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MANY WOMEN *The White Girl Enters*

By TED HAVILAND

WHAT HAS HAPPENED: Ronnie Ford, a young tap dancer, breezes into New York and becomes an overnight sensation. He meets a chorus girl, Jeanie Temple, and falls very deeply in love with her. Jeanie tells him that she loves him, too, but he is soon disillusioned when he learns that she is only planning to wed him for the sake of his money.

It leaves the show in which he is appearing and disappears for a month, returning again in Atlantic City, where he again a contract to appear in a new show. His whole nature changes with his discovery of Jeanie's unfaithfulness to him, and he decides that all women are like her—false and deceitful and calculating.

He sets out, therefore to get what thrills he can out of life, and his story from then on is the story of many women in quick succession. The first of these is Martha Hunter, who introduces him to a fast Washington set, and from whom he learns to drink to smoke. Many other girls interest him momentarily during the months that follow, but he soon finds that he is becoming jaded, that they are all beginning to bore him. He finds that he can never be happy because he cannot forget Jeanie Temple, his first love.

One day he spots a girl in the audience of a Washington theatre who catches his fancy. He meets her outside the theatre, takes her home, and learns that her name is Thelma Hughes. He soon discovers that he loves her, but hesitates to tell her of his love because he feels that he is too hardened, too spoiled by the life he has led, to be worthy of her. As soon as he leaves Washington he slips back into his old ways of dissipation in spite of his resolutions to do better, and finds that the bad habits which he has formed in his early years are too strong to be broken.

HOW DO ON WITH THE STORY:

CHAPTER IV WHITE GIRL

It was late in the spring when Ronnie finished his tour with the show, and immediately he drove all the way from Chicago back to Washington, and to Thelma. Thelma greeted him joyously, and they made plans to spend as much of the summer together as possible. Ronnie would be rehearsing for a new show which would open in New York the coming fall, he said, but there would be week ends which they could spend together, and perhaps even more after the new routines had been whipped into shape.

Thelma's mother and father finally came to approve of Ronnie, in spite of the fact that he belonged to the stage, of which they strongly disapproved. Their home was now always open to him, and thus Thelma and Ronnie managed to spend quite a good deal of their time together, their warm friendship meantime ripening into open love. Ronnie did not dare as yet to bring the subject up before Thelma; he felt that he had not yet proved himself worthy of her affection, while Thelma seemed to take the whole matter for granted.

One night Ronnie found that he could contain himself no longer. They had been for a long drive through the wooded darkness of Rock Creek Park, and had parked for a few minutes to enjoy the cool freshness of the air. And that night Ronnie told Thelma that he loved her. That night he begged her to promise that some day in the near future she would marry him.

He wasn't going to be ashamed of himself any more, he decided. After all, he had given up the old life he had been leading as much as was practicable; and he had resolved mentally that if Thelma accepted him, he would begin anew and make a man out of himself. That wouldn't be hard at all, he thought, with Thelma's promise ringing in his ears.

He put the question to her in a peer, throaty, voice which didn't seem to be his at all. He put his



The whole crowd became drunk.

arm around her and gazed into her dark and luminous eyes.

"You know," he whispered, "I really love you."

"I love you, too," she replied. "I'm sure now that I do, but . . ."

"But what?" There was slight irritation in his voice.

"Well, gee," she said, "I scarcely feel as though I know you! Sometimes you're yourself, and then you're all right. But sometimes you seem so strange—even to me—and then it seems almost as though you were a different person. I've only known you a few months, after all. And to get married now—well, I don't know. Forever is a long time, you know, to tie yourself to somebody you scarcely even know."

"Aw, honey—" he protested.

"I know what," she said finally. "Give me a couple of days to think. You're going back to New York tomorrow morning, and you'll be back here next Friday. By then I'll know I'll tell you definitely then."

Ronnie went back to New York, but he carried with him a very definite reaction of discouragement as far as Thelma was concerned. He felt that had she really loved him, she would have demonstrated that fact by accepting him at once. This procrastination he could not understand. Perhaps after all she was in love with somebody else, someone whom he did not even know. After all, his acquaintance with Thelma had never been more than very slight. He had picked her up, really, in front of the theatre, without any

signs of encouragement on her part. After that he had seen her only on very special occasions. Could she have been hiding something, some other love affair, for instance, from him?

Yet on second thought Ronnie came to the conclusion that, after all, she was being true to him; that, had there been another man in her life, she would have told him long before. Her face was too innocent, too frank and open, to conceal any secret of that sort. And he couldn't bring himself to think of her as the type of girl who would do such a thing.

Yet the following Friday, when he drove down to Washington, he found that Thelma couldn't see him that night. The excuse she gave was that her mother had company—relatives—and she had to entertain them at a theatre party. Ronnie had to hurry back to New York the next afternoon for a special conference with the backers of his new show, and he went back disgruntled not only at the long trip which he had been forced to make in vain, but also at Thelma's action in failing to see him.

The conference, which lasted far into the morning, proved a dull and wearisome ordeal. The whole affair was more than Ronnie's depraved system could stand. As soon as it was over he went to his hotel room and dug out his flask, which he had put away, he thought, forever, and took a long, scorching drink. Then he hurried out into the night.

And in spite of Ronnie's repeated

promises to himself, he ended up that night exactly where he least wanted to be, in the degrading company of Martha Hunter and her wild, hilarious crowd. He was greeted merrily and soon found himself warming to the spirit of the madly dancing, Bohemian mob as the warm liquor coursed through his veins. Martha, looking around hurriedly for someone to whom she could introduce him, finally selected Sylvia Washington, a slender white girl with wild black eyes and trailing raven hair. She grasped Ronnie's dark hand in her own white one with surprising warmth and friendliness, and drew him into a corner where they could drink and talk without being disturbed. Ronnie found her to be wonderfully companionable, and within an hour it seemed as though they had always been warm friends.

What power Sylvia possessed over Ronnie he never really knew; he could only be sure that there was something definitely irresistible about her, something which drew him unyieldingly to her, which made him thereafter always half insane to hold her in his arms. The supple, sinewy manner in which she danced, the smile of allurements with which she dazzled him, the utter abandonment of her manner, the rich, red lips against her clear white skin and coal-black hair, all combined to put him quite definitely under her power.

The gaiety of the party grew proportionately greater as the hours flew by. The whole crowd became very drunk, nobody seemed to know what was happening, and nobody seemed really to care. Ronnie made tempestuous love to his newly-found sweetheart, and she in turn responded in a manner which amazed him.

In the morning he tried in vain to recall from his befogged memory just how far that love-making had gone. It was, he decided, dangerous business. Once again he resolved to give the whole thing up, but that very night, after several hours of torture in trying to get to sleep, he again sought out Martha and her crowd. And once again he found Sylvia, and made love to her.

So it was that Ronnie began to live what was really for him a double life. It was dangerous, he knew, but he was powerless to resist. He cared for Thelma above all things, loved her in fact. And yet he could not forget the willowy seductiveness of Sylvia.

Week ends, when he was free from work, he would drive down to Washington, and he would visit Thelma, the girl he loved, the girl he really wanted to marry. He would tell her how much he loved her; would beg her to marry him. And she would put him off with troubled excuses. "I'm not quite sure, yet—" she would say. If only she would decide! The waiting was driving him to madness.

With his mind still in a whirl he would return to New York, to Harlem, and once again he would find himself in some gay dive with Martha and her crowd, and Sylvia, whose bitter laugh and gay love-making would utterly disrupt his resolutions to be true to Thelma.

The days went by, and Ronnie in the meantime learned a great deal about Sylvia, the beautiful white-checked girl for whom he had such a passionate fondness. He found, for one thing, that she loved and reviled in power above all else. She loved to rule men, to dictate to them, to order them around. And, as Ronnie found to his sorrow, the men she

selected as her victims were powerless, absolutely powerless in her hands. If they refused to do her bidding they suffered for it; she took their hearts and twisted them around her finger, and thenceforth ruled them. If all else failed, she destroyed their souls. Her methods were ruthless, she was without mercy. She exulted in her power over men, gloried in it. And though outwardly she was as beautiful a young woman as Ronnie had ever seen, inwardly her soul appeared to be blackened in some inexplicable way. Somehow she seemed more like a witch than a woman.

Ronnie realized all this in a vague sort of way; he knew, to some extent at least, that he was playing with fire. Yet he found himself powerless to resist Sylvia. Whenever he was in New York he was with her; she commanded him and he obeyed her as though he were her slave.

Powerless to shake off the spell which she held over him, he became increasingly unhappy as time wore on. His new show opened, and it proved an immediate sensation. Thelma was his special guest at the premiere, but she had to go home immediately after the final curtain to attend to her mother, who was sick. Ronnie was sorry that they could not celebrate his new success together, and yet he was glad because Thelma's departure made it less probable that she would find out about Sylvia.

Not that it mattered very much, Ronnie had almost forgotten Thelma completely now, and her letters to him had grown gradually less frequent. No more was said about their possible marriage; Thelma, like her parents, had some objections to the life of an actor's wife and therefore refused, for the time being at least, to consider Ronnie seriously. And Sylvia had such a grip upon Ronnie's emotions that he was actually incapable of doing anything which would displease her.

Things grew gradually worse and worse; Ronnie, tired after long hours of work found it impossible to sleep because of the worries which disturbed his mind, and likewise impossible to arouse himself to the pitch necessary to put his act over with a bang. It was discouraging and disheartening, for he felt himself, after all his years of success, slipping.

Sylvia must have noticed that all was not well with him. "What's the matter, kid?" she asked him once while they were sitting in a stuffy little cabaret in Harlem. "You don't look like the same fellow I used to know. What's happened, anyway?"

Ronnie shook his head disconsolately and murmured, "Oh, nothing." She smiled knowingly. "You can't fool me," she said, "there's something wrong. Now come on, tell me what it is. Maybe I can help."

He remained gloomily silent.

"Is it love?" she resumed suddenly.

He shook his head. "Nope," he told her. "I ain't in love, I'm just tired, that's all—worn out."

"Oh-h," she nodded knowingly. "So that's it." She smiled. "That's easy. You just wait—we'll have you feeling fine again in a couple of minutes."

She left the table where they were seated and disappeared from the stuffy room. After a few moments she came back smiling triumphantly. She sat down again and looked at him. From her purse she drew stealthily a tiny white pill. "Here,"

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