

Rash Romance

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By LAURA LOU BROOKMAN

Chapter XIII

Tony Knight, infuriated and in action, was a sight to make strong men quail. Her eyes flashed. The vivid, radiant lips were drawn with rage. Tony stamped one foot as she cried:

"You're going to get out of here—your gold digger! You cheap, scheming money grabber, you! Don't think you can stay in this house and get away with your tricks! I won't have it."

Judith was on her feet, too. Now, Judith's eyes had narrowed. There was a dangerous light smoldering in their blue depths. No one had ever said that Judith Knight could not defend herself.

For a moment she hesitated, and in her perfect silence there was strength. Tony, spent with the tempestuous outburst, stood quivering and glaring at the older girl. Judith's lips moved—but before the words came she had checked herself.

She was remembering this was Arthur's daughter with whom she had to deal.

"I am not a gold digger," she said calmly. "I'm your father's wife, and there is no reason why you should dislike me so. I want to be friends with you."

The blazing Tony had recovered her voice again.

"But I won't be friends!" she screamed, and her voice rose to a higher, louder pitch. "You're nobody! You're nothing but a sneaky, designing shop girl, and you want my father's money. Well—you won't get it, do you hear that? You fooled him into marrying you but he'll get rid of you all right. He'll do exactly as I say and I won't have you here! Do you get that?"

Someone else had come into the living room. Neither of the two girls had heard the third person's footsteps. Both turned at the sound of his voice.

"You are to apologize at once, Tony."

Arthur Knight, coat over his arm and holding his hat, stood in the doorway. He had come into the house just in time to hear his daughter's last tirade. Knight's face was flushed and his chin (of which Tony's was an exact replica) was set in a hard line.

"Apologize to Judith!" he commanded the daughter the second time. "You are to do it at once!"

"I won't."

The air of the room was electric. One spark—and the fuse would be lit. Judith glanced from her husband to Tony, then back again. What would happen next? It was terrifying.

"But you mustn't!" she protested. "You mustn't, Arthur!"

"Stay out of this, Judith," Knight told her curtly. "Tony is going to obey me. She is going to ask you to forgive the outrageous things she has been saying and tell you she is sorry for them. All right, Tony." He turned toward the girl. "Let me hear your apology."

Judith had never seen her husband in a mood like this. There was anger in his voice to match Tony's own. In addition there was determination to brook no resistance.

The decisive figure in this drama of clashing wills was Tony Knight. She met her father's gaze sullenly and rebelliously. Then, as though his unflinching disapproval was too much, she sank into a little heap on the davenport, hid her face in her hands and began to weep.

Ruddy circles of embarrassment shone in Judith's pale cheeks. What a scene for her introduction to the Knight household! And what gossip for the servants! Both the father and daughter's voices must have carried far enough for them to hear. Judith had taken no part in the controversy and yet she knew she was the guilty cause of it all.

She looked at Arthur and

thought his obdurate mood was weakening. Tony's shoulders rose and fell. Her quick, snapping voice made the only sound in the room.

"Excuse me, ma'am!"

Frightened, apparently in doubt about the intrusion, Harriet appeared in the doorway.

"What is it, Harriet?"

"It's—someone on the telephone. A message for Miss Knight, ma'am."

"Thank you."

The maid turned to leave. Tony raised her head, seeking her father with fearful, accusing eyes. Then she arose, brushed back her disordered hair and called to Harriet in a quivering, unsteady voice:

"I—I'll take the call in the study."

Tony Knight disappearing through the study door, gave the impression of a forced and hasty retreat. Temporarily Tony's guns were lowered.

Judith placed a hand on Knight's arm.

"I don't mind about what she said," Judith told him. "Don't be severe with her, Arthur, on my account."

He shook her hand off.

"Tony defied me," she said. "I will not have defiance. Why, she was talking like a—like a little vixen. It was outrageous!"

"But I don't think it's going to help any to antagonize the child," Judith pleaded.

Knight made no answer. There seemed nothing for Judith to do but wait dully for the outcome.

It was a good five minutes before Tony reappeared. She had to pass through the living room in order to reach the stairs. Otherwise she certainly would not have returned.

Tony looked as though she had recovered from her temper. The small face was petulant and sullen still, but the look of wildness was gone. Some word had come to her over the telephone which had proved quieting. She was an odd-looking little creature as she entered the living room. The scarlet lounging suit she wore had a blonde and loose trousers, the top part of the garment very gay with appliqued figures in black.

Tony wore her dark hair in a low knot at the back of her neck. It curled becomingly about her face, but just now the curls were unkempt and the knot was disordered. On the girl's feet were frivolous pumps which shrieked "Paris."

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Toby gave her father an apprehensive glance and started across the room. Knight stopped her.

"Tony," he said, "who was that on the telephone?"

"Why, father—just—a friend. A friend who crossed on the same ship I took."

"Was it a man?"

"Yes. He—he asked to take me to the theatre."

"You're not leaving this house tonight until you apologize to Judith for what you said to her."

Surely Arthur Knight had never used that tone with his daughter before. She stared at him for an instant, as though studying the man. Suddenly Tony looked toward Judith.

"I apologize," she said in a low, grudging voice, "since my father insists."

With that Tony Knight fled.

She ran out of the room and up the stairway.

The restraint was broken and Judith made the most of it. Her face lit with a smile as she turned quickly.

"Time is flying, Arthur. It's nearly six o'clock and neither of us is dressed for dinner. With a treasure like Cora in the kitchen it would never, never do to keep the meal waiting. Shant we go up?"

Knight picked up the hat and coat he had dropped in a chair. He looked tired.

"Yes," he agreed. "Here I've got to get rid of these things."

Judith took the hat and coat from him. She hung them away in a closet for wraps. Then they mounted the stairs.

Dinner had been ordered for seven o'clock. Fifteen minutes before that time Judith was downstairs, nervously assuring herself that there could not be another scene. Such affairs like that in a row were impossible!

Would Tony appear for dinner? Arthur came down, looking very

handsome in his dinner clothes. The hour had refreshed him and he seemed to have forgotten his anger.

"I sent off a note to Junior this afternoon," he told her. "By the way, he'll be here Saturday. Can't decide what to buy the young rascal for Christmas. You know, to really please him, it ought to be the Graf Zeppelin. Think you could wrap it in an attractive package, Judith?"

She was glad to hear him joke. Just then Judith's heart lifted, for down the stairs came Tony.

"Dinner is served, I think," said Judith Knight. "Let's go into the dining room."

Tony spoke only once or twice throughout the meal, but was civil

toward her stepmother. The girl had dressed for the theatre in a dazzling white frock which combined the crispness of tulle with tulle. It was sophisticated, low-cut, and a great bow on the skirt suggested its French origin. Tony wore coral jewelry, no more flaming than her lips.

The dinner passed more comfortably than Judith had expected. Tony asked to be excused when coffee was served. She went up to her room, and 15 minutes later when Harriet announced a young man was waiting, Tony descended.

Judith saw that the girl was wrapped in white fur. Without any word for the two in the living

room, Tony and her escort left the house.

An hour or so had passed before Judith Knight said hesitatingly to Arthur:

"Do you know whom Tony is with tonight?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Good Lord, no! I can't keep track of her admirers. Never could!"

At that precise instant, it happened. Tony Knight rode in an imported coupe driven by a young man in evening clothes.

"No, no, darling!" he was saying to her. "Not the Casino! Much too likely there to meet my wife!"

(To Be Continued)

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SIDE GLANCES

By George Clark

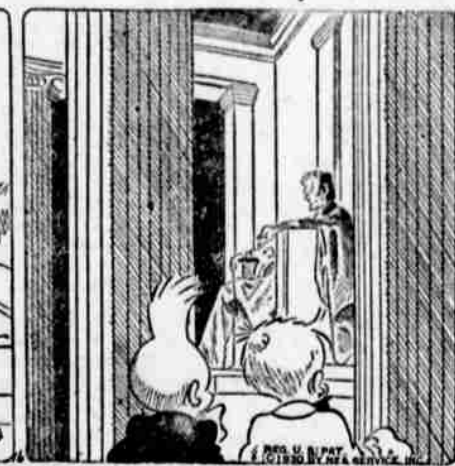


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