

Linked by Fate

BY CHARLES GARVICE

Author of "The Verdict of the Heart," "A Heritage of Hate," "Nell of Shorne Mills," "Paid For," "A Modern Juliet," Etc.

[CONTINUED.]

"It's a first rate soup," he said. "Oh, thank you!" she retorted, drily. "I was afraid you didn't like it. You didn't say so." "I beg your pardon," he said, meekly. "I was pondering over—"

"More important things. I'm sorry," she caught him up in a quick little way that was so rare as to be charming. "Please go on."

"I'm confirmed in my opinion that the largest of the group of islands lies on the southwest; and I propose building a boat—it will be safer than a raft—in which I—we—can make a cruise of discovery."

She listened earnestly and forgot to serve him; then she remembered it, and with a start begged his pardon and took his plate.

"I also found more evidence of gold. Some of the quartz, or whatever they call it, show quite plainly on the big stones or rocks in the dry river beds."

"Yes, do you like the ducks best this way or stewed? I put it in an empty tin amongst the ashes of the fire. Is it all right—done enough?" "It is very good," he said. "It is a delightful dinner and I am enjoying it. Where was I?—Oh, the gold. And I think there is copper; in fact, the place seems to abound in valuable minerals."

She nodded carelessly and sighed. "We seem to find all the useless things," she said. "Now, if we'd been two persons in a book of adventure, cast on an uninhabited island, we should find all the useful things, of the materials out of which to make them."

"Ah," he said, rather resentfully. "I always had, even as a boy, a suspicion of fraud in those shipwreck stories; but I little thought that the thing was so tragic and uncomfortable as it is."

"I am sorry you are not comfortable," she said. Then she remembered the two she had lost and the tears came into her eyes. He saw them and tried to divert her mind.

"We haven't tried the old trick they always perform in the adventure books—sending empty bottles with 'We are shipwrecked on an unknown island. Help us! Rescue!'"

"I've only three empty bottles and I couldn't spare them," she said. "One is a rolling pin and worth its weight in gold."

"Yes, but your people; their anxiety will be, must be, very great," she said, gravely.

"I haven't any people," she replied. "My father and I were alone in the world. I suppose we must have relatives, but I never heard of them. We lived for one another." After a pause she said, with her eyes on the table: "If you would like to try to communicate with your people I will sacrifice my bottle."

He shrugged his shoulders. "It's of no consequence."

She looked at him with almost startled surprise.

"Your sister, brother? Why, surely you have some one?"

"Why should I any more than you?" he answered. "I haven't father or mother or a sister or a brother; and as to the rest of my people—well, grimly, 'they won't suffer any anxiety over my disappearance.'"

"Are you not going to smoke?" she asked after a moment or two.

He thanked her and sat down on the ground before the fire and lit his pipe. He was terribly tired, and presently, as she glanced towards him, she saw his head fall on his breast—he had fallen into a doze. His attitude was an uncomfortable one, and she longed to put something for him to lean against. The desire grew so intense—she told herself that it was only because the sight of him sitting so "fidgeted" her—that she stole on tip-toe to him.

As she stood over him hesitatingly her eyes wandered over his face and form. She noticed the short curls that clustered closely on the head of the strong neck, the great shoulders, broad yet flat, the handsome face, the grace of the whole figure. The thought flashed across her that he was the best looking man she had ever seen. And how tired he was! The maternal instinct, which lies dormant in all women, awoke in her and her heart ached with pity for him.

She drew the box gently against his back. But the touch, gentle as it was, awoke him; in a moment he was on his feet and had seized her arm in a grasp of iron, his vacant eyes glaring at her sternly. She thought he was going to strike her, but suddenly he was awake fully and staring at her with dismay.

"I—I beg your pardon!" he stammered. "I must have fallen asleep; and I dreamt that the Lascar had come back. I must have thought you were he and—oh, I beg your pardon!"

"If you'd let my arm go," she said with a painful smile. "You are hurting it. I am glad I am not the Lascar!" He released her arm, and in doing so saw that the ring was not on her finger. He did not frown or show surprise; but his face became thoughtful, and he avoided her eyes.

She noticed the subtle change in his manner, though she did not discern the cause.

"I will go now," she said; it almost seemed a formula. "Give me your coat, please."

"My coat?" he repeated, vaguely. "Yes. You have torn it; I will mend it for you."

portrait of another woman—and how beautiful a woman—in his breast pocket.

But Mannering slept soundly, rose a little after the wondrous dawn and, having got through his usual work, went to the saloon. Nina was not there and he saw that breakfast was only laid for one. She came in as he was pondering over this fact, came in with a quick step and said, in a matter-of-fact way:

"Good-morning. I have had my breakfast"—she had not been able to eat anything. "I had so many things to do. Have you got everything you want?"

"Yes, thanks," he said, absently. Something in her tone, a coldness and aloofness, struck him; and glancing at her he saw that she was paler than usual and that her eyes were dull.

"I hope you are not overworking yourself," he said, earnestly. "There is really no need for it. We have plenty of time to do what is necessary; and I could help you in ever so many ways. For instance, for the future you must let me bring the water from the spring; the can is heavy. And I will light the fire."

She laughed, but mirthlessly. "And do the cooking, and lay the table, and wash up the things; and I could sit by with some fancy work and watch you. Oh, no, I am not working too hard; if it were not for the work I should—" "go mad," she was going to say; but she stopped short and made a gesture of impatience.

"I am going to set about that boat," he said; "but I shall be back to lunch."

"Oh, I've tied up your lunch for you," she said, coldly, pointing to the package.

"Very well," he responded, almost meekly. "Perhaps it will be better; it will save time."

"There is your coat," she said, taking it up and holding it out to him.

"Thank you," he said, simply, as he put it on. He did not know that her eyes were raised to his searchingly, almost accusingly. "I'm afraid you sat up late last night to mend it. I saw the light in your hut. I'm sorry. I'll be more careful in the future. You look tired this morning."

"I'm not in the least tired," she retorted with a little snap in her voice, usually so calm and low. "If you do not want anything else—"

She went out and Mannering turned to his breakfast again; but her coldness, her strangeness had spoiled his appetite. What was the matter with her? She had removed his ring from her finger, was stand-offish and sharp with him.

With a sigh he pushed his plate away from him and shouldering his gun went off to the woods. Nina watching him from her partly opened door.

Mannering selected the biggest tree, felled it, and, scooping out a length of the trunk, made a fairly good canoe.

It was a tremendous day's work and he regarded it with pardonable pride; but he was too tired to haul it down to the beach and he left it reluctantly.

When he entered the saloon she was standing by the table. He saw, with a sigh of relief, that it was laid for two. But she had on her old frock, and the bit of ribbon was absent from her neck; and she scarcely lifted her long lashes as he wished her "good evening."

"I hope you're better," he said, blundering like a man.

She bit her lip impatiently. "I have not been ill," she said with ominous emphasis, as she passed him his plate.

"I've finished the boat," he said, trying to speak as if he did not notice her coolness.

She fixed her eyes on the plate. "Why did the raft not do?" she asked.

"Oh, it is not nearly as safe as a boat. I could not steer it or sail it as well. I made the raft because"—he hesitated and stammered—"there is no immediate hurry now. Oh"—hastily—"this boat—it's only a canoe—is ever so much better! I'm hoping that we shall be able to reach one of the inhabited islands; perhaps, if we have luck, the mainland."

Her face grew set and her lips came together straightly as if she were bracing herself to an effort.

"And—and—if we do, Mr. Mannering?" she said in a low voice, which palpitated with her aversion. "What will you do? Will you tell the people we meet—that we are married?"

Mannering gazed at her blankly, as if he were trying to see what was passing in her mind.

"I—I don't know; I haven't thought of it," he stammered, his face flushing. "What—what would you wish me to do?"

"I—I would rather you did not," she replied. "I—I want to make a—bargain with you."

"Yes?" he said, interrogatively. She raised her eyes and looked him steadily, bravely, in the face.

"I want to tell you that I know how great a sacrifice you made in mar- in doing what poor Mr. Fleming wished."

"As to that—the sacrifice was yours," he put in eagerly, earnestly; but she ignored his interruption and went on:

"If we escape to England—and, oh, I hope and trust we may!—I want you to understand that—that the marriage, what we have done—hasn't any meaning, significance; that we shall part as if—as if it had not been done. I will give you my word—I will swear it if you wish it—that I will never tell anyone of—of the ceremony we went through, never, as long as I live; and I need not say that I will never—oh, never!—make any claim on you."

Her voice broke and the tears burnt in her eyes; but she drove them back and continued:

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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CHAPTER VII.

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9:50 a. m.—For St. John and East.

5:50 p. m.—For St. Stephen, Houlton, Woodstock, Boston, etc. Montreal and West. Palace Sleeper Fredericton Jet to Montreal. Pullman Sleeper Fredericton Jet to Boston.

9:00 p. m.—For St. John and East.

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9:20 a. m.—From St. John and points east, 11:45 a. m.—From Boston, Montreal, St. Stephen, Houlton and Woodstock, etc.

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No. 321 Suburban for Marysville. 11:15
No. 323 Suburban for Marysville. 15:00
No. 325 Suburban for Marysville. 17:10
No. 327 Suburban for Marysville. 18:25
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No. 318 Suburban from Marysville. 8:15
No. 320 Suburban from Marysville. 11:00
No. 322 Suburban from Marysville. 16:25
No. 324 Suburban from Marysville. 17:05
No. 326 Suburban from Marysville. 18:20
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Moncton, N. B., November 18th, 1904.

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