

SEVEN YEARS

By
JOSEPHINE A. MEYER

(Continued)

It was a surprise to hear her voice unaltered.

"Dorissa I wonder if you know what a wierd-looking sight you are?" he exclaimed with a chuckle.

"Say, what's the matter with me; ain't I all there?" She clutched at various presumably insecure portions of her costume. "Don't tell me I ain't hooked up!"

"Oh no. What there is of your costume seems to be working overtime. It's your face I mean," explained Thorpe.

"Ain't you seen me in my war paint before? No, I guess last time I must of been cleaned up. Well, you want to take a good look because that's one swell make-up, let me tell you. See that purple below the eyes and green above? That gives depth. I got it from a girl at the Follies. She was thirty if she was a day, and on the stage she looked about thirteen. I don't need it so much now, of course

but it's good to be help to it, for when I will need it."

"Still expecting to grow old overnight!"

"That does happen, let me tell you! Madge knew a girl whose hair got all gray from worry in one day. Heavens, I'd die! Say, did you come here just to tell me how funny I looked or what?" she added, suddenly business-like.

"I wanted to ask you to go to supper with me after the play."

"I got a date with Donny."

"Maybe you'd let me come along, if you knew what I wanted. Maybe you'd even throw Donny's date to the discard," insinuated Thorpe.

She looked at him sharply out of that expressionless daub of vivid paint which masked her face. Her eyes grew round.

"You—you ain't, by any chance, thinking of casting yourself as angel to little Dodo?" she asked incredulously.

"If I said 'yes', would you break your date with Don and come with me?"

She started at him searchingly, and he wondered what she was thinking about.

"Is this straight?" she demanded at last.

"If you mean, do I mean it; yes, it is."

"Then I'm with you," she said heartily.

Her hearty readiness was something of a blow to Thorpe. He remembered rather cynically Don's boast of her loyalty. She may have seen something of this though in the slight contraction of his eyelids.

"Donny won't die of it," she declared soothingly. "And I got to think of myself. Don't I?"

"I was counting on that."

"All right, but don't hurt yourself counting too hard on anything, see? Now we can't meet here. He'll come here, so I'll have to beat it early and tell the girls to say I had a headache. No, that won't do. He'd be up after me to the apartment. Oh, I'll frame up something all right. We'll go some wheres quiet where he won't think of looking for us huh?"

He suggested an old-fashioned hotel on lower Fifth Avenue, and she agreed, so they shook hands on it and he left her feeling like a black traitor to the friend he was endeavoring to help.

She met him about the time they had arranged and, as she came in, he noticed her resemblance to an impudent sparrow in her cheap and exaggeratedly stylish street clothes, from her tiny brown hat, cocked too far over one eye, to the high-heeled brown satin slippers which it took much of her skill as a dancer to manipulate gracefully.

"All fine," she informed him, showing her big teeth in an excited grin. "Do you know what I thought of? I says to say that Madge had gone home sick, see? And me with her. He knows he ain't got a chance to get his nose inside Madge's place, so he wouldn't go there. It pays to have a few respectable friends, don't it?"

"You're a cold, calculating little vampire," laughed Thorpe as a head waiter led them to a secluded table. "You have no sentimental notions about friendship, have you?"

"Believe me, I got no sentimental notions about nothing," said Dorissa emphatically. "And," she added with a sharp look as they seated themselves, "you got nothing on me. What do you want to take me away from Don for?"

"I've got a crush on you myself."

"To the tune of twenty thousand cash? Like hell you have!"

"Twenty thousand!" Thorpe was taken aback. "I thought you said ten."

"Aw, you could do it for that. I suppose, but you want to do it right, don't you? And I'll need decent clothes and all. Say, you'll get it back and more with it, if we pick the right play! You can count on me to do my best because it's to my interest, see? I may never get the chance again."

"Good little old rational kid," he said, patting her hand where it lay on the table, still gritty the satchily removed chalk make-up, and sparkling with two handsome diamond rings.

"Where do you get that 'old' stuff?" she demanded peevishly as a waiter came up for their order. "I'm eighteen, not a day older and that's the truth!"

When the waiter had gone she sat looking at Thorpe in silence, with an expression that showed so clearly she had something to say that he waited for her to begin.

"Well," he said lightly and with some curiosity at last, "get it off your chest before we begin to talk business. What's the trouble, Dodo?" He purposely used Don's pet name for her, but she did not flinch.

"You think I'm pretty rotten, huh?" she asked in a low voice.

"What an idea! Why should I?"

"Because—because of what I done to Don and all. Maybe I am. I don't know what decent is. If it's what my mother told me it was, I ain't got no use for it, see? She's in potter's field now. Do you know how old she was when they put her there? Twenty-eight. Real twenty-eight. Only—only a little older than me now. Do you know why? 'Cause a man was decent and married her, and she had to be decent and stick to him, though he was a rotten drunk. She let him hit her any time he felt like it and me, too. Oh, he was decent all right! He didn't kill her in one biff. He took about four years at it. My father never was married to her, see? And this feller comes along with a regular wedding ring and didn't ask no questions about how I go into the family, see? I was ten when she croaked. Believe me, I ain't going to die poor!"

"I understand," said Thorpe.

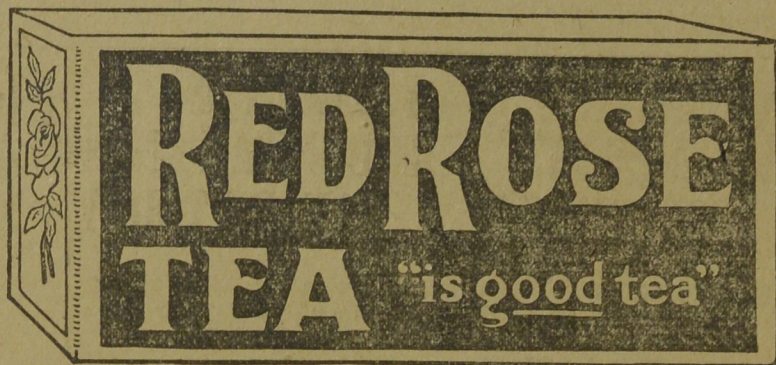
"No, and I ain't going to die till I have to. It's awful to think about, ain't it?" The pupils of her fright-

ened blue eyes were dilated at the thought. "I take good care of myself you bet. And I don't mind telling you"—fear gave way to an expression of cunning as one eyelid quivered half closed—"I got money put by already, and these things"—she indicated her rings—"is always ready cash. In case I do get sick I can get the best doctors in the world, see? And if I live to be old, too old to work any more, I'll have a nice, soft big bank account to rest me weary bones on. Am I right, huh?"

"You are very prudent," agreed Thorpe.

(To be continued.)

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JAILED FOR HAVING DRUGS

Montreal, Dec. 1—Yvonne Belard was sentenced here today to serve a year in jail for having a cigarette tin containing seventy-seven decks of cocaine in her possession. She pleaded guilty to the charge last week when she appeared as a witness in defence of a blind man, Raphael Moleno, in whose rooming house, where she was employed, the drug was found. Moleno was acquitted.

Few men have made a success of polygamy.

CONVICTS ARE RECAPTURED

Marquette, Mich., Dec. 1—Eddie Weisman, Detroit bandit, and his pal Philip Hall, the last group of fifteen prisoners who escaped from the Branch prison here last Sunday, were recaptured by a posse of 100 state police, prison authorities and local officers today in a thicket near Rapid City, Delta county.

In response to the craze for publicity why not have a Family Skeleton Week, with a big parade?