

CHECKERBOARD LOVE

JOSEPH M. CORD

CHAPTER VIII

Synopsis
Audrey Swan, nicknamed "Cygne," is the only daughter of a highly respected horse trainer. His farm adjoins the estate of Judge Castle, whose only son, Jeffrey, has been Audrey's friend since childhood. Jeffrey marries Olive Cooper. Judge Castle has always wanted to make Jeffrey a partner, but Olive does not wish to bury herself in Parville. During their long honeymoon, Vio Quinn, Jeff's friend in love with Audrey, has substituted for Jeff in the Judge's office. Returned from their trip, Jeff visits Parville without Olive. He is telling Audrey that Olive's father is giving him a job in the city.

"That's a pity."
"It's one of those things," he offered grimly. "The sooner it's over with, the better. I suppose you think it's funny, Cygne, that I should come barging over here with my troubles. You've always been an understanding kid."
"Best of luck, Jeff. Always."
The surprised roan bounded forward and settled into a swinging gallop. Audrey was thinking, Jeff never would be coming back any more.

Dust, or something, was making her eyes smart.

It was almost lunch time the following day when Judge George Castle arrived home from the city and greeted his newly returned son. "But where's Olive?" was almost his first question. "I particularly wanted to see her."

"I left her at home," was the brief explanation.

"When do you expect her down?"
"Soon, I dare say."
After that the conversation among the three Castles was of a general nature, devoted largely to an account of the wedding trip, business and political conditions as Jeffrey had observed them. When the trio left the table, Mrs. Castle smilingly remarked that she would retire to her room for a little while. "Jeffrey," his father announced, "I have an errand before we settle down to a visit. I shall need the car. Tell Dean that you will drive for me, if you don't mind."

"I'll be very glad to, sir," Jeffrey was experiencing a momentary thankfulness. He had intended to blurt out the bad news to his father without any preliminaries, once they were alone. But this made it easy to postpone the ordeal.

Down at the road gates, the Judge indicated a left turn and did not speak until they neared the Ross estate. "In here, please, Jeffrey." The latter negotiated the circular drive in some surprise, brought the machine to a stop at the foot of the porch steps.

"I've a key somewhere," the Judge said. "The deed and title search for this place came through the office not long since. Quinn looked after it for us." He stepped heavily from the car. "I have been curious to see the general condition of things. Come along. Let's have a look."

Jeffrey followed his parent without much enthusiasm, helped him with the door and the two began a circuit of the cheerless rooms.

"I should say that it is in excellent shape," the Judge decided when the inspection ended. "How do you like that house, my boy?" he inquired abruptly.

Jeffrey felt his heart sink. It was his first premonition of a fresh disaster. "Nice place," he managed dully.

"Do you think it will appeal to Olive?"
"To Olive?"

Judge George gave vent to a throaty chuckle. "This is your home from now on, my son... and Olive's! A little gift from your mother and me." The words seemed to be coming from some distance off. "We've always known that we couldn't keep you at home," Jeff heard dimly. "But it has been our pet dream to have you close by so that we could enjoy our grandchildren."

Jeffrey sat staring at his father with such a vacant expression that the Judge emitted an exasperated "Well, what all's you?"

"I... I wish I had known about that, Father. Wish you had told me. It's perfectly swell of you and Mother. But it's like this. I'm not just sure how much of the time we'll be here in Parville after this. You see... Olive likes the city. She's never lived in a small town or in the country and the idea sort of gets her down."

"Interesting, really. May I ask where she does intend to live?"

"She wants me to take a position in her father's office. Mr. Harrison has been kind enough to... to arrange it."

"What sort of a position? What are your duties?"

"Oh, executive of some sort. We really haven't threshed out the details, naturally."

"Naturally. But you are thinking of allowing your wife to support you."

"Of course I'm not! Harrison's is a huge concern. There is no reason why there can't be a future in it for a young man."

"But not for you, Jeffrey. You will learn that they have not the slightest need for your services. I wonder that you can accept that situation. We spoke of it once before, prior to your marriage. You were quite independent then. You led me to believe that you would settle down here as we had planned so many times."

"You don't quite understand, Father. I..."

"I presume," the Judge went on coldly, "that this was all arranged before you were married. Did you know it then, Jeffrey, or did you not?"

"I did not," Jeffrey turned appealingly to his father. "See here, sir! I can't let it stand like this, if there is any way out of it. I'm thinking about that house. I know Olive was under the impression that if we came here we would live with you and Mother for the time being. A real home like the one you have given us may appeal to her. She could have the horses and all that sort of thing... don't say anything to Mother. I'll drive back tonight and have a talk with Olive tomorrow morning. Don't you think it would be a good idea?"

"You are a better judge than I, Jeffrey. The older man's voice sounded suddenly tired. "Did you tell Quinn that you were not going to remain here?"

"Yes... He was thinking about leaving."

"But he will remain now?"
"He wasn't sure. Said he would have to think it over."

"He will stay here," by golly!" the Judge retorted explosively. "I do not intend to be let down by everybody."

"Well, and how did you find everything down in the sticks?" Olive Castle smiled up at her husband from her breakfast tray.

"Oh, fine," he assured her. "The folks are both well. Very much disappointed that you didn't come along. Had a chat with old Vic in the office. He looks like a million dollars."

"How's Audrey?"
The unexpected question caught him so off guard that he instinctively repeated Olive's last word, "Audrey?"

"Why, yes. You seem to have rounded up everybody you know in Parville. I took it for granted you wouldn't overlook her."

"Oh, sure. Yes, I did see her... happened to bump into Audrey on the road. We had a little visit from the saddle. She looked very well, I thought."

"That was nice." There was nothing but innocent pleasure in his wife's face and words, but Jeffrey felt a sudden discomfort. Darn it all, he had met Audrey accidentally—merely riding past when he saw her at a distance jumping that roan. It didn't sound so well as a story.

"What sort of a day did you have?" he countered amiably.

"Tiresome enough. Looked at two apartments and neither of them suited. We really don't need more than ten rooms, if they are arranged right."

"No," Jeff agreed smilingly, "that's five apiece. We ought to be able to keep out of each other's way... on clear days. Speaking of abodes, darling, have you ever thought it would be nice to have a country place of our own?"

"Hardly. Dad has his hunting lodge in Maine, the place in the mountains and the one down at the shore. They're almost always empty."

"I was thinking more about... well, not exactly a farm, but a modern house near town with good stables. Enough to handle half a dozen horses. That sort of thing."

"I see!" She broke a bit of toast between her fingers and smiled provokingly. "You're so funny and transparent, Jeff dear. What is up your sleeve now? Come on and tell Mummy."

"I was merely asking if you

wanted a country place because... well, because we have one. Got the deed over in my room."
"Jeffrey Castle, whatever are you talking about?"
"A gift. From your Parville in-laws." He was smiling broadly. "How's that for something pretty nice in the way of a late wedding present?"

"Tell me about it. Everything." Olive's dark eyes met his in a level gaze. "You didn't know anything about it before?"

"Cross my heart and hope to die, darling! You could have knocked me over with a feather. Just after lunch, Father asked me to drive him on an errand and we went to this place. After I had admired it sufficiently, what did he do but tell me that it's a gift from him and Mother to us."

"They shouldn't have done that, dear. Sweet of them, of course. I listen, Jeffrey. I hate to be tiresome, but you're making me wonder if you made it clear to your folks before we were married that you were not going to settle down in Parville."

"Well, I figured perhaps we'd better think it over thoroughly before we came to a really definite conclusion. Now that we actually own that place, I'd like you to see it. It's just the idea of letting the folks down. You know."

"Apparently that's more important than letting your wife down. I took it for granted that I married you instead of your family. I still want to think so." Olive did not raise her voice, but Jeffrey caught a quiet determination in her tone that he had never heard. Her dark eyes were fixed unwaveringly on his face. There was no suggestion of a smile in them.

He shrugged his broad shoulders. "I don't believe it's necessary to put it that way. And we certainly don't have to be dramatic about things. I want you to be happy and nothing else counts with me. How and where we live is for you to decide."

Olive flashed him a smile. She reached for her husband's nearest hand and patted it softly. "You're sweet, Jeff. About everything. Come on, kiss me and don't let's

be tiresome any more. If you'll run away now, I'll dress. Oh, Jeffrey... as he was starting for the door. "... I was wondering. Why wouldn't it be simpler if you wrote your father a nice letter about that house? You can be appreciative in your explanation. If it will help, I'll write my thanks, too."

"No," he said quietly, "that wouldn't do. I'll run down and see and see it... through. He wouldn't be satisfied otherwise and neither would I."

"I'm sure you can smooth everything over. Will you offer to give him back the place?"
"You don't know Father. If he is willing, I'll try to sell it and reimburse him. I doubt if he will want to do that. It's a little hard to say, but... but this is the end of a good many things in Parville."

"Quinn!" Judge George Castle's voice called brusquely from his room a few moments after he had arrived at the office.

Victor entered and stood waiting. "Yes, sir?"
"Shut the door. Sit down." Quinn obeyed both orders.

The Judge appeared to be in an ill humor. "Jeffrey was down. He returned to the city last night. He will not be back here."

"Not coming back? But I thought..."
(Continued Next Week)

12 REASONS WHY WE HAVE THE MOST MODERN AND COMPLETE WATCH REPAIR SERVICE IN THE CITY.

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CHAPTER VIII (continued from previous page)

ALTERATION
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