



By
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WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

Giles Chitttenham, distressed over the suicide of his younger half-brother Rodney, returns to Europe from America, where he made an unhappy marriage. Rodney had killed himself because a notorious woman, Julie Farrow, threw him over. Giles is introduced to Julie Farrow by his friend Lombard, in Switzerland. He resolves to make her fall in love with him, then throw her over as she threw Rodney. She tells him she has made a bet with her friend "Bim" Lennox that she can drive her car to the top of the St. Bernard Pass and back. Giles challenges her to take him with her and she accepts. They start out in the face of a gathering snowstorm.

Chitttenham discovers, to his amazement, that the girl beside him in the car appeals to him as no other woman has ever appealed. And something intangible convinces him that her feeling toward him is similar to his own toward her. "Do you believe in love at first sight?" he asks her, as the car toils up the mountain toward the hotel. At the hotel, after refreshments, Chitttenham and Julie found their mutual attraction so strong as to be irresistible. In the morning they returned to the town below, Julie apparently jubilantly happy. Lombard tells Chitttenham that he has made a mistake, that this Julie Farrow is not the one who ruined Rodney, but her cousin of the same name. Chitttenham is horrified. He calls at Julie's hotel and confesses that he had tried to win her love for purposes of revenge, believing her to be the other Julie.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

Chitttenham turned his face flushed his eyes furious— "What in hell are you talking about?" he demanded thickly.

"My dear chap, I've just told you. It was a mistake—quite an innocent one on my part naturally. After all, there's no harm done, is there? What difference can it make? Miss Farrow will never know..."

"Never know!" Chitttenham flung past him and out of the door. He went downstairs, took his coat from the lobby and went out into the gathering dusk.

Not Julie Farrow! not the woman who had driven Rodney to his death!

Not Julie Farrow, the woman who had lain in his arms last night! not the woman to whom he had believed he was paying back a bitter debt—not the cold, calculating adventuress whose kisses and sweet, whispered words he had taken with a covert sneer.

"It's possible to be just as happy down on earth as it is on the heights..."

She had said that to him, her hand in his, just before they parted; she said that, believing in him, trusting him, loving him! Not knowing anything of Sadie—not knowing that he was a married man! not knowing perhaps any of the tragic happenings which had led up to this, the worst tragedy of all.

What would she say when she knew? How could he explain what possible excuse could he find for his actions which would not seem utterly callous and despicable in her eyes?

It was as if some one had torn down a veil that had blinded and deceived him.

He remembered a hundred and one little things which should have warned

him, told him of his mistake.

He knew now that when last night Julie had said she loved him it was the truth also. And there was Sadie...

What a sport of the gods!

He felt like a man in a dream. He tried to believe that he had only to rub his eyes and he would find that the house before him had vanished, find that he was back again in South America, that he had never come to Switzerland with Lombard, never met Julie Farrow on the little lake steamer.

And then one of the windows leading on to a balcony opened—the sound of voices was wafted down to him through the quiet evening, and a woman's figure was silhouetted against the light.

Julie? For a moment the pounding of Chitttenham's heart almost choked him, then with a breath of relief he saw that it was not Julie, but Bim Lennox.

Presently he heard her voice—quietly cynical.

"I can't see any signs of your Romeo, Julie dear?"

Chitttenham drew further back into the shadows as he heard Julie's laugh, and the little confident note in her voice when she answered.

"He will come. I am not at all afraid."

So she had told him as he had been sure she would. Chitttenham gritted his teeth and clenched his hands. He was to be spared nothing.

He turned with an effort and went up the steps.

He could hear voices from that balcony room and muffled laughter as the maid turned to him to ask his name. He braced himself and went forward.

Julie Farrow was there alone.

Chitttenham heard the door shut behind him, but he did not move forward. There was a mist before his eyes, blinding him, then he heard Julie laugh nervously.

"I believe you are more afraid of me than I am of you," she said.

She was very pale—in her white frock she looked almost like a ghost, but she was smiling happily, and when he made no movement towards her she raised herself a little on tiptoe and softly kissed him.

"Isn't it the same now we are down on earth again?" she asked with a note of banter in her voice, though it shook a little with emotion.

Chitttenham tried to speak, but he could not.

He read a shadow of question in her eyes, that changed into vague fear.

"Why... is anything the matter?" she asked uncertainly.

"Is it the same now we are down on earth?" he asked hoarsely. "You haven't found that last night was just a dream?—that we were two dreamers, and that now we are awake?"

She laughed at that, shaking her head.

"The earth is so much—so very much more real than the mountain tops were, dear," she said softly.

She bent her head and lightly

brushed his coat sleeve with her cheek.

"I told Bim—" she said. "I was so happy, I just had to tell some one..." And then as if struck by his silence she looked up swiftly to ask: "You don't mind? you're not angry?"

"Angry...?" How could he answer? what could he say? He released her hands, and moved a step from her.

"I've something to tell you," he said abruptly.

"Tell away then?" Chitttenham looked away from her.

"It's about last night... last night."

"Yes."

"And about my brother... Rodney."

"Yes."

"You told me you knew him."

"Yes. I often met him when he was with my cousin Julie."

Chitttenham caught a hard breath, then it was true.

"You knew Lombard, too? Do you know that at first he mistook you for your cousin—the other Julie Farrow?"

"Lombard told me that you were the other Julie, that you were the woman Rodney had cared so much about."

She met his gaze directly, but unsuspectingly; suddenly she smiled.

"Well, what difference does that make? I'm not, and you know it now." She frowned a little in perplexity. "It's not anything to look so tragic about surely, is it?"

Chitttenham's eyes wavered, for a moment he hesitated desperately, searching for yet some means of escape, then he told her.

"I went up to St. Bernard with you yesterday believing you were the woman my brother had loved. I wanted to pay back some of his debt. I wanted to hurt you as I believed you had hurt him. I wanted to make a fool of you as I knew you had made of him. I thought Fate was playing into my hands when you agreed to take me with you yesterday. I thought I was being damned clever..."

It seemed so easy to make love to you... you seemed to make it easy for me..."

"Giles!" Her voice was a wounded cry.

"I know it sounds a damnable insult... but you mustn't forget who I thought you were. A notorious woman—a woman who counted one man more or less as nothing. I wanted to make you more—to see if I could make you care for me and then treat you as you had treated my brother. You told me you had never really cared for any man and so... last night..."

He felt her sway beneath his hands.

"You mean... it was all just a game?" she asked dazedly. Her eyes never left his flushed, agitated face.

Chitttenham watched her, white-faced, tense.

Suddenly he found himself beside her, folding her unresponsive hand, pleading with her.

"Forgive me. For God's sake, say you forgive me. I shall never forgive myself. I'd give ten years of my life to wipe out the ghastly mistake. But it wasn't altogether my fault, Lombard—"

She turned her head and looked at him.

"Can you blame Mr. Lombard because you wished to behave like a cad to a woman who had never done

you any harm?" Chitttenham flushed crimson.

"She sent my brother to his death. I had a right to make her pay."

"Your brother was as much of a coward as you are." The very stillness of her voice was like a knife-cut.

"Brave gentlemen both of you! The one to die and leave the stigma of his death upon a woman who never wanted him and had often told him so and the other to break a woman's whole life in order to satisfy his petty pride and the thing I suppose he calls his honour..."

"Julie!" Chitttenham said passionately.

And then somehow, without either of them being conscious of having moved, she was in his arms sobbing, her face buried in his shoulder, her arms about his neck.

"Oh, say you love me... say you really love me—" she pleaded wildly.

"Oh, do you really love me after all?" Chitttenham answered between clenched teeth:

"I do, God help me."

It was the truth; a truth of which he had never dreamed.

He turned her face up to him and kissed her lips.

"I love you—whatever happens, always remember that I love you—" he said hoarsely.

She freed herself from his arms, wiped her eyes, and pushed back her hair.

"I hope nothing else is going to happen," she said, half sobbing still.

"I think I've had enough for one day. I'm not used to crying... it doesn't suit me..."

He caught her hand, holding her "Walt... Julie, there's something else; something..."

He drew her into his arms again, holding her fast for yet another moment, then he gently released her.

"I love you with all my heart and soul—" he said hoarsely. "But you will hate me when you know all the truth—hate me more than I can ever hate myself, Julie... My dear, I—Julie, I'm not free to marry you, Julie... I—"

Then Julie said—at least her lips said it, for no sound seemed to pass them: "You mean... you're married already?"

"Yes."

Suddenly she began to laugh; helpless hysterical laughter which she tried in vain to check or control.

"Julie..." Chitttenham said.

But she went on laughing.

It was so funny, so intensely funny that she of all people, who had never cared immoderately for any one, and who had always dreaded caring, should so suddenly have been plunged into this tragedy.

Two days ago she and Chitttenham had never met, and now a whole life-time of events bound them together.

They had quarreled, loved, quarreled again, then kissed and been happy, and now the end had come...

Suddenly she spoke; she felt as if she were choking.

"Please go away."

"Not like this. I can't go like this. Julie, there must be some way out. I'll do anything... anything..."

She laughed with white lips.

"What can you do? I suppose you'll say that you are unhappily married, and ask me to be sorry for you? Perhaps you will even offer to divorce her?"

"She would be as glad of her freedom as I should," Chitttenham said curtly.

Julie laughed in his face.

"Julie..." He caught hold of her so roughly that she cried out. "Do you think you're going to be the only one to suffer?" he asked savagely.

"Do you think it doesn't rebound on me too? Do you think I wanted to care for you, or for any woman? I set a trap for you and I've been caught in it myself."

She flung back her head and looked at him with blazing eyes.

"I wish I could kill you. I wish I could kill you," she panted desperately and was gone.

Giles Chitttenham's mother leaned back in her chair and applied an absurd lace handkerchief to her eyes.

Giles frowned and moved restlessly over to the window.

He had all a man's dislike for a scene, and for the past three days he had been treated to one every time he was in his mother's presence.

He found himself remembering the barely-furnished room at the hotel on the heights of St. Bernard—the isolated top-of-the-world room in which he had held Julie in his arms.

He had been forced to leave Switzerland, without seeing her again, although he had made several attempts.

He had wired Sadie the name of the hotel at which he intended to stay, and the day following his arrival a letter came from her.

She did not even sign her name, and Chitttenham burnt the letter as soon as he had read it.

A thousand times since he left Switzerland he had thought of asking Sadie to divorce him, but Chitttenham knew her well enough to guess that if she thought he wished to get rid of her she would never allow him to do so.

All these thoughts were passing through his mind as his mother went on wailing and complaining.

Giles turned round.

"I thought you were too miserable to wish to go anywhere," he said harshly. "I'm hanged if I know what the devil you do want—" Then as she burst into tears he repented, and apologised remorsefully.

His mother dried her eyes and smiled faintly.

"I daresay you will be shocked," she said almost coquettishly. "But I should love to go out to dinner and then to a dance somewhere."

"Very well, we'll go out to dinner and a dance," he agreed. "Where would you like to go? The Savoy..."

"Oh, no..." She was looking quite eager. "To a night club. I've never been to a night club, Giles, not to a real one that is open all night, and where you eat eggs and bacon at three o'clock in the morning. It would be quite all right with you, wouldn't it?"

"It would be quite all right anyway," he answered amusedly. "These places are only what you choose to make them. Very well, what time do we start?"

"What time is it now?"

"Seven o'clock."

"Call for me at nine."

So he arrived in the dull, highly expensive street where his mother lived, punctually at nine o'clock.

The door opened behind him, and his mother came in.

"I haven't kept you waiting, have I?" she asked gaily.

Giles turned round, then he rose slowly to his feet. He felt as if he was in the presence of a perfect stranger.

"It's... well, it's amazing!" he said at last. "You don't look a day more than thirty-five."

"You dear thing!" She stood on tip-toe and kissed him gratefully. "So you won't mind dancing with your old mother to-night, Giles?"

"And where are we going?" Mrs. Ardron asked, as they drove away.

"I'm told the Fann is the place to go to," Giles said. "If you don't like it we can go on somewhere else." But Mrs. Ardron adored it, and told him so every few minutes during the evening with varied extravagance.

Presently she saw some people she knew.

"Darling, you simply must be introduced! They're such sweet people. Doris Gardner is the girl—no, the one in the black frock and the scarlet shoes. She's twenty-two, and she's just got divorced from her husband."

Continued Next Week

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