

couldn't respect myself if ever she set foot inside my house."

Joe and Jenny had a long talk with Mildred. They pointed out the necessity of taking action. In fact, they had both heard that Tom's infatuation was a serious thing, though neither told Mildred of that. In the end Mildred succumbed to their suggestions and placed herself in their hands.

Mrs. Hilda Lagarde received a letter the next day, written in the nicest vein. Would she give the writer the pleasure of her company to dinner on the following evening at 7 o'clock? Mrs. Benton had heard so much about Mrs. Lagarde from her husband that she felt they ought to know each other.

Hilda Lagarde read the letter very thoughtfully. She scented a trick. She knew that her conduct with Tom had not been entirely discreet. She was as much an adventuress as a woman of her type could be. She had married the rich old man for his money. After he died the shock of discovering that the money was hardly existent had infuriated her. She had been left with the big house on her hands and Tom's sympathy had first touched and then interested her. When she discovered that Tom was rich, and a genius, and heard a lying report that he and his wife did not agree, she had let herself indulge in thoughts of catching Tom.

But above all she was discreet. She had attained to social success in spite of the misfortune of birth. She would not let that slip. Not for worlds would she have endured publicity. She had often wondered what sort of woman Mrs. Benton was. She must see her, spy out the land before she could go further.

Trick or no trick, therefore, Mrs. Benton's letter afforded her opportunity. She wrote a pleasant acceptance and set out in a borrowed automobile from the suburb in which she lived.

At seven o'clock precisely Hilda

Lagarde, gorgeously attired, was admitted into the Benton apartment by a neat servant, who respectfully took her cloak and hat from her and preceded her along the hall toward a closed door.

Hilda Lagarde was almost at the door when she stopped aghast as a shrill scream rang out from behind it.

"How dare you lay your hands on me, you monster!"

"I'll show you now! I've stood for you long enough. Take that for a lesson!"

The terrified woman, rooted to the doormat, heard the thud of a man's fist upon a soft object, and then a heavy fall. Faint moans ensued.

"I told you what you'd get some day, you jealous old cat!" thundered Tom Benton's voice. "And if I have any more trouble with you I'll do for you once and for all."

"You coward, to strike a woman, let alone your wife! I know why you've shaken me. You think you're going to marry that peroxide blonde of yours. You're too old for her, with your dyed hair."

"Too old, eh?" screamed Tom. "I guess that don't matter. At least she didn't seem to feel any objection when I kissed her yesterday. That woman's crazy over me, what's more, she's ten years younger than you are. Now stop that squealing, or it will be worse yet for you."

Hilda Lagarde staggered uncertainly toward the door of the apartment. But the maid stood in the way.

"I hope you won't be frightened, miss," she said, in her quiet English accent, as if the affair was nothing unusual. "The master's had a bad day and taken a little too much. He'll sober up very quick, miss."

"Oh, let me go," sobbed Mrs. Lagarde and, rushing past the maid, she somehow found the door. Breathlessly she gained the street.

As soon as the outer door closed the maid ran into the dining room.