

AWAKENED WOMAN

ELINORE BARRY

ELEVENTH INSTALLMENT

At last they were all gone, and Packard, closing the front door, came back to the living room and began to put out the lights. He yawned widely. "Gee I'm sleepy. Got to be up early tomorrow, too. Going to bed now, Frills?" he asked, pausing with his hand at the last light.

"Yes, I am," replied Joyce. She couldn't get the words out which she meant to say casually. Turning she went upstairs, closely followed by Packard, who switched on the bedroom light for her.

"I sure have missed that sleeping porch. Seems as if I never had any real air in those hotel rooms," remarked Packard when they were in the bedroom. "Once you get used to sleeping out anything else seems stuffy."

This hardly seemed an appropriate time to announce that she had decided to sleep in the house, hereafter and Joyce, in an agony of embarrassment and indecision wandered over to her dressing table where she sat down and lighted another cigarette.

If he would only go to his own rooms and let her alone! But Packard lingered taking off his tie and unbuttoning his shirt while he talked.

Neil was now taking off his shirt, and Joyce, catching sight in her mirror of the white top of his sleeveless underwear felt a wave of color burn her face and she sat rooted to the spot. To her great relief, however, he went off to finish his undressing elsewhere and she jumped up and hurried to the closet. Just as she had stripped her last garment off and was reaching for a kimona she heard him again in the bathroom. She had left the door of the closet just a trifle ajar so that she could keep track of his movements and the bathroom door stood wide open.

"Shall I run a hot bath for you?" called Packard, "or are you going to take a shower?"

Joyce hastily called out, "No tub, thanks. I'll take a shower when you get through."

"You needn't wait. I'm not using the shower," he called back cheerfully. "I want a real soak after being on the train two nights!"

She sat huddled on a chair in the closet and listened tensely to the process of his bath. He splashed and whistled and to poor Joyce it seemed as if he would never finish.

Suddenly the whistle stopped abruptly and she heard him ejaculate, "Damn! There goes the soap!" Then raising his voice he called, "Say, Frills, be a good kid and get me the soap, will you? I dropped it out and it skidded way over into the bedroom!"

Joyce was petrified by this simple request. She was so startled that she even failed to take refuge in what had been her salvation in other awkward moments, the conveniently temperamental disposition of Frills.

"Well, wait a minute, I'll . . . I'll get it," she returned, and holding her silk Coolie coat tightly about her she emerged from the closet, found the cake of soap innocently lying on the blue carpet, picked it up, and entering the bathroom, hastily thrust it into Packard's wet outstretched hand. Then she turned hurriedly and left the room in a turmoil of emotions.

"I wish he'd hurry," she fumed, with a sigh of relief that that awkward moment was over, though her heart still thumped violently, "I'm tired. If that shower didn't have a glass door I'd go and take a bath now. I simply can't do it, though." She sat down again and listened anxiously.

Presently she heard him rubbing himself vigorously and a few minutes later he appeared in the bedroom in blue pajamas and slippers, his hair sticking up in damp rumpled confusion. How funny a man looked without a collar, she thought, and the pajamas seemed so loose and baggy! Lowering her eyes she went past him into the bathroom. She shut the door after her and very quietly and carefully turned the little catch that locked it.

When she opened the door again she found the bedroom empty, but from the porch Packard implored

her, "Say, Frills, bring me a glass of water, like an angel, will you?"

Joyce wanted to retort crossly, but her naturally obliging disposition automatically asserted itself and getting the water she went to the sleeping porch which lay in the shadow. The moon made it light enough, however, to see Packard's face vaguely.

He sat up in bed and took the glass which she handed him. As he did so she said hastily, "Good night! I'm . . . I'm going to sleep inside for a while." She turned away as she spoke, but she scarcely finished the sentence before Packard put down the glass and jumped out of bed. He stopped her at the door and drew her into his arms, not roughly but with a gently firm movement which she could not evade.

"Oh, say, sweetheart," he protested, "not my first night home, Frills? I've been so . . . so lonesome for you, dear."

Packard bent his head quickly and kissed her eagerly, not once but several times, then drew her closer still and kissed the hollow of her neck several times. "Oh, sweetheart, won't you love me a little?" he whispered, his cheek laid against hers. "Won't you love me? Somehow tonight you were so sweet, going out with me alone that way and I got to hoping you might—Oh, Frills, what can I do to make you come back to me?"

"Oh, let's not talk tonight," she exclaimed impatiently, "I'm dead tired, I tell you." To her relief he did not follow her, but she heard his deep sigh as she went on into the other room and shut the door, her knees trembling a little.

Once in bed with the door locked, she lay and thought over what had happened. This victory was hers, but she did not feel quite the satisfaction in it that she had felt in circumventing Maitland.

Waking the next morning at her usual hour of seven o'clock she heard Packard whistling as he dressed and she debated whether to get up and have breakfast with him or to let him go away without seeing her.

She got out of bed and listened. It was so quiet that she concluded Neil had gone downstairs. She had just taken a dress from a hanger and had come out to put it on in front of the long mirror when she was startled by Packard appearing. "Good morning, wife!" he exclaimed, "how's the world?"

"Oh! . . . Good morning," she responded, hastily pulling the dress on and watching him apprehensively in the mirror as she fastened her collar and tie.

"Gee, this is great. Are you going to eat breakfast this morning?" he asked, leaning against the foot of the bed.

"We'll give Roxie a surprise, eating breakfast together," she remarked, as they entered the dining room. "Good morning, Roxie, where's my blessed Dickie?"

"Out with Sam," responded Roxie. She too smiled, but there was a puzzled look about her face as she did so.

"Oh, then I'm going out to get him," exclaimed Joyce, "you start eating, I'll be right back," and she dashed out through the kitchen and called to Dickie, whom she saw lying with a bored expression outside the stable door.

"I wonder if he'd get too tired to go along with me if I go out to ride on Rosita. What do you think?" asked Joyce as she began her breakfast.

"Well, I wouldn't take him if you're going more than a short ride. I doubt if he's used to long runs."

"By the way, I heard that Mait has a new horse," remarked Packard toward the end of the meal. "What sort of a cayuse is it? Did he get t from MasBready?"

Joyce's heart thumped. Now was her chance, and she determined to take it. She spoke casually, though the knowledge that she was changing color disconcerted her slightly. "I'm sure I don't know," she replied, "I haven't seen Mait for nearly two weeks."

When she raised her eyes from her plate she encountered a look on Packard's face which filled her with sudden anger. It had always infuriated Joyce to realize that her word was doubted.

Suddenly her pleasure in the day was spoiled. A hurt feeling of resentment against him for ruining her happy mood seized her. She forgot his side of the affair and the things which Frills had done to make this reaction so natural.

She said nothing until they had left the table and were in the living room. Then suddenly she faced him and with flaming face said, "Look here, I want you to know that I wasn't lying just now when I said I hadn't seen Mait for two weeks."

Packard stared at her. He looked

bewildered. An expression of eager hopefulness dawned in his face, but it was the cautious hope of one who has been hurt and disappointed too many times.

After fully five seconds' silence Packard said dully, "God knows I want to believe you, Frills, but after . . . that New Year's thing . . ." He hesitated as if he were referring to some painful incident he could scarcely bear to mention.

Joyce was quivering all over. It seemed to her that nothing was more important than to make him believe her. She groped desperately for the right words to convince him. "But I'm telling the truth," she insisted, "you can ask Clarice . . . or ask Mait himself if you won't believe me."

Neil still looked as if he dared not believe and Joyce, exasperated at his obviously unconvinced manner, exclaimed, "Perhaps I was mistaken, perhaps you . . . you don't really care what I do—"

But at this Packard suddenly woke up. His face went white under the tan and taking a step forward he gripped her shoulders with his hands and said, with an intensity of restrained force that frightened her, "By God, Frills, I won't stand for that! When have you ever cared what I thought? When have you ever done anything but give me the most careless sort of response? You've lied to me before. You know it and I know it. How can I help doubting you? I've done everything I could to try to make you happy."

I've given you every bit of freedom and fun I could just so you might have a good time. I've protected you more than you knew against open scandal. I've stood so damn much from you that I sometimes wonder what kind of a weak fool I am. But I can't help loving you in spite of it all. I've stood for this business with Maitland . . . I've stood for all sorts of things—for your sake, and partly for my mother's. And when . . . when you've been a little nice to me, what has it ever meant? Some devilish scheme of yours to put something over on me. I don't know what your game is now, but even you can't tell me I don't really care what you do."

Joyce listening fascinated to this explosion, recalled the words in Jerry's letter: ". . . Just remember that a man like Neil won't stand pushing too far." (Continued Next Week)

Maple Springs News

Mr. and Mrs. Harvey Sparks of Winston-Salem, spent the week-end with relatives here.

Miss Lizzie Wagoner of Jonesville, visited Mrs. Gaither Howell over the week-end.

Mr. and Mrs. Grant Wagoner visited friends in Jonesville Saturday. Mr. Fred Sale, of Roaring Gap, spent the week-end with his parents, Mr. and Mrs. W. E. Sale.

Messrs. Roscoe Poplin and Francis Hoover of Statesville, were Sunday guests of Mr. and Mrs. Leet Poplin.

Mr. and Mrs. C. S. Sale and family visited Mr. and Mrs. Tom Boyd of Elkin Sunday.

Mr. and Mrs. Ed Ham and Miss Bessie Sparks went to Pilot Mountain Sunday.

Mr. and Mrs. Jim Morrison of Jonesville visited Mrs. Matilda Howell Sunday.

Seven widows of the War of 1812 are still alive and receiving pensions.

Cycle News

The farmers in this section are very busy in their tobacco and corn.

Mr. and Mrs. M. C. Dobbins and son, Paul, returned Saturday from Philadelphia, where they were called on account of the serious illness of Mrs. Dobbins' brother, Paul Sparks.

Friends of Miss Jettie Inscore will be glad to learn that she is gradually improving from a lengthy illness.

Mr. and Mrs. S. Pardue are spending some time with Mr. and Mrs. Pearsons Pardue, the former their son.

Herbert, the small son of Mr. and

Mrs. F. L. Cheek, has been suffering for the past three weeks with an abscess on his leg.

There was no service at Mountain View church Sunday, due to the fact that the pastor was called to the Richmond Hill church to assist in a service there.

On Sunday the friends and relatives of Pearsoh Pardue gave him a surprise birthday dinner at his home.

The Sunday schools are doing well at this time in all the local churches.

The birch tree sheds its bark annually.

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