

that was the law: a hard fight—the best man to win.

He was ready now to face the world with her. He was eager to do that. Neither heights nor depths held any terrors for him. He envied Chic—he envied even poor mad Hamilton.

If he could only be given another chance to do something for Marjory—something that would bite into him, something that would twist his body and maul him! If he could not face some serious physical danger for her, then some great sacrifice—

Which was precisely the opportunity now offered him. He had been considering this sacrifice from his own personal point of view. He had looked upon it as merely a personal punishment. But, after all, it was for her. It was for her alone. Peter played no part in it whatever. Neither did he himself. It was for her—for her!

Monte set his jaws. If, through Peter, he could bring her happiness, then that was all the reward he could ask for. Here was a man who loved her, who would be good to her and fight hard for her. He was just the sort of man he could trust her to. If he could see them settled in New York, as Chic and Mrs. Chic were settled, see them start the brave adventure, then he would have accomplished more than he had ever been able to accomplish so far.

There was no need of thinking beyond that point. What became of his life after that did not matter in the slightest. Wherever he was, he would always know that she was where she belonged, and that was enough. He must hold fast to that thought.

A knock at his door made him turn on his heels.

"Who's that?" he demanded.

"It's I—Noyes," came the answer. "Have you gone to bed yet?"

Monte swung open the door.

"Come in," he said.

"I thought I'd like to talk with you, if it isn't too late," explained Peter nervously.

"On the contrary, you couldn't have come more opportunely. I was just thinking about you."

He led Peter to a chair.

"Sit down and make yourself comfortable."

MONTE lighted a cigarette, sank into a near-by chair, and waited.

"Beatrice said she told you," began Peter. "She did," answered Monte. "I'd congratulate you if it wouldn't be so manifestly superfluous."

"I didn't realize she was an old friend of yours."

"I've known her for ten years," said Monte.

"It's wonderful to have known her as long as that. I envy you."

"That's strange, because I almost envy you."

Peter laughed.

"I have a notion I'd be worried if you weren't already married, Covington."

"Worried?"

"I think Mrs. Covington must be a good deal like her."

"She is," admitted Monte.

"So, if I hadn't been lucky enough to find you already suited, you might have given me a race."

"You forget that the ladies themselves have some voice in those matters," Monte replied slowly.

"I have better reasons for not forgetting that than you," answered Peter.

Monte started.

"I wasn't thinking of that," he put in quickly. "Besides, you didn't give Marjory a fair chance. Her aunt had just died, and she—well, she has learned a lot since then."

"She has changed!" exclaimed Peter. "I noticed it at once; but I was almost afraid to believe it. She seems steadier—more serious."

"Yes."

"You've seen a good deal of her recently?"

"For the last two or three weeks," answered Monte.

"You don't mind my talking to you about her?"

"Not at all."

"As you're an old friend of hers, I feel as if I had the right."

"Go ahead."

"It seems to me as if she had suddenly grown from a girl to a woman. I saw the woman in her all the time. It—it was to her I spoke before. Maybe, as you said, the woman wasn't quite ready."

"I'm sure of it."

"You speak with conviction."

"As I told you, I've come to know her better these last few weeks than ever before. I've had a chance to study her. She's had a chance, too, to study—other men. There's been one in particular—"

Peter straightened a bit.

"One in particular?" he demanded aggressively.

"No one you need have any fear of," replied Monte. "In a way, it's because of him that your own chances have improved."

"How?"

"It has given her an opportunity to compare him with you."

"Are you at liberty to tell me about him?"

"Yes; I think I have that right," replied Monte. "I'll not be violating any confidences, because what I know about him I know from the man himself. Furthermore, it was I who introduced him to her."

"Oh—a friend of yours."

"Not a friend, exactly; an acquaintance of long standing would be more accurate. I've been in touch with him all my life, but it's only lately I've felt that I was really getting to know him."

"Is he here in Nice now?" inquired Peter.

"No," answered

Monte slowly. "He went away a little while ago. He went suddenly—God knows where. I don't think he will ever come back."

"You can't help pitying the poor devil."

"But he wasn't good enough for her. It was his own fault too, so he isn't deserving even of pity."

"Probably that makes it all the harder. What was the matter with him?"

"He was one of the kind we spoke of the other night—the kind who always sits in the grand-stand instead of getting into the game."

"Pardon me if I'm wrong, but—I thought you spoke rather sympathetically of that kind the other night."

"I was probably reflecting his views," Monte parried.

"That accounts for it," returned Peter. "Somehow, it didn't sound consistent in you. I wish I could see your face, Covington."

"Marjory liked this fellow well enough because—well, because he looked more or less like a man. He was big physically, and all that. Besides, his ancestors were all men, and I suppose they handed down something."

"What was his name?"

"I think I'd rather not tell you that."



"As soon as we're over the ugly part—'The divorce?' 'As soon as we're over that everything will be all right again.'"

It's of no importance. This is all strictly in confidence."

"I understand."

"So she let herself see a good deal of him. He was able to amuse her. That kind of fellow generally can entertain a woman. In fact, that is about all they are good for. She had had a hard time of it, and wanted a bit of amusement. Maybe she fancied that was all she ever wanted; but—well, there was more in her than she knew herself."

"A thousand times more!" exclaimed Peter.

"She found it out. Perhaps, after all, this fellow served his purpose in helping her to realize that."

"Perhaps."

"So, after that, he left."

"And he cared for her?"

"Yes."

"Poor devil!"

"I don't know," mused Monte. "He seemed, on the whole, rather glad that he had been able to do that much for her."

"I'd like to meet that man some day. I have a notion there is more in him than you give him credit for, Covington."

"I doubt it."

"A man who would give her up—"

"She's the sort of woman a man would

want to do his level best for," broke in Monte. "If that meant giving her up,—if the fellow felt he wasn't big enough for her,—then he couldn't do anything else, could he?"

"The kind big enough to consider that would be big enough for her," declared Peter.

Monte drew a quick breath.

"I think he would like to hear that. You see, it's the first real sacrifice he ever undertook."

"It may be the making of him."

"Perhaps."

"He'll always have her before him as an ideal. When you come in touch with such a woman as she—you can't lose, Covington, no matter how things turn out."

"I'll tell him that too."

"It's what I tell myself over and over again. To-day—well, I had an idea there must be some one in the background of her life I didn't know about."

"You'd better get that out of your head. This man isn't even in the background, Noyes."

"I'm not so sure. I thought she seemed worried. I tried to make her tell me, but she only laughed. She'd face death with a smile, that woman. I got to thinking

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