

TO HAVE TO KEEP

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JANE ABBOTT

CHAPTER TWENTY

"You've gone into the movie, I mean," said Allithca Mathewson. "Where will you show it, Diane?"

"Danny Carver's giving a party down on Gus Schütz's showboat. We'll run it off then."

"You don't mean you'd go—"

Satisfaction was in Mrs. Winston's voice as well as horror.

"Oh, we're wild to see the inside of it! And meet Gus."

Mrs. Arden rose from the table. "Shall we play some bridge? Bill, you and I will take on the girls."

Bill put up the tables. "One rubber, Mother," he said, as he sat down opposite his mother.

"Of course, you're tired."

Was her sympathy only for his tiredness, Diane wondered, uneasily. For her defiance had spent itself; her anger had left her. She played stupidly, scarcely hearing Page's bids, reluctant to meet Page's glance, acutely aware of a soberness in Bill's manner that was not for the game. She was glad when the rubber was over, she rose as quickly as Bill from the table.

There was another round of congratulatory hand shaking with the goodboys. Then they were in the car and driving away. Diane sat back in her corner, holding her breath, waiting for Bill to speak. Then she could say: "I'm sorry! I know I was silly and cheap!"

Cheap, like Vicky. And she'd despised Vicky for it. "Something just sent me off, darling. It doesn't matter what—"

When his arms were around her

she would tell him about the baby. But they were almost at the Chatham Arms before Bill spoke. And then coldly: "How many cocktails did you drink before dinner?"

Her voice was as cold. "You saw me!"

"I saw only the one you brought to the living room!"

He stopped the car at their door. "You go on up. I'll take the car round."

She was undressing when he came in. Frightened, she dropped down on the edge of the bed, clutching the garment she had taken off. What would he say next? She didn't know.

He said from the living room: "Coming out here again?"

"No."

She heard the click of the wall switch, his step across the dinette. He was in the room.

She stood up, desperately willing her knees not to double under her. "I'm sorry, Bill." But she could not say it while there was that closed look on Bill's face.

He pulled off his coat, took it to the closet, hung it there, turned. "Di, I take it you're going out to the club on your father's membership?"

Incredibly, that was in his mind, not Rufus!

"Family membership, isn't it?"

"Not mine. I'd prefer you stayed away until I can afford to join it. You can find other amusements, can't you?"

She picked up a brush from the

dresser table, drew it over her bright hair. "Why haven't you spoken of it before?"

"Because I was too deep in that trial to even know what you were doing," Bill retorted.

She had set the trap for him, but she was no less stung by his admission. She sat quite still, her fingers tight on the edge of the dressing table, repeating his words to herself, as if, together, they made something she must remember.

He came to her, put his hands on her shoulders. "Don't look like that, Di. I'm not asking a great deal of you, am I? You can't care much for that crowd you've been playing around with out there. To me they seem a fearful waste of time."

She did not answer. She let him think that that was the issue and that it was closed now. She tipped her face back to receive his kiss. But her lips felt stiff against his; the coldness was creeping up over her again.

Bill got into his pajamas. "I'm half asleep on my feet! But it's good to know I haven't a hard day ahead of me tomorrow!"

He fell asleep almost as soon as his head touched the pillow. Diane listened to a numb wonder to his regular breathing. After a little she raised on her elbow to stare, almost fearfully, at his dark head, outlined against the white of the bed linen. "I'm going to have his child and I don't real! know him!"

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"Are you too sleepy for a little talk, dear?" asked Mrs. Winston of Page when they arrived home from the Ardens.

Page shrank from it; she was too distraught in her mind to counter the triumph she saw in her mother's bearing. But to re-

fuse would only postpone the moment, so she followed her mother into the living room.

Mrs. Winston put her gloves and bag on the table, sat down in a chair, a little forward in it, squared her plump shoulders. "Did you ever see such an exhibition as Diane made of herself tonight? I felt so sorry for Bill's mother. Though it ought to be for Bill, he has to live with her! Her boldness, in practically announcing before Bill and everyone, that she's starting an affair with that Rufus Kent!"

Diane had given Mrs. Winston a high trump, and she played it with satisfaction.

Page dropped her eyes to her tightly locked hands. She did not believe there was anything like that between Rufus and Diane, in spite of what Diane had said. Diane had wanted, for some reason of her own, to shock them there at the table, or hurt Bill. And Rufus wasn't that kind. It would be loyal to deny it and at the moment she longed, desperately, to give Rufus, at least, loyalty. But she did not speak.

Her mother read an advantage in her silence. She went on in a voice silky with approval. "I am very grateful, Page, that you haven't permitted him to pay you serious attention! He's quite impossible! I knew it the first time I met him and now it's proven by what Diane admitted." She hesitated a moment, then finished: "Because Bill made a mistake in no reason you should—"

"Mother!" Page cried, chokingly, her face flaming.

Mrs. Winston moved to where Page sat on the divan, put her arm over the girl's shoulders. "Don't you think I know how you felt about Bill? Even before you did. It's like that with mothers. I was so happy about it, I thought—" Her hold tightened. "And when I knew it couldn't be, my heart ached for my sweet girl. I prayed for you, dear child, that you'd keep your head. And you have. Any other girl would have encouraged the first man she met! I suppose that is why I worried when that Kent man began coming here so often. Though I might have known you'd see yourself that he is quite beneath you! I talked to him one evening, Page, when he was waiting for you to come downstairs. I asked him about his family. The most he can claim is a couple living on a farm somewhere in Massachusetts, an aunt and uncle. Ordinary farmers, he made quite definite. He grew up with them. But he may have told you—I struck me he was a little boastful of the fact!"

Page drew away from her mother's hold. "Yes, he's told me. You didn't need to ask him!"

"Your father and I certainly have the right to know, Page, with what sort of men you are going out!"

Page got to her feet, looked wildly toward the door. "I'm frightfully tired, Mother."

Mrs. Winston rose, too, kissed Page's cheek. "Yes, you're tired. Run along to bed, dear."

(To Be Continued)

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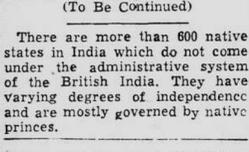


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