

# Rapture Beyond

by KATHARINE NEWLIN BURT

**EIGHTH INSTALLMENT**

**Synopsis**

Jocelyn Harlowe, raised in a French convent, at the age of eighteen joins her mother, Marcella, 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 goes to talk things over with her mysterious father. There she meets Jock Ayleward, a gambler, who gradually interests her more and more. When she mentions the name Felix Kent in front of him he acts greatly shocked but says nothing. One night Jock comes to her home and begins to tell his story of how he was a mining engineer, worked under Kent and was sent to jail for making what was adjudged a false affidavit upon which worthless stock was sold to his townspeople.

little—as would secure from any engineer a good report."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that Kent paid Talley one million dollars for a worthless mine, received two million dollars from the stockholders for the same mine, cleared a profit of one million, made me the scapegoat and got off clear."

Jocelyn found that she was on her feet. Until that instant she had not realized how important that man Felix Kent was in her life, how solidly he had laid hold of her interest, her loyalty. She must defend him.

"I understand that you would naturally be tempted to find some such explanation for your own terrible mistake. I understand that you would almost inevitably be driven to making it. But since I know Mr. Kent very well, I find the whole story—as you tell it—perfectly preposterous."

Jock was looking at her carefully and coolly. He bowed.

"I didn't suppose you would believe me. I merely wanted to explain to you my hatred of Felix Kent. I hoped that it might damage him with you."

"Your hatred belongs elsewhere, Mr. Ayleward; and it is you that have been damaged in my eyes. I should think that rather than spend your strength in hatred you would try to make a more—a more honorable fresh start. A gambler is not much better than a thief."

"You are in love with Felix Kent?" he asked her quietly.

"You are asking me—"

"For the hundredth time, I beg your pardon, Miss Sandal. I will say goodnight. Thank you for

the music and for your patience in listening to my—fairytale. May I take a message to your father?"

Jocelyn said, "What is his new address?" Their words seemed to be spoken above a sort of tumult, as of hurrying water... a tumult that belonged to some other sense than hearing. A tumult of their soul.

Jock handed her a slip of paper. "Here it is. With the telephone number. You'll come to see him?"

"Yes."

Marcella was the first of Jocelyn's two guardians to return. She let herself in quietly with her own latchkey to find the large room beautifully filled with flowers by Kent's constant orders and with the sloping light of a warm April sun. Marcella went straight over to her shrine and shut herself in.

While she was kneeling there she heard Jocelyn come in from the other end of the apartment. Before Marcella revealed her own presence she partly opened the leather doors, drew back her curtain and for a long instant observed her daughter unaware.

The girl stood near a vase of red roses and bent above them pale and wistful face. With one of her fingers she doubtfully caressed the flowers. It seemed to Marcella that this child was older, thinner and more vexed with thought.

What had the girl been thinking of during the past two weeks to make her look like this? Perhaps it had been an error to leave her so alone with her half-scared, half-ecstatic thoughts. Marcella came out quickly as though to remedy her mistake.

Jocelyn caught at her breath, cried out a stifled word, turned, and in a tremor of relief ran to her mother.

"Oh, I didn't hear you come in. Oh, Mother, I'm so glad. Cousin Sara left me this morning."

"I know. It was the day and the time of day when I had expected her to leave you. I see no reason for hysteria, darling. I am glad to see you. Is Felix back?"

Jocelyn's warmth fell back upon her own stormy soul like a wave from a rock.

"He will be back tonight. I had a message."

"His flowers are beautiful."

"Yes. And, Mother, he sent me this." Jocelyn touched a band of emeralds at her throat.

Marcella at that came closer and examined the jewels. She too passed a finger across their splendor. She looked at them for a long minute. Jocelyn saw that a flush crossed her face.

She must have some painful or some happy association with emeralds, the girl thought.

"Excellent taste, Felix has. It's most becoming to your skin and eyes," said Marcella evenly. "Now I will go in and change. Tell Mary to serve us tea. I want to see your clothes. Is everything ready?"

"I will talk to you about that when you come back," Jocelyn said quietly.

Marcella turned at the door, holding it half-open to look at this quiet speaker.

But when she came back in a trailing tea gown of gray silk Jocelyn waited on her with such daughterly sweetness, poured and served her tea with such lowly docile hands and sat so meekly in the windowseat thereafter, that the tyrant's suspicion was reassured.

"Did you like Cousin Sara, Jocelyn?"

She's rather a darling. But hard to know. She is so deaf and so fearfully busy. I never knew that any one could be so excited over clothes."

"You aren't excited about your trousseau?"

"I love pretty clothes. I have a red dress that you will love to see me in." She added with a slow drag to her words, strange, startling to her mother's ear. "That is, if you can love me in anything."

"You are reproaching me, Jocelyn?"

"I don't think so. But you did tell me not to look to you for warmth of feeling."

"I love you, my dear. Your husband will love you more warmly, is quite natural and right. But I am, after all, your mother." Marcella held out her two long hands and her daughter fell at once on her knees, drew them to her and hid her face upon them.

"Oh, please love me. Warmly. A lot. And, Mother, don't let Felix marry me so soon. I want—before we are married," her eyes came up, flaming, wet, magnificent, "I want before we are married—to love his kisses."

"He is very kind and he is the first man to love me. That means so much in my life. It moves me deeply to be loved by a man. And he is strong and handsome. I like his strength and his hardness and his gentleness to me. He is always so clean and wears such nice clothes. But, Mother, I do not understand why it is that when he kisses me—really kisses me—I have this horror of him."

Marcella spoke with authority, in an even voice. "Why can't you trust me, Jocelyn? I have told you already that this horror as you insist so absurdly, so child-

ishly, so ignorantly in calling it is perfectly natural, that it will some day explain, translate itself. If you are fond of Felix, admire him, trust him, like his touch, that is all you need to feel. But your reaction is, I am perfectly certain, the right one."

"And have you ever felt—that a lover's kiss might be a sort of—of ecstasy?"

Marcella stood up with abruptness. Her face was flushed.

The telephone rang; a question from the dressmaker. While Jocelyn was answering it Marcella, glad to escape those eyes, went in to dress for dinner. She would see Felix alone, talk to him, warn him.

Marcella had her opportunity that same evening to diagnose for Kent's benefit the state of mind of his betrothed. Felix came in while they were at dessert and Marcella asked Jocelyn to leave them alone over their coffee afterward.

Marcella explained her uneasiness to Felix Kent. The man's fair regular face flushed first, then clouded.

"You mean she wants to put me off, to delay the marriage?"

"You must remember, Felix, that it is you and I who have tried to hasten matters. She never disputed our original date, you know. It was a mistake, I think now, to press any change, to hurry her. It is difficult for you, and even for me, to understand the mind or the moods of a young girl, convent bred and entirely innocent of all emotional experience, even of the warm intimacies of family life."

"Jocelyn," Felix interrupted, "is not cold."

"Far from it. For that very reason love is more difficult for her. She feels, she will feel intensely. But it is not a facile nature. It will not be easy for her to express this intensity. It will not be easy for her to let go."

"You are probably right," Felix concluded. "But my instinct is to smash through, to break down that conventional barrier of her will against mine."

"You would lose her."

"Perhaps. But I like—" Felix

pondered cloudily, "sometimes I like to take chances, you know. There's something of the gambler in me."

Marcella opened her eyes upon him suddenly in a fashion that fairly frightened him.

"If you were a gambler, Felix, if I thought you were a gambler, you should not have her—not unless you killed me first."

The cold gray woman had spoken as though fire were at her heart and Felix came to his feet. "My dear Mrs. Harlowe, I am not a gambler in any evil or literal sense. We are all gamblers in one way or another."

In a mood of calm, of almost cold self-possession, Jocelyn went two or three evenings later to see her father for farewell. Oh, she would see him again and often certainly. She would tell her secret to Felix; one does not keep secrets from one's husband; and get his help and sympathy for Nick. This visit would be the last one she would make in secret.

She had freed herself, it is to be seen, of any sentimentality toward Jock Ayleward, even of that sentimentality of an over-emphasized dislike. She had freed herself too from sentimentality toward Nick; but not of her affection. She would carry him away from Jock, from the degradation and obscurity of this association, from the misery of his present humiliating circumstance.

In this mood of fiery deliverance did Jocelyn Harlowe in one of her own gowns—for Lynda Sandal had been condemned to death—approach her father's new abiding place.

The respectable quarters gave a first turn of the screw to Jocelyn's imperturbability. They were to her taste so pitifully second-rate, so much less endurable than the shabby and more adventurous setting in which she had found Nick before; a drearily clean lodging, the second floor of what once had been a private house downtown and far over on the west side.

Nick was obviously ill at ease in its stiff ugliness but also just as obviously proud to receive her in a room of respectable clean-

liness, newness and unsullied past. There was no sign of Ayleward's presence.

She had removed her hat and coat and Nick was staring at her. Instead of answering her question he scowled. "So you are Miss Jocelyn Harlowe tonight, are you?"

"No," said Jocelyn quickly, scenting trouble in the air, "although you once said you would like to see me again with sleek hair and in an evening dress. But to you I am always Lynda Sandal."

"I suppose you are. You would hardly, except by accident, expose Miss Harlowe to contamination. Isn't that it? I see you don't like the new apartment much better than you did the old one. I'm afraid, my dear, that living up to you is just a stretch beyond us."

"Nick! I think this beautiful

and much, much pleasanter. And nearer for me, too. May I see your other rooms?"

Bent into the likeness of her first fearful glimpse of him, he hobbled through double doors into a large bedroom and showed her a bath and a dressing-room beyond.

"Are you well again? Jock told me you'd been sick with pain and fever."

"I'm well. Come back and sit down and ask me about my symptoms and my finances. Isn't that what the Lady Bountiful does when she visits the poor?"

"Father! You have no right to say such a cruel thing to me."

(Continued Next Week)

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