

# With Banners

By Emilie Loring

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CHAPTER XV—Continued

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"Pay it back! Don't be foolish. There is no question of paying it back. Have you forgotten that Mary Amanda Dane left an income to you?"

Brooke came from behind the chair to perch nonchalantly on the arm. For an instant she watched the flame-color pattern the firelight cast on her white satin frock. She was quite steady now, she assured herself, quite self-possessed. She managed a smile as she looked up.

"You don't think for an instant, do you, that I would accept a cent of that money? Would you take any from me when I tried to divide with you? I'm surprised, I'm really surprised that you don't play the martyr and ask me to marry you."

"No. I shan't ask you to marry me. I've made a lot of mistakes in my life, but, believe me, I've learned enough not to make that one."

His cool denial hurt Brooke intolerably. He hated her, she told herself. Why shouldn't he?

"In the library a while ago you told Lucette you were leaving here because you had accepted an offer. Are you engaged to Jerry Field?"

A gate in the wall! A way out without letting him know that she cared, how desperately she cared for him. She laughed.

"I—Here come Sam and Lucette. They are stamping snow from their feet outside as a warning that they are about to interrupt our conference. Amusing, isn't it?"

"Amusing to you, perhaps. It isn't to me."

Sam's face was as red as the fire as he and Lucette entered the room.

"Sorry to interrupt, but—"

"Don't apologize."

"I'm not apologizing." His face went from red to crimson. "I'm only trying to explain, Brooke, that the inspector's walking the floor and gnashing his teeth and muttering something about keeping the Law waiting. He wants you, Mark, and he wants you quick."

"I'm going." Mark Trent paused on the threshold. "Good-night, Brooke. We'll finish our talk tomorrow."

CHAPTER XVI

"We'll finish our talk tomorrow."

A month had passed since Mark Trent had flung those words as he, since she had left Lookout House. They had echoed to the accompaniment of the whirl of the wings of the great plane in which she had flown south at the urgency and the expense of Carston's Inc.; they had intruded in business hours; they had flitted like wraiths through her dreams. She had not seen him, he hadn't even written, Brooke told herself bitterly. Hadn't she said that he had made a lot of mistakes, but that he had learned enough not to make the mistake of asking her to marry him? After that, why couldn't she forget? Why did his voice everlastingly echo through her memory?

The days slid past breathlessly. She was conscious of a sort of breathless urge to keep up with something which was escaping her. Keep up with what, she asked herself, as in the flower-scented dressing room of Carston's, Inc. she slipped out of the green organza number she had been modeling and into a frock of cool yellow linen. She was looking out unseeingly at the palm-bordered white street when Madame Celeste entered. Her thin white frock rested Brooke's eyes after the rainbow collection she had put on and off for the last two hours.

"You done noble, cherie," the woman approved heartily. There was something in her nasal twang as refreshing as a breeze from a thousand New England hills. "That last customer is one of the richest girls in the country. She ordered all the gowns you modeled. You look kind of tired, you've a right to, cherie, after landing that

whale of an order. Get some lunch here, go home and rest until four, then come back. You will dress here, the society models will dress at the Shaw's sports house. Sidone will be there to help them. You'll be the only professional mannequin, but I wouldn't trust an amateur to show that wedding gown. The charity fete begins at five. The wedding party will be the last feature of the style show. Look your best. We expect that some prospective bride will snap up the whole outfit when she sees you walk up the ribbon and flower-bordered aisle in that heavenly white satin veiled in a mist of tulle. You'll make a ravishing bride, cherie; it will be your last appearance, so knock their eyes out."

The words "last appearance" penetrated the turmoil in Brooke's mind.

"Last appearance! What do you mean?"

Madame Celeste twisted her amethyst beads. "Cherie, don't go white on me. You know business hasn't been too good, and I have my orders. After the fashion show I'm to hand you a check for your commissions and a month's pay and you're through."

"But—but I thought I had sold a lot of frocks since I came."

"You have, and you can search me for the boss's reasons. Never knew him to turn a trick like this before—but, I ask you, is any business being run as it ever was run before? I'll tell the world it isn't. I'm terribly sorry to lose you."

For an instant, emotion threatened damage to the enameled calm of the woman's face.

Brooke was still puzzling over the dismissal when she reached the small Bermuda-type house, with its whitewashed roof and walls built around two sides of a patio, in which she had been living since she had come to Palm Beach, and entered her room.

She changed from the yellow cotton frock to white shantung pajamas. She picked up letters from a desk, pushed open a window, stepped out on the gallery and breathed deeply of the light thin air. She opened a letter from Lucette.

For the first two pages the word "Jerry" monopolized space; to even a feeble-minded person it would be evident that Jerry Field was leading in a long stag line.

Brooke was glad that, but how did Lucette manage to take on all the festivities and be fit for her work in the morning? As if she had anticipated the question, Lucette wrote, with words heavily underlined for emphasis:

"After this evening I'll cut out the night spots. There's nothing in them for me. It's an ill wind that blows nobody good. If you hadn't lost the Dane money you would still be hovering over me like a hen with one chicken. You and Mother were so afraid to let me be on my own; I know what you've been thinking from your letters. Trouble with you two is, you don't trust me enough. Did you think I would like having men make passes at me? That I would want to look and act like a silly fool from too many cocktails? That I would drive around the country after midnight with a man who was so tight that I'd find myself at dawn mugged up round a telegraph pole? I've tried them all—except the pole; that night I told my muddled escort that I had never driven a car like his, would he let me try it? I asked sweetly. He would. Of course I drove with the dumb-bell's head parked on my shoulder, but, in the words of our old friend Henry W. L.,

"Into each life some rain must fall. Some days must be dark and dreary."

"You know that I've always loathed cheapness, and if the pastimes above listed aren't cheap—cheap—cheap, I don't know what is."

"So stop worrying about little sister, darling, and get this: I want to

be like you, Brooke. You don't smoke, you don't drink, and yet I've never seen a man who, when introduced to you, didn't stand a little straighter, fuss with his tie, and get that I've-found-her-at-last look in his eyes; and you're grand fun and the life of the party."

"There, you have the inside story of my life, so what? Never thought I would let you know how I adored you—bad for you—but here it is.

"Lucette."

"P. S. News flash! Sam's play may be produced any day. Its predecessor is folding up; it was a terrible flop."

Brooke shut her eyes to keep back tears. She had known that Lucette loved her, but that she set her on a pedestal was unbelievable. As to that "I've-found-her-at-last" look in a man's eyes, she should have seen Mark Trent's when he had called her a "schemer" in Jed Stewart's office.

Why think of it? Hadn't she plenty of happier things to think of? She glanced at the clock. Sam's play might be produced any day. She had lost her job. She was free to go to New York! Could she afford it? Why did that grubby question have to pop up to take the joy out of life? Of course she would go. She had flown to Palm Beach at the ex-



"Last Appearance! What Do You Mean?"

pense of Carston's Inc. She would take a bus in return on her own. She would go tonight, go on to a new adventure in living.

Tingling with excitement, she telephoned for a reservation on the night bus; packed a small trunk to be sent by express; folded her silver evening frock and accessories into the air luggage suitcase which Carston's Inc. had provided. She would take the gala clothes for the premiere—thrilling thought. She laid out an amethyst tweed suit with crimson scarf and beret, to wear on the journey. It would be cold when she reached New York.

All ready and somewhere to go! She glanced at the clock. There was time for a swim before she started for the style-show. It would set her up and refresh her.

She slipped into the white water-frock and caught up a beach coat. Life was gloriously worth while even if the man one loved did think one a "schemer," she told herself, as she ran down the steps which led to the patio.

She was humming a snatch of gay song as she crossed the strip of yellow sand steeping in golden sunlight which the march of fashion had left behind. Arms extended, she slid into the sparkling water. It parted. Buoyant, foamy, it closed over her. Marvelous feeling. This would stabilize her mind, drown haunting memories. She swam with quick strokes, turned, floated, came back arm over arm, and, dripping with coolness, waded out to the shore.

A man rose from the shadow of the dark hibiscus hedge outside the patio. Its scarlet flowers seemed to nod at her in amused derision as she stopped in surprise. Mark

Trent! This was the cue for cool sophistication.

He held out the beach coat she had dropped on the sand.

"Put this on, Brooke. Let's sit here. I want to talk to you and we may be interrupted inside."

"How did you know where I was?"

"I've been playing round with Lucette, more or less. Saw Sam when I came through New York."

"Sam! How was he?"

"Nerves taut as violin strings, otherwise in great shape."

"When does his play open?"

"Day after tomorrow."

"So soon!"

"Why that sudden look of horror?"

"It wasn't horror, it was—I've lost my job and I had planned to leave here tonight by bus, but traveling that way I can't possibly make New York in time for the premiere of 'Islands Arise.'"

"I know that you've lost your job. I had a talk with your boss before I left the city. He agreed with me that you shouldn't miss the opening of Sam's play."

"You mean that you told him to fire me? What right have you to interfere in my life?"

"The right of a sort of guardian; didn't Aunt Mary Amanda so request in that last will?" Eyes on a pelican fishing in shallow water, he accused:

"You haven't answered Jed's letters notifying you that the amount of income you had been receiving from my aunt's estate would be deposited monthly to your account as usual. I had to come to find out if you had received them."

Brooke sprang to her feet. Her beach coat slipped off. Slim and golden-skinned in her white water-frock, she dug pink toes into the hot sand.

"I didn't answer because you both know without being told that I won't touch that money."

Mark Trent loomed over her.

"Put this on again," he commanded grimly. "Why won't you touch that money?"

Brooke thrust her arms into the beach coat he held and stuck her unsteady hands into the pockets.

"Would you take a cent of Mary Amanda Dane's when I thought it mine? Didn't you say in that snobby voice of yours the afternoon we met in Jed Stewart's office:

"'Hope you'll enjoy the house and fortune,' Miss Reyburn. Now it's my turn:

"'I hope you'll enjoy the house and fortune,' Mr. Trent. I'm sure Daphne Field will be crazy about it."

"Daphne!" He caught her wrist in a grip which hurt. "Where did you get that crazy idea?"

How crude, how unbelievably crude she had been to mention Daphne's name, Brooke accused herself hotly. But, having blundered, she'd better see it through with the light touch.

"From a letter from Mrs. Gregory the other day. It was full of news, all about Mark Trent and Daphne Field, the current lady of his heart. She's a grand gossip."

Mark Trent's eyes drew Brooke's like a magnet. Was the light in his laughter?

"Anne Gregory is more than a gossip; she's a strategist. I haven't spoken to Daphne Field since the night of the play and she knows it." He loosened his hold on her wrist. "What are you doing this afternoon?"

"I'm—I'm modeling—for the last time."

"Can't you get out of it?"

"No."

"That's decisive. I have a present for you, but this doesn't seem to be just the moment to produce it. You seem to dislike me more than ever. I thought we might play round together. If you can't, or won't, I'll join a bunch of friends who wanted to date me up for some sort of fete this afternoon. They were all excited about a plan to surprise somebody about something. I didn't listen; I was anxious to locate you. I'll see you tonight before I leave, Brooke."

"Are you leaving tonight?"

"Yes. By plane. Come with me?"

"Certainly not." She imitated his

voice and inflection to a note as she stopped at the gate of the patio.

"Hope you'll enjoy the trip, Mr. Trent. Happy landings!"

The sky was like a huge sapphire; the sunshine was rose-tinted; the ocean a tumbling mass of emeralds. A fragrant breeze, a mere suggestion of a breeze, ruffled the bright orange flame-vine on top of the high Spanish wall which enclosed three sides of a garden open to the sea, a garden filled with tables set in gay borders which were filmy frocks; there were faces above the tables, faces under large hats and men's faces with no hats at all.

From a Moorish gallery drifted male voices singing to the accompaniment of guitars as Brooke stepped from the automobile which had brought her to the charity fete. Carstons Inc. had staged the wedding party of the style show with meticulous attention to detail, even to sleek shining cars to bring the bride and bridesmaids to the ornate grilles which were the garden gates. Reporters were there and camera men, hordes of them, all the frills and appurtenances of a wedding except groom and ushers.

Madame Celeste, chic in black and pearls, was flushed with excitement under her make-up; her French accent was noticeable for its absence as she whispered last instructions:

"Wait until the singers stop, girls. The moment the orchestra strikes the first note of the wedding march, start. Don't get flustered. Don't get out of step. You're all lovely, your floppy hats are divine, and your bouquets of Transvaal daisies combining the shades of your frocks are perfect. Remember to smile when you turn in the space where the altar should be and isn't, to come down the three stairs to the aisle. Brooke, you are almost too white under that tulle; perhaps I should have put on more rouge. Too late now. Remember that you're giving an imitation of a radiantly happy bride, cherie. They've stopped. Ready! Listen!"

A violin sighed a soft note. Others joined until strings and harps and woodwinds swelled into the wedding march from Lohengrin.

Bridesmaids, their lips scarlet, their eyes shining between dark mascaraed lashes, passed between the iron grilles and moved slowly up the ribbon-outlined aisle, dragging their gold slippers a little in time to the rhythm of the music, and the swish of their taffeta slips. The first two were dressed in billowy rose-orange net; behind them at a short distance came two more in a lighter tint, then two in soft yellow, then a fourth pair in ivory, and then the bride in snowy satin so soft in texture that it trailed in ravishing folds. Slowly she came with head slightly bent, eyes presumably on the mass of white Transvaal daisies and stelia she carried, hair shining like burnished copper beneath the mist of her veil, but she could see, could feel the people who crowded the garden, people distinguished, powerful, chic: what the papers would headline as the cream of society.

Brooke felt the surge of motion as everyone stood up—a tribute to Madame Celeste's stagecraft—the wedding procession was so perfect that habit had brought the audience to its feet. She must keep her attention on the girls in front—why had Mark Trent come to Palm Beach—this heavenly music made one all trembly inside—would she never reach the spot where she was to turn—three stairs to mount before she reached it—this ought to be great fun, why was she taking it so seriously—a mass of faces—they seemed to be closing in—even out of doors the scent of exotic perfume and flowers was suffocating—almost there—step—drag—the vivid colors, the people seemed unreal—the orange-color bridesmaids were mounting the steps.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Doukhobors From Russia

The Doukhobors arrived in Canada in 1898 and 1899, and the government allotted them land in the province of Assiniboia, near Yorktown, and in Saskatchewan, near Thunder Hill, and Prince Albert. They came from Russia.