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TWELFTH INSTALLMENT
WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

Giles Chittenham sets out to make Julie Farrow love him, intending to throw her over in revenge for the suicide of his brother Rodney, whom Julie had cast off. He succeeds, but finds that he has fallen desperately in love with her himself. Then he discovers that it was not this Julie Farrow, but her cousin of the same name, who had driven his brother to death. But Giles is married, to an American girl named Sadie Barrow, with whom he has not lived for a long time. Sadie unexpectedly turns up in London, at a party at Giles' mother's house, but both keep silent about their marriage.

Julie, disillusioned, enters into the wild night life of London to try to drown her anguish. Lawrence Schofield wants to marry her. Lombard, who had first introduced her to Chittenham, demands money from Giles with the threat that if he is not paid he will tell Schofield that Chittenham and Julie spent the night together on the St. Bernard Pass. Later Julie confesses to Chittenham that she loves him.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

The two men made no attempt at a greeting. Chittenham merely said: "You're in rather a hurry, aren't you? However, you've saved me the trouble of sending it to you. You can have your two hundred."

Lombard smiled — an unpleasant smile.

"I want five hundred."

"You agreed for two."

"The price has gone up since last night."

There was an eloquent silence, and Lombard said calmly:

"Five hundred is not a high price to pay, surely — I cannot imagine that Schofield would crap at it in return for the favour you received last night." He shrugged his shoulders as he saw the passionate rage in Chittenham's face.

"It was you outside Miss Farrow's flat last night?"

"I waited three hours — very patiently, you will admit."

With an effort Chittenham controlled himself.

"I give you just five seconds to get out of here," he said.

"Very well, You know what I intend to do. I shall tell Schofield what happened in Switzerland and again last night—"

"Tell him, and I'll break every bone in your body."

Lombard went on evenly, not heeding the violent outburst.

"And I shall tell Miss Farrow that the woman she has been making her friend is your wife."

Chittenham was white to the lips, but he laughed.

"You can spare yourself the trouble. I have already told her myself."

For a moment the two men glared at one another, and it took all Chittenham's will-power to maintain his self-control, then Lombard said hoarsely:

I'll make you sorry for this before I've done!"

"Get out, or I'll make you sorry for it now."

The door closed between them.

For some moments after Lombard had gone, Chittenham stood staring at the closed door.

He would see Julie at once and tell her the whole truth. But Fate was against him. He went to Julie's flat only to find that she had gone out to lunch. He went to several restaurants where he thought she might be but could not find her. There was nothing for it but to wait till the after noon when they would meet at his mother's house.

He purposely arrived rather late. Mrs. Ardron, who was near the door, crept to him and whispered that he must be very quiet.

"It's so wonderful!" she breathed; she squeezed his hand excitedly.

Giles stood beside her, angry and silent.

Now he was more accustomed to the darkness he could see that there were about a dozen people in the room sitting in a ring, and apparently holding hands. There was a queer aromatic scent in the air, and a curious feeling of nervous tension.

He saw now that the light from the shaded lamp was falling on the face and figure of a man whom he supposed must be the great Chryer. A strange-looking man with a pale ascetic face and long dark hair, who lay back in the chair, his eyes closed and his hands clasped against his breast.

Presently he began to speak in a sing-song dreamy sort of voice.

"Two women and one man—one man and two women . . . they stand before me in the darkness not knowing of the tragedy that divides and will still divide their lives. . . ." He drew a quick breath and their followed a little silence, broken again almost at once by the same sing-song voice—"Two women and one man—in the darkness all of them, and two of them will come out into the light, but the third will never see sunshine again. Darkness—blindness. The blindness of the eyes . . . here, close beside me. . . ."

His clasped hands released one another, and moved forward in a curiously groping fashion as if seeking to find something. Giles did not know whether to be amused or angry. What fools women were, to be taken in by such a charlatan! He had moved back a step to find the switch of the light when suddenly those groping hands swooped down with a curious pouncing movement and fastened on something or some one in the silent ring of listeners.

A piercing scream rang through the silence of the room, a scream in the frightened voice of a woman, and then the cry of his own name: "Giles! Giles . . ."

It seemd an eternity until his fingers came into contact with the switch, and still that cry went on: "Giles Giles."

It was Sadie's voice, he knew, and when at last the room was flooded with light he saw that she was standing up, her hands covering her face, her childish body swaying to and fro as if in great pain or terror, while the wailing repetition of his name came from her lips monotonously again and again.

It was like a scene in a dream—the ring of half frightened women—and the strange figure of the man Chryer as he rose slowly to his feet, a shocked, awakened look in his somnolent eyes. Then Mrs. Ardron began to cry hysterically, and the whimpering sound seemed to break the spell which was upon every one.

Giles took a quick stride forward: "Sadie."

She turned swiftly at the sound of her name, her hands outstretched and when he took them in his, she clung to him, sobbing and shaking like a frightened child.

He kept protecting arms round his wife's slim figure as he glared round the room with furious eyes.

His mother, Doris and half a dozen other women whom he knew slightly and . . . Julie!

Julie was standing up, very stiff and straight, looking at him across the room, a pitiful, wondering question in her pretty eyes, her face quite colourless, her hands gripping a chair back.

And then for a moment nobody moved or spoke, but Chittenham's arms fell from his wife and he took an involuntary step away from her.

She looked up, her face white and distorted.

"Giles! . . ." and then before any one could move to help her she fell fainting at his feet.

Chittenham was very pale and his voice was rough and uneven as kind hands carried Sadie from the room.

He was conscious of impending disaster.

"We've sent for a doctor," his mother said. "Julie is staying with her."

"It's only an ordinary faint," Doris said contemptuously. "I'm surprised at Sadie being such a fool."

The others had all gone and Chittenham stood with an elbow on the mantel-shelf staring down at the grate which was filled with flowers and ferns. He could think of nothing but that pitiful, wondering question in Julie's eyes.

What was she thinking? What had she guessed?

What a fool he had been not to tell her the truth last night; she would have understood and forgiven him then. Would she understand or forgive him now,

It seemed an eternity until the door opened behind him and Julie came in.

Chittenham turned. He made a swift movement towards her as if to take her in his arms, then stopped.

This was not the woman who had clung to him only last night and whispered how much she loved him—this was not even the wild, broken Julie who had hurt him with her utter recklessness during the past unhappy weeks — this was a woman whom he had never seen before, with cold eyes that accused him harshly even before she spoke.

"Sadie is no better. The doctor has just come. Would you like to go to her now?"

Giles flushed scarlet. It was such an unexpected challenge.

"Why should I go to her? What do you mean?" he asked roughly. They were the last words he meant to say and yet for the life of him he could not have controlled their utterance.

Julie shrugged her shoulders.

"I only thought . . . in the circumstances . . ."

He covered the ground between them in a stride and caught her by the shoulders.

"Julie . . . have you forgotten last night? How can you speak to me like this? How can you look at me in such a way?"

He felt her slim body stiffen beneath his grasp, and her eyes met his unflinchingly.

"How long have you known Sadie? Why did she call out to you and run to you like that? What is she to you?"

There was an agonised question in her voice though she tried desperately to keep it unconcerned.

She moved back a step when he would have touched her and both their faces were white.

"There's no need to pretend any longer," she said with a harsh breath.

"Julie—" Chittenham broke out again desperately then stopped as the door opened beneath his mother's agitated hand.

"Giles—they want you at once—the doctor sent me for you—oh, Giles!" she caught his arm with ineffectual hands. "I don't understand! I feel as if I am going mad, or as if every one else is—what do they all mean? And if it's the truth why didn't you tell me? Sadie is saying awful things, too—she must be light-headed! She says she's your wife? How can she be your wife when you are not married?"

Giles turned on his heel and strode out of the room. Mrs. Ardron turned to Julie, both white, useless hands outstretched.

"Is it true?" she appealed helplessly. She forgot her dislike for Julie. In her present distress she would have turned to her worst enemy for consolation. "You heard what I said. Sadie declares she is my son's wife. How can she be when he is not married? He never liked women—he has said so scores of times."

"I think it's quite true," Julie answered with stiff lips. She took Mrs. Ardron's hands and held them, hardly realising what she was doing. "I'm quite sure it's true that Sadie is his wife," she said again gently.

She was unutterably grateful when just as she felt she could bear no more the doctor came into the room. Mrs. Ardron at once turned her attention to him and Julie slipped away. She took her coat from a maid on the landing and went out into the street.

"She is my wife—"

They seemed to be the only words that would take form and find utterance in her brain.—

For Chittenham she had sent Lawrence Schofield away. For Chittenham she had deliberately dashed Schofield's happiness to the ground.

"I have changed my mind. I can't marry you. I don't care for you enough." She had told Lawrence that only this morning. And now once more the brief dream was ended—or—wasn't it? After all, nothing was really altered. He had deceived her about Sadie, it was true, but apart from that things were in no wise changed. Chittenham still loved her and she loved him—and if he still wanted his freedom and Sadie was willing to give it to him.

"Giles—Giles—"

The memory of Sadie's agonised cry came back to her, ending afresh the peace which she was trying so hard to regain. It had been the cry of a woman to a man she loved, or so Julie told herself in bitterest jealousy, and she remembered how often Sadie had spoken of Giles—and in what a queer, rather shy way—as if—even then it had seemed to Julie almost as if there might have been something between them. And now she knew. Sadie was his wife. The one woman of all the many in the world who had a right to him and to his love and his protection—the protection she had claimed only that afternoon in her hysterical fear.

The maid came tapping at the door.

"Aren't you very wet, Miss? Can I dry your clothes for you?"

"No, no. I'm not wet, and I don't want anything, you need not wait."

She heard the girl move reluctantly away and then a moment later the shutting of the front door. But it was a long time before Julie moved or stirred. The room was quite dark save for the yellow light from the street lamp outside, and the fitful rain had settled into a steady downpour and was beating against the window.

(Continued Next Week)

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