



The LEADING LADY

by GERALDINE BONNER
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STORY FROM THE START

While despondent over the enforced hiding of her fiancé, Jim Dallas, slayer in self-defense of Homer Parkinson, member of an influential family, Sybil Saunders, popular actress, is engaged to play Viola in a charity performance of "Twelfth Night" on Gull Island, on the Maine coast.

PROLOGUE—Continued

"You can always be relied on, Anne, to do the tactful thing. Walberg was set on it. Stokes can't be beaten in that part, and he's at liberty. But I wasn't going to take any chances of her refusing, and if Stokes was in the company I was afraid she might."

"I don't know whether she'd have gone that far, but it would have spoiled everything for her and for the rest of us, too. It's all plain sailing now except for one thing"—she stopped and then in answer to his questioning look—"about the police. If they have her under surveillance, as people say, what'll they do about it up there?"

The big man shrugged: "Camp in the village on the mainland—they certainly can't come on the island. We've special instructions about it—no one but the company to be allowed there till the performance. Did she speak to you about that?"

"No, she hardly ever alludes to the subject. But they would keep a watch on her, wouldn't they?"

He nodded, frowning a little at a complication new in his experience:

"I should think so—a woman in her position. Men under sentence of death have been unable to keep away from the girl they were in love with. And then she may know where he is, be in communication with him."

"Oh, I don't think that," Anne breathed in alarm. "She'd never take such a risk."

A slight grating noise came from the hall. Anne held up a quick cautioning hand.

"Take care," she murmured. "Here's Joe."

Joe came in, his Panama hat low on his brow. He gave no sign of greeting till he saw Bassett, then he emitted an abrupt "Hello" and snatched off his hat:

"Little Anne's got a caller. Howdy, Bassett! How's things?"

He was like Anne, the same delicate features, the same long eyebrows and the same trick of raising them till they curved high on his forehead. But his face had an elfish, almost malign quality lacking in hers, and the brown eyes, brilliant and hard, were set too close to his nose.

He launched forth with a suggestion of pouncing eagerness on the "Twelfth Night" performance. He had heard this and that, and Anne had told him the other. His interest surprised Anne, he hadn't shown much to her; only a few laconic questions. And she was wondering what was in his mind, as she so often wondered when Joe held the floor, when a question enlightened her:

"Have you got anybody to play Sebastian yet?"

"No. I wanted that boy who played with Sybil on the southern tour last year, but he's in England. He gave a first-rate performance and he surely did look like her."

"That was a lucky chance. You'll search the whole profession before you get anyone that looks like Sybil's twin brother. Why, Mrs. Gawtreys, the English actress, when she was over here, had a boy to play Sebastian who looked as much like her—well, not as much as I look like Sybil."

Bassett had seen his object as Anne had and was considering. He had been looking forward to the week at Gull Island with Anne. It loomed in his imagination as a festival. There would be a pleasant, companionable group of people, friendly, working well together. But Joe among them—

The boy, looking down at his feet, said slowly:

"What's the matter with letting me do it?"

"Nothing's the matter. I've no doubt you could, but you and she have about as much resemblance as chalk and cheese."

Joe wheeled and gathering his coat neatly about his waist walked across the room with a miming imitation of

Sybil's gait. It was so well done that Bassett could not contain his laughter. Encouraged, the boy assumed a combative attitude, his face aflame with startled anger, and striking out at imaginary opponents, shouted: "Why, there's for thee, and there and there and there. Are all the people mad?" Then as suddenly melted to a lover's tone and looking ardently at Anne said: "If it be thus to dream then let me sleep."

"Oh, he could play it," she exclaimed, and Bassett weakened before the pleading in her eyes.

He understood how to manage Joe, he could keep him in order. The boy was afraid of him anyway, and by this time knew that his future lay pretty well in Bassett's hands. If there was anything Anne wanted that was within his gift there could be no question about its being hers.

She was very sweet, murmuring her thanks as she went with him to the door and assurances that Joe would acquit himself well. Bassett hardly heard what she said, looking into her dark eyes, feeling the soft farewell pressure of her hand.

Joe had left the sitting room when she went back there and she supposed he had gone to bed. But presently he came in, his hat on again and said he was going out. She was surprised, it was past eleven, but he swung about looking for his cane, saying it was too



Like a Picture From Some Antique Romance.

hot to sleep. She tried to detain him with remarks about the new work. He answered shortly as was his wont with her, treating it as a small matter, nothing to get excited about—also a familiar pose. But she noticed under his nonchalance a repressed satisfaction, the glow of an inner elation in his eyes.

CHAPTER I

The performance was over and the audience was dispersing. Some of them had gone into the house, taken the chance to have a look at it—when the Driscolls were "in residence" you couldn't so much as put your foot on the rocks round the shore. Others lingered, having a farewell word with the actors, congratulating them—it was the right thing to do and they deserved it. The committee was very affable, shaking hands with Mr. Bassett the director and Miss Saunders, the star, who, in her page's dress with the paint still on her face, looked tired, poor girl, but was so sweet and unassuming.

The fleet of boats, rocking gently on the narrow channel that separated Gull Island from the mainland, took on their freight and darted off. They started in groups, then broke apart. The launches skinned, light-winged, the white flurry of their wakes like threads that stretched back to the island.

Part of the flotilla carried the Hayworth villagers—all-year residents of the little town on the mainland. Some of the more solid citizens were in the launch that old Gabriel Harvey owned, which had been used by the

actors in their week's stay. Hayworth had gathered a great deal of information about these spectacular visitors, some from Gabriel and some from Sara Pinkney who was Mr. Driscoll's housekeeper. Every day she came over to Hayworth for supplies and had to appease the local curiosity, which she did grudgingly, feeling her power.

Now at last the Hayworth people had had a first-hand view of the actors—the whole company, dressed up and performing—and they fitted Sara Pinkney's description to them. Olivia, that was Miss Tracy, the one she said was so refined and pleasant spoken. And the Duke was Alexander Stokes. And the woman who stood round and "tended on" Olivia was his wife. Sara hadn't said much about her. Well, she wasn't of much importance anyhow or she'd have had more acting to do. But that boy who was Viola's twin, he was Miss Tracy's brother, and Sara had said he and Miss Saunders didn't get on well, she could see it though they didn't say much. And here piped up the butcher's wife who was more interested in the play than in personalities:

"I don't see how Olivia took him for the page she was in love with. He didn't look like Viola in the face. She was real pretty, but he'd a queer sly mug on him, that boy."

"I guess she was meant to be blinded by love. And him dressed the same, hair and all, might lead her astray."

"I don't see how you could have 'em look just alike unless they'd get an actress who had a real twin brother, and maybe you'd go the whole country over and not find that."

"He ain't like her no way," growled old Gabriel from the wheel. "I seen 'em both when they wasn't acting and he's an ugly pup, that one."

Then the boat grating on the Hayworth wharf, Gabriel urged them off. He hadn't got through yet, got to go back for part of the company who were calculating to get the main line at Spencer, and after that back again for the Tracy boy.

The swaying throng of boats emptied their cargoes and the thick-pressed crowd, moving to the end of the wharf, separated into streams and groups. Farewells, last commending comments, rose on the limpid sea-scented air. The waiting line of motors absorbed the summer visitors, wheeled off and purred away past the white cottages under the New England elms. The matrons sank gratefully upon the yielding cushions, rolling by the dusty buggies, the battered autos, the lines of bicycle riders, into the quiet serene country where the shadows were lying long and clear. Yes, it had been a great success; from first to last there hadn't been a hitch.

There was one outsider left on the island, Wally Shine, the photographer sent by the Universal syndicate to take pictures of what was a "notable society event" in a place of which the public had heard much and seen nothing. But, unlike the other outsiders, his impressions, extending over a longer period, had not been so agreeable. He had seen the actors at close range, in their habits as they lived, lunched with them, watched the last rehearsal, taken a lot of pictures of Miss Saunders in the house and garden. And he had sensed an electric disturbance in the atmosphere, and come upon evidences of internal discord.

That was at the last rehearsal, when the poetic Viola had lost her temper like an ordinary woman and jumped on the Tracy boy—something about the place he stood in—nothing, as far as Shine could see, to get mad about. And the boy had answered in kind, like the spitting of an angry cat. An ugly scene that the director had to stop.

Then the man Stokes who played the Duke, a handsome, romantic looking chap—something was the matter with him. He had a haunted sort of look, as if his mind was disturbed, especially when he'd turn his eyes on Miss Saunders. His wife—the woman they called Flora—was on to him. Shine saw her watching him, sidelong from under her eyelids, the way you watch a person when you don't want them to see it.

The photographer was sensitive to emotional stress and he felt it here—below the surface—and was moved to curiosity.

The photographs were finished and the group broke up. Miss Saunders and Miss Tracy linked arms and moved off toward the headlands. Receding in the amber light they were like a picture from some antique romance—the noble lady and her page. One in narrow casings of crimson brocade, the other in short swinging kilt and braided jacket of more sober gray. Shine, fascinated, watched them pacing slowly over the burnished grass. He turned to go and saw that Stokes was watching them, too, intent like a hungry dog, the hand that held a stalk of feathered grass against his lips, trembling.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

The early bird catches the worm—and often catches a cold into the bargain.—Florida Times-Union.

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"Don't you have trouble getting your wife to believe what you say when you get home late?"

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Even if One Really Was

There is gratification in the simple fact that the eyelids of the frog wink upward. It makes one feel that one never was a tadpole.

When all men are what they pretend to be the millennium problem will be easy.

Men's Long Hair

Bobbed hair and truncated tresses may be popular in America and Europe, but the mode has not penetrated Asiatic Russia. Even the men in some parts of Turkestan wear long hair. In the "Heavenly Mountains" of Turkestan the Kalmucks, who are pure Buddhists, wear their hair in long, thick braids. They live in felt tents, eat mutton and drink "dounmiss." Baldness is practically unknown among them.

Everything Has Its Uses

Professor (lecturing class)—Everything has its uses. I challenge you to give me an instance of a useless article.

Bright Student—Well, what about a glass eye at a keyhole?—Exchange.



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