

AWAKENED WOMAN

by ELINORE BARRY
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Tenth Installment

Synopsis: Joyce Ashton, poor stenographer, suffered loss of memory in a skidding taxicab accident in Chicago. One morning two years later she woke, after a fall from her horse, her memory restored, to find herself, as Frills, the wife of Neil Packard, rich California fruit packer. She determined to tell nobody of her predicament but set about learning what she could of her life in the interval. From the conversation of her friends and letters in her desk she gathered that she had been a heartless, pleasure-loving young woman. One letter that troubled her was from a woman signing herself Sophie, blaming Frills for not giving a home to a baby Sophie was caring for. Could it be her baby, Frills wondered? She also found herself involved in an affair with a man named Maitland. In San Francisco, where she went while her husband was away on business, she met Robert Ainsworth, a poet whose work she had always admired. When Joyce returned home, she decided to be pleasanter to Neil than Frills had been. But this line was dangerous, too, for Neil was pathetically anxious to win back Frills' love. NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY.

"Can you stand it to have only me for dinner this once?" asked Joyce.

"Whoopee! Just ask me, can I?" he replied. "You know that, Frills, old kid. I'll go up and wash and be right down again."

When Packard came down the stairs Joyce divined his intention to kiss her again, and she moved toward the dining room immediately, saying, "Dickie eats with us. At least he sits at table and snaps up what favors he can persuade me to give him, don't you, darling? He has his regular dinner in the kitchen."

"Where do you want his chair?" inquired Packard politely. "Here you are, boy, get up and let's see how good your table manners are."

They sat down opposite each other at the small round table with Dickie between them. Joyce was struck by the lingering bewilderment on Packard's face. There seemed to be something he couldn't quite understand, but he asked for no explanations.

"Gee! it's good to be home again," he began. "I sure do hate Chicago."

She asked politely, "Was the conference a success?"

Packard stared. Joyce flushed. "Oh, is it something I'm not supposed to ask about?" rushing into the first remark which occurred to her in an effort to cover her embarrassment.

"Good Lord, no!" he exclaimed hastily. "Only—only—" he hesitated. "I'm sorry, Frills, I can't keep up with you. You've jumped me so hard about talking shop and said so often you didn't give a damn about what happened so long as you didn't have to hear about it that—"

"Well, I don't want to know everything that happened. I just wondered if you had a successful trip in general," said Joyce. She began to wonder if Frills had ever had a decent word for anyone.

"Oh, sure, we fixed up what I went for and got the new branch office planned out and ready for business," he said.

"Sam said there was a fire at the plant here," remarked Joyce casually, "but almost no damage done. Had you heard about it?"

"Yes, I called up from the city before I came down. But, tell me what you've been doing with yourself, Frills. How's every one in the gang? Doc been in much?"

"Don't know. I just got home today myself," replied Joyce. "I haven't seen anybody I know for nearly two weeks. The first two days after you went they wouldn't let me alone, and I wanted to be quiet, so I walked off and went up to the city alone."

There was an uncomfortable silence. Packard ate for a few moments with his eyes fastened on his food. Joyce understood without doubt that he didn't believe she had spent all that time in San Francisco alone. Why should he? Suddenly she knew that she wanted him to believe it. It was perfectly obvious to her the he loved Frills and that he was a little afraid of her.

Joyce wondered with a sudden thump of her heart how he would like a baby around the house. If she could only ask him about that baby in New York.

"I promised Dickie to throw a stick for him," she said as they left the table, "if you care to join us, come along," and she ran across the terrace and down the wide stone steps to the stretch of lawn at the top of the garden, without waiting for a reply. Packard lighted a cigarette and followed her more slowly. By the time he joined them she was racing around with Dickie, having a lively game and secretly amused to wonder what he thought of the unusual sight of Frills enjoying a childishly simple pleasure of this kind.

She turned to him and asked very abruptly, "Are you very tired after your trip?"

"Good Lord, no!" he answered, evidently startled, "why?"

"It's going to be glorious moonlight in a few minutes. Let's go for a horseback ride." His look of blank amazement at this suggestion caused her heart to sink for a moment. Suppose he refused! A gust of angry impatience struck her. If they didn't hurry, somebody would come and spoil her plan!

"What's the matter? Afraid it'll cause a scandal if any one discovers

you've been out with your own wife?" she demanded.

"Hell!" grinned Packard. "I should worry about that. But you can't blame me for . . . for wondering if I'd heard you right. You—we haven't spent many evenings together lately."

There was something in his voice which hurt Joyce a little. She had not found him exactly interesting so far, but she already liked him enough to be sorry for the way Frills had been treat-

self just once without shrieking over it?"

"Oh, sure, only it's . . . it's not exactly like you."

Joyce, torn between impatience and amusement, answered, "Well, whatever I do is me isn't it?"

Packard made no reply to this, but a little later on he said earnestly, "Look here, sweetheart, I stopped to see mother today on my way down. She'd like awfully to . . . be friends with you.



"Are you afraid it'll cause a scandal if anyone discovers you've been out with your own wife?"

ing him. "Well, it's up to you," she replied. "I'm going for a ride and if you want to come, all right." Secretly she quailed at the idea of going out alone for the first time. Would it be safe to leave her house for safety? Could she handle Rosita?

But Packard accepted without further questioning. "I'll tell Sam to saddle up while we get into our things," he said. "Run on in the gang shows up. I'll be back by nine and leave him with Sam," said Joyce, and, trembling

with excitement, she raced into the house and upstairs to her big chest, where she proceeded to kick off her slippers and pull her dress over her head as rapidly as possible. She was just drawing her boots on when she heard Packard cross the balcony and go through to his dressing room.

Scarcely five minutes later they were hurrying downstairs and out to the stable.

She noticed as they rode off slowly that Neil kept eyeing her in an apprehensive fashion. She decided he must be worrying about the accident she had had and probably wondering what mad idea the moonlight would inspire in her tonight. Well, if he were looking for trouble of that kind he would be disappointed!

"Want a cigarette, dear?" he asked once, holding out his case toward her as they rode close together on a short level stretch along the hills. Joyce accepted it but did not dare to try lighting it while they were moving.

"You light it, please." She handed it back to him.

"That gives me permission to kiss you," he remarked, smiling as he handed her back the lighted cigarette.

"But who wants to kiss his own wife?" retorted Joyce, urging Rosita into a quick trot.

"Here's one man who does," he replied, easily catching up with her. Riding close to her horse he put his arm around her and tried to draw her toward him. Joyce was alarmed, this time not so much at the prospect of being kissed as at the danger of such reckless actions while on horseback.

"Oh, please don't!" she exclaimed hastily, "you make me—" she had been about to say, "you make me nervous," when she was struck by the absurdity of Frills Packard saying anything like that.

Packard looked surprised, but he obediently fell away a little. Joyce was undecided whether to be contemptuous of him for his lack of spirit or to conclude that his experience with Frills, when he crossed her, had probably been so unpleasant that he had learned his lesson thoroughly.

Try as she would, Joyce could not keep Robert Ainsworth from her thoughts. The beauty of the night brought vividly to mind his delightful personality. It would be so perfect with the right man!

Joyce wondered most of the way back if her silence puzzled Neil very much. She would have chatted willingly enough, but nothing except dangerous remarks seemed to occur to her. Neil was little help for he too rode in silence. What was he thinking? Looking at him she thought with amusement "Prunes!"

"Don't you feel well, Frills? You . . . you're sort of quiet tonight," said Packard, in what Joyce described to herself as a "cautious voice."

"I feel absolutely wonderful!" she retorted with spirit. "can't I enjoy my-

self? I'd give anything in the world if you'd go to see her and just be nice to her a few minutes. You needn't go often or spend much time there, but if you . . . she's so anxious to have things friendly. It's tough on her, my being her only son and my wife never going to see her. She's getting old, you know."

Before Neil stopped Joyce felt a lump coming into her throat. His voice was so pleading and so earnest. She remembered the sweet-faced woman whose picture she had

found in his desk drawer, and how she wondered if his mother were still living.

"Well, all right, I'll make a date with you to take me to see her tomorrow. I will go alone," and was a little pleased with herself for her diplomacy.

Her prompt acceptance surprised him, she saw, but he seized upon it gratefully. "Thanks a lot. We could take a run out there before dinner. Could you be ready at about five? Or would that interfere with anything you're doing? We don't have to go tomorrow, you know."

"No, we'll go at five. If you forget or let any business interfere you'll have hard work making any more dates with me—for anything," retorted Joyce.

"I'll be there, I'll tell the world. Gee, Frills, that's sweet of you. You know how much mother means to me."

Joyce rode on in silence thinking fast and furiously. If she could do things like this for Packard surely she needn't feel that all the giving was on his side, even though she refused him herself. She could give him more of her company than Frills had; she could eliminate all cause for jealousy with Maitland; she could make his house more of a real home. Or was it too late to do that? And could she follow out such a plan without misleading him as to her feelings?

Well, she had made enough concessions for such a short time! The future must somehow take care of itself.

As, on foot once more, they approached the house from the terrace side, Joyce heard voices; and when they entered the living room they were immediately surrounded by a welcoming group who had evidently been waiting for their return.

"Well, what do you know? Frills' been riding in the moonlight with her husband! Hot stuff! Somebody telephone the scandal to the papers."

The company consisted of Doc, Ellison, Ross and Clarice Emery, Charlie Bates, and Art Belmain. Joyce wondered where the other women were.

"Don't suppose you got any golf while you were East, did you, Neil?" asked Art Belmain.

"Not a round," replied Packard. The men proceeded to talk golf and business.

As the party broke up, Dr. Ellison said in an aside to Joyce, "Say, Frills, you're looking much better than you did two weeks ago. Has your head bothered you any lately?"

Continued Next Week

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