



SINNERS IN HEAVEN

BY CLIVE ARDEN

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(Continued)

IV

A group of rough bowlders, moss-covered, commanded a long view over the eastern shore of the island, while forming a shelter from the wind. The girl approached them; then, at a sudden soft sound, stood still, her heart beating rapidly. Noiselessly rounding them, she discovered the man she sought stretched upon the ground, his head thrown back upon clasped arms, his eyes dreaming far away over the softly outlined scene below.

For a moment she fingered the folds of her thin garment, watching him. Then the wind fluttered one of her loose sleeves; and his gaze flashed back from far distances. Turning his head, he saw the figure standing, motionless, by his side.

She stood perfectly still, her hands pressed upon the garment at her breast, the wind waving her cloudy hair, her lips a little parted, her blue eyes darkly shining in the faint light.

Once—twice—she tried to speak, but the words would not come; she could only envelop him, as it were, in the radiant glory of her face.

Suddenly a great wave of understanding broke over him, rendering him for a moment breathless, blinded, bewildered. . . . Then, instinctively, he raised his arms. With a little inarticulate cry the girl allowed him to take her, trembling in her captivation, clinging to him, submitting, without resistance, to the storm of passion at last set free. His kisses burned into her soft flesh, his arms crushed her well-nigh breathless; she was carried away by the tide of his ardor, responsive, gloriating. . . .

Barbara had crossed her Rubicon for all time.

Presently he sat down upon the rocks, still holding her to him.

"You—came to tell me?" he whispered, his face close to hers, his eyes piercing to her very soul.

"Yes," she whispered back. . . . After a time she raised herself, still in his arms.

"Alan, I—couldn't tell you before; until I felt convinced that all—was right. You understand; don't you? It was because I loved you so, dear heart, not—fear, or coldness—"

"I understand," he murmured, laying his cheek against hers. "I always understood. It was the beastly brute in me that sometimes seemed not to. . . . When, Barbara?"

Her head fell back upon his breast; with a little throbbing sigh, she renounced her will to his.

"Whenever—you like, Alan."

"At dawn?" he whispered. "It will soon be here. When the sun rises over the water it shall witness our—marriage rites!"

The passion had died out of his voice, and a note almost of awe had crept in.

They remained, sometimes silent, sometimes discussing, in low tones, their forthcoming bridal, while the moonlight waned, and the wonderful blue-black of the southern night softened and paled.

Presently Alan lowered the hand he held near his cheek and opened the fingers.

"What can we do about a wedding ring?" he asked.

"Oh! Does that matter?"

"I should like to see you wearing one—of mine. Wait!" he continued, searching in the pockets of his frayed breeches. He displayed a collection of keys, a pocket knife, and a pencil, suspended upon a small tin key ring.

"Will this fit? It's better than nothing."

"It looks about the right size, and will do beautifully. Oh, Alan! how I shall love it!"

He smiled, a world of tenderness in his eyes. "Look," he said. "Dawn is breaking."

Early birds began to chirp and whistle, away in the forest; the dancing waves turned a steely gray. The wind had dropped, leaving a great silence. It seemed as if nature were holding her breath, waiting for the dawn not far off. . . . When at last the sun's first long shaft of gold quivered across the water, the man rose and set the girl gently upon her feet. The hand in his trembled a little; but she met his eyes bravely, smilingly.

With only the birds for witness, the sound of the surf for choir, the radiance of the eastern sky for altar, simply and from their hearts' depths these two pledged their troth. The few chief sentences from the marriage service were chosen by Barbara for their only rites.

There would be many, away in the world, to scoff, many to condemn. But



The Sound of the Surf for Choir.

no outward consecration of ground, no army of ordained priests, could have rendered more sacred that moment when the hush was broken by their low-voiced avowals. Perchance the "Destiny that shapes our ends," seeing all things, reading all hearts, who had flung these two together upon this far garden of His own creation, and given them there the one supreme gift which is part of Himself, would understand and accept their vows:

"To love and to cherish till death us do part. . . . And thereto I plight thee my troth. . . ."

Their voices did not falter. The small tin ring encircled the girl's finger; they stood silent a while, with locked hands. Then he drew her toward him, and very gently their lips met.

"My wife!" he breathed.

Barbara bathed, dressed, and got breakfast, with no thought of fatigue after a sleepless night. Her heart seemed almost unbearably full. As she watched the smoke curl up from her own fire, and that rising from Meama's hut, she resembled the primitive woman gloriating in this life shorn of all false trappings. Was not Meama likewise cooking food for her man? In the south, too, the native women were so employed. Man and his mate—in palace or hovel, in mansion or hut! All the artificiality hiding the big realities faded away with the worlds beyond the blue horizon.

It was the same with Alan. Like some fine, strong, wild thing, he dived, swam and splashed in the river; then returned for breakfast, ravenously hungry, singing as he swung down the bay.

"I have a great surprise!" Barbara announced. "Here is a tin of 'bully beef.' I saved it for any emergency. Shall we have it for our wedding feast, as a special treat?"

He shouted with laughter. "Lord! To think of 'bully' becoming a special treat for a wedding feast! Bring it along. O wise and thrifty woman."

They ate their "wedding feast" in a mossy shady dell; and even the memory of Aunt Dolly, who unconsciously had provided it, failed to cast more than a momentary shadow across their joy.

Alan lay along the bottom of the boat, his head pillowed in Barbara's lap, as the sun began to sink.

"Well?" he asked. "Have you found a desert island honeymoon very frisky? What about the big cities where you expected to 'feel life'? What about your heart's desire?"

She laughed low, passing caressing fingers through his hair. "I have no other heart's desire. You are life itself to me now, Alan. That's why—"

"You came to me last night?" he suggested softly, as she stopped.

She nodded. The boat drifted idly, caressed by the soft breeze, rocking gently with the tide.

"Thank God you did," he murmured, after a pause. "Everything was becoming—unbearable."

She trailed her fingers in the water, lost in thought.

"It was strange," she observed presently, "that the day on which I first began to feel—what you had become to me—should have been my wedding day!"

"These first months" were nearly

drove me mad—until I was sure the field was clear," he replied. "Then I meant to win!"

"Oh, Alan!" With sudden passion she drew his head back against her breast. "If I lost you—my husband—I should die."

He turned in her arms, and pressed his lips to her soft neck.

"Barbara! It means—all that—to you, at last?"

They stayed in the boat until darkness had fallen. Then Alan took the oars he had fashioned, and paddled back to land.

Silence fell upon them as they neared the shore. It was the hour when exterior things diminished to nothingness, and the Big Things were too vast for conversation. He beached the boat, then slipped his arm around the girl and drew her toward the hut.

"Our wedding night, Barbara," he whispered.

Her feet lingered a little, and she paused now and then to admire beauties of scent or sound; the rising moon showed her face tremulous. Outside the dark hut, she drew herself free, turning toward the sea as though loath to leave it. It seemed as though she were silently bidding farewell to some part of her life; and the man behind her stood motionless, his eyes on her averted head, silently waiting, making no attempt to touch her. . . .

At last, slowly, she turned and held out her hands. He took them close in his.

"Come, my dearest," he said.

V

Six months, when you live in an earthly paradise, are but a flash of vivid light in a sky which is always blue. These two had crossed their looming mountains and arrived at the valley upon the other side; and they found it fair and shining, full of the songs of birds.

The days sped by, each seeming to exceed in beauty its predecessor. There was no need now to fill each moment with arduous, thankless toil. All walls and divisions were down. When Alan, with a few slashing cuts, severed the bamboo partition in their sleeping hut, it had been symbolic.

"There!" he exclaimed, his foot upon the canes strewn the floor. "No

more twos. Everything's one."

"One!" she breathed, renouncing, with the outward surrender of her only privacy, all the private strongholds of her nature. But the look she gave him was no longer elusive. It was steadfast, shining, exultant. . . .

In the wilderness Barbara had found the "hidden want": the love which, with all its many far-reaching subkeys, can alone tune the extraordinary cosmology, called life into any semblance of a harmonious whole. . . .

Sometimes they played ridiculous games upon the sand, gambling with the money lying useless in their luggage.

They hunted, fished, worked, bathed together. And, during these months, each learned much, which was accumulated and stored within their hearts.

Their clothes were in rags, but they made fun of the matter. Alan clung to his old razor, and Barbara to her scissors.

"After all," she said, "we can cover ourselves in reed matting. Provided you don't grow a beard, I can face anything."

Six months of perfect happiness! It was against all the rules of fate; but even fate seemed to have cast off these two for a time. For some reason the world was made passing beautiful, and human beings placed in it without any choice. But the attainment, much less the possession, of permanent bliss therein has not been decreed.

At the end of six months, the first ominous cloud appeared. Chimababoh the native chief, fell ill and died. Babooma became head of the tribe.

No care or pity for his fellows permeated the hide of brutality encasing Babooma. All the worst instincts of the savage, held in check by the old chief under Croft's influence, now rose to the surface. His own adherents, impatient of restraints, hailed him with joy. The division in the settlement became at once more evident: murmuring dissatisfaction upon one side, threats and tortures upon the other.

The white men's popularity had increased with the increase of health, cleanliness and industry among the natives. Now he took full advantage of it, and only his continuous intervention maintained order. The position, however, was fraught with dan-

ger. To continue to inspire a superstitious fear after more than eighteen months was in itself a precarious task, only achieved by the weight of his own personality. Furthermore, he was confronted by Babooma's personal hatred. From Roowa he had learned of the chief's mania for women, and women were scarce in the tribe. White women no longer offended the black men's instincts. . . .

At present vivid memories of a wounded shoulder, blue devils hissing from round Croft's hut, the supposition of a hidden white tribe ever at hand, restrained Babooma from defiance of a man tabu. But familiarity and the scraps of education imparted by the white people were gaining upon superstition. . . . It was only a matter of time.

Barbara had quickly perceived that her man was seriously troubled concerning the tribe. Dimly aware herself of the first faint clouds in the brightness of their sky, heralding a possible storm, she sought to hide them, to keep their happiness undisturbed.

During the following months the cloud grew ever more menacing. Those natives who, fundamentally brutal and idle, had not appreciated their enforced life of industry, quickly deteriorated under Babooma's leadership. His adherents increased in number, as did his cruelties. There being insufficient grown women, he seized young girls, almost children, made them the toys of his lusts, and afterward they disappeared—sometimes, under cloak of religious fanaticism, upon the sacrificial altar to Bahubaka; sometimes to satiate his own appetite for human flesh.

Many times Croft was on the point of utilizing that last bullet. But with it his influence would have vanished. Natives regard their own chief with extraordinary superstition. To them he is permanently tabu. The next in rank was one of Babooma's followers. Only more danger would have resulted for Barbara and himself, and probably civil war in the settlement. These people were insisting on making their own hell, and nobody could save them short of exterminating half their number.

After a time Alan refused to allow

native woman continued her crooning song.

Barbara was seated upon the rocks where, nearly a year before, the dawn had witnessed their simple marriage ceremony. Her elbows were propped on her knees, her chin was sunk in her hands.

Alan approached noiselessly, but she became instinctively aware of his presence. He noticed a strange expression in her eyes as she turned to greet him: a far-seeing wonder blended with a tenderness which seemed reflected in the smiling, tremulous lines of her mouth.

She silently stretched out her hands, and he took them in his, mystified.

"I wondered what had become of you—" he began.

"I felt I must come here. This always seems a kind of sacred temple, our own. . . . Oh, Alan!"

She gazed into his face half-smiling, yet with a suspicion of fears dimming the soft light in her eyes.

"What, dear?" he asked, more puzzled.

She made no reply; but the glory in her face seemed to deepen, radiating toward him. . . . Loosing his hands, her arms crept up to his shoulders, round his neck, drawing his head down to her own.

A sudden, vague realization of some stupendous happening caused him to draw her close. "What is it, Barbara?" he murmured. "What are you trying to tell me?"

She tilted her head back a little, and saw the dawning comprehension in his face. A faint smile flickered again across her own.

"Can't you guess—my husband?"

Instantly he was conscious of the same inimitable tenderness in her regard which he had just seen in the eyes of the woman suckling her child. The same mysterious essence of motherhood seemed to emanate from both. With a muttered cry, his lips sought hers; he caught her close, pressing her to his heart as if daring all the forces of nature, all the venom of savage humanity, to take her from him now.

Suddenly, impulsively, she looked up into his eyes.

"Shall you love—It?" she whispered.

A reflection of her own tenderness showed in the smile which answered her. The glory of the sinking sun illuminated his face.

"Shall I?" he breathed. "My dear—what a question!"

(To be continued)

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A Wailing Cry Arose.

Barbara near the settlement. She said little. She passed long hours with Meama and her children, banishing the mental torture during his absence in the radiance of her welcome upon his return.

One night he returned, after a stormy day's battling in the south, with his own optimism gravely shaken. It was, he knew, but a question of days before the threatening mine should burst. The division had widened to an extent which only blood and explosion would, eventually, bridge; it needed but a match to the fuse, and that explosion would come.

Barbara did not meet him as usual. He wondered a little, making his way quickly down to their hut. Supper was ready, but she was not there. He looked into the sleeping hut, but that also was empty. Anxiously he turned his steps toward Roowa's abode. Meama sat outside, suckling a new addition to her family, crooning softly over the little dark form.

She waved an arm toward the east. "The great chief's wife went up to the heights long, long ago! Meama still watching for her," she said.

He strode off up the slope, and the

Little Difference in Fall and Spring Pigs

The swine husbandry division of the University farm, St. Paul, through carefully conducted experiments, have found that it takes a greater variety of feeds to grow fall pigs successfully than is necessary to grow spring pigs; their explanation being that green crops are not available for fall pigs. However, fall pigs make as rapid gains when well housed and handled as do spring pigs. In the experiments it was found that the amount of feed required to produce gains was practically the same for pigs farrowed at the two different seasons. Cheaper gains were made by fall pigs because feed costs were lower in the winter than summer. Fall pigs sell at a higher price than do spring pigs, not on the quality of the pigs, however, but from the fact that they usually "hit" a more favorable market. The overhead feed cost in maintaining brood sows is greatly reduced by having them raise two litters per year.

Can Add Several Years to Life of Peach Trees

Except that the soil should not be too rich in nitrogen, the peach tree is not very particular regarding the variety of soil in which it is to stand. While the usual preference is for a sandy loam, some very good yielding orchards stand in heavy clay, as well as in the intermediate grades. Plenty of potash and lime are favorable to the peach and are really essential to long life of the tree. Peach trees seventy years old and still bearing fine crops of large peaches, are reported as standing on a limestone hill. While such an age is, of course, quite exceptional, one may have bearing peach trees of considerably greater age than the 12 or 15 years that is usually thought to be about the limit of their useful lives. A careful and intelligent selection of the site for the trees, together with the right kind of care in their cultivation, fertilization and pruning is quite likely to add several years to their lives over that which is common to neglected trees.

Soy Acreage Increased

The acreage of soy beans grown for the grain in the northern states where the crop is rapidly gaining in favor, increased about 25 per cent in 1924. The total United States acreage grown for the beans, rather than for forage, in 1924, is estimated at 534,000 acres compared with 452,000 acres in 1923. Ohio shows an increase of 18 per cent. The October 1 average condition of the crop for the United States was 79 per cent of normal.

Stringing Him

Tenderfoot (to fiddler)—Do you make a living playing the violin? Fiddler—Waal, young feller, I manage to scrape along!

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