

Rapture Beyond

by KATHARINE NEWLIN BURT

FIFTH INSTALLMENT

Synopsis
 Jocelyn Harlowe, raised in a French convent, at the age of eighteen joins her mother, Marcelle, in New York. Worried about her safety, because she is unfamiliar with the modern world and has developed into a beautiful woman, her mother's first wish is to get her safely married. Attending her first ball, Jocelyn meets Felix Kent, rich, handsome and nineteen years older than herself. Encouraged by her mother, she and Felix quickly become engaged. Alone in her apartment one night, a cripple, Nick Sandal, enters by the fire-escape, confides in her that he is her father and that her real name is Lynda Sandal. Uncertain about whether she wants to get married so quickly, Jocelyn becomes irritable with Felix and one night decides to go to talk things over with her mysterious father. As Lynda Sandal she goes to his house, climbs three flights of stairs and enters a room where he is sitting with several men in the midst of a card game. Later, when both Felix and her mother are away, Jocelyn returns to have a second visit with her father.

"There's only one beside this, two if you count my bath. By all means explore. Excuse me if I don't play courier. I've got some figures to read over, and you'll find me at leisure for daughterly confidences when you return. Lord, Lynda! If you knew how odd it feels to be the father of a tall lovely thing like you."

Lynda paused at the closed inner door and smiled.

"Do you really think I'm lovely?"

"I seem to. I'd like to see you in your ballgown with your smooth hair and your pearls. Were they real pearls, Lynda?"

"No, I think they were just cheap pearls that went with the costume. Mother bought it for me."

The bedroom, which contained one full-sized bed and one narrow cot against the wall, was the most untidy and unattractive apartment Lynda had ever been allowed to enter. Its one dirty window looked out on a blackness of sooty yards and passageways. On Nick's dressing table there were no photographs, no knick-knacks; there were no pictures on his walls. The one shallow closet held two threadbare suits and some battered-looking shoes. In his drawers the underwear shocked Lynda. Tattered. She would bring her sewing kit and mend his clothes! On top of a tall chest of drawers, however, a set of clean cheap toilet articles had been neatly arranged and there was a great picture of a dog, one of those magnificent canine heads which, loyal, brave, unselfconscious, have a nobility greater than humanity's. A setter, listening, looking, the eyes deep with devotion, with a sort of ecstasy.

"Tell me about your dog, Father," was the girl's first question when after a very brief inspection she came back into the outer room. "He's such a beauty."

"It isn't my dog. It's Jock Ayleward's. The animal's dead now, I imagine. He was Jock's best before Jock met with other beasts less beautiful. Jock keeps a sort of corner here with me."

"It's not his home, then?"

"Bless the child! Home?" He clucked his tongue a dozen times, his eyes laughing at her. "No. This is not his home. Look like a home to you? Jock is what you might call a bird of passage."

"A salesman?" suggested Lynda.

Nick chuckled. "Well, yes. You might call it that. He's a sort of hunter, too. Tonight he's after big game—against my express advice. If I'm touchy tonight, Lynda, that's the reason."

"When will you be married?"

"That is one of the things I must talk to you about, Father. They—they are planning an earlier date for my wedding, Easter week."

Nick whistled. "So soon! Well, why not have it over? The sooner it's over the sooner to weep."

"Oh, Father. I don't want to weep!"

She looked at him so humbly and so wistfully that he put a hand across her eyes.

"Tell me then just this: Shall I like being married, Father?"

"I wish you'd call me Nick."

"Oh, wouldn't that be horribly disrespectful?"

"The last thing I crave, O daughter of mine old age, is respect."

"Then—Nick... oh, please do answer me quickly, someone is coming up the stairs."

Nick listened, alert, rigid.

"Father, Nick, please. Before Jock Ayleward comes."

"How did you know his step, young witch?"

"I don't know. It sounds like him. Nick, shall I like being married?"

"No. Of course not, you little simpleton."

The door was opened with a sort of quiet violence and Ayleward, faultlessly attired in even-

ing dress came in, shut the door and flung a fierce arm about Sandal's shoulders.

"There, you old belly-acher, what do you say? Next time will you trust a born card-hander?"

As he spoke he was pulling from his trousers pockets great handfuls of paper money which he shook before Nick's eyes and then tossed up in the air so that they fell about the room like dead leaves.

"Jock, you fool. Here's Lynda!" Ayleward turned upon Nick's visitor in startled grim fixation. He bowed and began to collect his earnings; for surely they must be, thought Lynda, some sort of earnings from his salesmanship! When he had them bundled together he added to them what was left in his clothing and put the whole great mass into a drawer which he locked. Then he turned to go.

"You stop here tonight, Jock," Nick commanded but with an undertone of pleading. "Lynda can't put up with you. Good for you to talk to a real gentleman once in a blue moon."

Obediently but with a sullen air he sat down at a distance from the two Sandals near the central table and taking up the pack of cards that lay there began to shuffle absent-mindedly but with a skill which widened Lynda's gaze.

"Oh, I wish I could do that!"

"Come over here and I'll teach you," he said with impersonal brusquerie, like a big schoolboy to a small one.

Jock pulled up his coat sleeves and turned his long and limber hands about—artist's hands, thought Lynda, but stronger, maybe. He went through a dazzling series of wizardry in which the cards seemed to shift and dance and climb about the room at his will.

"Take her home, will you, Jock," said Nick suddenly. "I'm done and she ought to be getting back to where she seems to belong."

Lynda's laughter went away. Her face turned pale and blank.

"Oh, Fath—oh, Nick—"

"Better do what he tells you, Miss Sandal. He's a bad man to disobey. I'll tell you! Come on. I'll tumble you into a taxi at the corner. So long, Nick. I know you want to hear the dope. Don't make off with the swag while I'm out, will you? I'll cut right back."

But it was nearly morning when he came back to furious prowling Nick.

Ayleward came in at the door then, humming a dance air with a strange dazed wistful look on his young face.

Halfway down that first flight, Jock on her heels ready to put her into a taxi, Lynda Sandal had abruptly stopped. So abruptly that the young man following was forced to leap up a step.

"What's the matter? Forget something?" asked Ayleward. His voice was quite casual.

She turned with the difficulty of a nightmare-will and raised her eyes to him.

"I know," said Jock. "You

think he turned you out. Poor kid! You mustn't let Nick hurt you, Miss Sandal. The times I've been shown the door! He's a great man, is Nick, but he can be rough. Nick can do what he likes with me. I'm his. I'd be dead now if it hadn't been for Nick."

She ran before him down the stairs. Not until they were on the pavement did he come up to her. Then she stopped again and gripped his arm. "I must talk to you. You must tell me about Nick."

"All right. I'll take you somewhere."

Their taxi moved toward some address he gave the driver.

"Do you like to dance," asked Ayleward.

"Yes. But I'm not dressed for a restaurant and my mother—"

She was going to say, "has never let me go" but checked herself with a hysterical impulse toward laughter. What did that mother on her knees before an altar know of Lynda Sandal, the adventures?

"You're dressed for the place I'm taking you to, only I will say you're a bit stager."

"I—I thought it was all right."

"So it is. Pretty cute get-up. You're on the stage anyway, aren't you?"

"Why n-no, Mr. Ayleward."

"You talk like an actress somehow. You 'r's' or something. I like it awfully."

She stiffened. "I am going with you," she said with her princess air, "because I want to learn something about my father. You understand that, don't you, Mr. Ayleward? It is not desire for your companionship."

"Oh, I see. I hadn't really analyzed the situation. All right. Here we are, Miss Sandal."

He helped her out and gave a number or a name, some open sesame at a grilled door under a flight of marble steps. Lynda found herself seated on a bench against a wall, Jock opposite her across a bare small narrow table. It held one shaded light. Jock ordered supper food. Mechanical music was playing. The floor was filled with dancers. Others drank and ate.

Lynda drank the black coffee

Jock had ordered for her. Jock was watching the dancers.

"I ought not to let you do this for me," Lynda said suddenly. "I ought not to let you. I mean, give me a good time. That wasn't what I meant to do. You see of course I don't know you well and may change my mind but it seems only fair to tell you that—that—" her cheeks were hot with the effort of such a statement, "that I don't really like you at all yet, Mr. Ayleward."

"That's O. K. with me," he grinned, glancing at her and away.

"I did not suppose it would matter to you but I felt that I ought to be honest with you. And we shall probably be running into each other now and then. Women usually like you, I understand."

"You understand? Who told you that tale?"

"Nick did. Want to dance?"

"But I came here to ask you—"

"Want to dance?"

She rose. He took her into his arms so tightly that she could hardly breathe.

"Don't! I can't dance... that way—please."

"Oh, I forgot. Let me see. Sure. This is the way, isn't it?" And he moved with her out on the floor, dancing with the ease, the pride and the smoothness of a gentleman. And he danced beautifully.

"Where did you pick it up?" he asked her.

"A Frenchwoman came to the convent to teach me. The nuns did not really approve but my mother—they had orders."

"You mean you were educated in a French convent?"

"Yes." She was annoyed. It was no part of her intention to tell anything of her own life as Jocelyn Harlowe to this young man.

"Aren't there some very queer sort of people here tonight?" asked Lynda.

"Are there? I hadn't noticed it."

"Look now, that big man with a white scar, dancing with the woman in—in—shoulder straps."

"In and out of 'em, eh? Well, yes, you might perhaps call him queer. He's Toni Padrona. Just out."

"Of the hospital?"

"From up the river. He got off with two years."

"Oh, I can't stay here, Mr. Ayleward. I can't stay in a room with—criminals!"

"Hullo!" said Jock. "Go easy. If Mr. Padrona heard you he might resent it."

He gave her a queer long glance and took her back to the table silently. He called for his check. Lynda was distressed.

"I haven't asked you, you've told me nothing about Nick."

"Maybe you'd better leave it to him. He would like to tell you himself perhaps. It seems a queer question but I gather you are a queer family—how long have you known your father?"

"Only since one night a few weeks ago."

"You live here in New York alone?"

"No. With my mother."

Jock's eyes opened. "You mean Nick's got a wife here in New York?"

"They have been divorced for very long. I do not know their history."

"Nor do I, Miss Sandal, believe me. I did not even know his wife was living nor, until I met you there that night, that he had any child."

"You won't dance just once more?"

Lynda was tempted. "If you will promise not to let me touch that man."

"Not touch the jailbird, eh?"

(Continued Next Week)

Scotch Thrift
 Two Scotchmen had planned a hike into the country, and had agreed to meet at a certain place at five in the morning. Only one of them owned an alarm-clock, but he finally hit on a solution of rousing the other.

"Mac," he said, "when the clock goes off, I'll get up and ring you on a public telephone. But be sure and don't answer it; so I can get my nickel back."

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