

SHINING PALACE

By
CHRISTINE WHITING PARMENTER

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WNU SERVICE

THE STORY

Leonora Lambert persists in her intention to marry Don Mason although her foster-father, James Lambert, tries to dissuade her. Leonora suspects that her half-brother, Ned, has influenced their father. Lambert offers to give Don a job for a year, saying that if the pair elope, he will disinherit the girl. Don attempts the work offered but becomes nervous and tired, declaring he feels stifled. Nora is distressed and begs her father to end the experiment. Ned tries to induce her to doubt Don. When accused of having given money to a girl whom he had helped in charity Don knocks Ned down. He and Nora elope and settle down in Maine. Lambert refuses to communicate with them, but sends the girl her clothes and \$1,000. Don and Nora go to Capri for the winter. Their son is born while they are away, Don having work on a London paper. Don is sent to Cape Town, has typhoid, and his work suffers because of ill-health and worry. They return to America. A friend gives Nora a parting gift of a Kimberly diamond. They buy an old house in Maine and remodel it. They are sent to California on an assignment for the London paper.

CHAPTER XII—In Chicago en route West, a movie theater collapses under a heavy snowfall. Don and Nora escape, but Don goes heroically to the rescue, and is carried out a broken man. Three years later, on old Martha's birthday, she reveals to Lambert Nora's remembrance over the years, and shows him her last gift, a handkerchief yellow with age and mended. She worries over what has befallen the girl, and reproaches Lambert for his stubbornness.

CHAPTER XIII

James was still deep in thought when, an hour later, his son came down from the birthday visit with old Martha. In fact, Ned found his father so noncommittal that he, too, lapsed into silence and took up a book. But he did not read. Not only had he something on his mind, but he was observing with genuine concern those lines of care and worry in the older man's familiar visage. Ten years, and troubles with a growing son had made Ned Lambert more tolerant of others. Now, coming to a decision, he asked abruptly: "Dad, do you hear from Nora these days?"

James started, because Ned seemed to have read his thoughts. "Not a line for nearly three years, son."

"You're worried?"

His father nodded.

"I can't help wondering if they're in difficulties; and tonight Martha—"

He stopped, not wishing to go further; and Ned moved to a window, looking into the dark night as if uncertain about something. It was James who spoke.

"Look here, son. I think you ought to know that when your sister went away I didn't change my will as I intended. Except for an extra two hundred thousand and the business, which goes to you, the estate is divided evenly, as it was then. There are bequests to servants, of course; and to the men who've been with us longest at the office, besides something for Nora's boys; but the bulk of the property goes to you and—and your sister. When she left home I was too upset to think about such things. Later I let the matter drift. Now—well, if you feel that it's unjust to you and yours—"

"Why should I?" Ned turned—sat down beside his father on theavenport. "It's your money, Dad. Do as you please with it. I've got enough of my own—enough to have pretty nearly ruined my own boy, as you know. We'll both be happier, you and I, if we feel that Nora is provided for."

"You mean that?" questioned James, a trifle puzzled.

Ned smiled.

"Of course I mean it! Why in the world shouldn't I? I'll admit that I used to be jealous of Nora when I was a kid; and after I understood about things I was sometimes cad enough to feel ashamed of her. I think she knew it, and despised me a little. But I realize now that you seemed every bit as near to her as you did to me, and I shouldn't want you to hurt her in any way. Where was she, Father, when you last heard?"

James cleared his throat, not in anger as he used to do in the old days, but because of a sudden rush of feeling. Ned's words had brought him immeasurable relief.

"They were in Chicago, on their way West. Her husband was planning to write a series of articles like those he did about South Africa. You read 'em, didn't you?"

Ned nodded, admitting: "They were darned good. I remember sitting up late to finish one. But I've never seen any of them since, Dad. Have you?"

"Not one." The old man's eyes grew vaguely troubled. "I watched for them too. Nora wrote as if there were no uncertainty about their publication—it was an assignment, I believe. She seemed happy; but her letter must have been two weeks old before I saw it. I was down with pneumonia just then, and all my personal mail was laid aside until I could attend to it myself. She wrote from a boarding house, I think, not a hotel. They were leaving in a day or two, as soon as Don attended to some business and the city got dug out of a blizzard."

Ned raised his head, quickly, as if reminded of something.

"You say this was within three years? Are you absolutely sure, Dad?"

"Sure? Am I likely to forget that wretched sickness? It was three years next month when the letter came, Ned; and since then nothing but silence. Such a thing never happened before. I didn't answer Nora's letters, but she's always written. Sometimes regularly, sometimes with several months between. I tried to persuade myself that their plans changed suddenly, especially when Don's articles failed to appear. I thought they might have gone to some out-of-the-way country and stayed there. I suppose I was just trying to 'kid myself,' as the boys say. I even tried to believe that since they were apparently successful she had forgotten me—given me up as a bad job—but that's not—Nora. I've been very unhappy about her, Ned. Very troubled. And tonight something that Martha said has made me more so."

James glanced up, conscious that his son was inattentive. Ned said, thoughtfully: "Do you remember a terrible catastrophe in Chicago, when the roof of a theater collapsed under a weight of snow?"

His father was suddenly erect.

"You don't mean—"

"I don't mean that anything happened to Nora," broke in Ned. "The thing occurred, as I remember now, when you were too sick to see the papers. I only glanced at the headlines myself. I loathe such details. But Corinne revels in 'em, you know. She even read part of the story aloud at the table—how a fellow who was in the audience and got out safely, went back into the doomed place and spent hours under a collapsing balcony trying to rescue a child who was pinned beneath the wreckage. It was very luridly told. The reporter claimed to have been an eye witness. Said the man refused to quit even when warned. He saved the child, I believe, but failed to get out himself. And his name was Mason. He was caught under the timbers."

"Killed?"

"No; but I judged from what the paper said that he'd better have been. If it were Don—"

James turned on his son angrily. "Why wasn't I told of this?" his voice softening: "But Ma—"

Why should you think it was Nora's husband?"

"Only because the paper said Dan Mason—not Don, you understand, but so near that a misprint might have been possible. I didn't speak of it because you were so sick just then. I couldn't worry you, Dad;

though I see now that I should have investigated the matter myself. My only excuse is that it was the very time when Junior got into that scrape at college, and Corinne was—well, she felt it was all my fault. She thought I was too strict—didn't understand the boy at all—said he forged that check because I didn't give him enough allowance and—Oh, I was snowed under! I went through things I never told you, and never will. My home very nearly went on the rocks, Dad; though that's over now, thank God! But it put everything else out of my mind at the time—the awful worry of it. And later, when I remembered, I supposed of course that if Nora were in real want she would have appealed to you."

"Oh, no she wouldn't!" The bitterness in James Lambert's voice was toward himself. "I lost my temper one day and warned her not to. And Nora's got pluck. Always did have. And character. Did I ever tell you . . ."

It was then that Ned heard the story of courageous little Nora, sitting for hours beside the body of her mother, waiting for the father she had never seen to take her "home." He was plainly touched. "Yes, she's got character," he admitted. "She showed it when she gave up a fortune (or thought she did) because she loved that fellow and knew he needed her. There've been times these last few years, Dad, when I've felt responsible for the whole racket. If Don Mason hadn't knocked me down that day in the office, the break between you and Leonora might never have come about."

James, staring into the fire, said nothing because there was no denying this aspect of the case; and after a silence Ned went on:

"You see, I thought that story he told me was just bunk. I supposed he was trying to pull the wool over my eyes; and I as much as told him he lied. I couldn't imagine (can't now, for that matter) how any sane man could be so easy as to hand over a roll of bills to a girl he'd never seen before, without



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making some sort of investigation. But I suppose it takes all kinds of people to make a world; and my own kids, now they're old enough to think about it, tell me I haven't any imagination. And if Don wasn't lying (and I doubt now that he was), you can hardly blame him for seeing red, can you?"

"He didn't lie," said James, "but the fellow had no business to lose his temper to—that extent," he added hastily, remembering occasions when his own temper had exploded too violently for the comfort of those concerned.

Surmising his father's thought, Ned smiled a little; and then went on: "Well, that's ancient history now; and since then other things have hurt me so much more that that old experience doesn't seem worth remembering—certainly not

worth bearing grudges for. What troubles me is that I've gone on all these years without trying to bring you and Nora together. And I might have. You can't deny that, Dad. I've known you were missing her; but I've never lifted a finger to bring her back. Years ago Martha told me how dead the whole house seemed without her. She hinted that I ought to talk with you about it; but somehow I couldn't. It was the night I made the mistake of trying to buy Nora's four-poster! Do you remember?"

James looked up, a pathetic smile in his worried eyes.

"Did I hurt your feelings, son?" "Not so they stayed hurt. You never have, Dad. It's because you and I have always been so close and understood each other, that the gap between my boy and me has seemed so tragic. Even the girls (whom I sometimes feared I was spoiling) tell me I never see their side—that I'm unsympathetic. I suppose I am, in a way. I was unsympathetic to Nora, always; though it took a number of hard knocks to open my eyes to the fact."

James murmured, as if his mind had wandered a little from what Ned was saying: "If—if I could only know where she is now!"

"I know where she was six weeks ago," was the amazing rejoinder.

"You do!" James Lambert's voice sounded belligerent.

"I heard not half an hour before I started over," Ned told him. "Corinne was at a tea this afternoon and gave one of the other women a lift home—Mrs. Ed Whitney, whose niece was in school with Nora, you'll remember. She and some friends were on a motor trip through Maine a while ago. They stopped somewhere for lunch and couldn't get away for several hours—some trouble with their car—and to pass the time they wandered into the hotel ball room to watch a dancing class—children of the summer population, I suppose. And Nora was at

"She was!"

Ned nodded.

"Mrs. Whitney didn't recognize her at first. Said she looked a good deal older, and—and pretty rocky. She was going to speak, but on second thoughts decided it would be kinder not to. But she made some inquiries of the hotel people who were natives of the place. They said that Nora was trying to support her family. That she played the organ at church, and gave music lessons, and made cakes to sell during the summer season; and—"

Ned hesitated, as if uncertain whether to finish, "and—well they said, Father, that she was living in an old barn or garage or something, down near the water."

James stared at him.

"My Nora living in a barn?"

"That's what Mrs. Whitney said; but she's one who makes the most of a good story, Dad, so don't let that worry you. What riled me was that she told Corinne she thought we ought to do something about it. She implied, as politely as possible, that we'd treated Nora outrageously. Corinne was so mad she didn't have sense enough to ask the name of the town; but I'll call Mrs. Whitney on the telephone and find out. Even Corinne thinks that something should be done—that is" (a cynical smile curved Ned's lips) "she's afraid there'll be talk unless we do it!"

For a moment or two James Lambert did not respond. Then he arose and unlocked a beautiful cabinet of Chinese lacquer. As the doors swung open Ned saw that it contained letters—neat piles of letters held together with elastic bands, and a somewhat surprising pair of silver slippers, tarnished now, from being laid away. "Nora's!" he thought; and then his father turned, extending the postal written so long ago.

(Continued Next Week)

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