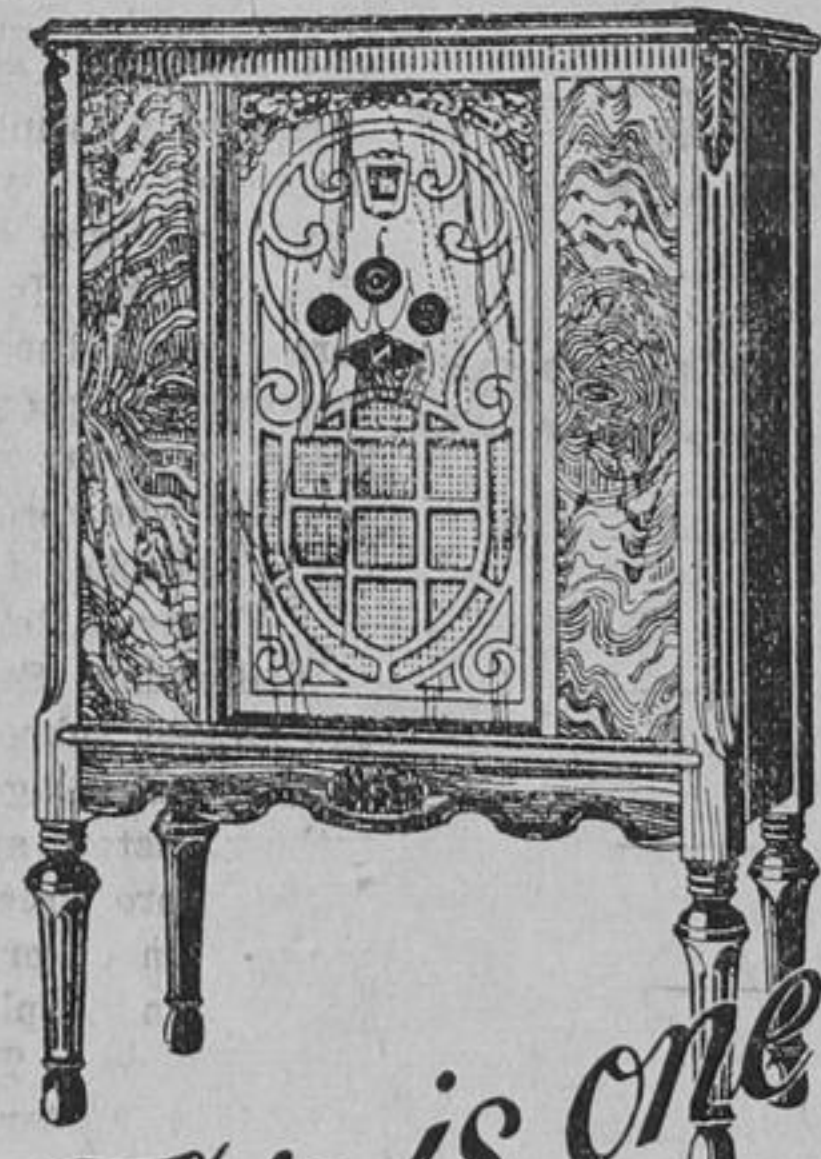
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