

The Innocent Cheat

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CHAPTER X

"Why, my dear," Brent said to Helen, "I've told you what I mean by that. It was only my crazy idea that I could control you through force of habit. I thought if you were used to giving in to me you would more readily consent to marry me."

His voice was thick with emotion, as though he made his confession by force of a tremendous will power. His acting was so clever that Helen sensed, as he hoped she would, his feeling of having blundered into a stupidity and his humility over it.

She sat very still for a moment, stirred by the emotion that rose within her own breast, saving it, delighting in it.

But Brent's silence pressed her for an answer. She moved over closer to him.

"Leonard," she whispered, "it is the most natural thing in the world for me to do as you wish."

Her inference of surrender satisfied Brent. But his plans were too well laid to permit him to follow up the promise in her words.

There must be, he conceived, a reluctance to accept her pledge. For it might possibly occur to her that his proposal had come upon the eve of her interview with her grandfather. If that interview should lead to a fortune for her Brent wanted to be above the suspicion of having shown an eagerness to share it with her.

"Don't say that," he said rather sharply. "You make me feel like a blackguard. I was planning to take advantage of your youth and inexperience, Helen."

Helen sat away from him. She was startled.

"I had no right to dominate you," Brent went on, with enough apology in his voice to imply that his abruptness was called forth by his bad conscience.

"It doesn't matter that you wanted to do it," Helen sought to appease him. "I'd have turned to no one else but you anyway, Leonard."

"But I don't want you to feel that way now," he replied. "I want you to think only of yourself, Helen, and the promise that was made to your mother. Your life from now on may be far apart from mine. You mustn't be influenced by me, and what I have done for you."

"You cannot change it," Helen told him.

"But your grandfather may," Brent observed. "You are far too young to make important decisions which will affect your entire life. I am better informed than you are, my dear, and I know that anything you feel now will change."

Helen smiled with the superiority of youthful assurance. "My grandfather at least will have nothing to do with my decisions," she said.

"I think he will," Brent told her. "You're a lovely girl, Helen. I'm sure your grandfather will love you."

"Love me?" Helen repeated. "He couldn't expect me to return it."

Brent offered no further comment on the subject and gradually they fell to talking of other things. Helen enjoyed the drive to the city, the approach to the heart of it down Riverside Drive and the slow progress through traffic to the hotel where Brent had engaged a room for her.

She was a bit disappointed that he had given up the apartment he had occupied until a few months previous. It had been a charming place, not too mannish for feminine taste. Helen had dreamed of keeping house in it as Brent's ward until they sailed for Europe or some land even more remote. Brent had let it go as Helen's graduation neared so that he

would be free to sail immediately. That was before his meeting with Charles Nellin. Now he too regretted having given it up, as he hated the bother of settling again.

The home atmosphere, the suggestion of permanence afforded by housekeeping, would better suit his purpose at present than a hotel. He rather feared to introduce Helen to the excitement and pleasures of living in a metropolitan hotel. It might be too great an influence in turning her mind from settling down with him, he thought.

But there was the chance that her grandfather might remain firm against her, and the alternative of following his original plan of filling Carmel's place in his affairs with Helen. In which case they would soon move on, and there would be many hotels and few apartments.

Of Helen's opposition to her grandfather, he took but little account. She was an emotional, sensitive girl. Should the old man appeal to her sympathy and seek her forgiveness for his harshness to her mother, Brent had no doubt Helen would grant both in great measure.

And the best card in his hand, the ace with which he hoped to take the winning trick, was Helen's present bitterness over the treatment her mother had received. Nothing could better convince Cunningham, Brent reasoned, that Helen was not seeking his riches.

Brent thought always now of Helen as Evangeline Cunningham's daughter. Diamond Page and his wife were no longer in his memory. He had discarded them.

And Helen had accepted his story as truth. It all fitted in so well with the past. She had grown up with the mystery of her identity—a mystery that fired her with desire to solve it.

Now she was eager to do what she must to keep faith with her father's promise to her mother, and show Leonard how little she cared for her grandfather's wealth.

The day following their arrival in New York Brent drove her up

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SIDE GLANCES



"I'm practically working my way through school; dad's buying me a car, but I'll have to pay for all the gas."

to Yonkers and to Bramblewood. It was less dreary-looking than on the occasion Brent first had seen it. To Helen it was the home of her mother and she looked at it with reverence.

They had come unannounced. Brent had not trusted Cyril Cunningham to welcome them. Should they fail to admittance today he proposed to approach in a different way.

But Mr. Cunningham did not refuse to receive them. Their message, brought to him by the butler, was simply that they had important information which they wished to deliver to him in person.

For many years Cyril Cunningham had been hoping to receive certain important information. His declining years were torn with a yearning that his stubbornness could not obliterate.

Few strangers came to his door, but those who did were welcome. And when Helen and Brent were shown into his private sitting room on the second floor he peered at them from dimming eyes with a feverish intensity.

Helen hesitated on the threshold, fighting to still the agitation that was causing her to tremble nervously. The room seemed to waver slightly and then her

glance settled upon the aged man in the invalid's chair that was drawn close to a window.

His shrunken figure was lost in the folds of a loose dressing gown but the hands that rested upon the silver head of a heavy cane were evidence, in their frailty, of the man's feeble condition.

Helen did not, at that moment, feel pity for him. In spite of the picture he presented of belonging already to another world, she steeled herself to think only of her mother and the unhappiness she had known in this house.

The butler announced them and retired, but Brent noticed that an attendant whom he thought to be a valet or a nurse remained.

"Good morning, Mr. Cunningham," he said, advancing and bowing before the old man. He refrained from extending his hand; a point that did not escape Mr. Cunningham's notice.

Mr. Cunningham nodded and his own hands remained folded upon his cane. "Marks," he said to his attendant, "bring a chair close for Mrs. . . . Brent, I believe you said?" he finished, addressing himself to Leonard.

Brent silently inclined his head, and waited until Helen was seated before speaking again. Mr. Cunningham was offering apologies for being unable to rise to receive her. Helen answered with a faint smile and left the conversation to the two men.

Mr. Cunningham waved the servant aside, dismissing him, and turned back to Brent. "Your business is important?" he queried,

plainly striving to suppress some inner excitement.

"Quite," Brent replied, and then, without preamble: "It is in regard to your daughter's child—your granddaughter." As he spoke Brent kept his eyes upon Mr. Cunningham with an intent gaze. He saw him start, saw his hands flutter on the cane head and heard him draw a sharp breath.

"My granddaughter!" It was barely a whisper, rather a thought that lived for an instant upon the air.

"Yes," Brent said. "Are you interested?" The light that burned suddenly in the eyes that Mr. Cunningham lifted to search his own was sufficient answer for Brent. "You may if you like, meet her," he said.

(To Be Continued)

It's all right to pick up a stranger on the highway if, like the Good Samaritan, you pick one too far gone to knock you in the head.

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CANADA WHEAT BETTER GRADE THAN AMERICAN

WASHINGTON, Sept. 13 (AP)—The high protein content of Canadian wheat, adequate storage facilities and favorable transportation rates were cited Thursday by officials of the bureau of agricultural economics as important factors contributing to the disparity between Canadian and American wheat prices.

The bureau yesterday undertook an investigation at the request of the federal farm board to learn the causes of the disparity and what bearing storage facilities in this country had on it.

The greatest disparity in prices was found by Dr. O. C. Stine, chief of the division of statistical and historical research, to be on cash grain and grain for delivery in the immediate or near future, generally from eight to nine cents a bushel in favor of the Canadians. It was found also that dominion grain generally had higher protein content and there was a tendency in the world market to pay a premium for it because of its better suitability for flour milling purposes.

Preferential freight rates in Canada also were found to bring growers almost ten cents a bushel more at the point of delivery than received beyond domestic growers. In addition, Canadian spring wheat crop was short and was handled without difficulty because of sufficient storage and handling facilities. Also it was found that with Canadian crop being harvested later than the domestic crop, more time was allowed for it to be handled.

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