

# Second Chance

by ROSAMOND DUJARDIN



**CHAPTER II**  
**WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE**  
 . . . Lisbeth Carmichael started out in the sleety rain to call upon Cassandra Devine, known to her friends as Cassy, who was one of New York's foremost fashion authorities. As she arrived in front of Cassy's apartment building, a young man, Jon Ever, arrived in a cab. They both entered the elevator together on way to Cassy's apartment.

The pleasant room seemed in that moment very still. There was only the sharp clatter of Lisbeth's cup against her saucer as she set them down, the frightened urgency of her voice, saying, "No, No, I haven't, Cassy. What is it?"

Cassy seemed blind to the fear in the girl's eyes and voice. She said callously, "He got ten years. And I'm inclined to think he deserved it, making so free with other people's money. I heard it on a news broadcast just before you came in, and meant to tell you. But the sight of Jon here made me forget the whole thing until just a minute or so ago."

Lisbeth repeated, "Ten years." Jon's puzzled glance took in her sudden pallor and the warm rush of color that followed it, the pitiful tremulousness of her young mouth. He went d, all at once and perhaps absurdly, to shield her from the blow this

news had inflicted, although her connection with Ferris still remained obscure to him.

"My dear child!" Cassy sounded impatient. "It's nothing for you to blush over. Bob Ferris is nothing to you. Merely your mother's fourth husband — or is it fifth? I never can remember."

Lisbeth's chin came up. There was a gleam of pure fury in her eye. "You know perfectly well he was her third and last, Cassy Devine! Just because you've got a cold in your head is no reason for you to be nastier than usual!"

Cassy chuckled. "I deserved that. It's worth being snapped at just to see the way you always rise to Gay's defense. And, speaking of Gay—"

Lisbeth was on her feet now, her blue eyes serious. "I've got to go Cassy, Gay"—her voice seemed to caress the name—"this is going to be shocking news for her. I wonder if she's heard . . . I ought to be there."

Jon rose, too, propelled irresistibly by the imminence of Lisbeth's departure. He said, "I'll have to be going, too, Miss Devine. I've stayed too long, as it is, when you aren't feeling well. Dad and I will surely call together before we sail."

"You'd better," Cassy boomed. There was a flurry of far wells, the sound of a door closing, then silence. The ancient maid came in

for the tea things. Cassy Devine chuckled, stretching out comfortably once more on the chaise longue. For a moment, Emma, I think he was afraid he was going to lose out on a chance to see her home — but we wouldn't know about such things, would we?"

The ancient maid sniffed. "No miss" . . . It seemed incredible to Jon that on this very corner, only a little more than an hour before he had first laid eyes on Lisbeth Carmichael. He slipped a hand through her arm, detaining her. He asked, "May I take you home? I'll get a cab."

But Lisbeth said, "Thanks; don't bother. It's only a few blocks. And the rain's stopped." "Then I'll walk with you."

"If you like." They walked through the dusk together, tall buildings on the one hand, cars flashing past on the other. Presently Jon managed, with a bit of embarrassment, in his voice, "I'm sorry about your — your step-father, your mother's husband."

"He isn't her husband any more," Lisbeth said constrainedly. "They were divorced a couple of years ago."

"I see." "I'm afraid you don't. But you're very kind to be sorry. I rather like you, Jon Everton. Let's not talk about Bob Ferris and — and horrid, bothering things any more. Let's talk about you."

"Me?" Jon wished fervently she hadn't rushed past that point about "liking him," saying him so earnestly to tell her he liked her, too. Now it would sound degraded in, forced, if he said it. Yet it was true. It was a little appalling, to realize how true it was. He went on, "There's not much to tell about me. Two years out of college—"

"Making you how old?" There was quizzical inquiry in her tone. "Twenty-three. And you?"

"Nineteen — and don't say, 'A mere infant!'"

"I wasn't going to." "Tell me more. I interrupted." "Tell me more. She interrupted."

"Well, I work for my father. He's the head of the company. I mean, I haven't much of a job yet. They switch me here and there at intervals to give me perspective."

"Learning the business from the ground up," she tested. And then, "What line are you in?" "Farm equipment, harvesters, that sort of thing. The Evertons were farmers originally. Then my great-grandfather invented a reaper."

He talked on, and Lisbeth listened, asking questions now and then, just enough to keep him going. Finally she said, her voice solemn, "It sounds like such a strong, safe sort of business. Repeaters. Farm equipment. Aren't farmers the backbone of the nation? It sounds"—she sought for a word, found it—"secure."

"And as you suppose of security, at your age?" It was Jon's turn to test.

But Lisbeth's face captured momentarily in his was unsmiling. "I think security should be the most wonderful thing in the world."

Not until later did it occur to Jon that she had said "would be," not "is."

Abruptly she was smiling, her hand outstretched to his. "This is where I live."

Jon's fingers closed around hers warmly, hard. He felt absurdly let down because they had reached their destination so quickly, because obviously, she wasn't going to ask him in. "I've got to see you again! How about tomorrow? How about dinner — at seven,

shall we say? And we could see a show."

He thought her fingers returned the pressure of his own. He thought there was a queer breathlessness in her low voice, saying, "I'd like that." But she was gone before he was quite sure. . . .

Letting herself into the fourth floor apartment she and her mother shared, Lisbeth heard voices, Gay's and a man's. Recognizing these slightly mocking masculine tones as she slipped out of her coat in the hallway, Lisbeth was aware of a sharp uprising of assiate.

Reid Terry! What Gay saw in the man had never been apparent to her daughter. Lisbeth despised his sleek good looks, his brittle, sardonic humor. She would have gone to her own room to await his departure, had not her mother's voice stopped her in mid-flight: Lisbeth, Darling is that you?"

Lisbeth went into the living-room because there was nothing else to do. She smiled at Gay and greeted Reid politely for her mother's sake. Only one lamp was lit in the exquisitely furnished room, its dim glow falling on the warm rusts and browns of fabrics, the pale, dull wood of modern furniture. Gay and Reid sat side by side on a low couch. Gay was wearing a house gown of palest ivory, high-necked, long-sleeved, classically simple. She was so lovely it made Lisbeth's throat ache a little.

In that light Gay Ferris might have been twenty instead of almost twice that. Her hair was much lighter than Lisbeth's, a true, golden shade, and her eyes were a deep, purplish blue. Her skin seemed as vital and glowing as Lisbeth's own, and if considerably more time and effort were required to keep it that way than Lisbeth would have dreamed of lavishing on hers — well, that was Gay's affair. Nor did she begrudge the money paid to a skilled masseuse, or the hours of physical discomfort required to keep her figure slender, but delicately, naturally rounded.

Now she exclaimed, drawing her daughter down to the arm of the couch. "Sweet, you look positively beautiful! Your stockings are a mess. You shouldn't walk in this beastly weather!" — a faint quaver marred the smooth flow of her voice, but she smiled bravely — "even if we are practically destitute."

Reid lifted his glass to Gay.

"That's the spirit, darling. Carry on. Keep up a front if it kills you. After all, you've been broke before," Reid said.

Lisbeth wondered when Gay had heard about Bob Ferris. Perhaps Reid had told her. There was a sardonic streak in his nature; he always seemed to revel in being the bearer of bad news.

"Don't mind me," Gay pleaded. Her tone was light, but beneath the lightness was a note of panic. Lisbeth could sense that, being so close to Gay, knowing her so well. She felt, in that moment, older than her mother, stronger, curiously protective toward her helplessness, her hidden fears.

Gay said bitterly, "I hate Bob Ferris! He always was a fool."

"For being dishonest — or getting caught?" Reid inquired, one eyebrow quirked in the supercilious way Lisbeth disliked so acutely.

"Both! And for several other reasons, which we won't go into at the moment. But he was generous about alimony. I've never denied that. When I remember how Steve Butler fought against even the tiny settlement that judge allowed me . . ."

(To be continued)

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