

# In the MIRROR

By ELIZABETH JORDAN  
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WNU Service

tion. He liked and approved of his new brother-in-law. The memory of his own New York triumph was still fresh enough to give him a thrill. He was devoted to his partners, and proud of his association with them and their work. But most of all, and this he himself would loyally have denied, deep in his heart he was exulting fiercely over his coming freedom.

Laurie loved his sister, but he was weary of the leading strings. Henceforth he could live his own life. It should be a life worth while, on that he had decided, and 't should continue free from the vices of gambling and drinking, of which he was sure he had cured himself in the past year. He had come into a full realization of the folly of these and of the glory of the work one loves. He hadn't the least notion what he was going to do with his independence, but a boundless delight filled him in the prospect of it. Whatever life held he was convinced would be good. Looking down from his slender height on the plump Epstein and the stocky Bangs, he smiled into the sober face of each, and under the influence of that smile their momentary solemnity fell from them like dropped veils.

"Come and see Barbara," Laurie buoyantly suggested. "She wants to say good-by to you, and to tell you how to tuck me into my crib every night. She's going to slip away pretty soon, you know. Bob and I have got her off in an alcove to get a few minutes' rest."

He led them to this haven, of which only fifty or sixty other guests seemed aware, for the room was but comfortably filled. They found Barbara sitting in a high-backed Spanish chair, against which, in her bridal array and

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her extraordinary beauty, she made a picture that unaccountably deepened the new depression in Rodney's soul. On her train by the side of the chair, the infant Samuel slumbered in peace, like an exhausted puppy.

Warren, hovering near his wife, shook hands with the newcomers and responded to their congratulations. Then, slipping his arm through Laurie's, he drew him across the room to where his sister, Mrs. Ordway, was languidly talking to several of the bride's old friends. He knew that Barbara wanted a final and serious word with her brother's partners. Laurie knew it, too, and winked at the pair like an impish child as he permitted himself to be led away.

Young Mrs. Warren, whose title was still so new that she looked startled when they addressed her by it, greeted them warmly and indicated the sleeping Samuel with an apologetic smile.

"His mother is lost somewhere in the crowd," she explained. "He has had two glasses of milk, four fat cakes and three plates of ice cream; and he's either asleep or unconscious, I'm not sure which." Her manner sobered. "I'm so glad to have a moment with you two," she said gently. "You know what I want to talk about."

"We can guess it," Bangs smiled at her with the odd wistfulness his smile always took on when he spoke to Barbara. To Bangs, Barbara had become a temple at whose portal he removed his earth-stained shoes. "You want us to look after Laurie," he added quietly. "Well, you bet we're going to do it."

She smiled again, this time the rare smile that warmed her face like a light from within.

"Then I shall go away happy," she told them. "And there's nothing more to be said; for of course you both understand that I don't distrust Laurie. How could I, after he has been so wonderful all this year. It's only—" she hesitated—"I suppose it's life I'm afraid of," she confessed. "I never used to be. But—well, I learned in New York how helpless we are, sometimes."

Rodney's nod was understanding.

"I know," he robustly agreed. "But it's going to be absolutely all right. Be sure of that."

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"We'll let it go at that," she said, and extended a hand to each man. "Good-by. I won't try to thank you. But—God bless you both!"

Under the influence of this final benediction, Epstein waddled over to the corner where Warren, very pale, and Louise Ordway, very much bored, stood surrounded by a group that included Sonya Orleaneff. Firmly detaching the bridegroom from this congenial assemblage, Epstein led him to one side.

"Warren," he said solemnly, "I got to congratulate you all over again. You got von woman in a million—No, you got von woman in eighty million!"

Warren laughed, rather shakily. Over the heads of the crowd his eyes caught his wife's and held them for an instant.

"Make it a million million," he suggested joyously, and led Epstein to the supper room.

Laurie was there with Bangs and a group of friends, who, having patronized young Devon a year ago, were endeavoring to wipe out the memory of this indiscretion by an excess of friendly attention.

"No," Warren and Epstein heard him say to Mrs. Lytton and Mrs. Renway, "there's nothing I'd like better than to come, thank you. But I'm going back to New York tomorrow. You see," he added, "this business of marrying off a sister, and attending to all the details and seeing that she conducts herself properly as long as she's in my care, is a bit of a strain. I've got to get back to town and recuperate."

"I suppose you will rest your mind by writing another play?" gushed Mrs. Renway.

Laurie shook his black head.

"Not a bit of it!" he asserted. "Don't even suggest such a thing before Epstein, there. It sounds abhorrently like work."

Mrs. Renway's curiosity had a brief and losing struggle with her good breeding.

"Then what are you going to do?" she demanded coquettishly.

The young man pondered, as if considering the question for the first time.

"Well," he said at last, "between you and me, I'm going in for adventure. I intend to devote the next four months to discovering how much excitement a worthy youth can crowd into his life if he makes a business of going after the gay bird of adventure, and finding it, and putting salt on its tail!"

The puzzled countenance of Mrs. Renway cleared.

"Oh, I see," she said brightly, "you're joking."

Laurie smiled and turned to greet a late guest who had come up behind him. In the little group that had overheard him three pairs of eyes met in startled glances.

"Humph!" said Warren. "Hear that?"

"Nice prospect for us!" muttered Rodney Bangs.

Jacob Epstein looked harassed. A little later he joined the throng in the main hall, and watched the showers of rice fall harmlessly from the polished sides of Barbara's limousine as the bride and groom were whirled away from the brilliant entrance of Devon house.

"She's gone," he said to Bangs as the two men turned and re-entered the still crowded yet suddenly empty house. And he added solemnly, "Believe me, Bangs, on that job she's left us you an' me ve got our hands full!"

healthy pink of his youthful cheeks had deepened to an unbecoming flush. His wide, engaging grin, the grin of a friendly bulldog, was lacking, and his lips were set tight.

Sitting on a low chair in the dressing room of the bachelor apartment he and Lawrence Devon occupied together, Rodney drew on a shoe and stamped his foot down into it with an emphasis that shook the floor. Devon, fastening his tie before the full-length mirror set in the door leading to their common bathroom, started at the sound, like a high-strung prima donna. This was one of Laurie's temperamental mornings.

"What the devil's the matter with you, Bangs?" he demanded, but without ill humor. "Can't you get on a shoe without imitating the recoil of a seventy-five centimeter gun?"

Bangs grunted, drew on the other shoe, and drove his foot into it with increased energy. Laurie looked at him, and this time there was a spark in his black eyes. Very quietly he turned, crossed the small room, and, planting himself in front of his chum, resentfully stared down at the dynamic youth.

"What's the idea?" he demanded. "Are you deliberately trying to be annoying?"

Rodney did not raise his head. His fingers were busy with a complicated knot.

"Oh, shut up!" he muttered.

Laurie, his hands in his pockets, remained where he was. Under his continued inspection the fingers of Bangs grew clumsy. He fumbled with the knot, and, having unfastened it, propped to the utmost the process of lacing his shoes. He knew what must come as soon as he settled back in his chair. It had been coming for days. He was in for an unpleasant ten minutes. But the situation was one he had deliberately created as the only possible way of bringing about a serious talk with his friend. Now that it was here he was anxious to make the most of it. With head bent and thoughts busy he played for time.

At last, the shoes laced and his campaign mapped out, he sat up and met Laurie's eyes. Their expression of antagonism, temporary though he knew it to be, hurt him. Devon, when he had his own way, and he usually had it, was a singularly sweet-tempered chap. Never before, throughout their year of close association, had he looked at Bangs like that. Rodney knew that he deserved the look. For days past he had deliberately subjected his companion to a series of annoyances, small but intensely irritating.

"Well?" demanded Laurie. "What's the answer?"

"What answer?" Rodney was in the position of a small boy challenged to combat in cold blood. He was experiencing some difficulty in working himself up to the necessary heat for an engagement. But Laurie's next words helped him out.

"You've been making a d-d nuisance of yourself for the last week," he said deliberately. "I want to know why."

Bangs squared his stocky shoulders and rose to his feet. His brown eyes were below the level of his chum's black ones, but the two glances met sharply and a flash passed between them. Under the force of his rising excitement the voice of Rodney shook.

"The reason I've been a d-d nuisance," he said curtly, "is because you've been acting like an infernal fool, and I'm sick of it."

Laurie's lips tightened, but the other rushed on without giving him a chance to reply. The moment was his. He must crowd into it all he had not dared to say before and might not be given a chance to say again.

"Oh, I know what you'll say," he cried. "It's none of my business, and you're your own master, and all that sort of rot. And I know you're not drinking, and God knows I'm not as enough to take on any high moral tone and try to preach to you, whatever you do. What gets my goat, Devon, and the only thing I'm worrying about, is this infernal waste of your time and mine."

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