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Phone 438

Orchid

THIS HAS HAPPENED

Ashtoreth Aash and Hollis Hart were married the other day in Boston. A quiet little wedding, in the office of Mr. Harvey Higginbottom, an attorney who is also justice of the peace.

Ashtoreth wore a black crepe satin, six months old, a small velvet hat, and a pointed fox scarf. The scarf was a gift from the groom (he hasn't had time yet to buy a real gift. Only a few pearls—earrings, a necklace, and an enormous ring).

Mr. Hart is a multi-millionaire, and deeply in love with his beautiful wife. Before their marriage, she was a stenographer in his employ, who played her cards well, and couldn't help being exultant.

They are sailing for Paris on the Isle de France, leaving Ashtoreth's adoring mother, in the flat in Boston, with Sadie Morton to keep her company. Sadie, a little exciting clerk, brittle but not so dumb, had contemplated blackmailing Mr. Hart. Sadie isn't really bad. Just scheming. Matzie can manage her all right, though. Matzie, with her heart of gold, and her big jovial soul.

Ashtoreth, by the way, is 23. And her worshiping husband must be nearly 50 old enough to grab rate, to be her father. Before she met him, Ashtoreth was more or less in love with Monty English, a young radio salesman, poor as a church mouse, but engaging.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY CHAPTER XII

"Star bright, star light—first star I've seen tonight."

I wish I may, I wish I might—have the wish that I wish tonight."

Ashtoreth had thrown about her silver star, and over her velvet dinner gown (clashed to the waist in the back) a rap that was studded with semi-precious stones, like the best brocade gown of an archbishop.

She felt like a princess in a fairy tale, who had been rather drab once upon a time. But, by virtue of being beautiful, had come at last into her own. . . . She considered the firmament. . . . And touched the silver star on her low, white forehead. A trifle bizarre. But none could deny that it suited her unusual beauty.

Hollis had accounts in New York at all the smartest shops. That struck Ashtoreth as a bit strange. But then it was very convenient. And, after all, she wasn't marrying the man's past.

She thought French lingerie, and a squirrel coat. Ten pairs of shoes, and five of colored pumps, with rhinestone heels and buckles. Six hats. Seven dinner gowns (one for every night of the voyage), two evening wraps (the other was of feathers, and too fragile to wear on deck), five dozen pairs of chiffon hose. And a few sport things.

"Not too much," cautioned Hollis. "Because we don't want to travel

with a lot of trunks. You can do your serious shopping in Paris."

So Ashtoreth had chosen her beautiful clothes with a little new air. . . . A dozen nightgowns will be enough, I think. And only two negligees—the scarlet one, and the green velvet. I'm going to Paris, you see, and I don't want to be surdured with luggage. It's so silly, don't you think—when one can pick up such exquisite lingerie over there? . . .

It had been hot and close in the ballroom tonight. Too much smoke and too much champagne. Besides, Lady Mary Somebody, returning from London, via Paris, had appropriated Hollis. They were old friends, it seemed.

Ashtoreth wasn't exactly piqued. Still, it did seem that Lady Mary might have been a little more considerate. The way she was always talking of things and people of which Ashtoreth knew nothing. And there was another dreadful woman, Mrs. Humbert Worthingford, who lived in one of those places you read about in the Gibbe's novels, and wanted them to go shooting.

Hollis had lots of friends aboard. They drank innumerable aperitifs, and played incessant bridge. And chatted of books and travel, and the stock market. So that Ashtoreth had, sometimes, a suffocating feeling of being completely swamped. Cocktails made her ill, because the passage was a little rough. She couldn't play bridge, nor deck games. And she'd had so little time to read! As for stocks, and bulls and bears, and buying on the margin, and selling short—well, a girl can't know everything.

Ashtoreth was glad that Lady Mary had luck tonight. She knew if the truth were told, Lady Mary would have been glad to exchange all her erudition, and her high-brow ways, for a good set of even, white teeth, to sparkle every time she opened her mouth. . . . And Mrs. Humbert Worthingford had the ugliest feet! Ashtoreth found them absurdly reassuring.

After all, society women usually are plain. If they don't know how to dress, or they're awfully fat, or terribly acromy. Against the solidarity of their maidens and their titles, and their good old families, of their assured ways and their certain knowledge, Ashtoreth considered the back teeth of Lady, the flat feet of Mrs. Humbert Worthingford, and the triple chins of Miss Amy Morrill, the society poetess. They comforted her immeasurably.

She would be glad when they reached Paris, and the passengers had gone their varied ways. Still, even that would have its drawbacks. Hollis was a darling, and she certainly loved him. But it was so silly, the way he idolized her.

When he called her "Orchid," he kind of whispered it. Not really whispered, but he said it so sort of thrillingly. Quietly, with a little quiver in his voice. Almost as if he were calling on a saint, or the Mother of God. . . . And he was always talking about her "darling unloachdness," and telling her how cool she was, and chaste, and lovely, like an orchid.

Sometimes, in the pressing dark of her cabin, she thought of Monty. And all his rough, young ways. And his merry slang. And the way he used to tell her truths about herself. And she wondered if Monty would laugh if he could hear Hollis saying such a trifling thing.

Monty had told her something once, about getting married.

"You'll get married for ease of two things, Ash," he said. "Love or money. You won't be like all the rest of the women. Half the girls I know get a big on getting married. Not because they love a man! But because they'd like a little place of their own. Or they're fed up on working. Or they're lonesome, and they want company. Maybe it's just a meal ticket they're grabbing. Or they don't want to be old maids. Some of them do it so's they can have kids. There's reasons enough, decent and respectable, and all that. But it's not love—and it's not just money."

"Now, you're different, Ash. I'll be love or money with you. And nothing else but."

"But money doesn't make a happy marriage, Monty!" she had protested.

"No, but it makes up for an unhappy one," he told her wisely. "If you don't love a man more than you love yourself, be sure he's got money, Ash. If you love him enough, it don't count. I got a feeling in my bones."

"What sort of a feeling?" she had demanded, when he hesitated.

But Monty shrugged his shoulders then, and whistled. That was all, he declared, that he had to say.

"Love or Money. . . . Well, I did, didn't I?" thought Ashtoreth to herself. . . . "Marry for love, I mean," she added hastily.

She had left Hollis in the ballroom, and slipped out during a brief moment when nobody was paying any particular attention to her. Now she leaned over the rail, and drew her glittering cloak about her.

There was somebody standing in a little corner that was full of shadows. Ashtoreth had not seen him, but she felt him, standing there. He had seen her, of course, in the light of the open door, clothed in black and silver, with a star on her forehead, and a gleaming wrap to warm her. Probably he was lonely, and would like to talk to somebody. . . . Why not? Hollis was dancing with Lady Mary, wasn't he? And not caring a bit what became of her.

She leaned over the railing, and addressed herself to the heavens. "Star bright, star light—first star I've seen tonight, I wish I may, I wish I might—have the wish that I wish tonight."

She turned her profile toward

the dark corner, and clasped her hands against her throat, shivering slightly, and drawing her cloak closer. Hollis said that her hands made him think of calla lilies. As for her profile—she knew that was perfect. . . . She sighed softly.

Then out of the shadows stepped a familiar figure. . . . And that moment the door opened, framing Hollis. His hands thrust in the pockets of his dinner coat.

Ashtoreth knew he was looking for her, but she pretended, for a moment, to be lost in contemplation of the wintry sea. The stranger stepped back, filling the corner filled already with darkness.

"Orchid!" cried Hollis, and joined her at the rail. "My dear, won't catch cold!"

He covered her hands with his, chaffing them warmly. "Silly little girl!—he's trilled as Greenland's icy mountains out here."

"I didn't know you'd miss me," she pouted prettily. "You were so interested in Lady Mary."

"Darling!" he cried, and put his arms about her. "You know better than that, don't you Sweetheart?"

She let him hold her for a moment, looking over his shoulder, peering into the shadows. That man had given her a dreadful start. He looked so exactly like Monty. It couldn't be, of course. But what if it was? . . . She drew a little away from her husband.

"Come on in, Hollis. I'm frozen to death."

"But why did you come out, Orchid?"

"To wish on the first star," she told him. "I always do."

"Baby!" he murmured. "Darling little baby!" and forgot that there had been several first stars, rising over the Caribbean, that his bride had quite overlooked.

They arrived in Paris on a Monday, and went directly to the Ritz. Because it was Monday, the shops were closed, and the museums and galleries, and even a number of the smaller restaurants. Hollis was quite content to stay in their suite. Ashtoreth was annoyed when he seemed to think there was nothing more exciting to do than just hold hands, and kiss, and things like that. He was still talking about how exquisite she was, and consummate, and she had begun to find it slightly nerve-racking.

Finally, they went to the Cafe de la Paix, and on the way Ashtoreth noticed that on the Avenue of the Opera, there were many of the newer American things for sale—sewing machines, and shoes and dress patterns. It was disconcerting, somehow. But the Cafe was very exciting. They sat outdoors, on the sidewalk, in the middle of winter. And everybody drank cocktails, or cafe au lait, or chocolate, to keep warm. And there were flower vendors, selling violets and daffodils.

Hollis talked to one of the waiters, and presently the man who owned the place (or maybe he only managed it) was there, bowing and shaking hands, and calling her Madame. Hollis knew everybody, and everything.

They went from there to Place

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Vendome, to see the crystals at Premier's. And, as they strolled along the boulevard, Hollis spoke to a number of people. Several of them stopped, and exchanged lengthy greetings. They made Ashtoreth feel ignorant and gauche, even when they spoke English. Because she could think of nothing to say, except, "It's my first trip, when they asked about her plans."

They went to Prunier's for dinner, because Hollis said it was the most famous place in the world. But Ashtoreth did not want lobster. She wanted some of Matzie's sausage cakes, with tomato sauce. They had 15 hors d'oeuvres. And a bottle of Pae Roget, because it was their first dinner in Paris, and Hollis said they really should celebrate. Then lobster thermidor.

But Ashtoreth had eaten too many hors d'oeuvres by the time it arrived. And the wine had gone straight to her head. It wasn't a very successful dinner. Probably it was the wine that made her homesick, and the palisades that made her ill. . . . She cried herself to sleep, between linen sheets, and shivered all night, because no French puff can cover anyone's feet and shoulders at the same time, and Ashtoreth liked to keep them both warm.

To make things worse, she dreamed about Monty, and woke up shrieking, because he was standing in a dark corner, and someone was dropping anchors on him.

Hollis was very sweet, and dried her eyes, and kissed her gently. But Ashtoreth had discovered that his two front teeth (the upper ones) were on little swivels, and he removed them at night, after the lights were out.

In the morning she woke believing that Monty was in Paris.

Hollis had gone out so quietly that she did not hear him. There was a note from him on the pillow, telling her to ring for petit dejeuner, and that he would have a little surprise when he returned. (To Be Continued)

The honey-moon begins to wane. But Ashtoreth, just as she is getting a little fed up on her husband's love-making and bored with his compliments, encounters—read the next chapter, and find out.

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