JOANNA

Story of a Modern Girl and a Million Dollars

Beautiful JOANNA MANNERS, clerk, is summoned by HARKNESS, the buyer, to appear before here mployer, Mr. Graydon, who delivers an overwhelming message. Some one whose identity she is not to know has placed $1,000,000 on deposit at the Metropolitan Bank subject to her personal check. Graydon convinces her "there are no strings tied to the proposition," and has his chauffeur take her to the banker, Andrew Eggleston, Graydon's old friend.

That evening, when Joanna hopes to talk confidentially with JOHN, her fiancee, she finds also the eloquent and wealthy FRANCIS BRANDON, her banker's nephew, waiting in the drawing-room. Brandon departs, after being assured of a later engagement.

Joanna promises to share her fortunes with John, but he will not believe her story and departs with utmost coldness.

Joanna is perplexed because John, as well as COHEN, the furrier, and even her landlady, MRS. ADAMS, now distrust her.

At a brilliant social affair, Brandon introduces her to YVONNE COUTANT, famous society divorcee, whose partner, Roddy Kenilworth, rich, romantic idler, admits he will try his hand for Joanna. He knows Brandon is the one thing Yvonne desires that she hasn't got.

Yvonne invites Joanna to live with her until she becomes properly launched, but it is suggested that Joanna withhold her decision until later.

Joanna learns from her chum, Georgie, that John is willing to apologize since speaking with Joanna's banker, Eggleston. She sends John a note, and tells Eggleston of her plans.

By H. L. Gates

CHAPTER XIII

Yvonne Coutant

YVONNE COUTANT was one of those women, young in body and lure but old in the lore of all else that is woman, of whom it was the fashion to know much, but of whom few knew much. Her appearance on the sunshade balcony at Shepherds, in Cairo, brought heads together and curious gleams into eyes that had grown weary with their struggle to pierce the blue haze that shrouds the distant Sphynx. Her arrival at Nice, or Cannes, during the season of the Mi-careme fetes was told in the Casino, at Monte Carlo and echoed from villa to villa along the whole Riviera shore. If, some evening, she unexpectedly framed herself in the purple curtains of the exclusive Embassy Club in London, or stopped to drop her cloak in the lounge of any other fashionable supper rendezvous, Mayfair knew of it long before it greeted the dawn with a final brandy and soda. Only the favored few knew whence she came, or what were to be the high lights of her stay.

For Yvonne Coutant was a creature of high lights—"Roddy" Kenilworth called them "high spots." Teddy Dorminster, of London, Paris and New York, who was born a lord but with none of the sobrieties supposedly attached to such high estate, maintained a continuous argument with Roddy as to whether or not it shouldn't be "spot" lights. Being an Englishman, Lord Teddy was a stickler for exactitudes. In its minor way this was as good an example as any of the controversies Yvonne Coutant fostered, and quite as sensible. She guarded her mysteries, her past and her future, and danced to melodies of her own making.

Undoubtedly born in France, she had married an American and an Englishman. She laughted at both when they announced that their affections for her were serious, and laughed at them both when she decided that as husband they were too encumbering. There was no public comment over settlements. Indeed, there may have been none; if there were, it is probable the husband were voluntarily generous. Both had been artists at heart and were of the sort, who wore a woman as a jewel and would continue to be proud of the splendor that had been theirs during their devotion to a wife of whom at least one order of the world must ever envy them. It is probable they would willingly do their share toward preserving the golden sheen on the butterfly wings that had fluttered for them.

The latter one of these had been Alfred Coutant the American. Long before him, however, Yvonne Coutant had been one who helped, with her intense, and exotic, cosmopolitan charm, to give romantic color to the affairs of aspiring American hostesses who in themselves can provide only dullness. Men who were without a sense of humor fell desperately in love with her. She irritated women and they bored her dreadfully.

* * *

RODDY KENILWORTH might have said a great deal more about Yvonne Coutant than the sum of these things if he wished. So might Brandon. Of the two Roddy probably had the safer knowledge. He was an unprejudiced observer of women. Brandon was only occasionally interested, Kenilworth always. And somewhere out of his knowledge of her Kenilworth had acquired the power of disconcerting her whenever he wished. She sensed the challenge in his mood when he came upon her in a corner of the little winter garden which opened off the drawing room of her house in one of the fashionable cross streets that have usurped the exclusiveness of the Avenue.

This house was another of the mysteries that encompassed Yvonne Coutant. It had come to her from neither of her husbands. So far as any one knew she always maintained it as a sort of retreat from her globe trotting. She called it her "anchor." No matter how long were her absences it was always staffed with servants, and the hot-house flowers that gave their color and perfume to the winter garden were carefully tended. Roddy's greeting was his usual one: "Can you make some magic signs or recite mystic words that will bring me a morning highball?"

"I fancy Walker, having let you in, has the tray already waiting," she replied, motioning him to a silver bell on the low, marble table, which fronted the bench on which she had fixed herself, cross-legged on a pile of cushions, obviously for half an hour wih a book. "You won't mind, will you?" she inquired, "if I don't straighten my legs out? It's quite a bother to curl them up this way, you know."

She patted a cushion beside her, inviting him to share the bench, but he declined, propping himself on the edge of the table, so that he faced her.

"I can never enjoy a highball when I'm too close to a woman," he explained. "One distracts my attention from the other, consequently I miss something of both."

"I can't fancy you failing to exact the utmost from either," she retorted.

"You flatter my vanity and in the same breath shame my faults. For the moment, as Walker is prompt in his response to the summons, I shall disabuse you of your judgement—as to the highball."

* * *

SHE watched him silently while he poised the decanter over a glass. She merely nodded her refusal to his, "Are you joining me?" He poured his portion and added the ginger ale he preferred to soda. "My compliments!" he said, holding his glass slightly toward her. She nodded her permission, her eyes still fixed on him.

"Do you know," he observed, when he had tasted his drink, "I never see a woman—a pretty woman, that is—posed on a cushioned pedestal as you are, in the posture of a female Buddha, or the wife of some Hindu god, that I don't wonder what sinister deviltry they ponder over. If I should come across you, like that, in a Hindu temple of gold, or behind the altars along some path of auspiciousness, I should feel the urge to make a sacrifice to you—of a maiden widow, or a first born girl child, or something of the sort, to propitiate you!"

The lines at each corner of her lips deepened, and her soft, silvery laugh seemed to blend into the winter garden perfumes.

"Admirable, Roddy!" she exclaimed merrily. "Your overture is magnificent. I am all prepared for the play. Finish your highball, pour yourself another, fix one for me, without ice, please, so it will be ready if I need it, and then you may tell me the evil you are going to accuse me of pondering."

His expression didn't change. He obeyed the first of her injunctions, and emptied his glass. When he had also filled it again, and another for her, which she motioned him to put aside, in reserve, he remarked: "I refuse to be so abrupt."

"Then you really have some new accusation! Is it very serious, this time, Roddy?"

"I repeat," he insisted, "that even if you do spoil my carefully thought-out approach, I shall not be deterred from getting my information in my leisurely way. Let us talk of something extraneous—of the girl of last night, for example. Extraordinary situation, isn't it? Smothered by money and doesn't know where to turn for breath!"

"You are not nearly so good now, Roddy, as you were before!" Yvonne flicked him with the tail of her inscrutable smile, and then prodded him deeper. "It was the girl you were thinking about when you came in—I don't think she's been off your mind since last night. And if there's any evil in store for her you want to provide it yourself, don't you, Roddy? Isn't that it?"

* * *

HE put down his glass. "That's good whiskey," he observed, it dulls one' wits. My strategy seems to be going wrong."

"There!" the woman on the cushions exulted: "You are delightful again, as you always are when you're trapped. Now I shall sip my drink, if I may, while you proceed to your cross examination. See? I am careless of my wits; I expose them to the same whiskey."

"Satire becomes you, wonderfully," he said regarding her as with a deep sense of appreciation. "Someday a master painter will parody the Madona with you as his model, and give the world a new masterpiece. Your lips are set just right for him, now. Presently I shall drink a toast especially to everything that isn't Madona-like about you, since I can do that better than paint. Meanwhile, I admit to being curious. Mind you, only curious. What are you going to do with—or to—the girl?"

"Do you think an impulse of last night, born of my own thrill at the riot that must be going on in her mind, must necessarily be so definite as that? With some hidden motive behind it?"

He did not at once reply. His thoughts seemed to have wandered off for a moment. When he spoke again his tone had lost all veneer of banter.

"I do not believe you ever surrendered to an impulse in your life," he said, his words studiously measured. "There can be nothing in common between you and this girl who has no other masque than her own natural vividness. She's more likely to be a thorn than a foil. So you have a motive as clearly defined as the pretense you are trying to bring into your eyes." Yvonne treated him to her silvery laugh and would have interrupted him, but he went on, calmly; "Brandon is obviously playing a game. I am convinced that he knows where her money came from and why, despite his evasiveness. And I am convinced, too, that you do not, yet you deliberately spin a web for the girl and play spider to the fly. Why?"

* * *

IF HE thought to provoke the woman he cross-examined, Kenilworth was disappointed. She studied him coolly. "I'm not so sure my whiskey dulled your wits after all," she observed. "You argue beautifully. I shall give you your triumph. I have a motive. As clearly defined as you picture it. As for the girl herself, I shall probably like her tremendously, though that is of no importance. And it doesn't follow, necessarily, that my motive means evil to her. That will be up to her."

"There's going to be quite a lot put up to her, I should imagine," Kenilworth agreed. "You simply give her an added problem. How does Brandon associate in your plotting?"

"Now, Roddy, I didn't guarantee to go into details. There aren't any, yet. You may be unperturbed, however. Brandon wanted me to ask her to come to me. He doesn't know why I consented—and you won't, either, until you discover for yourself. Now, then, I'm going to uncurl my legs and come out of my female Hindu goddess pose. It's becoming uncomfortable. So I shall be pondering evil no longer. You observe I do not ask you what your intentions are toward my ward, as I should, but that is because I'll see for myself. I know your procedure perfectly."

He gave her his hand and helped her to her feet. "I have a sense of being completely baffled," he remarked, ruefully. "I learn only what I already knew, and nothing more, except—" Suddenly his tone aletered. "Except that you would torture every living thing and wreck every castle that was ever built in the air if Brandon would hold out his hand to you!"

"That!" she retorted, "is the highball. Perhaps I had better change my brand of Scotch, after all. "But when Kenilworth had gone Yvonne dropped into the nearest chair. Had he returned and studied her, at anytime during the next half hour, he would have concluded that there could be no doubt about it this time. She pondered.

It was late in the afternoon when Walker stood behind his mistress, who was serving tea to a small company of men and women around the same stone table, in the winter garden, on which Kenilworth had perched himself earlier in the day. "The mademoiselle who is expected has arrived," the butler murmured.

Yvonne rose at once. "I shall be back in time for a cigaret, at least," she added to her excuses. She crossed her drawing room, from its entrance into the winter garden, just in time to see Teddy Dorminster, the one who was born a lord but could persuade no one to consider the coincidence seriously, come to a standstill before the slight, girlish figure that stood directly in his path from the reception hall, where he had just turned over his coat and stick to Walker, across the room to the garden. Teddy Dorminster kept none of his secrets or his enthusiasms to himself. He brought a new store of both on his daily droppings in at Yvonne's—her's was, in a measure, a continuously open house when she was in town.

The newcomer stared into Joanna's face frankly. He fumbled in his pocket and produced his eye glass, which he carefully screwed into his eye. Then he scrutinized her again, utterly oblivious to her equally unabashed stare at him.

"Jove!" young Dorminster exclaimed. "What a pretty girl!" Yvonne was in time to hear Joanna's reply:

"How in the world did you ever happen?"

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(To Be Continued).

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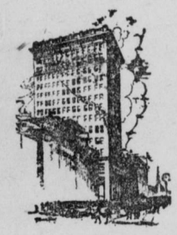

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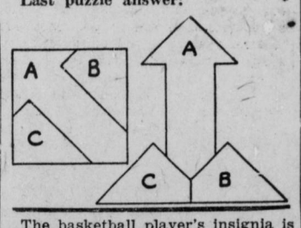
Last puzzle answer:



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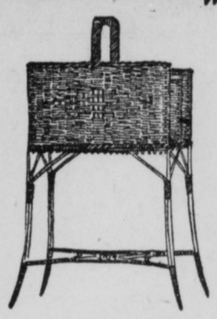

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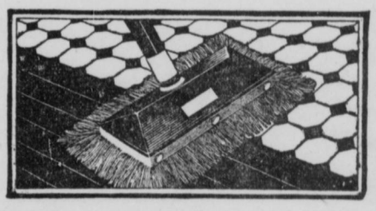

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