Heart of Liane

by MABEL McELLIOTT

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CHAPTER XV

SHE searched the faces of the nurses and doctors for a sign. "They're monsters, all of them," she thought stonily. Young as she was, untried, she thought their cheefulness in the face of this certain defeat too horrible. She did not realize they grappled daily with that enemy, Death. And sometimes won.

Poor child, thought the tall nurse, as she moved briskly, capably about. Poor child, she has a lot to learn. Aloud she said in a low voice which Liane resented for its matter-of-factness. "You must go out now and get some lunch. Can't have another patient, you know." She even smiled.

Liane looked at the sturdy watch on the other's round white wrist. It was 1 o'clock. She dragged herself out of the chair.

"I'll fly," she said tonelessly. "Just around the corner."

Somehow Liane swallowed the hot, salty broth, crumbled a cracker and left it untasted. Then she fairly ran the short block to the hospital in a fever lest she had stayed too long. Something — anything — might have happened.

She was afraid to open the door. Dread had swept over her again like a searing flame. But Miss Nesbit sat, quiet and relaxed, watching the sufferer, listening to the labored breathing.

"Doctor's due," she whispered. Liane nodded. She was counting the seconds.

She took up her place by the bed. In silence came a sound, low, sibilant, like a sigh. Cass was beginning to moan again. Fragments of words tore out of her delirium.

Liane bent nearer. "Darling, I'm here," she kept saying over and over.

Cass said suddenly, clearly, "Luisa wouldn't want her to know. Anyway, she's mine. I've earned her. My little girl."

Then she began to toss again.

* * *

The doctor came and went. Long shadows crept over the walls. Liane crouched, unstirring. "He says the crisis will come tonight," Miss Nesbit whispered to the night nurse who entered, rustling and fresh, at 7.

The two nurses held a long consultation outside the door as Liane kept watch. Elsie fluttered in for a moment, sympathetic and reassuring, on her way to the theater.

"You've got to get some sleep, kid" she said anxiously. "You'll cave in."

"Make them let me stay tonight!" Liane begged. "Make them. You can!"

Elsie shook her head. "Don't think it can be done, kid. Anyhow they're not certain there will be any change."

But Liane was determined. Miss Nesbit shook her head. "Against the rules," she said firmly.

Liane went to the floor head. The starched woman listened with cool, blank eyes. In the end she said stiffly, "The room next door happens to be empty. I will make an exception. That is, if you promise to lie down and wait till nurse calls you."

All her life long Liane Barrett was to remember that night as her Gethsemane. Young as she was she seemed to touch the very depths of human anguish. There was no one to stand by—not one of her own flesh and blood to hold her hand.

Toward midnight she heard the slipping rush of feet on the oil-clothed floor outside. Shaking, she crept to the door. An interne shot out of the clanging elevator. The night nurse appeared for a split-second, her cap slightly awry.

"Change has come," the little floor nurse told Liane calmly, "but don't go in now."

She touched the young girl on the arm with compassion. "Be brave," she said. She, too, was young. She turned away that Liane might not see the bright drops trembling on her lashes.

Ages passed. Glasses clinked at the end of the corridor in the diet kitchen. A tall, middle-aged nurse went by with a glass of orange juice in her hand.

Liane put her hand across her eyes. When she opened them the young interne was standing there. Was he—oh God, was it possible?—was he smiling at her? She reached out, snatched at his hand. Something ti hold to.

He said, "Yes. It's good news. She's over the top—we think."

Liane went down on her knees. She said, "Father, we thank Thee—" just before the black faintness swirled around her.

* * *

The room was full of sunshine and the scent of hothouse roses. Cass sat up in the middle of a big bed, a little paler and noticeably thinner. Otherwise she was not so greatly changed as Liane had expected her to be.

It was the fourth week of Cass' convalescence. As soon as she had been able to be moved Mrs. Cleespaugh had autocratically commanded that she be brought to Wildacres. Everything had been arranged—the drawing room, the nurse to accompany the invalid. Mrs. Cleespaugh had sent the big car to the station to meet them, had welcomed Cass Barrett to her house with royal dignity and simplicity.

Cass was established in the sunniest of the south chambers. She still had a nurse in spite of protests that she no longer needed one—and now Mrs. Cleespaugh was suggesting a southern trip.

"Yes," the old lady was saying majestically and finally as she settled herself in the armchair on the occasion of her morning call. "We must pack you off south as soon as you feel like traveling. Or perhaps California. You're not to struggle with this wretched winter climate. I've made up my mind about that."

Cass protested feebly but earnestly. "I've got to get back to my work—to the company. Vernon's keeping my place open."

"Nonsense!"

"But I'm so frightfully in debt to you already. I shan't feel right until I get on my feet again and can begin to pay you back."

Mrs. Cleespaugh flicked her fingers delicately against an imaginary obstacle.

"My dear," she said with great distinctiveness, "You are being a bit absurd, aren't you? You came very close to death's door. You were miraculously spared to this dear child here. Now you speak of jeopardizing your health again. Let me manage all this. It is a great delight to be able to do it."

Cass closed her eyes.

"As you wish," she said faintly. She was still so weak it was easier to be quiescent. And she was very grateful.

* * *

Liane came in from her morning errands in the village, all rosy and sparkling. "What's all this?" she asked.

"It's a conference," Mrs. Cleespaugh informed her, "but it's ended now." She swept out of the room.

Liane sat down, regarded her mother with a fond and anxious gaze. Cass opened her eyes once more.

"Tell me, darling," she asked quickly, irrelevantly, "did I talk a lot of nonsense when I had the fever?"

"Oh, just a lot of gibberish," Liane said with great carelessness. "Why?"

"I just wondered." Cass looked relieved. "I—o, I seemed to have the most frightful dreams all that time."

"Isn't it time for your milk?" Liane wanted to know.

"Miss Wilson has gone down for it."

"Don't talk then. Just rest until she comes. The doctor said you wern't to tire yourself."

Liane sat there, quietly companionable, until the nurse came back.

A little later Cass fell asleep again, in the middle of her drink, like a child. As Liane tiptoed out she thought uneasily of the small fib she had told. "Because of course she did say something distinct — something that I remembered," she thought. And how odd it had been, too, "I've earned her. My little girl." What had Luisa to do with her? Or perhaps her mother hadn't meant Liane at all. Anyhow it was puzzling, although probably not at all important.

"I can ask her about it when she's perfectly well," Liane thought, dismissing the matter. Nothing mattered now—nothing except the fact that Cass Barrett was mending, little by little. The first days she had begun to look up and to smile had been sheer ecstacy. The first cup of broth she had been coaxed to take had been held in Liane's firm hands. The girl was thinking of that now as she came down into the big hall.

"You look happy anyhow," said a quiet voice at her elbow.

Clive stood there in his riding things, his hair tumbled as usual. There was a dog at his heels. He brought with him the odor of wood smoke and stables.

"Oh, I am!" said Liane, stretching out her arms and laughing aloud for the sheer, unmitigated joy of being alive.

(To Be Continued)

Today's Variety Bazaar

HORIZONTAL

1 Seraglio.
6 Shallow dish.
11 Contagious fowl disease.
14 Musical drama.
15 To entertain.
16 Coin.
17 To become exhausted.
18 Flat-bottomed ships.
19 Iniquity.
20 Opposite of shut.
22 To vouch.
23 Military snare drum.
27 Unit.
28 Seas.
29 Enraged.
34 To darn.
35 Melody.
36 To lay a street.
37 Chancellor of Germany.
40 Ridden.
42 Finale.
43 To lead in singing.
44 By reason of.
47 States.
48 Bugle plant.
49 Heavy cords.
51 Effigy.
56 Noise.
57 To make into a law.
58 To retard.
59 Deer.
60 Leases.
61 Growing out.

VERTICAL

1 Dance.
2 To imitate.
3 To rot flax.
4 Before.
5 Dull red.
6 Former secretary of war from Ohio.
7 Last word of a prayer.
8 To bring legal proceedings.
9 Cuba is an ——?
10 Packed in graduated series.
11 To act as model.
12 Lily.
13 To breathe laboriously.
21 Matter from a sore.
23 Grave.
24 Maple tree.
25 Bill of fare.
26 Invited.
27 Paddle.
29 Marble.
30 Poem.
31 Part of a church.
32 Equable.
33 Small nick.
35 Conjunction.
38 Closer.
39 To chant.
40 Arid.
41 To dwell.
43 Past histories.
44 To secrete.
45 Bad.
46 Grown coarse.
47 Believers of a particular creed.
50 Skillet.
52 Males.
53 Wing.
54 Channel.
55 Orb.

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

W	I	L	K	I	N	S		M	O	N	T	A	N	A
A	L	I	E	N	A	T	E		H	O	R	R	O	R
T	I	N	Y		V	A	N	S		D	E	M	U	R
E	A	T		M	E	N	T	A	L		T	O	R	E
R	D		L	A		D	E	V	I	L		R	I	A
S		L	O	S	S		R	E	L	A	Y		S	R
	A	B	A	T	E	S		S	T	R	A	T	H	
C	R		N	E	V	E	R		S	I	L	O		P
H	E	N		R	E	P	E	L		N	E		T	R
O	N	U	S		R	A	V	I	N	E		P	R	O
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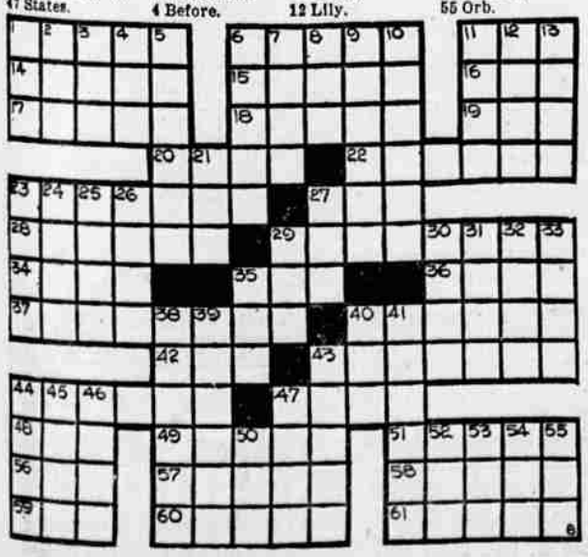

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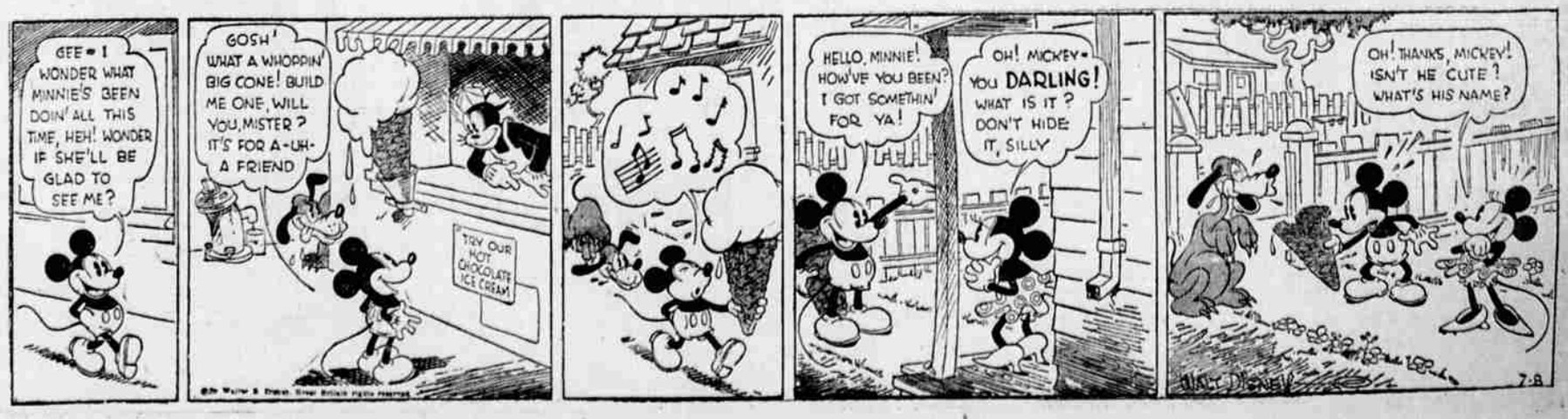
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