

AWAKENED WOMAN

by ELINORE BARRY

FOURTH INSTALLMENT

Who was this man? What did he expect from her?

He was older than Nell Packard, she realized—older, and wiser. His dark eyes had heavy, drooping lids and his mouth a slightly one-sided twist to the full lips. The nose was straight and clean cut, his chin narrow, while, like Nell, his face was evenly tanned. His was dressed in golf togs and had an unmistakable air of smartness about him.

"I called up while you were asleep," he went on, pulling out a silver cigarette case, "did Roxie tell you? This morning." With-

out taking his eyes from her, he put two cigarettes between his lips and lighted them expertly, both from the same flame. Extinguishing the match with a quick shake of his hand, he offered her one of the cigarettes. From his automatic manner, it was plain that this was an accepted procedure.

"I . . . I don't care for any—now," faltered Joyce, making no move to take the cigarette and surreptitiously attempting to push her chair farther back, away from him. He was so close that it seemed to her he must be able to look right through her eyes and read her confused thoughts.

"For Heaven's sake, Frills, what's the matter? Better smoke; your nerves need steady. How do you feel?"

"Well, I have a headache, naturally . . . and I feel sort of shaken up," replied Joyce, dropping her eyes before his ardent gaze.

"You're damn' lucky it's not worse," he remarked forcefully. "what you need is a good stiff drink right now, and I'm going to give it to you. Got some real Canadian rye here, some Jake Townsend got me." He drew out a large silver flask, unscrewed and filled the top and handed it

to her. She accepted it without protest, silently. Perhaps it would help steady her nerves.

Raising the flask high in one hand, he placed his other hand on her knee, and pressing it with a sudden strong clasp that made her wince, he exclaimed softly, "Here's to Frills, the most marvellous girl in the world!"

Joyce smiled an embarrassed acknowledgement and gulped the liquor down hastily.

"Feel better?" he inquired, still watching her closely. "Lord, Frills, I was in a torment till I found out you weren't seriously hurt! If Neil doesn't take Fire Queen away where you can't get at her, I'm going to do it myself. That beast ought to be killed, and you know it. If you weren't such a stubborn little devil, you'd admit it."

Joyce now knew without doubt that this man was "Mait." His assured tone sent a tremor of apprehensive terror through her.

"Did Neil get away this morning?" he asked, flicking ashes from his cigarette.

"Oh, yes."

"I was afraid he might cut out the trip on account of your accident, and do us out of our bit. You'll be all right to go with the crowd Wednesday?"

Joyce's heart sank. Go where? "Oh, no, I can't. . . . I . . . don't feel up to going anywhere. . . ."

she answered quickly. Frank perplexity mingled with real alarm swept over the man's face. "Judas, you act queer this morning! Never know you so quiet and . . . so queer."

Joyce was thinking desperately. "I must get rid of him. I can't stand much more of this sort of thing. . . . I've got to do something quick. I'll make use of a little 'temperament,' I guess."

She jumped to her feet and exclaimed, "Oh, let me alone! Can't you see I'm sick? And if you don't like it, you can . . . you can . . ." she faltered, her burst of courage evaporating suddenly, and she turned toward the door, her one thought to escape.

"I can go to hell," supplied Maitland. He laughed, without rancor, and looked relieved. "Fine! That sounds more like you, darling."

He followed her with long strides into the living room. Joyce, confident now that he understood he had been dismissed and was about to leave, turned and held out her hand to him.

Instead of taking it, however, he came close to her and swept her into his arms. "Lisen, sweet-heart! I'll come tonight—up through the garden. . . . Between the rapidly muttered words, his kisses fell on her neck and face with scorching touch and ardour.

Joyce was aghast to find she could not struggle free from his grip. At last, her unresponsiveness and her feeble efforts to free herself seemed to reach his consciousness. He lifted his head to gaze inquiringly at her. His eyes were humid; his handsome face moist and flushed.

"Let me go!" gasped Joyce, taking advantage of his slightly relaxed hold to pull her arms out from under his. Putting her hands against his shoulders, she gave him such a suddenly violent push that she broke his hold. He stared at her in blank amazement at the unexpected repulse, then a shadow crossed his face. "Frills, something's happened to you. Has Neil? . . . It is Neil? Tell me what it's all about!"

Joyce backed to the door, fighting for self-control. "Let me alone! Don't touch me. . . . Go away—" She was almost sobbing.

"But, sweetheart, I can't understand it. Don't you love me? What have I done? Or is it Neil? Has he been—"

Without answering, Joyce fled upstairs, her knees trembling under her. The very force of her aversion, however, took her to the front window, and, peeping out from behind the curtain, she watched Maitland getting into a long gray sport roadster outside the door. He glanced up and saw her. Joyce dodged back, angry at having been seen, but not before she caught the wide confident smile on his face and the wave of his hand toward her.

Then she ran into the big bedroom and shut and locked the door. "Oh dear! What am I going to do? Well, next time I'll know enough to keep at a distance and not give him a chance to grab me that way!"

She was interrupted by a knock. At first, she decided to pay no attention. Then, merely to get away from her own dis-

turbing thoughts, she hastily opened the door.

Roxie stood there, holding out a yellow envelope. "Telegram for you, Mrs. Packard."

"Oh? Oh, thank you," said Joyce taking it. When she had torn it open apprehensively, dreading to encounter further complications, Joyce read: "How are you. Please wire me hotel Blockstone, Love, Nell." It was evidently sent enroute for it was headed Sacramento.

"He's much nicer than Mait!" she thought impulsively.

What should she telegraph? She sat down at the desk and considered.

Then, picking up a pencil and scrap of paper, she finally wrote: "Everything fine. Don't worry. Take care of yourself. Love, Frills." "I could use another word. That's only nine, and my thrifty New England soul does hate to waste anything. Shall I say 'Much Love'? I'll bet the telegram will be different enough from what he expected without that. Now, how does one send it? Telephone it? Or have the chauffeur, if there is one, attend to it?"

She finally decided to telegraph the message. Scarcely had she hung up the receiver than the bell rang. She listened in and heard as before Roxie's calm answer.

"Hullo, Roxie, can I speak to Frills?" drawled a feminine voice.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Emery, but she gave orders she didn't feel up to answering the 'phone today."

"Is that right?" with an incredulous note in the voice. Look here, Roxie, go and tell her I'm on the wire, will you? Ross and Ed and Ethel and I want to come over after dinner. . . ."

Joyce shuddered. Ross and Ed and Ethel! Whew! Four new ones at a blow. Who were they?

When Roxie appeared, Joyce said, "Please tell Mrs. Emery I have a headache and I don't feel like seeing any one for a day or two."

She smiled with a touch of malice when she heard Mrs. Emery's remark to Roxie. Roxie, honest, did Frills say that? Has Doc been in today to see her? . . . Frills is sure sick when she won't see the gang."

Joyce set her lips indignantly at this further evidence of the unknown Mrs. Emery's familiarity with her affairs. She was glad that Roxie answered with obvious acidity, "No, ma'am."

"I like Roxie," she decided gratefully.

It all began to seem to Joyce

like a species of fantastic game. How long could she hold off these unknown friends? With the one important exception of Maitland, the points had so far been in her favor. With care and good luck she might continue to win, until there came the move which would require her utmost skill—the return of Nell Packard.

Her restlessness gradually became more than mental. She found her hands moving nervously, the fingers rubbing together automatically, or picking up objects aimlessly. When she sat down it was impossible to keep her body still for more than a moment at a time. She realized a craving in her for something—without knowing what it was.

When Roxie appeared to ask whether she wished dinner, she gave an affirmative answer, adding that she would like it served upstairs, and that she was not at home to any callers.

"Excitement must make me hungry," thought Joyce later as she sat before the attractive dinner which Roxie brought to the boudoir and arranged on a small round table. "Anyhow I'm not so far gone with shock that I can't appreciate good food when I taste it."

When the sun had disappeared darkness came on rapidly—not with the soft lingering of twilight in the East. Going out on the sleeping porch, Joyce caught her breath with delight at the brilliance of the stars in that clear deep blue velvet of the night sky. There seemed to be more than she had ever seen before, closer together and brighter. The entire sky was powdered with stars. She could plainly see the scalloped line of the distant mountains against the firmament, and beyond the garden the blossoming fruit trees spread a carpet of soft white, faintly shimmering in the starlight. Not a building, not an artificial light, emptiness spread around her like a pool of fathomless still water, lonely, awe-inspiring.

Joyce sat there until she discovered that the night air was actually cold, a surprising change from the hot sun of the daytime, and she returned to the house. At ten-thirty Joyce was still so wide-awake that she had no desire to go to bed, but a feeling of restlessness swept over her again, and she could no longer sit still in front of the fire.

"It must be safe to go downstairs now. . . . Think I'll sneak out to the kitchen and look for something to eat."

She found the lower part of

the house in total darkness, but remembering the cubistic floor lamp just inside the living room door, she fumbled for it and successfully pulled the chain. This gave her light enough to find the kitchen.

When she had finished eating, Joyce tried the back door and found it locked. Then, before she went upstairs again, she made the round of all the windows and doors on the lower floor.

When she was in bed, Joyce lay tense for some time, nervously sure she would never go to sleep. She could not have lain awake long, for when she woke to broad daylight, Joyce had no recollection of a sleepless vigil in the dark.

She felt so much better that her courage went up with a sudden leap. There was a quality about the brilliant sunshine and clear air which sent a thrill of pleasurable excitement through her. The prospect of the coming problems stimulated instead of disheartening her. Today she would play the role of Mrs. Nell Packard more convincingly. . . . (Continued next week)

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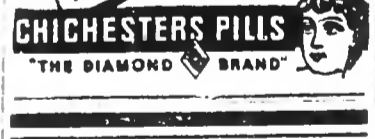
A certain tract of land lying and being in Wilkes county, North Carolina, Edwards Township and adjoining the lands of D. F. Layells heirs and Mike Blackburn heirs: Beginning on a black oak sapling, Blackburn's corner and runs east 9 chains to the branch; hence up said branch north 19 degrees east 5 chains to a poplar; thence up said branch north 7 chains to a stake in the branch; thence west 28 chains to a post oak; thence south 9 chains to a gum; thence west 18.83 chains to a rock; thence south 3.14 chains to the beginning. Containing 28.1 acres, more or less.

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4-17-33. Earl C. James, Attorney.

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