

MAD MARRIAGE

by LAURA LOU BROOKMAN Author of "HEART HUNGRY", etc.

Chapter Forty-Five (Continued)
She opened her eyes, brushed away the tears and dabbed at her cheeks with a tiny powder puff. Gypsy sighed. Then she went down the stairs to the first floor of the library.

A row of books with the plaid, "Timely and Interesting," above them, caught her attention. She remembered a new biography which Jim had said he was anxious to read. It was not among the volumes on the desk.

Gypsy approached one of the girls behind the counter and asked for the book. It was listed, but was "out."

As Gypsy turned away she noticed that by the clock in the entrance it was ten minutes after 4. By a surprising turn of the weather the day was cool.

She decided to stop at the Plaza tearoom for a cup of tea. It wasn't the tea she cared about. It was the chance to be alone a little longer. A chance to be alone with her thoughts.

She entered the tearoom and sat down at a table near the wall. A waitress asked for her order and presently passed with it.

A woman across the room smiled at Gypsy and the girl nodded. The woman was with two others and immediately turned back toward her companions.

Gypsy drank the hot tea. If any one had told her six months ago that she was to send Alan Crosby away how she would have scoffed!

Now he was gone and Gypsy's only feeling was one of pity for him. Alan would get over it, of course. He would get over it the same as she had.

That was the really amazing thing! She had recovered completely from the spell of infatuation for Alan. How had it happened? When? She had no idea.

Gypsy only knew that after the first few minutes Saturday, when the shock of seeing Alan again had worn away, she suddenly was aware that the rest had gone too.

She did not love Alan Crosby. She did love Jim. She was amazed to discover that this feeling which she had called friendliness, loyalty, understanding—half a dozen different names—was something deeper.

Oh, this was love now! She was sure of it. This was love that she felt for Jim Wallace.

Jim's kindness, his strength, that sturdy dependability which had ever failed her, his gentleness came back to the girl in a hundred manifestations.

How could she have been so blind? She loved Jim. Did Jim feel the same way? Oh, she hoped so! She thought of his attentiveness during her illness. That must mean something.

There was a telephone booth in the rear of the tearoom. Gypsy entered the booth. She gave the operator the number of Jim's office. The secretary's voice answered.

"Is Mr. Wallace in?" Gypsy asked. "Mr. Wallace has gone for the day," she was informed.

DISAPPOINTED, Gypsy returned to her seat. She had hoped to ride home with Jim. If he had gone already she ought to be on her way. She paid the check, stepped out on the street and hopped a taxi.

Excellently she began to plan for the evening. She would put on the printed chiffon dress. Jim had complimented her the first time she wore it. They would have dinner served by candlelight.

Afterward when she and Jim were alone together they would sit on the davenport and talk.

Gypsy straightened. It occurred to her suddenly that there was only one way to let Jim know how much she cared for him. She would tell him the truth.

She would tell him who Alan really was and that what she had mistaken for love was only infatuation, quickly killed.

When the cab stopped Gypsy gave the driver a bill and, without waiting for change, ran up the walk to the house.

Mr. Wallace came in a while ago and went out again. Matilda informed her. "No, he didn't leave any message."

Gypsy was waiting for him, wearing the becoming chiffon frock and smiling when Jim entered the house. It was after 6 o'clock.

"You look tired, dear," she told him.

Jim sank into a chair facing her. "Gypsy," he said in an odd unnatural voice. "I want you to free me."

CHAPTER FORTY-SIX
GYPY COULD not believe that she had heard the words correctly. "You want what?" she asked, leaning forward.

"I want you to free me. Bring an end to this farce that is supposed to be a marriage. Break it off."

We both should have known better in the first place than to try such a crazy thing. I think it's time we became sensible."

"Oh!" the girl interrupted him.

"I see! You mean you want me to divorce you. Go away. That's what you mean, isn't it?"

Jim nodded. "I suppose it would be better if you'd go away. I can if you don't want to. Reno is still the quickest place."

"Of course I'll expect you to bring charges against me. The usual thing—desertion or incompatibility."

"You want a divorce?" As the girl breathed the words, they were barely above a whisper. "It's Marca, isn't it?" she went on.

"You're going to marry her?"

Jim met her eyes steadily. "That isn't quite settled yet. I thought you'd be reasonable about this thing. I supposed you'd see it was the best way for both of us."

Gypsy's lips were trembling. "Oh, yes," she said, trying to steady them. "I see that it's the best way."

They heard footsteps and both turned. Matilda stood in the doorway. "Dinner is served, Mrs. Wallace," she announced.

Gypsy glanced toward her husband. "We'll come," she told the servant, and arose. Jim followed her into the dining room.

GYPY rose to her feet. "You don't mind if I go now, do you, Jim?" she asked. "I'll do just about all the rest. I'm not sure yet when I can get away. Day after tomorrow perhaps."

He said there was no need of rushing away so quickly. He would get in touch with a lawyer in Reno to represent her. It might take a few days.

Always his conversation seemed to veer back into legal technicalities, which were like a foreign language to Gypsy.

"Will you want to keep the house open?" she asked from the doorway.

"I hadn't thought about it. No, I guess not. What do you think?"

Matilda's planning on three weeks at her brother's. You might get Cora and Sam to stay here."

As long as she lived the girl was never to forget that meal, her face, darkly tanned, and his eyes avoiding hers, directly opposite over that mass of flowers.

The outlandish candles, symbols of festivity. The knife in Gypsy's heart that was turning, turning so that she could have cried out from sheer physical pain.

There was so much she wanted to say to Jim. The words tumbled to her lips and then suddenly were silenced. Nothing could be said now. Nothing!

Matilda seemed constantly at her side offering dishes which Gypsy merely looked at and shook her head. Was the meal never to end?

Jim made an effort or two at conversation. He was doing it, of course, for Matilda's benefit. To keep up appearances. Gypsy recognized this fact, but could not play up to it.

She heard him mention the fact that she was not eating.

"I had tea down town," she told him. How long ago that seemed now. Two hours? It was like a lifetime. At last the travesty of eating was ended.

"There are a few things we ought to talk about," Jim suggested. "I suppose there's less chance of being interrupted in the library."

Gypsy nodded. As she stepped onto one fluttering end of the drapery at the side of her skirt caught in the doorway. She gave a little exclamation. Jim bent down and unfastened the silk.

The girl stifled an impulse to brush her fingers against his soft, sandy hair. She walked ahead of him into the library and sat down on a chair facing the desk. Jim took the desk chair.

"You want me to go right away, I suppose?" Gypsy asked.

"Suit your own convenience. I was under the impression that the sooner affairs could be arranged, the better it would be for both of us."

Gypsy nodded. She was looking at the floor. Presently she said slowly, "So it really was true about Marca after all?"

"I suppose when I was sick you were just—sorry for me and that's why you tried to make me think you didn't care about her. That's why you talked about going away for a vacation—"

"Oh, don't bother to impugn high motives to me! I don't deserve that. We tried something ridiculous and it failed."

"Whether I happen to be in love with some one else or not isn't the

question. We made a bad bargain and I'm asking you to let me out of it."

"I'll let you out of it," Gypsy told him. "I agree with you perfectly. Will you tell me how I'm to go about it?"

"You'll have to have a lawyer. I'll arrange that." He went on explaining technical details of the divorce.

Gypsy tried to listen to what he was saying. She found instead that she was looking at the modeled profile of Jim's chin.

"I'm afraid I'm not going to remember all this," she told him. "I think I'm tired. We don't have to let anyone here know about the divorce until after I'm gone, do we?"

Jim said that they did not. "About the alimony—he began.

"I won't accept alimony! I won't have to pay the expense of the trip and the divorce. I'm going to leave as soon as I can. It—it would be right."

"But you'll have to have something to live on. What will you do?"

"Never mind about that. I'll take care of myself. You'll have to pay the expense of the trip and the divorce. I'm going to leave as soon as I can. It—it would be right."

"Then if you don't want alimony, I'll make a settlement," Wallace insisted.

Vigorously Gypsy refused to consider this. She noticed the cool, impersonal way Jim talked. Well, why not? The divorce would mean freedom to him, happiness with Marca.

GYPY rose to her feet. "You don't mind if I go now, do you, Jim?" she asked. "I'll do just about all the rest. I'm not sure yet when I can get away. Day after tomorrow perhaps."

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