

SINNERS IN HEAVEN

BY CLIVE ARDEN

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(Continued)

[The closing paragraphs of chapter 4, scheduled to appear on page 6 last week, was crowded over to this column by pressure of late news.]

tonished them both. Passion and a sense of the dramatic had ever been far from his nature. Involuntarily, however, his fingers closed around her wrists. Raising her hands, he pressed his lips upon them.

"Heaven knows what was right or wrong," he declared hurriedly. "But—oh, my dear! God help you!"

The door slammed, and he was gone from her life—this man who had been friend and brother, playmate or lover, all her youth. . . . She stood gazing drearily through the window at the desolate tennis court, where they had played so often together, and an extra wave of lonely bitterness swept into her heart. . . . She saw Hugh, with bent head, cross the grass to the garden gate. . . . Then she sank into a chair before the fire, crushed by an overpowering sense of physical weakness.

V

Darbury seethed and bubbled, and consumed endless tea, over the broken engagement of Hugh and Barbara. It is always easier to criticize other people's actions with the aid of this soothing beverage. It seems to enhance one's own sense of respectability in a world of sin.

Nobody was surprised, of course! Nobody ever is on such occasions. Everybody knew that something would happen—which is always a safe conjecture.

But what everybody did not know concerning the latter thrill was the real reason. And herein lay the cause of the emptying tea caddles. Unfortunately, Miss Davies was in London attending Christmas meeting over "fallen girls," so the mystery remained unsolved. But the weed of suspicion grew into a luscious tree. Again, and in louder tones, the question arose: What happened on the island?

It was known that the Rochdales



"How Do You Know?"

and Mrs. Stockley were deeply upset, the latter exceedingly wroth; but the two most affected kept their own counsel.

The only ray of comfort to Barbara in her wretchedness lay in her aunt's absence. The relations between her mother and herself were of the coldest. Mrs. Stockley never forgot her position as a beacon, nor her Honorable Grandmother's gracious act in establishing her own identity with the county. This marriage between her daughter and Darbury's future squire had been her dearest ambition. Now, for no tangible reason, this ambition—revived with the girl's return—was hurled to the ground. Not easily could Mrs. Stockley view the dashing of her hopes. The scene between them had been stormy. She had wept, cajoled and upbraided, exasperated by the other's irrevocable demeanor.

"You are throwing away what many would give their eyes to possess!" she cried at last. "What will people say? There has been enough talk already. You confess you still care for Hugh—"

dawned in her face.

"Jenny? Jenny Grant!" She remembered she had not seen the girl since her return. "What are you doing, Jenny? Home for Christmas?" she asked kindly, presuming her to be now in service somewhere. There was no reply; and, aware of the shyness of such village maidens, she continued: "Where are you working now?"

"I—I ain't got no work, Miss Barbara."

The voice trembled on a sob. Barbara glanced at her quickly again, and realized the child's presence. A dim memory of one among the many choice morsels recently recounted for her own benefit returned to her mind. . . . "Oh, Jenny!" she cried involuntarily; then stopped, as the girl, hiding her face on the sleeping child, burst into a passion of tears. Taking her arm, she led her to a seat placed near the lake, saying nothing until the fit of weeping had subsided. There was no need of words. In Barbara's face and heartfelt exclamation Jenny had read the knowledge she had learned to dread awakening, mingled with a

sympathy she had never yet encountered. Of her own accord, at last, she began a stumbling explanation. . . . "E was goin' to marry me, but was ordered sudden-loke back to 'is ship; an' then 'e—'e got the 'monia an' died. . . . But 'e would 'a married me, all right! 'E would!" She spoke with a defiance which the listening girl understood well. "We was wrong, I know," she went on, "but we was young an'—an'—partin' an' with sinking voice, 'I loved 'im! Oh, miss! I did, indeed! . . ."

The hand on her arm tightened its grasp.

"Yes, Jenny. . . . I know. . . ."

Then for a few moments she fell silent, reflecting upon the varied and extraordinary results—the high resolves and sacrifices, the impetuous, hot-headed folly, the loss of all principles—achieved by that "terrific force." . . . "What has happened since?" She glanced at the child. "My aunt sent you to a 'home,' I think?"

"Yes, miss. Afterward I got work; but the baby was delicate an' I couldn't 'ave 'im with me. An' it's bin the same all along. I've bin out of work now w' 'im fur weeks, an' all me money well-nigh gone. So I cum 'ome to mother, an' she—she's turned me away." . . . The sobs broke out afresh. "I—dunno w'ere to go, nor w'at to do. . . . I wish I was dead! I was wonderin' there by the lake, if—"

"No, no, no! Don't say it, Jenny! We—we'll think of something." Perhaps it was more than natural aversion which forced such horror into her own face and voice. "Have you any friends, anywhere?"

"Only in Edinburgh," Jenny replied hopefully. "I 'ave an aunt there wot would 'elp me over Christmas if I could afford to—"

She broke off, swaying forward and nearly dropping the child. Barbara took him from her.

"Jenny," she asked, "have you had any food lately?"

"I ain't 'ad—none today—miss," came the whisper.

With all Alan's suddenness of purpose, Barbara rose, supporting the girl with one arm and the baby boy with the other.

"Come with me," she said.

Mrs. Stockley, making out a list of necessities for a systematically organized parish tea, presently listened aghast to her daughter's impetuous explanation and extraordinary request.

"That girl! Jenny Grant! To stay in my house? My dear Barbara, I won't hear of such a thing! Whatever would people say? A wicked little—where is she now?"

"Martha is giving her food. She was starving."

Her mother gasped. She rose uncertainly, as if on the point of frustrating this disposal of her goods; then something in the girl's expression caused her to resume her seat.

"Oh, well! She can have some food. But then she is to go, Barbara—"

"Where?"

Mrs. Stockley fidgeted with her writing paper.

"That's no concern of mine. Her mother must look after her. Your aunt will be back tonight. She will do something—"

Barbara waved this idea to a place unmentionable. "Will you lend her money to reach Edinburgh? I haven't got enough loose cash—"

"Certainly not! I might never see it again."

The girl abruptly left the room at this point, with another impulsive res-

olution.

Half an hour later, after extricating her charges from Martha's distinctly grim ministrations, she rang the bell at the "House of the Moor," and deposited them in the friendly arms of the housekeeper of that harbor where all were welcome. "Mrs. Field won't mind," she said. "I shall be back soon." She hurried away across the dark paths; then turned along the road leading to the vicarage.

"Surely the vicar will help," she muttered to herself. "If only I had the money handy myself—"

Down the road skirting the wall, a bicycle lamp came flashing. A dark form flew past the girl; then, with a scraping of brakes and rattle of springs, jumped off and hurried back.

"Ah! Miss Stockley! I have wanted to see you. . . ."

The vicar's voice sounded unusually subdued.

"I was just coming to see you, Mr. Horne," Barbara replied.

"Really? Ah! I am very glad of that. I hoped you would."

"Wbx" she inquired, in genuine

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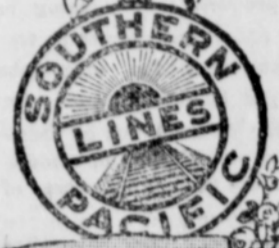
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moon. The windows of the house blazed forth a pathway of welcome, long before its refuge was reached. Then a bright-faced maid opened the door; and that subtle sense of radiant warmth—which is only possessed by a house or person when the spirit of it is at the helm—stole out and enveloped her. . . . With a long-drawn sigh she entered the cheerful hall.

One swift searching glance at the sharpened white features of the girl hurrying up the stairs, and the woman in the fur traveling coat caught the extended hands and drew her close into her arms.

"Oh, Bab darling!" came the cry from her heart's depth.

A convulsive clinging of thin arms; no words were needed. . . . Here was, at last, the blessed peace of understanding. . . .

When the door of her den was closed behind them the elder woman raised the girl's face and looked long into the sunken eyes, with those deep gray ones which bore such resemblance to another's that Barbara

you sent him as guide to a party of tourists?"

"Er—no," he said, bewildered.

She laid her hand on his bicycle, and the passion rose in her hurried words.

"Suppose your whole life—your thoughts, your motives, tastes, ideals, faith—had been taken and changed; then whirled around and dashed to the ground, so that—so that you were broken, crushed, blind—groping in the dark—could you, teach children their creed? Or train young girls to be 'guides'? Or—or kneel in church and worship a God whom—if He exists at all—you hate?—yes, hate!"

"Miss Stockley—!"

Poor Mr. Horne was rendered speechless.

Barbara seized the opportunity of forwarding her original purpose.

"I wanted to see you, tonight, about Jenny Grant."

"Jenny Grant?" he echoed, still dazed.

In a few sentences she acquainted him with the facts. He looked at her, by the light of his bicycle lamp, in yet more astonishment; then, with an air of profound melancholy, shook his head and sighed again.

"They are chapel people, Miss Stockley. It is not my business to interfere."

"But surely—! Whatever difference does that make? It's only a loan of a few pounds—I will pay you back—"

"You don't understand these matters. If we begin lending money to those who are but suffering the rewards of their sins—if we encourage them to expect—"

Barbara turned away.

"If only Mrs. Field were here!" she muttered involuntarily.

"Mrs. Field? I saw her at the station—"

"Saw her? Then she has come back? . . . Good night, Mr. Horne!"

Before he could open his lips, he found himself alone, the sound of flying footsteps in his ears. Still feeling distinctly dazed, he took off his pinenez and wiped the glass, before mounting his bicycle. . . . Yes, very wrong! Whatever the trouble, it was being taken in quite the wrong spirit. But one must be broadminded; one must not give up these in sin and darkness. He would send her that little book. . . .

VI

An anchor at last, in a merciles-

sea! Thus did it seem to the girl stumbling hurriedly across the dark cop-

pediment.

"Oh! I Love Him So. . . ."

caught her breath. She remembered once thinking his lacked their wonderful tenderness. But she had seen it grow there—intensified.

"Ah!" she cried, "how I wanted you!"

"I want to keep you here for Christmas," Mrs. Field said. "Will you stay? I am leaving afterward. Miss Davies traveled back with me, so your mother does not need you." She saw the flash of unutterable rictus cross the girl's face, and turned to the door. Within a few minutes a letter had been dispatched to Mrs. Stockley, instructions given to the housekeeper, their outdoor clothes removed and they were back in the little sitting-room.

Mrs. Field knelt and poked the fire into a bright blaze, then looked up at the silent figure beside her. Her eyes followed those of the girl toward the writing table and the photograph upon it. . . . And she understood. She rose to her feet. And all the peculiar magnetism, which drew people of every class and creed to this woman, shone in her face, seemed to vibrate in the hand she held out. As the other caught at it, the sealed chamber of her tortured heart burst open in one agonized cry:

"I love him. . . . Oh! I love him

so. . . . "And—he, Barbara?" "He—loved me." Barbara abruptly held out her left hand. "This was our wedding ring," she whispered. The involuntary start which the other gave was quickly controlled. She met steadily, albeit with some apprehension, the girl's searching look—seeming to probe to her very soul, proving its faith.

(Continued on page 4)

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