



The GIRL in the MIRROR

By Elizabeth Jordan

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"Yes." This time her answer was prompt. "It will end everything I am trying to do, and destroy what I have already done."

Laurie threw his half-burned cigarette into the fire, as if to lend greater emphasis to his next words.

"That settles it," he announced. "I won't listen to you."

She turned to look at him.

"But you must," she faltered. "I'm all ready to tell you. I've been working myself up to it ever since you came."

"I know. I've watched the process, and I won't have another word." He lit a second cigarette, drew in a mouthful of smoke, and sent it forth again in a series of widening rings. "Your conversation is extremely uninteresting," he explained; "and look at the setting we've got for something romantic and worth while. This cozy room, this roaring fire"—he interrupted himself to glance through the nearest window—"a ripping old snow-storm outside, that's getting worse every minute, and the exhilarating sense that though we're prisoners, we've already taken two perfectly good prisoners of our own; what more could one ask to make an afternoon in the country really pleasant?"

He stopped, for she was crying again, and the sight, which had taxed his strength an hour earlier, overtaxed it now. She overwhelmed him like a breaker. He rose, and going close to her, knelt beside her chair.

"Doris," he begged, brokenly. "Don't cry! I can't tell you how it makes me feel. I—I can stand anything but that." He seized her hands and tried to pull them away from her face. "Look at me," he urged. "I've got all sorts of things to say to you, but I won't say them now. This isn't the time or the place. But one thing, at least, I want you to know. I do trust you. I trust you absolutely. And whatever happens, whatever all this incredible tangle may, I shall always trust you." She wiped her eyes and looked into more serious in that moment than had ever seen them.

"I will stop," she promised, with a catch in her voice. "But please think I'm a hysterical fool. I'm

Illustration of a woman and a man in a room, possibly a study or library, with bookshelves in the background.

"Doris," He Begged Brokenly, "Don't Cry!"

Not crying because I'm frightened, but because—because—Laurie, you're so splendid!"

"I told you you'd find all sorts of unexpected virtues in me," he lightly announced; and it was the familiar Laurie who smiled down at her. There are dozens more you don't dream of. I'll reveal them to you guardedly. They're rather overwhelming."

She smiled vaguely at his chatter, but it was plain that she was following her own thoughts.

"The most wonderful thing about you," she said, "is that through this whole experience you've never, for one single instant, been 'heroic.' You're not the kind to 'emote'!"

"Great Scott!" gasped Laurie, startled. "I should hope not!"

He could look at her now, and he did, his heart filled with the satisfying beauty of her. She was still leaning forward, a little in the low chair, with her hands unconventionally clasped around one knee, and her eyes staring into the fire. A painter, he reflected, would go mad over the picture she made; and why not? He himself was going mad over it, was even a little light-headed.

She wore again the gown she had worn the first day he saw her, and the memory of that poignant hour in-

tively. "By the way," he turned to her with quickened interest, "something tells me it's long after lunch time. Is there any reason why we shouldn't eat?"

She smiled.

"None whatever. The icebox contains all the things a well-regulated icebox is supposed to hold. I overheard Shaw and his secretary discussing their supplies."

"Good! Then we'll release Mother Fagin long enough to let her cook some of them."

He strolled to the bedroom door. On a chair facing it the woman sat and gazed at him with her fierce eyes.

"Would you like a little exercise?" he politely inquired. There was no change of expression in the hostile face. "Because if you would," he went on, "and if you'll give me your word not to cry out, give any kind of alarm or signal, or start anything whatever, I'll take that bandage off your mouth and let you cook lunch for us and for yourself."

The fierce eyes set, then wavered. He waited patiently. At last the head nodded and he expeditiously untied the bandage.

"The very best you've got, please," he instructed. "And I hope you can cook. If you can't, I'll have to do it myself. I'm rather gifted that way."

"I can cook," avowed the old woman sullenly.

"Good work! Then go on your joyous way. But if you feel an impulse to invite into your kitchen any of the gentlemen out in the grounds, or to release the secretary, restrain it. They wouldn't like it in here. They wouldn't like it at all!"

A strange grimace twisted the woman's sardonic features. He interpreted it rightly.

"I'm glad you agree with me," he said. "Now, brook trout, please, and broiled chickens, and early strawberries and clotted cream."

She looked at him with a return of the stolid expression that was her habitual one.

"We ain't got any of those things," she declared.

"We ain't?" Her guest was pained.

"What have we got?"

"We got ham and eggs and lettuce and milks and coffee and squash pie."

He sighed.

"They will do," he said resignedly. "Do you think you could have them ready in five minutes?"

At that, he shook his head.

"I don't know," he said slowly, and with the seriousness he had shown her once or twice before. "Death is a rather important thing. I've been thinking about it a good deal lately."

"For the birds," he explained. "For the cold little birds out in the grounds."

"This storm will be a good thing for us," he mentioned to Doris, when they had returned to the upstairs sitting room. "It will be dark soon after four, and the snow will cover our footprints. But I'm inclined to think," he added, reflectively, "that before we start I'd better go out and truss up those two birds in the grounds."

He showed an immediate apprehension.

"Oh, Laurie!" That was all she said, but it was enough. Again he turned away from her and looked into the fire.

"I want to talk to you about it sometime," he went on. "Not now, of course. I'm going in for the aviation end. That's my game."

"Yes, it would be," she corroborated, almost inaudibly.

"I've been thinking about it a lot," he repeated. There was an intense, unshakable intensity in his eyes which he had made to no one else but Bangs, and to him only a casual phrase or two. "That's one reason why it has been hard for me to get down to work on a new play, as Bangs and Epstein have been hounding me to do. I was afraid I couldn't keep my mind on it. All I can think of, besides you—" he hesitated, then went on rather self-consciously—"are those fellows over there and the tremendous job they're doing. I want to help. I'm going to help. But I'm not going into it with any illusions about military bands and pretty uniforms and grand-stand plays. It's the biggest job in the world today, and it's got to be done. But what I see in it in the meantime are blood and filth and stench and suffering and horror and a limitless, stoical endurance. And—well, I know I'm going. But I can't quite see myself coming war."

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