

The ITINERANT LOVER

By MAY EDGINTON

What May Happen to Any Man Who, Like the Sailor, Has a Sweetheart in Every Port

ALTHOUGH not blessed, or hampered—according to the point of view—with any particular business or vocation in life, Charles Faraday was always distinctly a man of affairs.

That they were affairs of the heart rather than of the head had ever been a source of annoyance and uneasiness to the Dowager Lady Faraday. It was the business instinct in her that prompted her annoyance at times and opportunities lost in useless dalliance. When her eldest son reassured her on his brother's score she only shook her bearded, evangelist head and prophesied that some day Charles would find himself seriously involved. After the young man, however, had been involved in a whole series of more than usually undesirable escapades she began to lose patience and spoke seriously to him about his shortcomings.

"I consider it lamentable," she told him, "that a young man of your age can seriously devote himself to an endless series of flirtations, often entirely out of your own class of life. Some day, Charles, you will burn your fingers, and—righteously—you will have to bear the brunt of the burning. Only yesterday I was ashamed"—she wiped her eyes—"when my very old friend, Cecilia Simmonds, came to me about her own girl. That you should trifle with the affections of Cecilia's child—"

She looked pained.

"I consider myself the victim of temperament," he murmured deprecatingly.

"Victim!" Lady Faraday snapped. "Victim indeed! Victim of a fiddlestick! It was Cecilia's own girl who was 'victimized.' Every one is talking about it. And I would have been a very satisfactory arrangement for you, now that I come to speak of it. But, instead, the poor dear child—" she applied the handkerchief again.

Charles lifted his fine eyebrows in his usual charming distaste.

"I had really no idea—" he began.

"None?" said Lady Faraday. "With your experience you ought to know how susceptible girls like age are. And then it's not only nice girls like Cecilia's—but—I really am ashamed. When I only remember the dreadful husband of that terrible little music hall person who came the other day to swear at you—"



Blue Ribbon Fiction

Charles was adjusting a new tie critically at the pier glass. He dated his shortcomings exactly matched his fine eyes. His mother's anger rose. "It must end!" his mother declared firmly. "I insist upon it, Charles. It is absurd that a young man of your ability should have the allowance you have settled upon him and pass his life in utter idleness. I shall speak to Derek about it."

"Derek will not interfere," said Charles complacently. He knew his brother.

"What are your plans for next week?" asked Lady Faraday, changing her tactics.

"I'm going to St. Medbury," he answered, "to stay with Mrs. Simmonds-Smith."

"With whom?" said his mother almost in a shriek. "I never even heard the name before! Some impossible person, I suppose, whom you have picked up upon some of your diplomatic expeditions?"

"She picked me up," he explained.

"Don't split hairs," said Lady Faraday impatiently. "Is she young? Is she pretty?"

"Neither one nor the other," he answered truthfully.

"I don't believe you!" said Lady Faraday. "I suppose she is a dreadful, made-up, womanly young person—in a mercerious way, Lady Faraday proclaimed her own 50 years of compromising caps and gray hair—and you will get into some fresh entanglements. And why, for goodness sake, St. Medbury?"

"It has a cathedral," he remarked.

"Don't talk nonsense to me about cathedrals!" said Lady Faraday angrily. "I shall write to your Uncle Rupert, I think, and ask him to get you to see a diplomatist, or—"

"But I should go in for neither, mother," said Charles, escaping.

Mrs. Simmonds-Smith was a very merry widow, indeed, of almost middle age, verging on portliness, and with only a pardonable soupçon of the make-up and would-be-young element with which Lady Faraday had accosted her. Before she settled in St. Medbury she had possessed somewhat of an itinerant temperament, and when she discerned its like in Charles Faraday she took to the scapegrace at once.

She had met him in Switzerland one summer—before the era of portliness and make-up, which had only just dawned—and he had formed a very agreeable part of her holiday. They traveled, walked, talked, and climbed together, and, both being experts at the same game, and pleasantly recognizing the fact, they played together, quite assiduously and charmingly. Neither kindled a fire, only the pleasantly temporary semblance of one, so neither was really burned.

"You must come down and stay with me in St. Medbury," she said to him.

He was a well born boy, and looked it, and he was also quite amazingly handsome. She would not mind dangling him before her provincial neighbors.

"There is a cathedral," she added, "and quite a lot of pretty girls."

It was a year or two before he remembered the invitation—against the giver of it, then having an empty week or two before him, and his mother's temper being unusually touchy, he wrote an insinuatingly reproachful reminder to Mrs. Simmonds-Smith and betook himself to St. Medbury.

"My little niece," said Mrs. Simmonds-Smith playfully, as she gave him tea in her rather overbedecked drawing room, "staying with me. Now—she shook at him an arch, forefinger—"she is a little girl—a dear little girl—just from school, and you must behave very, very nicely. My dear Mr. Faraday, I remember you, I assure you."

He thought he also remembered her, before this portliness that really distressed him, when the admiringly forefinger had been a taper thing of beauty, but he only smiled with charming deprecation.

"Ah!" he said. "I adore ingenuities—only we never have the bona fide thing nowadays, do we?"

"But that is just," said Mrs. Simmonds-Smith, "what you must not do. I know your adoration! (he made a mental note that fat something should not be arch). And you are not to adore my little Berta. She really is ingenuous, you know—an interesting mixture of ingenuousness and unusual maturity for her age. Schoolgirl innocence," said Mrs. Simmonds-Smith with the air of an analyst, "and southern impetuosity. My poor brother married a Sicilian."

She said it compassionately as if with a figurative headsake at the idea of the impetuosity of Sicilian women in general. Faraday thought there might be possibilities in Mrs. Simmonds-Smith niece. The susceptible organ that he fondly called his heart was at that moment unoccupied.

"I shall be delighted to make her acquaintance," he said, very candidly.

"At that moment the door opened and Roberta came into the room."

"Come!" is a wholly inadequate description. There was a sinuous litherness, an overpowering grace of movement about Roberta that invested the ordinary action of entering a room with something indescribably subtle, made it an entrancing sight, a joy, a delight, that conveyed the very poetry of motion.

She was slim, not with the lank, boyish slowness of the 18-year-old English miss, but with

a slender fullness and roundness that gave, just as Mrs. Simmonds-Smith had said, an impression of early maturity. Though only a little above middle height, her splendid carriage gave her girlish dignity, and the fire smoldering beneath the dark softness of her southern eyes formed a piquant contrast with the virginal curves of her full, red mouth. In the curves of bust and throat and cheek, and in the glorious sweeping line from shoulder to foot, there was the unmistakable promise of splendid womanhood.

Her black hair was parted and coiled simply in a schoolgirlish knot on the nape of her neck, and she wore a white frock that clung to her and fell and rippled away lovingly about her. Pale and with a sort of tentative innocent shyness, she came forward more like a graceful child than a young woman.

"You are Mr. Faraday," she said without awaiting for an introduction, putting out a soft, brown dined hand with ingenuous friendliness. Her voice was the voice of the south—low, liquid, musical; dormant in it there lay the troublesome suggestion of passion.

As Faraday listened and looked at her he felt headlong and irrevocably into one of his easy loves.

The young man, inured to conquest, pursued the tenor of his conscienceless way, but the conquest of Roberta was accomplished almost before the lazy desire for it had well been formulated in his mind. He put out a finger and the citadel fell.

He spoke the word he knew so well how to speak, he looked the look he knew so well how to look from his eloquent, long-lashed eyes; both word and look had become something of a parrot repetition with him. The passionate child of the south reciprocated this semblance of a love with a love that was only too real, hot from the depths of a hitherto unstirred but impetuous heart. Faraday basked in it and told himself for a whole week that he adored her.

He told himself that the little girl was very lovely; that she undoubtedly loved him, as he undoubtedly loved her—for the moment; that southern women were so much more sympathetic than their English sisters, and that this summer idyll was very beautiful and held fresher elements of interest to his jaded senses than any heretofore.

For the time being he walked and talked and thought wholly with and of Roberta; spent moonlight hours with the romantic child in the garden after dinner; accompanied her to all the cathedral services, because sacred music and dim stained glass and mystic hush, and kneeling by Roberta in a vast empty twilight space all appealed to his aesthetic sense. Together, too, inadequately chaperoned sometimes by portliness made her very sleepy out of doors in hot weather, they floated up the narrow river that wound round about St. Medbury, Roberta, in a happy dream, at the tiller, he lazily on his oars, the two pair of eyes speaking eloquently what in their hostess' presence they might not say.

Faraday, who had done such things many times before, delirious for the same sensations, bled to Roberta. It was the great, the glorious, the sacred, the ineffable first time.

She had come to St. Medbury straight from a convent school and awesomely unsophisticated, except by the intuitions of her passionate nature. Till now the intuitions had lain dormant, but they were there, true, potent, ready to awake at the touch of the first hand that might unlock her heart-gates. Fate willed that Faraday's should be that hand—and they awoke.

God help her! Charles Faraday was the hand. He was at this time a slim young man of 26 or thereabouts, very tall, with the long, loose, graceful panther litherness that usually betoken the athlete. His appearance, however, belied Faraday. His eyes, too, long-lashed, beautiful eyes, expressive of the very soul of candor and honor, his fine mouth, his poet tongue, all belied him. Honor with Faraday was an elastic quantity; his poetry if analyzed would have been found usually to reflect only his own ego. But the analysis was one which few women ever made and those few only in the bitterness that followed the learning of the lesson he had taught them. Women of the world were among them.

Who, then, shall wonder at little Roberta bowing down, blind with faith, to worship the idol? Afterwards, when he had, with his own hand, shown her the clay feet, she knew, but even then the knowledge brought no balm to a wound but rather an added pang that the pedestal was made of the very stuff of candor and the unworthiness of the idol upon it mouth-giving and gibing at her for her own helplessness to cast it out.

It was when Faraday's week's visit had lengthened into a fortnight that Mrs. Simmonds-Smith, whose perturbation was growing, spoke to her niece:

"Roberta, I've a duty before me—"

"Yes, aunt," said Roberta, dreaming.

"Duties are unpleasant necessities," said Mrs. Simmonds-Smith, fanning herself, "but I'm such an aggressively moral sort of person that I never shirk them with any sense of satisfaction to myself. Are you listening, child?"

"Yes, aunt," said Roberta, her aunt's last words ringing irreverently into the dream. She sighed.

"I don't believe," said Mrs. Simmonds-Smith more vigorously, sitting up to shoot a sharp glance at the girl, "I don't believe you are. As

I said, Roberta, I have a duty before me and I intend to perform it. You are staying here under my protection, dear, and it is incumbent upon me to see that you don't make a little fool of yourself with Charles Faraday—"

Roberta started; her olive cheeks flew a danger signal.

"You're so terribly earnest and unsophisticated," Mrs. Simmonds-Smith pursued.

"Aunt," said Roberta, so—

"Pooh!" said Mrs. Simmonds-Smith briskly. "He is neither, my dear child. He falls in and out of what he calls 'love' on an average about once a month, if not oftener. He is, I grant, amusing, but it is not the sort of amusement for you. He's that really abominable thing, a thorough male flirt and absolutely conscienceless, nature having blessed him with a face that is a delight to look at and a pretty gift of tongue—why, it's all the easier for him to fool poor little—"

"How dare you?" Roberta almost screamed. She jumped up, two scarlet spots flaming in her cheeks, her hands clenched at her sides.

"How dare you? Do you think I—I—I don't know—"

"My poor, dear child!" said Mrs. Simmonds-Smith, thoroughly shocked and started for once in her easy life, "you must not fall in love with Charles Faraday. You must not, indeed. If I had thought it was more than a flirtation on either side—"

"It is," said Roberta, swaying a little, and white now, "a flirtation on neither side—on neither side—"

She went to the door, reaching a little uncertainly. When she reached it, she turned round and stood erect.

"Roberta!" said Mrs. Simmonds-Smith, struggling up from her deep chair to intercept her.

"I love him!" said Roberta.

The poor child flew out of the room, sobs strangling in her throat, down through the beautiful picture-gallery of abandonment in the chaos that struck his esthetic eye with a certain sense of pleasure, even while he was hurrying across the intervening garden to reach her.

He leaped into the punt.

She started, shuddered and looked up.

"My own dear little girl!" he said, putting out his hands with a caress and lifting her.

She allowed him to lift her to the seat beside him, and leaned her head against his shoulder. The overhanging bank effectively screened them from the vantage point of windows, and, knowing this, he slipped an arm around her waist. (He always made discretion play a large part in his affairs, hence his unscathed escapes.)

"My dear little girl—what?"

"N—nothing! Really nothing."

But as she spoke she opened her big southern eyes wide on his face, and in them he read the woman's soul he had evoked—the woman's soul which had finally supplanted the careless child soul. How charming! he reflected. Then he reflected that matters had reached the stage when it behooved him to be careful.

His carefulness, however, was always managed with a considerable amount of finesse. It was not in him to be what is termed brutal. His whole fastidious being would have revolted at the bare suggestion. There was nothing crude about his retreats. They were always graceful, and came about so naturally that they really seemed indefinable as such. He was already wearying a little of the situation, and of St. Medbury, and his hostess, and the cathedral services. The itinerancy was a fever, a disease, in his blood. He felt himself ready to absorb something new, in need of fresh sensations. The two weeks had been very pleasant, and the little girl beside him had been a wholly delightful companion, but—but—

But the thing was decidedly beginning to pall. That was the sober truth, which there was no blinking. Also, Mrs. Simmonds-Smith this very morning had said something about Roberta which had seemed most alarmingly like an attempt at probing. His sensible discretion had taken fright; valour was a negative quality with him. Love-making, however, with charming little Roberta was easy; moreover, it had become a second nature with him, and he felt it would meet the occasion now, and smooth the path of the announcement that he had intended to make of his near departure. As usual, he expressed the love-making more in the subtle infection of his well modulated voice, in the tender pressure of the encircling arm, than in actual words, which bear repetition.

"N—nothing," he mocked her very gently. "O, my dear little Berta, but I think there is. You are going to tell me?"

Her pale face lay against his shoulder, tear stained, the red lips tremulously vibrating. He bent and kissed them, and she returned his caress with an abandonment of passion that she showed now, poor child, for the first time, never doubting.

With the same absolute faith she told him, too, the wherefore of her tears, and waited, confident.

"Your aunt?" he repeated lightly. "What an absurd idea of hers, wasn't it? As if there was any possible harm in what has been to me, at

least, a wholly pleasant and delightful friendship. And I hope it has been so to you, too, dearest, sweetest little girl."

"H—has been?" she stammered, starting.

"Why of course," he said kindly, "all delightful things come to an end, don't they? That's part of the jest of that abominable old cynic, Fate. My delightful time must come to an end now, very shortly, I fear, for I—I—er shall have to leave St. Medbury tomorrow. Family business, and all sorts of perfectly rotten affairs to see to, the matter is worrying me—"

Lady Faraday had more than once been a useful scapegoat—to come home to talk matters over with her—"

Roberta was looking at him, astounded, white faced.

"B—but," she stammered, "you'll come—come back?"

He sighed deeply.

"Ah, when, I wonder?" he said pensively. "One never knows. Of one thing I'm certain, though. I shall never forget my visit to charming, quaint old St. Medbury, and the happy fortnight I've spent here—or is it— Yes, I declare, it will be nearly three weeks tomorrow! Time flies so, under perfect conditions, when one is absolutely and ideally happy, as I own I have been. One loses all count of it. Your aunt has been most kind, really, in letting me extend a sort of week-end visit into a regular visitation. No, I shall never forget it, this delightful fortnight, and my dear little—friend. Even if we were destined never to meet again—one never knows."

"What? What? What?" she almost wailed. She had pulled herself away from his arm, and was staring at him, her eyes wide open in blank, anguish, incredulous amazement, which she made no attempt to conceal. In a moment there flashed back upon her consciousness disconnected phrases of her aunt's: phrases culled from a shrewd worldly wisdom denied to babes such as she, phrases that, in her blindness, she raved at, spurning them—"that abominable thing—a thorough male flirt—a flirtation on either side—all the easier to fool poor little—"

What do you mean? she breathed rather than spoke.

"My dear little girl," he said, biting his lip in vexed anticipation of "a scene" that would be really abhorrent to so sensitive a nature as his, "what should I mean? What is there in what I have said to call for this—melodramatic attitude? You surely—er—have not misinterpreted—misunderstood—O! pray get up! I really cannot—"

She had slipped with one of her characteristic, sinuous movements down from the seat, and now half knelt, half crouched in the bottom of the punt, facing him, still staring with blank, incredulous amazement, still all but speechless. Heart and brain were hammering like drums, with great bursting throbs that choked her, driving the breath in panting gusts between her parted lips.

Faraday raised his fine eyebrows now in very real distress.

"O pray get up," he said futilely. He stretched out the long white hands that a moment or two ago had been a caress she loved. She struck at them in fury.

"What are you saying?" she panted, in a voice he hardly recognized. "What are you saying? Do you mean that all this time—that all this time—that all this time—" She trailed off into a senseless repetition. "You're not really going for ever—and ever?—But—but—I love you!"

She fixed her eyes on his face, reading it, and read it like an open book—read what the child of a fortnight ago could not have done, but what to the anguished woman of this moment stood out in letters of fire; read all the contemptible-ness of him, all the heartlessness, all the delicate cruelty, measured the height and depth of his utter egotism and blatant vanity, and, though unable in her experience to define it, yet felt the full horror deep down in her writhing soul.

Treading close upon the despair of this first great love came an uglier passion of rage—rage incarnate, rage of the south, rage that swept over her irresistibly, and shrieked out a terrible vendetta. He had humiliated her, mocked her, stolen her blind adoration blindly given, and put her aside.

"Oh! you!" she cried. "You—you—and you kissed me and I kissed you—"

"My dear little Berta," he murmured, really at a loss in face of such unexpected intensity in this pretty child, "you will forget all this—nonsense—"

"Forget!" she said, leaning forward and speaking very quickly. "Forget! Never! Never forget that I hate you—now!" A sob broke in her throat at the lie. "Never forget that—I'll be revenged! I am no cold English girl—to forget. You didn't know whom you were dealing with when you brought this on me. How dare you! How dare you! How dare you! And I told you, I loved you—and—and I kissed you! O, my God! I can't forget! O, if I only had strength to kill you I'd do it, I think. No, I don't think—I know I would. I hate you!"

She gathered vehemence, staring at him with black eyes distended in her white face.

"O," she said, in a voice like a moan, "if—I—I—I had a man to thrash you for it, you— you—"

She was beautiful in her fury, but with the beauty of a tiger-cat gathered for a spring as she crept there swaying a little from sheer force of compelling emotion.

"Go away!" she said, "Go away! Leave me! I've enough pride left. It will come back to me when—"

"Suddenly exhausted, she flung her arms forward on the cushions, laid her black head on them, and knelt thus, very still.

Quite silently Faraday got up and left her. There seemed nothing else to be done in the face of this most uncomfortable development, he told himself.

To a very shrewd, but eminently tactful, hostess he explained that a wire had summoned him back to town today. In any case he had made up his mind to tear himself away tomorrow. But she would understand.

He felt uncomfortably that she did.

So it fell that the pride that brought Roberta in, dry-eyed and smiling at tea time and summoned her through the trunk of a hat hour, was not called upon to stand the additional test of Faraday's presence.

In the hall afterward as she went through she picked up a glove he had dropped and carried it away to her room. The Pride swore an oath of vendetta over it, and the Love kissed it, and cried as it fondled it, before putting it away in a shrine of its own. The Love slept deep into the Sicilian heart that could not forget.

Six years after, when the black-eyed little Sicilian girl and dull old St. Medbury were hardly memories with him, Faraday met the Cambray Stuarts at Brighton.

He was still the dallying dilettante loafer whom many women loved and more men despised. During his six years he had wandered itinerant and culled much sweetness from many flowers. He had on leaving Roberta, six years ago followed a pretty peevish half over Europe, and the blue eyes had displaced the black in his fickle affections, and between them they nearly managed a cause-celèbre. It was discreetly hushed up, however, on one of Faraday's skillful retreats, and he returned home to fall in and out of love with his mother's latest companion. This, too, was now hardly a memory with him.

She first attracted his momentary unoccupied attentions at lunch. She sat at a small table with her husband, a huge, healthy, reddish haired young Scotman, discussing an attractive menu with a vivid interest that somehow seemed to suit her.

Faraday's table was to her right, where he had full and uninterrupted view of a glorious sweep of profile and throat and bust. After he had swept in and sat down, and begun her lunch, all in a careless, regal, unconcerned way, he ate no more.

At last she turned her head and met his eyes, and her own, full and black, distended widely for a moment before the dropping lids veiled them, and trailed out, very faintly, gauged the effect of the glance as it listed, and about his shaven upper lip curled a slight, fine smile. An adorable woman!

As she left her table she dropped her adorable handkerchief, and he was quick to return it to an adorable hand before her red-haired husband could perform the office. She murmured thanks, and trailed out, leaving a faint suggestion, that yet hardly was a memory, in the resonant sweet timbre of her voice.

He looked them up in the visitor's book, and went off to the smokeroom to smoke casual acquaintance with the red-headed young Scotman through the proffer of his own unparalleled cigars, a brand he especially imported. The acquaintance soon extended, for Cambray Stuart was a genial, unassuming good fellow. That evening the lover sat next to Mrs. Cambray Stuart at dinner.

He neglected his soup, feeding on enchantment. Her voice was beautiful, so was her profile under the shadowing black hair and the glorious slender fullness of her perfectly matured figure. With the advent of the fish the slight memory his neighbor had evoked came back and pursued Faraday a little. Through two ensuing courses he took-pooched it to himself, and then when the sweets appeared, he voiced it in an apologetic question:

"Something like a memory is troubling me; yet I could never have forgotten you had we ever met before."

"I do not think we ever have," she said deliberately, resting her eyes on his face.

With that she was taking him in with a delicate scrutiny that tried to be cold, but could be so only ostensibly. She saw him stouter than six years ago at St. Medbury—a pang drove through the Sicilian heart that could not forget—his hair already a little thinner on the top, the fine lines of his mouth and chin thickening. Idealism was absent from his face now. Letting his hands toward her, she made an intolerable egotism were making of him something grosser. Yet the old pang drove into her, scorching and searing her, heart and soul, brain and body. But the six years that had developed the pale girl into a glorious woman had taught her also how to dissemble. And so she had lied boldly.

"Do not think we ever have," she said, "Not at—at—at—" he said, racking his brains.

She held her breath. Would he remember? No, dear God! not that—not that—

A sudden enlightenment, not wholly pleasant and a little confused, broke over his face.

"Were you ever at—at—St. Medbury?" he asked, turning to her. "I think it must have been."

She had herself admirably in hand.

"No, I don't—think so," she said slowly. Then, lightly, "But one really forgets trifles, doesn't one? I have such a shocking memory."

"Still I thought—" he began dubiously, re-voiced.

"Perhaps," she said, after a pause, "you met—my—little sister there?"

"Ah!" he exclaimed. This solved a rather awkward problem really quite satisfactorily; and he hated to probe. "Ah! that must have been what was puzzling me. You—you—er—must have been very much alike—though I see the difference very plainly now."

She smiled a little wry smile, but her teeth were dazzling, and the bitterness was lost on him.

"Is she—er—with you?" he ventured further.

"She is dead," said Mrs. Stuart, an indescribable hardness sweeping over the beautiful face.

He looked his pained concern, and voiced it very gently in his own perfect manner. With the pointing aside of a painful subject he was happily aware that he might, too, put aside that little momentary uneasiness that was assailing him, for what, he really hardly recollected on the instant—no doubt some episode. So the little sister died? Well, well, he remembered her, he thought, as rather a—rather a pretty little girl.

But this woman was adorable.

As he talked to her his low voice raised all the ghosts of the pain and passion she had frantically striven all these six years to lay. She answered very little. That, however, he rather enjoyed. Ego was satisfied, and, as often, blind.

Roberta, reawakened, felt in her the old love, and the dormant fury flashing again. She looked across at her husband's good, ruddy face and prayed that the sight of it might exercise the quivering demons of the past, but felt fearfully that her prayers would be of no avail. She had married, partly in the mental exhaustion following Faraday's departure, partly because her own warm nature was very responsive to any love that assailed it passionately enough. The first man who had wooed her had happened to be young, wealthy, and kind, and he had made her nearly happy—he thought wholly so. So had she thought—God help her!—so had she thought till now.

She drove her teeth into her lip till the blood came. She sat and heard the egoist discourse. She loved him! She realized again all the contemptibility, the cruelty, the selfishness, the littleness of the man. Yet she loved him.

Then something unprecedented in his smug career, something almost unrealizable, fell upon the itinerant lover. His itinerancy checked, his wanderings fled, he fell blindly at Roberta

Stuart's feet and adored them and her with a whole, true first passionate single-heartedness that he had never before given, nor to any degree experienced.

She knew it—was scheming for it.

So she smiled, a cruel beautiful smile that curled up the corners of her full red mouth and reflected the vendetta that lay always alongside the love, sometimes superseding it, in her heart.

So he was bringing it back to her humbly, was he—the gift she had given him, which he had taken and tossed aside? Bringing it back, full value, heaped up measure. She had no fear for herself. She was strong—strong in the armor forged from the pride that had "come back to her"—as she had told him it would long ago—and in the trust her husband gave her most completely. She did not forget that, with its other occupancy, her Sicilian heart held also her husband's honor.

Good Cam! When his wife paraded Faraday's devotion almost faintly before the whole hotel he only shut his eyes the closer. He said he knew her. His psychological instinct—though he might have asked the meaning of the term had it been spoken to him—was unerring. Roberta almost wept at what seemed to her the pathos of it. If she could she would have loved him.

The climax, inevitable with such a woman and such a man, came in the second week of their new acquaintance. She was sitting in the big palm-shaded vestibule of the hotel after dinner waiting for her husband to take her out. It was a glorious, hot, still night and they had planned to spend an hour on the pier; many lights and music upon the water satisfied a certain undefined craving in Roberta.

To her came Faraday, very slowly, giving himself time to feast his eyes on the vision of her, in long black dress with the scarlet silk wrap thrown over her, her pale cheeks and red lips entrancing under the shadow of black hair.

"Are you going out?" he said, coming up to her.

"To hear the band," she answered carelessly, smiling at him.

"Why do you never let me take you?" he said a little recklessly, looking into her eyes, feeling the balance of things slipping. "Always—"

"My husband," she said.

He looked around. They were alone in the vestibule. He slipped his arm under her loosely opened wrap and put it on her waist.

"Roberta!"

She looked at him, very still.

"Your husband, Roberta! What a farce, this! A farce! You do not love him—you love me—"

She did not answer, but he felt her quivering, and her erect head drooped a little, acquiescent.

"You love me—me!" he said wildly, "and I love you. Love, God! what a poor word for what I feel! I adore you, worship you with every drop of blood in my veins, with every fiber of my being. I was mad from the moment I saw you. We were meant for one another. I could have killed that cold Scotman when I knew you were his. Roberta, Roberta, my darling, you will leave him—you will come away with me. We will go together to the beautiful south hat you and I both love. Together we will wander hither and thither and forget everything but each other. Tomorrow—tonight—now, Roberta!"

She lifted a ghastly face. He stopped.

"What? What? What?" she said almost frenziedly, and awayed rather than voluntarily drew herself away from him.

What? Wh—a repetition of—of—he could not remember, and it did not matter.

"Roberta, my darling."

"I—have—I had," she said, changing her tense confusedly, "no man—no man to thrash you for it."

He stared, started, suddenly white as she. She stood in the middle of the vestibule, a wan ghost under the glare of electric light, but with a very devil of fury incarnate loosed in her blazing black eyes. Her bosom dilated, she threw her head back, gazing at him—gazing—gazing—and looking all white and black with her black gown and hair and eyes, and white neck and whiter face, and the scarlet wrap striking a weird note of startling color. Back came a mad recollection fraught now to him with a terrible significance. The floodgates of memory loosed showed him the black and white little Sicilian wildcat raving at him in the bottom of a red-cushioned punt.

His pale face grew ghastly. He threw out his hands toward her, stammering brokenly.

She smiled.

"No one—then—"

Cambray came into the vestibule at that moment, humming a snatch of an opera, and stopped dead.

Roberta went up to him and laid her face down against his arm. He dropped the coat he was carrying, and he looked over her shoulder at the black hair, terribly at Faraday, standing here stammering.

"My darling!" said Cam.

"Cam," she said scornfully drawing herself erect. "Mr. Faraday is urging me to visit the south with him. The invitation is for you to decide."

She drew his head down and kissed him before Faraday's eyes, then pressed from the vestibule, gasping, her hands pressed over her ears to shut out the sounds. She knew her cold Scotman.

Twenty minutes later, having packed a raving hotel proprietor and an aghast staff, Cambray went to her room to look for her. He found her flung upon the bed, her black and scarlet huddled around her, her distended eyes looking somewhat vacantly into space. He bore signs of stress in a blood streaked face, torn tie, and crumpled collar, but he smiled the smile of a man who has done good work and on whom a great calm has fallen after the storm.

He went over to the washbasin and rinsed his hands—and what before touching her.

"Wh—wh—what have you done, Cam?" she faltered, behind him.

But she knew.

He turned round, taweling himself vigorously.

"Never mind, dearest. I'm going to take you out, and you're not to worry over anything. Because it's all over."

She got up from the bed and clung to him mutely.

"Don't worry, dearest," said honest, blind Cambray. "I won't have you worry. I shan't say another word to you about it tonight, except to say that I—I—I'm proud to think—his voice was a little husky—"that—that Caesars' wife, you know. And to thank you, darling, for giving it to me to do for you."

Roberta lay back a moment on his arm, her eyes half closed, her full red lips trembling over his near own. He bent and kissed them passionately.

They went out together into the warm, still night and sat on the pier amid a crowd of pleasure seekers and the myriad twinkling lights that she always liked dotting and dimpling the dark water below. She felt Cambray's faithful, passionate eyes searching her white face and set it stiffly like a mask, and sat mutely, blind and dead. He kept a protective arm around the back of her chair.

In the pavilion the band was playing Elgar's "Pomp and Circumstance," with a glorious fanfare and blare of marching music.

"Isn't that good, dearest?" Cam was saying, and heard the storm of violins, the blare of cornets, the throb of drums, wailing a dirge in a minor key.

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NEXT WEEK.
STUCK A FEATHER
IN HIS HAT
By William Almon Wolff.