

SHINING PALACE

By
CHRISTINE WHITING PARMENTER

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THE STORY

CHAPTER I—James Lambert tries in vain to dissuade his beautiful foster-daughter, Leonora, from marrying Don Mason, young "rolling stone," whom he likes but of whom he disapproves according to his conventional business-man standards. He tells her, "Unless a house is founded upon a rock, it will not survive." Leonora suspects the influence of her half-brother, Ned, always jealous of the girl since the day his father brought her home from the deathbed of her mother, abandoned by her Italian baritone lover. Don arrives in the midst of the argument, and Lambert realizes the frank understanding between the two.

CHAPTER II—Sitting up late into the night, Lambert reviews the whole story, of Nora as a child, at boarding school, studying music abroad, meeting Don on the return trip. In the morning he delivers his ultimatum, to give Don a job with Ned for a year's showdown. When Nora suggests the possibility of running away with Don, Lambert threatens disinheritance. Don agrees to the job, but before a month is over, his nerves are jumpy, he cannot sleep at night, he is too tired to go out much with Nora, and admits to her that he feels stifled. Nora soothes him with her music. He falls asleep and his face is more peaceful than it has been in many weeks.

CHAPTER III—Nora grows quieter, and broods over Don, complains to her father of Ned's spying on him, and decides that rather than see Don's spirit broken, she will run away. She urges her father to put an end to the futile experiment. James Lambert is obdurate and angry. Lambert tells her that if Don quits she will quit with him; that he will be through with her. He adds that if she tries to get him back, she will use force to come to him for help.

CHAPTER IV—With the coming of spring, Don is full of unrest and wanderlust, and takes long walks at night. One evening a poor girl speaks to him, and in his pity for her, he gives her money. A car passes at that moment, flashes headlights and moves on. A terrific heat wave ushers in the summer, and Nora refuses to go to the country with her father. Ned, meanwhile, insinuates to his father about Don's evenings away from Nora, but Lambert refuses to listen. Meanwhile, Don broods over the undermining of his morale.

CHAPTER V—At the height of the heat wave, when Don is finding everything insupportable, Ned speaks of having the goods on him, having seen him give a girl money. When Ned scoffs at the true story of the episode, Don knocks him down, and is through. He calls Nora, who insists on running away with him to get married, realizing it is her job to restore Don's faith in himself. Her good-by to her father is met with complete silence.

CHAPTER VI—Don and Nora go to Maine and settle down in the studio of Carl Venable, a famous artist friend of Don's, whose daughter he saved from drowning. Nora writes her father. There is no answer, except her baggage, containing her entire wardrobe, and \$1,000 hidden in a gold mesh bag.

CHAPTER VII—After a tranquil summer, which partly restores Don's health, Don and Nora accept the Venables' invitation to Capri for the winter. Nora realizes she is to have a baby, but says nothing to change their plans. She is also reluctant to go so far from her father, and writes him of their sailing. At the dock, Nora, feeling that her father is there, waves good-by.

CHAPTER VIII—Ned, reading of the Masons' sailing, goes to see his father, and has a talk with Martha, the old housekeeper, who bemoans Lambert's stubbornness which is breaking his own heart and Nora's. Ned finds his father in Nora's old room, and when he offers to buy her old bed, Lambert asserts it is not his to sell, but belongs to his daughter. After Ned's departure, Lambert reads Nora's letter again, and wonders if she saw him on the pier.

CHAPTER IX

It is a wise Providence that blinds our eyes to what lies ahead. Nora little thought as she stood on the deck of the Larino with Don's hand on hers, that she would be twice a mother before she saw her native land again—that she was to descend into the shadow of death herself—that she was to watch fine lines etched by the ruthless hand of Care gather about Don's happy, sea-blue eyes—that she was to fight for the life of a little boy tossing with fever in far off Cape Town.

Her first son was born in England on a May night. The winter had gone well. As Carl Venable promised, Don's "Letters from Capri" were welcomed with enthusiasm by the London editor; and the same letters (supplemented by thumbnail sketches by the great Venable) found a ready market in America.

And living in Italy was inexpensive. Nora soon made a home of the tiny pink villa with its glimpse of sapphire waters and rocky hillsides, which Constance Venable had ready for their arrival.

"This is the most heavenly spot," (she wrote her father) "and I'm fast becoming a thrifty Italian housewife, or should be if I weren't compelled to stop my work every few minutes to drink in the beauties of this twin-humped camel of an island, kneeling so gently in the blue, blue waters of the Mediterranean. It's well worth the effort of climbing the million or so steps that lead to our front door (I can hear you say, 'Don't exaggerate, Nora. It's a bad habit!'), to gaze down on this wealth of flowers and foliage. Nature was in a lavish mood when she fashioned Capri. I wish you could see it, Dad. In fact, the only thing needed to make me supremely happy would be to look out some day and discover that my handsome father had overcome his prejudice against every country not flying the stars and stripes, and was climbing that rocky path, though he wouldn't have breath enough to kiss me when he reached the top . . ."

"The Venables are only five minutes walk (perhaps I should say climb!) away; and if you could look upon the seascape Ven's painting now, you'd mortgage the house to possess it. Incidentally, they have a beautiful piano on which they seem to consider it an honor for me to practice; so my fingers won't grow stiff, as I had feared they might. There are four young Venables ranging from sixteen to six—such jolly youngsters! And their mother is every bit as good a mother to me as she is to them, though she can't be fifteen years my senior . . ."

That was quite true. Nora had not counted on Constance Venable in vain. "You say it's to be in May?" the older woman questioned thoughtfully. And then: "We must take you to England. Not that bambinos don't arrive daily in Italy!" she smiled; "but my Phil was born in London and I had a most skilful doctor. The nurse was a wonder, too. I'll write at once and engage her for you, Nora. I'll arrange everything. You'll want a room in a nursing home; and I'll write the doctor. We were planning to sail for New York the first of May. I must tell Carl to put it off another month."

And no protest on the part of Leonora would make her change. "Of course I shall stay with you!" she said, almost indignantly. "Don't you know that our Alice wouldn't be here if it weren't for Don? He kept on working over her when everybody told him it was useless. Nothing you ever ask of us, Nora, will be too much."

What Don and Nora never knew, was that half the expenses incurred by the arrival of this first son of theirs, were paid by Carl Venable, who would have paid them all had it been possible to do so without arousing Don's suspicions. All the young couple ever knew was that the bills were far, far less than they'd anticipated; for Nora was very sick indeed.

Don sometimes wished he could forget that nightmare time when the firm hand of an English doctor thrust him unceremoniously from the bare, white room which sheltered Nora.

"Get outside and sit down, my dear chap," he commanded briskly. "She won't suffer any more."

He had a very English accent, that doctor, which made Don wonder if the man were quite efficient! There was a bench in the corridor and he sank down on it, very weak as to knees, wondering how long this horrible business would go on;

why the universe had to be populated in such a manner; and what for had they sent him out and let Connie Venable stay inside? And after an interval which seemed hours, there came from beyond that door a cry like nothing he had ever heard before, but Don knew it instantly for the wail of his first-born. It was then that all the remaining strength went out of him, and he wiped the sweat from his forehead and said: "Thank God it's over!" But no one came from Nora's room except a nurse. She had a blanket-wrapped bundle in her arms, and was hurrying so fast she didn't see him; but when she returned a minute later without the bundle, Don caught her skirt, and though his question wouldn't seem to come, the girl appeared to understand and told him hastily: "It's a boy. A splendid little boy, but . . ."

With that "but" he was left alone again. The door closed, though during the moment it had opened a strong and sickish scent of ether drifted out to him. It was Constance Venable who came next (after a lifetime, it seemed to Don, with that nurse's ominous "but" still ringing in his ears); and with one look into Connie's face his heart stopped beating. Literally,



"What do I care about a son."

He told Nora afterwards that he died for a minute. And then Constance sat down and took his hand. She said: "You've a son, Don—a beautiful little boy—" and he broke in harshly: "What do I care about a son? What's happened to Nora?"

Constance was still stroking his hand as he'd seen her stroke the hands of her children when she wished to calm them. She answered: "Nora will be all right, Don. I don't care what they say, she will be all right! There were complications—something no one had foreseen. Just at the last we very nearly—lost her; but she will be all right."

Then, after another aeon, the door opened. It was the English doctor—the man with the accent. He threw one significant glance at Connie and laid his hand gently on Don's shoulder.

"She needs you, old man," he said—just that—but Don knew, and Constance knew, what he was thinking; and Connie still held Don's hand when he crossed the threshold of that quiet room.

He stood there looking down on Nora, a Nora as white as the bed on which she lay—as white as marble. Her eyes were closed. Don could not see her breathe. He wondered . . . And then the doctor spoke softly: "I'd take her hand, my dear fellow, if I were you."

His voice, despite the accent which had sounded so la-de-da an hour before, was very kind. And because no one had thought to bring a chair, Don dropped to his knees beside the bed and took that white, strangely transparent hand into his own. He had forgotten the nurses, the doctors, and Constance Venable. He said (so Connie told him later), "Come back, Nora. I can't go on without you. Come back, dearest . . ."

So Nora came back, though it was all of two days before she spoke. Her first real sentence was: "Have you cabled to Father?" Her second: "What have they done to you, Don? You look five years older!" Her third: "I think his hair will wave like yours, darling."

Not until then did Don feel that she had come back to stay.

(Continued Next Week)

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