

CLOISTERED WAYS

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almost hid the four-piece college orchestra, which furnished the music.

Like the snap of a band, long under strain, Edna swung in to the spirit of the night, answered the call of life. Again and again, until the last waltz, she was surprised by her ease of movement after so long from the floor. So it was a decidedly different woman who rode along Oak Avenue, with Ralph Bauknight, long after midnight; a woman determined to leave the cloistered ways of convention's stronghold, to follow the lure of the glamorous.

"Please, Edna," Bauknight pleaded, as they parked in front of her mother's home, "please just one kiss, as a perfect ending to the most wonderful night I have ever known—Edna darling, I'll always want you, can't you see—you were made for me and my world, instead of—." He kissed her passionately, once—again, and despite her inclination to, she could not resist. When she finally freed herself from his stormy passion, and watched him ride away, the waning moon hung low in the misty west, and somewhere nearby, a restless sparrow, twittered of the dawn.

Spring always returns early to Carolina, lest she miss one perfumed breath of the jonquils, one shy blush of the violets. So this late March day knew a comfortable warmth, beneath a serenely blue sky. Dr. Johnson sat in his office, in his spacious new parsonage, and looked out on Cedar Springs. He scarcely noticed the huge buildings, which studded the growing skyline; for the inevitable hand of industry, had metamorphosed Cedar Springs from a growing, hustling little town, into a prosperous, wealthy city, a textile and business center of the South. And if the hand of industry had been busy, so had the restless hand of time, busy weaving a tapestry from the fragile threads of some lives. Two letters lay open before him on the square oak desk, one beneath each hand. The first one, written on his own stationery, in a well trained, flowing hand. With aching heart he recalls his wandering gaze to look upon it, for perhaps the ten thousandth time; for seven dreary years have passed since he first found it on his desk. It is only a note. His eyes follow the lines, but he does not read, for only too well does he know every word. He repeats them to himself:

"Dear David: I guess you will call

me yellow, a quitter, a sneak, and maybe I am, but David I simply can't go on; I want freedom, and I have been taking it, and sooner or later you would have been dishonored thereby, if I remained; so I'm going away, David. But please remember that I feel that I love you, but we just weren't meant for each other; believe me, when I say that no man is more dear.—Edna."

The other is longer, but his eyes see only the last few words: "And if you will allow me, I will return"—Edna.

Here he was interrupted by the sound of a voice which he realized became each day, more and more essential to his life—Marie. Marie was bringing in the morning's mail: "Lots and lots of mail this morning, Doctor."

"Yes?" he answered, "More work for you then."

"And for you, too."

As she left the room, with a few more kind words, he thought of her and of himself. Kind, thoughtful, understanding Marie; what would the years of Edna's absence have meant, had it not been for her! Truly enough she was only his secretary, but she was a perfect type of the office wife, always knowing what was needed most for his comfort, always seeking to lighten his burden. Sacrificing, and asking nothing in return, nothing save the rather meagre salary the church paid her as his secretary. But had she not unconsciously evoked a kind of reward? For sometime he wondered—"Oh yes, I love her," he unconsciously murmured, "love her dearly, God help me."

Later that day, Marie Carroll, plainly dressed, sat at her desk in a well appointed room in the spacious, beautiful parsonage, answering the pastor's letters. She always took a kind of prideful pleasure in this part of her work, for she felt it a special honor to be in the pastor's confidence. She felt too, that if fate were kind, he would some day say the words she most wanted to hear, for she had long since ceased denying that she loved him, as she could and would, never love another. She pictured, for a moment, herself rightfully his, to do with as he chose, a counterpart of his illustrious personality, a co-worker, a soother at evening of the day's merciless wounds—his wife. But the whimsical gods do not allow a picture perfect, therefore she remembered with a sickening reality, that the occupant of her shrine, had, somewhere in the world—a woman known as his wife. By the code of the conventional law—his wife.

"Marie?" He had been watching her from the doorway, and as if he had known her thoughts, he said:

"I forgot to tell you that Mrs. Johnson is coming home in a few days, and I have been wondering—well—if you would kinda help me look after her—you know—er she has—er she's not well—"

"Oh, no, no, I can't, I can't—I could never go through with it—I'll go."

"But Marie," he faltered, then—"You see I need you—er—, God help me: Marie I love you."

"Oh David," she whispered, as she tenderly pulled his face down to hers, "I'll do it, I'll do it—I'll do anything for you, David, I'll follow you to the end of the world and back, hungry and thirsty,—oh, I love you so."

Later as the afternoon waned, he stood on the front porch of the parsonage, admiring the gentle beauty of the violets, jonquils and early roses, as they perfumed the air. So much is human affection like them, he mused,—so very hard to understand.

So the wanderer returned to her husband's cloistered ways, resignedly and broken in spirit. April had brought the roses and the blossoms of every kind. Soft moonlight bathed the springy south in hazy radiance and romance rode the winged and perfumed breezes of the night. They sat on the east porch of the beautiful parsonage, watching the fire-flies at carnival among the

trees. It was warm, but she was wrapped, for as he had said, she indeed was not well. She had not talked much about her trip, which had lasted seven years, before tonight, but it seemed to David as he sat listening to her, that she would never tire of telling him of the lesson she had learned. But abruptly she changed her conversation, and her voice took on a mel-

lowness, a seriousness he had never before noticed. "David," she began, "I guess you know that I'm not going to be here long—I'm going away again, David, but I think it will be for a longer time than seven years this time—"

"Oh, Edna," he cut in, trying his

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