

Van Vorst Marie

The Girl From His Town



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CHAPTER I – DAN BLAIR

The fact that much he said, because of his unconscionable slang, was incomprehensible did not take from the charm of his conversation as far as the Duchess of Breakwater was concerned. The brightness of his expression, his quick, clear look upon them, his beautiful young smile, his not too frequent laugh, his “new gayness,” as the duchess called his high spirits, his supernal youth, his *difference*, credited him with what nine-tenths of the human race lack – charm.

His tone was not too crudely western; neither did he suggest the ultra East with which they were familiar. American women went down well enough with them, but American men were unpopular, and when the visitor arrived, Lady Galorey did not even announce him to the party gathered for “the first shoot.”

The others were in the armory when the ninth gun, a young chap, six feet of him, blond as the wheat, cleanly set up and very good to look at, came in with Lily, Duchess of Breakwater. Lady Galorey, his hostess, greeted them.

“Oh, here you are, are you? Lord Mersey, Sir John Fairthrope.” She mumbled the rest of the names of her companions as though she did not want them understood, then waved toward the young chap, calling him Mr. Dan Blair, and he, as she hesitated, added:

“From Blairtown, Montana.”

“And give him a gun, will you, Gordon?” Lady Galorey spoke to her husband.

“I discovered Mr. Blair, Edie,” the duchess announced, “and he didn’t even know there was a shoot on for to-day. Fancy!”

“I guess,” Dan Blair said pleasantly, “I’ll just take a gun out of this bunch,” and he chose one at random from several indicated to him by the gamekeeper. “I get my best luck when I go it blind. Right! Thanks. That’s so, Lady Galorey, I didn’t know there was to be any shooting until the duchess let it out.”

To himself he thought with good-natured amusement, “Afraid I’ll spoil their game record, maybe!” and went out along with them, following the insular noblemen like a ray of sun, smiling on the pretty woman who had discovered him in the grounds where he had been poking about by himself.

“Where, in Heaven’s name, did you ‘corral’ – word of his own – the dear boy, Edith? How did he get to Osdene Park, or in fact anywhere, just as he is, fresh as from Eden?”

“Thought I’d let him take you by surprise, dearest. Where’d you find Dan?”

“Down by the garden house feeding the rabbits, on his knees like a little boy, his hands full of lettuces. I’d just come a cropper myself on the mare. She fell, I’m sorry to say, Edie, and hacked her knees quite a lot. One of those disguised ditches, you know. I was coming along leading her when I ran on your friend.”

The young duchess was slender as a willow, very brunette, with a beautiful, discontented face.

“I’m going to show Dan Blair off,” Lady Galorey responded, “going to give the *débutantes* a chance.”

Placidly nodding, the duchess lit a cigarette and began to quote from Dan Blair’s conversation: “I fancy he won’t let them ‘worry him’; he’s too ‘busy!’”

“You mean that you’re going to keep him occupied?”

The duchess didn’t notice this.

“*Is he such a catch?*”

Neither of the women had walked out with the guns. The duchess had a bad foot, and Lady Galorey never went anywhere she could help with her husband. She now drew her chair up to the table in the morning-room, to which they had both gone after the departure of the guns, and regarded with satisfaction a quantity of stationery and the red leather desk appointments.

“Sit down and smoke if you like, Lily; I’m going to fill out some lists.”

“No, thanks, I’m going up to my rooms and get Parkins to ‘massey’ this beastly foot of mine. I must have fallen on it. But tell me first, is Mr. Blair a catch?”

Lady Galorey had opened an address book and looked up from it to reply:

“Something like ten million pounds.”

“Heavens! Disgusting!”

“The richest young man ‘west of some river or other.’ At any rate he told me last night that it was ‘clean money.’ I dare say the river is responsible for its cleanliness, but that fact seemed to give him satisfaction.”

The duchess was leaning on the table at Lady Galorey’s side.

“Dan’s father took Gordon all over the West that time he went to the States for a big hunt in the Rockies. He got to know Mr. Blair awfully well and liked him. The old gentleman bought a little property about that time that turned out to be a gold mine.”

With persistency the duchess said:

“How d’you know it is ‘clean money,’ Edith? Not that it makes a rap of difference,” she laughed prettily, “but how do you know that he is rich to this horrible extent?”

Lady Galorey put down her address book impatiently: “Does he look like an impostor?”

The other returned: “Even the archangel fell, my dear Edith!”

“Well,” returned her friend, “this one is too young to have fallen far,” and she shut up her list in desperation.

The duchess sat down on the edge of the lounge and raised her expressive eyes to Lady Galorey, who once more looked at her sarcastically, and went on:

“Gordon liked the old gentleman: he was extraordinarily generous – quite a type. They called the town after him – Blairtown: that is where the son ‘hails from.’ He was a little lad when Gordon was out and Mr. Blair promised that Dan should come over here and see us one day, and this,” she tapped the table with her pen, “seems to be the day, for he came down upon us in this breezy way without even sending a wire, ‘just turned up’ last night. Gordon’s mad about him. His father has been dead a year, and he is just twenty-two.”

“Good heavens!” murmured the duchess. Lady Galorey opened her address book again.

“Gordon’s got him terribly on his mind, my dear; he has forbidden any gambling or any bridge as long as the boy is with us...”

Her companion rose and thrust her hands into the pocket of her tweed coat. She laughed softly, then went over to the long window where without, across the pane, the early winter mists were flying, chased by a furtive sun.

“Gordon said that the boy’s father treated him like a king, and that while the boy is here he is going to look out for him.”

Over her shoulder the other threw out coldly:

“You speak as though he were in a den of thieves. I didn’t know Gordon’s honor was so fine. As for me, I don’t gamble, you know.”

Lady Galorey had decided that Lily’s insistent remaining gave her a chance to fill her fountain pen. She was, therefore, carefully squirting in the ink, and she flushed at her friend’s last words.

Lady Galorey herself was the best bridge player in London, and cards were her passion. She did not remind the lady in the window that there were other games besides bridge, but kept both her tongue and her temper.

After a little silence in which the women followed each her own thoughts, the duchess murmured:

“I’ll toddle up-stairs, Edie – let you write. Where did you say we were going to meet the guns for food?”

“At the gate by the White Pastures. There’ll be a cart and a motor going, whichever you like, around two.”

“Right,” her grace nodded; “I’ll be on time, dearest.”

And Lady Galorey with a relieved sigh heard the door close behind the duchess. Wiping her fountain pen delicately with a bit of chamois, she murmured: “Well, Dan Blair *is* out of Eden, poor dear, if he met her by the gate.”

A fortune of a round ten million pounds was a small part of what this young man had come into by direct inheritance from the Copper King of Blairtown, Montana. For once the money figure had not been exaggerated, but Lady Galorey did not know about the rest of Dan’s inheritance.

The young man whistling in his rooms in the bachelor quarters of Osdene Park House, dressed for dinner without the aid of a valet. When Lord Galorey had asked him “where his manservant was,” Dan had grinned. “Gosh, I wouldn’t have one of those Johnnies hanging around me – never did have! I can put on *my* stockings all right! There was a chap on the boat I came over in who let his man put on his stockings. Can you beat that?” Blair had laughed again. “I think if anybody tickled my feet that way I would be likely to kick him in the eye.”

Dressing in his room he whistled under his breath a song from a newly popular comic opera; and he intoned with his clear young voice a line of the words:

“*Should-you-go-to-Mandalay.*”

Out through his high window, if he had looked, he would have seen the misty sweep of the park under the faint moonrise and fine shadows that the leaves made in the veiled light, but he did not look out. He was dressing for dinner without a valet and giving a great deal of care to his toilet; for the first time he was to dine in the house of a nobleman and in the presence of a duchess; not that it meant a great deal to him – he thought it was “funny.”

In Dan Blair’s twenty-two years of utterly happy days his one grief had been the death of his father. As soon as the old man had died Dan had gone off into the Rockies with his guides and not “shown up” for months. When he came back to Blairtown, as he expressed it, “he packed his grip and beat it while his shoes were good,” for the one place he could remember his father had suggested for him to go.

Blairtown was very much impressed when the heir came in from the Rockies with “a big kill,” and the orphan’s case did not seem especially disturbed. But no one in the town knew how the boy’s heart ached for the old man. When Dan was six years old his father had literally picked him up by the nape of his neck and thrown him into the water like a pup and watched him swim. At eight he sent the boy off with a gun to rough-camp. Then he took Dan down in the mines with the men. His education had been won in Blairtown, at a school called public, but which in reality was nothing more than a pioneer district school.

On Sundays Dan dressed up and went with his father to church twice a day and in the week-days his father took him to the prayer-meetings, and at sixteen Dan went to college in California. He had just completed his course when old Blair died. Then he inherited fifty million dollars.

On the day of the shoot at Osdene, Dan dropped sixty birds. He tried very hard not to be too pleased. “Gosh,” he thought to himself, “those birds fell as though they were trained all right, and the other sports were mad, I could see it.” He then fell to whistling softly the air he had heard Lady Galorey play the night before from the new success at the Gaiety, and finished it as his toilet completed itself. He took up a gardenia from his dressing-table, and fastened it in his coat, stopping on the stairs on the way down to look over into the hall, where the men in their black clothes and the women in their shining dresses waited before going into the dining-room. The lights fell on white

arms and necks, on jewels and on fine proud heads. Dan Blair had been in San Francisco and in New York, on short journeys, however, which his father, the year before, had directed him to take, but he had never seen a “show” like this.

He came slowly down the broad stairway of the Osdene Park House, the last guest. In the corner, where, behind her, a piece of fourteenth century tapestry cut a green and pink square against the rich black oak paneling, the Duchess of Breakwater sat waiting. She wore a dress of golden tulle which was simply a sheath to her slender body, and from her neck hung a long rope of diamonds caught at the end by a small black fan; there was a wreath of diamonds like shining water drops linked together in her hair. She was the grandest lady at Osdene, and renowned in more than one sense of the word. As Dan saw her smile at him and rise, he thought:

“She is none too sorry that I made *that* record, but I hope to heaven she won’t say anything to me about it.”

And the duchess did not speak of it. Telling him that he was to take her in to dinner, she laid first her fan on his arm and then her hand. And Dan, one of those fortunate creatures who are born men of the world when they get into it, gave her his arm with much grace, and as he leaned down toward her he thought to himself:

“Well, it’s lucky for me I have my head on tight; a few more of those goo-goo eyes of hers and it would be as well for me to light out for the woods.”

Dan liked best at Osdene Park his chin-chins with Gordon Galorey. The young man was unflatteringly frank in his choice of companions. When the duchess looked about for him to ride with her, walk with her, to find the secluded corners, to talk, to play with him, she was likely to discover Dan gone off with Lord Galorey, and to come upon them later, sitting enveloped in smoke, a stand of drinks by their side.

To Galorey, who had no heir or child, the boy’s presence proved to be the happiest thing that had come to him for a long time. He talked a great deal to Dan about the old man. Galorey was poor and the fact of a fortune of ten million pounds possessed by this one boy was continually before his mind like an obsession. It was like looking down into a gold mine. Galorey tried often to broach the subject of money, but Dan kept off. At length Galorey asked boldly:

“What are you going to do with it?” On this occasion they were walking over from the lower park back to the house, a couple of terriers at their heels.

“Do with what?” Blair asked innocently. He was looking at the trees. He was comparing their grayish green trunks and their foliage with the California redwoods. A little taken aback, Lord Galorey laughed.

“Why, with that colossal fortune of yours.”

And Blair answered unhesitatingly: “Oh – spend it on some girl sooner or later.”

Galorey fairly staggered. Then he took it humorously.

“My dear chap, I never saw a sweeter, bigger man than your father. If he had been my father, I dare say I might have pulled off a different yard of hemp, but I must confess that I think he has left you too much money.”

“Well, there are a lot of fellows who are ready to look after it for me,” Blair answered coolly. Before his companion could redden, he continued: “You see, dad took care of me for twenty-one years all right, and whenever I am up a stump, why all I have to do is to remember the things he did.”

For the first time since his arrival at Osdene Dan’s tone was serious. Interested as he was in the older man, Dan’s inclination was to evade the discussion of serious subjects. With Blair’s slang, his conversation was almost incomprehensible.

“Dad didn’t gas much,” the boy said, “but I could draw a map of some of the things he did say. He used to say he made his money out of the earth.”

The two were walking side by side across the rich velvet of the immemorial English turf. The extreme softness of the autumn day, its shifting lights, its mellow envelope, the beauty of the park –

the age, the stability, the harmony, served to touch the young fellow's spirits. At any rate there was a ring in him, an equilibrium that surprised Galorey.

"'Most things,' dad said to me, 'go back to the earth.'" He struck the English turf with his stick. "Dad said a fellow had better buy those things that stay above the ground." Dan smiled frankly at his companion. "Curious thing to say, wasn't it?" he reflected. "I remembered it, and I got to wondering after I saw him buried, '*what are* the things that stay above the ground?' The old man never gave me another talk like that."

After a few seconds Galorey put in:

"But, my dear chap, you did give me a shock up there just now when you said you were going to spend 'all your money on some girl.'"

The millionaire took a chestnut from his pocket. He held it high above his head and the little dog that had been yelping at his heels fixed his eyes on it. Blair poised it, then threw it as far as he could. It sped through the air and the terrier ran like mad across the park.

"I like girls awfully, Gordon, and when I find the right one, why, then I'm going to feel what a bully thing it is to be rich."

Lord Galorey groaned aloud.

"My dear chap!" he exclaimed.

The spell of the day, the fragrant beauty of the time and place and hour were clearly upon Dan Blair. Lord Galorey was sympathetic to him. The terrier came tearing back with the chestnut held between his thick jaws. Dan bent down to take the nut from the dog and wrestled with him gently.

"Swell little grip he's got. Nice old pup! Let it go now!" And he threw the nut far again, and as the terrier ran once more Blair thrust his hands down in his pockets and began softly to whistle the tune of *Mandalay*.

He said slowly, going back to his subject: "It must be great to feel that a fellow can give her jewels like the Duchess of Breakwater's, ropes of 'em" – he nodded toward the house – "and a fine old place like this now, and motors and yachts and all kinds of stuff."

His eyes rested on the suave lines of the Elizabethan house, with its softened gables and its banked terraces. Possibly his vivid imagination pictured "some nice girl" there waiting, as they should come up, to meet him.

"I have always thought it would be bully to find a poor girl – pretty as a peach, of course – one who had never had much, and just cover her with things. Hey, there!" he cried to the terrier, who had come running back, "bring it to me."

They had come up to the terrace by this, and Dan's confidence, fresh as a gush of water from a rock, had ceased. His face was placid. He didn't realize what he had said.

From out of one of the long windows, dressed in a sable coat, her small head tied up in a motor scarf, the Duchess of Breakwater appeared. She greeted them severely, and Lord Galorey heard her say under her breath to Dan:

"You promised to be back to drive with me before dinner, Dan. Did you forget?"

And as Galorey left the boy to make his peace, the first smile of amusement broke over his face. He felt that the duchess had between her and her capture of Dan Blair's heart the elusive picture of some "nice girl" – not much perhaps, but it might be very hard to tear away the picture of the ideal that was ever before the blue eyes of this man who had a fortune to spend on her!

CHAPTER II – THE DUCHESS APPROVES

His attentions to the Duchess of Breakwater had not been so conspicuous or so absorbing as to prevent the eager mothers – who, true to her word, Lady Galorey had invited down – from laying siege to Dan Blair. Lady Galorey asked him:

“Don’t you want to marry any one of these beauties, Dan?” And Blair, with his beautiful smile and what Lily called his inspired candor, answered:

“Not on your life, Lady Galorey!”

And she agreed, “I think myself you are too young.”

“No,” Dan refuted, “you are wrong there. I shall marry as fast as I can.”

His hostess was surprised.

“Why, I thought you wanted your fling first.”

And Dan, from his chair, in which, with a book, he had been sitting when Lady Galorey found him, answered cheerfully:

“Oh, I don’t like being alone. I want to go about with some one. I should like a fling all right, but I want to fling with somebody as I go.”

The lady of the house was not a philosopher nor an analyst. She had certain affairs of her own and was engrossed in them and lived in them. As far as Lady Galorey was concerned the rest of the world might go and hang itself as long as it didn’t do it at her gate-post. But Blair couldn’t leave any one indifferent to him very long, not unless one could be indifferent to a blaze of sunlight; one must either draw the blinds down or bask in its brightness.

She laughed. “You’re perfectly delicious! You mean to say you want to be married at once and let your *wife* fling around with you?”

“Just that.”

“How sweet of you, Dan! And you won’t marry one of these girls here?”

“Don’t fill the bill, Lady Galorey.”

“Oh, you have a sweetheart at home, then?”

“All off!” he assured her blithely, and rose, tall and straight and slender.

The Duchess of Breakwater had come in, indeed she never failed to when there was any question of finding Blair.

Dan stood straightly before the two women of an old race, and the American didn’t suggest any line of noble ancestors whatsoever. His features were rather agglomerate; his muscles were possibly not the perfect elastic specimens that were those muscles whose strain and sinew had been made from the same stock for generations. He was, nevertheless, very good to look on. Any woman would have thought so, and he bent his blond head as he looked at the Duchess of Breakwater with something like benevolence, something of his father’s kindness in his clear blue eyes. Neither of the noble ladies vaguely understood him. His hostess thought him “a good sort,” not half bad, a splendid catch, and the other woman, only a few years his senior, was in love with him. The duchess had married at eighteen, tired of her bargain at twenty, and found herself a widow at twenty-five. She held a telegram in her hand.

“We’ve got the box for *Mandalay* to-night at the Gaiety, and let’s motor in.”

Only Lady Galorey hesitated, disappointed.

“Too bad – I had specially arranged for Lady Grandcourt to drive over with Eileen. I thought it would be a ripping chance for her to see Dan.”

When at length the duchess had succeeded in getting Dan to herself toward the end of the day in the red room, after tea, she said:

“So you won’t marry a London beauty?”

And rather coldly Dan had answered:

“Why, you talk, all of you, as if I had only to ask any girl of them, and she would jump down my throat.”

“Don’t try it,” the duchess answered, “unless you want to have your mouth full!”

Dan did not reply for a second, but he looked at her more seriously, conscious of her grace and her good looks. She was certainly better to look at than the simple girls with their big hands, small wits, long faces, and, as the boy expressed it, “utter lack of get-up.” The duchess shone out to advantage.

“Why don’t you talk to me?” she asked softly. “You know you would rather talk to me than the others.”

“Yes,” he said frankly; “they make me nervous.”

“And I don’t?”

“No,” he said. “I learn a lot every time we are together.”

“Learn?” she repeated, not particularly flattered by this. “What sort of things?”

“Oh, about the whole business,” he returned vaguely. “You know what I mean.”

“Then,” she said with a slight laugh, “you mean to say you talk with me for *educational purposes*? What a beastly bore!”

Dan did not contradict her. She was by no means Eve to him, nor was he the raw recruit his simplicity might give one to think. He had had his temptations and his way out of them was an easy one; for he was very slow to stir, and back of all was his ideal. The reality and power of this ideal Dan knew best at moments like these. But the Duchess of Breakwater was the most lovely woman – the most dangerous woman that had come his way. He liked her – Dan was well on the way to love.

The two were alone in the big dark room. At their side the small table, from which they had taken their tea together, stood with its empty cups and its silver. Without, the day was cold and windy, and the sunset threw along the panes a red reflection. The light fell on the Duchess of Breakwater, something like a veil – a crimson veil slipped over her face and breast. She leaned toward Dan, and between them there was no more barrier than the western light. He felt his pulses beat and a tide rising within him. She was a delicious emanation, fragrant and near, and as he might have gathered a cluster of flowers, so in the next second he would have taken her in his arms, but from the other room just then Lady Galorey, at the piano, played a snatch from *Mandalay*, striking at once into the tune. The sound came suddenly, told them quickly some one was near, and the Duchess of Breakwater involuntarily moved back, and so knocked the small tray, jostled it, and it fell clattering to the floor.

CHAPTER III – THE BLAIRTOWN SOLOIST

Blairtown had a population of some eight thousand. There was a Presbyterian church to which Dan and his father went regularly, sitting in the bare pew when the winter's storms beat and rattled on the panes, or in the summer sunshine, when the flies thronged the window casings, when the smell of the pews and the panama fans and the hymn-books came strong to them through the heat.

One day there was a missionary sermon, and for the first time in its history a girl sang a solo in the First Presbyterian Church. Dan Blair heard it, looked up, and it made a mark in his life. A girl in a white dress trimmed with blue gentians, white cotton gloves, and golden hair, was the soloist. He knew her, that is, he had a nodding acquaintance with her. It was the girl at the drug store who sold soda-water, and he had asked her some hundreds of times for a “vanilla or a chocolate,” but it wasn't this vulgar memory that made the little boy listen. It was the girl's voice. Standing back of the yellow-painted rail, above the minister's pulpit, above the flies, the red pews and the panama fans, she sang, and she sang into Dan Blair's soul. To speak more truly, she *made him a soul* in that moment. She awakened the boy; his collar felt tight, his cheeks grew hot. He felt his new boots, too, hard and heavy. She made him want to cry. These were the physical sensations – the material part of the awakening. The rest went on deeply inside of Dan. She broke his heart; then she healed it. She made him want to cry like a girl; then she wiped his tears.

The little boy settled back and grew more comfortable and listened, and what she sang was,

“From Greenland's icy mountains,
From India's coral straits – ands.”

Before the hymn reached its end he was a calm boy again, and the hymn took up its pictures and became like an illustrated book of travels, and he wanted to see those pea-green peaks of Greenland, to float upon the icebergs to them, and see the dawn break on the polar seas as the explorers do... He should find the North Pole some day! Then he wanted to go to an African jungle, where the tiger, “tiger shining bright,” should flash his stripes before his eyes! Dan would gather wreaths of coral from the straits and give them to the girl with the yellow hair! When he and his father came out together from the church, Dan chose the street that passed the soda-fountain drug store and peeped in. It was dark and cool, and behind the counter the drug clerk mixed the summer drinks: and the drug clerk mixed them from that time ever afterward – for the girl with the yellow hair never showed up in Blairtown again. She went away!

CHAPTER IV – IN THE CORAL ROOM

“Mandalay” had run at the Gaiety the season before and again opened the autumn season. Light and charming, thoroughly musical, it had toured successfully through Europe, but London was its home, and its great popularity was chiefly owing to the girl who had starred in it – Letty Lane. Her face was on every post-card, hand-bill, cosmetic box, and even popular drinks were named for her.

The night of the Osdene box party was the reopening of *Mandalay*, and the curtain went up after the overture to an outburst of applause. Dan Blair had never “crossed the pond” before this memorable visit, when he had gone straight out to Osdene Park. London theaters and London itself, indeed, were unexplored by him. He had seen what there was to be seen of the opera bouffe in his own country, but the brilliant, perfect performance of a company at the London Gaiety he had yet to enjoy.

The opening scene of *Mandalay* is oriental; the burst of music and the tinkling of the silvery temple bells and the effect of an extremely blue sea, made Dan “sit up,” as he put it. The theatrical picture was so perfect that he lifted his head, pushed his chair back to enjoy. He was thus close to the duchess. With invigorating young enthusiasm the boy drew in his breath and waited to be amused and to hear. The tunes he already knew before the orchestra began to charm his ear.

On landing at Plymouth Dan had been keen to feel that he was really stepping into the world, and at Osdene Park he had been daily, hourly “seeing life.” The youngest of the household, his youth nevertheless was not taken into consideration by any of them. No one had treated him like a junior. He had gone neck to neck with their pace as far as he liked, furnished them fresh amusement, and been their diversion. In all his rare unspoiled youth, Blair had been suddenly dropped down in an effete set that had whirled about him, and one by one out of the inner circle had called him to join them; and one by one with all of them Dan had whirled.

Lord Galorey had talked to him frankly, as plainly as if Dan had been his own father, and found much of the old man’s common sense in his fine blond head. Lady Galorey had come to him in a moment of great anxiety, and no one but her young guest knew how badly she needed help. He had further made it known to the lady that he was not in the marriage market; that she could not have him for any of her girls. And as for the Duchess of Breakwater, well – he had whirled with her until his head swam. He had grown years older at the Park in the few weeks of his visit, but now for the first time, as the music of *Mandalay* struck upon his ears, like a ripple of distant seas, he felt like the boy who had left Blairtown to come abroad. He had spent the most part of the day in London with a man who had come over to see him from America. Dan attended to his business affairs, and the people who knew said that he had a keen head. Mr. Joshua Ruggles, his father’s best friend, whom Dan this afternoon had left to go to his room at the Carlton, had put his arm with affection through the boy’s:

“Don’t look as though it were any too healthy down to the place you’re visiting at, Dan. Plumbing all right?”

And the boy, flushing slightly, had said: “Don’t you fret, Josh, I’ll look after my health all right.”

“There’s nothing like the mountain air,” returned the Westerner. “These old fogs stick in my nostrils; feel as though I could smell London clean down to my feet!”

From the corner of the box Dan looked hard at the stage, at the fresh brilliant costumes and the lovely chorus girls.

“Gosh,” he thought to himself, “they are the prettiest ever! Dove-gray, eyes of Irish blue, mouths like roses!”

Leaning forward a little toward the duchess he whispered: “There isn’t one who isn’t a winner. I never struck such a box of dry goods!”

The duchess smiled on Dan with good humor. His naïve pleasure was delightful. It was like taking a child to a pantomime. She was wearing his flowers and displaying a jewel that he had found and bought for her, and which she had not hesitated to accept. She watched his eager face and his

pleasure unaffected and keen. She could not believe that this young man was master of ten million pounds.

When Letty Lane appeared Blair heard a light rustle like rain through the auditorium, a murmur, and the house rose. There was a well-bred calling from the stalls, a call from the pit, and a generous applause – “Letty Lane – Letty Lane!” and as though she were royalty, there was a fluttering of handkerchiefs like flags. The young fellow with the others stood in the back of the box, his hands in his pockets, looking at the stage. There wasn’t a girl in the chorus as pretty as this prima donna! Letty Lane came on in *Mandalay* in the first act in the dress of a fashionable princess. She was modish and worldly. For the only time in the play she was modern and conventional, and whatever breeding she might have been able to claim, from whatever class she was born, as she stood there in her beautiful gown she was grace itself, and charm. She was distinctly a star, and showed her appreciation of her audience’s admiration.

At the end of the tenor solo the Princess Oltary runs into the pavilion and there changes her dress and appears once more to dance before the rajah and to prove herself the dancer he has known and loved in a café in Paris. Letty Lane’s dress in this dance was the classic ballet dancer’s, white as the leaves of a lily. She seemed to swim and float; actually to be breathed and exhaled from out her filmy gown; and the only ray of color in her costume was her own golden hair, surmounted by a small coral-colored cap, embroidered in pearls. The actress bowed to the right and left, ran to the right, ran to the left; glanced toward the Duchess of Breakwater’s box; acknowledged the burst of applause; began to dance and finished her *pas seul*, and with folded hands sang her song. Her beautiful voice came out clear as crystal water from a crystal rock, and her words were cradled like doves, like boats on the boundless seas...

“From India’s coral strand...”

But there was no hymn tune to this song of Letty Lane’s in *Mandalay*! To the boy in the box, however, the words, the tune, the droning of the flies on the window-pane, the strong odor of the hymn-books and panama fans, came back, and the clear sunlight of Montana seemed to steal into the Gaiety as Letty Lane sang.

The Duchess of Breakwater clapped with frank enthusiasm, and said: “She is a perfect wonder, isn’t she? Oh, she is *too* bewitching!”

And she turned for sympathy to her friend, who stood behind her, his face illumined. He was amazed; his blue eyes ablaze, his head bent forward, he was staring, staring at the Gaiety curtain, gone down on the first act.

He laughed softly, and the duchess heard him say:

“*Good!* Well, I should say she was! She’s a girl from our town!”

When the duchess tried to share her enthusiasm with Dan he had disappeared. He left the box and with no difficulty made his way as far as the first wing.

“Can you get me an entrance?” he asked a man he had met once at Osdene and who was evidently an habitué.

“I dare say. Rippin’ show, isn’t it?”

Dan put his hand on ducal shoulders and followed the nobleman through the labyrinth of flies.

“Which of ’em do you want to see, old man?”

Dan, without replying, went forward to a small cluster of lights in one of the wings. He went forward intuitively, and his companion caught his arm: “Oh, I say, for *God’s* sake, don’t go on like this!”

But without response Dan continued his direction. A call page stood before the door, and Dan, on a card over the entrance, read “Miss Lane.” The smell of calcium and paint and perfume and the auxiliaries hung heavy on the air. The other man saw Dan knock, knock again and then go in.

Unannounced Dan Blair opened the door of the dressing-room of the actress. Miss Lane’s dressing-rooms were worth displaying to her intimate friends. They were done with great taste in

coral tint. She might have been said to be in a coral cave under the sea, as far as young Blair was concerned. As he came in he felt his ears deaden, and the smoke of cigarettes grew so thick that he looked as through a veil. The dancer was standing in the center of the room, one hand on her hip, and in the other hand a cigarette. Her short skirt stood out around her like a bell, and over the bell fell a rain of pinkish coral strands. She wore a thin silk slip, from which her neck and arms came shining out, and her woman knelt at her feet strapping on a little coral shoe.

Blair shut the door behind him, and began to realize how rude, how impertinent his entrance would be considered. But he came boldly forward and would have introduced himself as “Dan Blair from Blairtown,” but Miss Lane, who stared at the entrance through the smoke, burst into a laugh so bright, so delightful, that he was carried high up on the coral strands to the very beach. She crossed her white arms over her breast and leaned forward, as a saleswoman might lean forward over a counter, and with her beautifully trained voice, all sweetly she asked him:

“Hello, little boy, what will *you* take?”

Blair giggled, quick to catch her meaning, and answered: “Oh, chocolate, I guess!”

And Letty Lane laughed, put out her white hand, the one without the cigarette, and said: “Haven’t got that brand on board – so sorry! Will a cocktail do? All sorts in bottles. Higgins, fix Mr. Blair a Martini.”

As the dresser rose from her stooping position, the rest of Letty Lane’s dressing-room unfolded out of the mist and smoke. On a sofa covered with lace pillows Blair saw a man sitting, smoking as well. He was tall and had a dark mustache. It was Prince Poniotowsky, whom Dan had already met at the Galorey shoot.

“Prince Poniotowsky,” Miss Lane presented him, “Mr. Blair, of Blairtown, Montana. Say, Frederick, give me my cap, will you? It is over by your side. I’ve got to hustle.”

The man, without moving, picked up a small red cap with a single plume, from the sofa at his side. In another second Letty Lane had placed it on her head of yellow hair, real yellow hair and not a doubt of it, like sunshine – not the color one gets from inside bottles. Her arms, her hands flashed with rings, priceless flashes, and the little spears pricked Dan like sharp needles.

“It’s the nicest ever!” she was saying. “How on earth did you get in here, though? Have you bought the Gaiety Theater? I’m the most exclusive girl on the stage. Who let you in?”

Her accent was English, and even that put her from him. As he looked at her he couldn’t understand how he had ever recognized her. If he had waited for another act he wouldn’t have believed the likeness real. The girl he remembered had both softened and hardened; the round features were gone, but all the angles were gone as well. Her eyes were as gray as the seas; she was painted and her lids were darkened. Seen close, she was not so divine as on the stage, but there was still a more thrilling charm about the fact that she was real.

“To think of any one from Montana being here to-night! Staying very long, Mr. Blair?” Between each sentence she directed Higgins, who was getting her into her bodice. “And how do you like *Mandalay*? Isn’t it great?”

She addressed herself to Dan, but she smiled on both the men with extreme brilliance.

“You bet your life,” he responded. “I should think it was great.”

Poniotowsky rose indolently. He had not looked toward the new-comer, but had, on the other hand, followed every detail of Miss Lane’s dressing.

“Better take your scarf, Letty. Hand it to Miss Lane,” he directed Higgins. “It is so damned drafty in these beastly wings.”

He drew his watch out, gathered up his long coat, flung it over his arm and picked up his opera hat which lay folded on Letty Lane’s dressing-table.

The call page for the third time summoned “Miss La – ne, Miss La – ane,” and she took the scarf Higgins handed her and ran it through her hands, still beaming on Dan.

“Come in to see me at the Savoy on any day at two-thirty except on matinée days.”

“Put on your scarf.” Poniotowsky, taking it from her hands, laid it across her white shoulders, and she passed out between the two men, light as a bird, smiling, nodding, followed by the prince and the boy from Montana. The crowds began to fill the lately empty wings – dancers, chorus girls with their rustling gowns. Letty Lane said to Dan:

“Guess you’ll like my solo in this act all right – it’s the best thing in *Mandalay*. Now go along, and clap me hard.”

It gave him a new pleasure, for she had spoken to him in real American fashion with the swift mimicry that showed her talent. Dan went slowly back to his party. As he took his seat by the duchess she said to him:

“You went out to see Letty Lane. Do you know her?”

“Know her!” And as Dan answered, the sound of his own voice was queer to him, and his face flushed hotly. “Lord, yes. She used to be in the drug store in Blairtown. Sold soda-water to me when we were both kids. Whoever would have thought that she had that in her!” He nodded toward the stage, for Letty Lane had come on. “She sang in our church, too, but not for long.”

“Who was with her in her dressing-room?” the duchess asked. Blair didn’t answer. He was looking at Letty Lane. She had come to dance for the rajah and in her arms she held four white doves; each dove had a coral thread around its throat. It was a number that made her famous, *The Dove Song*. Set free, the birds flew about her, circling her blond head, surmounted by the small coral-colored cap. The doves settled on her shoulders, pecked at her lips.

“Was it Poniotowsky?” the duchess repeated.

And Dan told her a meaningless lie. “I didn’t meet any one there.” And with satisfaction the duchess said:

“Then she has thrown him over, too. He was the latest and the richest. She is horribly extravagant. No man is rich enough for her, they say. Poniotowsky isn’t a gold mine.”

The doves had flown away to the wings and been gathered up by the Indian servants. The actress on the stage began her Indian cradle song. She came, distinctly turning toward the box party. She had never sung like this in London before. There was a freshness in her voice, a quality in her gesture, a pathos and a sweetness that delighted her audience. They fairly clamored for her, waved and called and recalled. Dan stood motionless, his eyes fastened on her, his heart rocked by the song. He didn’t want any one to speak to him. He wished that none of them would breathe, and nearly as absorbed as was he, no one did speak.

CHAPTER V – AT THE CARLTON

There are certain natures to whom each appearance of evil, each form of delinquency is a fresh surprise. They are born simple, in the sweet sense of the word, and they go down to old age never of the world, although in a sense worldly. If Dan Blair's eyes were somewhat opened at twenty-two, he had yet the bloom on his soul. He was no fool, but his ideals stood up each on its pedestal and ready to appear one by one to him as the scenes of his life shifted and the different curtains rose. He had been trained in finance from his boyhood and he was a born financier. Money was his natural element; he could go far in it. But *woman!* He was one of those manly creatures – a knight – to whom each woman is a sacred thing: a dove, a crystal-clear soul, made to cherish and to protect, made to be spoiled. And in Dan were all the qualities that go to make up the unselfish, tender, foolish, and often unhappy American husband. These were some of the other things he had inherited from his father. Blair, senior, had married his first love, and whereas his boy had been trained to know money and its value, how to keep it and spend it, to save it and to make it, he had been taught nothing at all about woman. He had never been taught to distrust women, never been warned against them; he had been taught nothing but his father's memory of his mother, and the result was that he worshiped the sex and wondered at the mystery.

With Gordon Galorey and the others he had ridden, shot better than they, and had played, but with Lady Galorey and the Duchess of Breakwater he was nothing but a child. As far as his hostess was concerned, on several occasions she had put to him certain states of affairs, well, touchingly. Dan had been moved by the stories of sore need among the tenants, had been impressed by the necessity of reforms and rebuildings and on each occasion had given his hostess a check. She had asked him to say nothing about it to Gordon, and he had kept his silence. Dan liked Lady Galorey extremely: she was jolly, witty and friendly. She treated him as a member of the family and made no demands on him, save the ones mentioned.

In the time that he had come to know the Duchess of Breakwater she, on her part, had filled him full of other confidences. Into his young ears she poured the story of her disappointment, her disjointed life, from her worldly girlhood to her disillusion in marriage. She was beautiful when she talked and more lovely when she wept. Dan thought himself in love with the Duchess of Breakwater. His conversations with her had brought him to this conclusion. They had motored from Osdene Park together, and he had been extremely taken with the pleasure of it, and with the fact of their real companionship. Two or three times the words had been on his lips, which were fated not to be spoken then, however, and Dan reached the Gaiety still unfettered, his duchess by his side. And then the orchestra had begun to play *Mandalay*, the curtain had gone up and Letty Lane had come out on the boards. But her apparition did not strike off his chains immediately, nor did he renounce his plan to tell the duchess the very next day that he loved her.

When with sparkling eyes Lady Galorey raved about *Mandalay*, Dan listened with eagerness. Everybody seemed to know all about Letty Lane, but he alone knew from what town she had come!

They went for supper at the Carlton after the theater.

"Letty," Lady Galorey said, "tells it herself how the impresario heard her sing in some country church – picked her up then and there and brought her over here, and they say she married him."

Dan Blair could have told them how she had sung in that little church that day. Dan was eating his caviare sandwich. "Her name *then* was Sally Towney," he murmured. How little he had guessed that she was singing herself right out of that church and into the London Gaiety Theater! Anyway, she had made him "sit up!" It was a far cry from Montana to the London Gaiety. And so she married the greasy Jew who had discovered her!

Dan glanced over at the Duchess of Breakwater. She was looking well, exquisitely high bred, and she impressed him. She leaned slightly over to him, laughing. He had hardly dared to meet her

eyes that day, fearing that she might read his secret. She had told him that in her own right she was a countess – the Countess of Stainer. Titles didn't cut any ice with him. At any rate, she would be able to “buy back the old farm” – that is the way Dan put it. She had told him of the beautiful old Stainer Court, mortgaged and hung up with debts, as deep in ruins as the ivy was thick on the walls.

As Dan looked over at the duchess he saw the other people staring and looking about at a table near. It was spread a little to their left for four people, a great bouquet of orchids in the center.

“There,” Galorey said, “there's Letty Lane.” And the singer came in, followed by three men, the first of them the Prince Poniotowsky, indolent, bored, haughty, his eye-glass dangling. Miss Lane was dressed in black, a superb costume of faultless cut, and it enfolded her like a shadow; as a shadow might enfold a specter, for the dancer was as pale as the dead. She had neither painted nor rouged, she had evidently employed no coquetry to disguise her fag; rather she seemed to be on the verge of a serious illness, and presented a striking contrast to the brilliant creature, who had shone before their eyes not an hour before. Her dress was a challenge to the more gay and delicate affairs the other women in the restaurant wore. The gown came severely up to her chin. Its high collar closed around with a pearl necklace; from her ears fell pearls, long, creamy and priceless. She wore a great feathered hat, which, drooping, almost hid her small, pale face and her golden hair. She drew off her gloves as she came in and her white, jeweled hands flashed. She looked infinitely tired and extremely bored. As soon as she took her seat at the table intended for her party, Poniotowsky poured her out a glass of champagne, which she drank off as though it were water.

“Gad,” Lord Galorey said, “she *is* a stunner! What a figure, and what a head, and what daring to dress like that!”

“She knows how to make herself conspicuous,” said the Duchess of Breakwater.

“She looks extremely ill,” said Lady Galorey. “The pace she goes will do her up in a year or two.”

Dan Blair had his back to her, and when they rose to leave he was the last to pass out. Letty Lane saw him, and a light broke over her pallid face. She nodded and smiled and shook her hand in a pretty little salute. If her face was pale, her lips were red, and her smile was like sunlight; and at her recognition a wave of friendly fellowship swept over the young man – a sort of loyal kinship to her which he hadn't felt for any other woman there, and which he could not have explained. In warm approval of the actress' distinction, he said softly to himself: “*That's* all right – she makes the rest of them look like thirty cents.”

CHAPTER VI – GALOREY SEEKS ADVICE

Blair did not go back at once to Osdene Park. He stopped over in London for a few days to see Joshua Ruggles, and so remarked for the first time the difference between the speech of the old and the new world. Mr. Ruggles spoke broadly, with complete disregard of the frills and adornments of the King's English. He spoke United States of the pure, broad, western brand, and it rang out, it vibrated and swelled and rolled, and as Ruggles didn't care who heard him, nothing of what he had to say was lost.

Old Mr. Blair had left behind him a comrade, and as far as advice could go the old man knew that his Dan would not be bankrupt.

"Advice," Dan Blair senior once said to his boy, "is the kind of thing we want some fellow to give us when we ain't going to do the thing we ought to do, or are a little ashamed of something we have done. It's an awful good way to get cured of asking advice just to do what the fellow tells you to at once."

During Ruggles' stay in London the young fellow looked to it that Ruggles saw the sights, and the two did the principal features of the big town, to the rich enjoyment of the Westerner. Dan took his friend every night to the play, and on the fourth evening Ruggles said: "Let's go to the circus or a vaudeville, Dan. I have learned *this* show by heart!" They had been every night to see *Mandalay*.

"Oh, you go on where you like, Josh," the boy answered. "I'm going to see how she looks from the pit."

Ruggles was not a Blairtown man. He had come from farther west, and had never heard anything of Sarah Towney or Letty Lane. He applauded the actress vigorously at the Gaiety at first, and after the third night slept through most of the performance. When he waked up he tried to discover what attraction Letty Lane had for Dan. For the young man never left Ruggles' side, never went behind the scenes, though he seemed absorbed, as a man usually is absorbed for one reason only.

In response to a telegram from Osdene Park, Dan motored out there one afternoon, and during his absence Ruggles was surprised at his hotel by a call.

"My dear Mr. Ruggles," Lord Galorey said, for he it was the page boy fetched up, "why don't you come out to see us? All friends of old Mr. Blair's are welcome at Osdene."

Ruggles thanked Galorey and said he was not a visiting man, that he only had a short time in London, and was going to Ireland to look up "his family tree."

"There are one hundred acres of trees in Osdene," laughed Galorey; "you can climb them all." And Ruggles replied:

"I guess I wouldn't find any O'Shaughnessy Ruggles at the top of any of 'em, my lord. The boy has gone out to see you all to-day."

Galorey nodded. "That is just why I toddled in to see you!"

Ruggles' caller had been shown to the sitting-room, where he and Dan hobnobbed and smoked during the Westerner's visit. There was a pile of papers on the table, in one corner a typewriter covered by a black cloth. Galorey took a chair and, refusing a cigarette, lit his pipe.

"I didn't have the pleasure of meeting you in the West when I was out there with Blair. I knew Dan's father rather well."

Ruggles responded: "I knew him rather well too, for thirty years. If," he went on, "Blair hadn't known you pretty well he wouldn't have sent the boy out to you as he has done. He was keen on every trail. I might say that he had been over every one of 'em like a hound before he set the boy loose."

Galorey answered, "Quite so," gravely. "I know it. I knew it when Dan turned up at Osdene –" Holding his pipe bowl in the palm of his slender hand, he smoked meditatively. He hadn't thought about things, as he had been doing lately, for many years. His sense of honor was the strongest thing

in Gordon Galorey, the only thing in him, perhaps, that had been left unsmirched by the touch of the world. He was unquestionably a gentleman.

“Blair, however,” he said, “wasn’t as keen on this scent as you’d expect. His intuition was wrong.”

Ruggles raised his eyebrows slightly.

“I mean to say,” Lord Galorey went on, “that he knew me in the West when I had cut loose for a few blessed months from just these things into which he has sent his boy – from what, if I had a son, God knows I’d throw him as far as I could.”

“Blair wanted Dan to see the world.”

“Of course, that is right enough. We all have to see it, I fancy, but this boy isn’t ready to look at it.”

“He is twenty-two,” Ruggles returned. “When I was his age I was supporting four people.”

Galorey went on: “Osdene Park at present isn’t the window for Blair’s boy to see life through, and that is what I have come up to London to talk to you about, Mr. Ruggles. I should like to have you take him away.”

“What’s Dan been up to down there?”

“Nothing as yet, but he is in the pocket of a woman – he is in a nest of women.”

Ruggles’ broad face had not altered its expression of quiet expectation.

“There’s a lot of ’em down there?” he asked.

“There are two,” Galorey said briefly, “and one of them is my wife.”

Ruggles turned his cigarette between his great fingers. He was a slow thinker. He had none of old Blair’s keenness, but he had other qualities. Galorey saw that he had not been quite understood, and he waited and then said:

“Lady Galorey is like the rest of modern wives, and I am like a lot of modern husbands. We each go our own way. My way is a worthless one, God knows I don’t stand up for it, but it is not my wife’s way in any sense of the word.”

“Does she want Dan to go along on her road?” Ruggles asked. “And how far?”

“We are financially strapped just now,” said Galorey calmly, “and she has got money from the boy.” He didn’t remove his pipe from his mouth; still holding it between his teeth he put his hand in his pocket, took out his wallet, drew forth four checks and laid them down before Ruggles. “It is quite a sum,” Galorey noted, “sufficient to do a lot to Osdene Park in the way of needed repairs.” Ruggles had never seen a smile such as curved his companion’s lips. “But Osdene Park will have to be repaired by money from some other source.”

Ruggles wondered how the husband had got hold of the checks, but he didn’t ask and he did not look at the papers.

“When Dan came to the Park,” said Galorey, “I stopped bridge playing, but this more than takes its place!”

Ruggles’ big hand went slowly toward the checks; he touched them with his fingers and said: “Is Dan in love with your wife?”

And Lord Galorey laughed and said: “Lord no, my dear man, not even that! It is pure good nature on his part – mere prodigality. Edith appealed to him, that’s all.”

Relief crossed Ruggles’ face. He understood in a flash the worldly woman’s appeal to the rich young man and believed the story the husband told him.

“Have you spoken to the boy?”

“My dear chap, I have spoken to him about nothing. I preferred to come to you.”

“You said,” Ruggles continued, “there were two ladies down to your place.”

Galorey had refilled his pipe and held it as before in the palm of his hand.

“I can look after the affairs of my wife, and this shan’t happen again, I promise you – not at Osdene, but I’m afraid I can not do much in the other case. The Duchess of Breakwater has been at Osdene for nearly three weeks, and Dan is in love with her.”

Ruggles put the four checks one on top of the other.

“Is the lady a widow?”

“Unfortunately, yes.”

“So that’s the nest Dan has got into at Osdene,” the Westerner said. And Galorey answered: “That is the nest.”

“And he has gone out there to-day – got a wire this morning.”

“The duchess has been in an awful funk,” said Galorey, “because Dan’s been stopping in London so long. She sent him a message, and as soon as Dan wired back that he was coming to the Park, I decided to come here and see you.”

Ruggles ruminated: “Has the duchess complications financially?”

“Ra-ther!” the other answered.

And Ruggles turned his broad, honest face full on Galorey: “Do you think she could be bought off?”

Galorey took his pipe out of his mouth.

“It depends on how far Dan has gone on with her. To be frank with you, Mr. Ruggles, it is a case of emotion on the part of the woman. She is really in love with Dan. Gad!” exclaimed the nobleman. “I have been on the point of turning the whole brood out of doors these last days. It was like imprisoning a mountain breeze in a charnel house – a woman with her scars and her experience and that boy – I don’t know where you’ve kept him, or how you kept him as he is, but he is as clear as water. I have talked to him and I know.”

Nothing in Ruggles’ expression had changed until now. His eyes glowed.

“Dan’s all right,” he said softly. “Don’t you worry! He’s all right. I guess his father knew what he was doing, and I’ll bet the whole thing was just what he sent him over here for! Old Dan Blair wasn’t worth a copper when the boy was born, and yet he had ideas about everything and he seemed to know more in that old gray head of his than a whole library of books. Dan’s all right.”

“My dear man,” said the nobleman, “that is just where you Americans are wrong. You comfort yourself with your eternal ‘Dan’s all right,’ and you won’t see the truth. You won’t breathe the word ‘scandal’ and yet you are thick enough in them, God knows. You won’t admit them, but they are there. Now be honest and look at the truth, will you? You are a man of common sense. Dan Blair is *not* all right. He is in an infernally dangerous position. The Duchess of Breakwater will marry him. It is what she has wanted to do for years, but she has not found a man rich enough, and she will marry this boy offhand.”

“Well,” said the Westerner slowly, “if he loves her and if he marries her – ”

“Marries her!” exclaimed the nobleman. “There you are again! Do you think marriage makes it any better? Why, if she went off to the Continent with him for six weeks and then set him free, that would be preferable to marrying her. My dear man,” he said, leaning over the table where Ruggles sat, “if I had a boy I would rather have him marry Letty Lane of the Gaiety. Now you know what I mean.”

Ruggles’ face, which had hardened, relaxed.

“I have seen that lady,” he exclaimed with satisfaction; “I have seen *her* several times.”

Galorey sank back into his chair and neither man spoke for a few seconds. Turning it all over in his slow mind, Ruggles remembered Dan’s absorption in the last few days. “So there are three women in the nest,” he concluded thoughtfully, and Gordon Galorey repeated:

“No, not three. What do you mean?”

“Your wife” – Ruggles held up one finger and Galorey interrupted him to murmur:

“I’ll take care of Edith.”

“The Duchess of Breakwater you think won’t talk of money?”

“No, don’t count on it. She is aiming at ten million pounds.”

Ruggles was holding up the second finger.

“Well, I guess Dan has gone out to take care of *her* to-day.”

Dan and Ruggles had seen *Mandalay* from a box, from the pit and from the stalls. On the table lay a book of the opera. While talking with Galorey, Ruggles had unconsciously arranged the checks on top of the libretto of *Mandalay*.

“*I’ll* take care of Miss Lane,” Ruggles said at length.

His lordship echoed, “Miss Lane?” and looked up in surprise. “What Miss Lane, for God’s sake?”

“Miss Letty Lane at the Gaiety,” Ruggles answered.

“Why, she isn’t in the question, my dear man.”

“You put her there just now yourself.”

“Bosh!” Galorey exclaimed impatiently, “I spoke of her as being the limit, the last thing on the line.”

“No,” corrected the other, “you put the Duchess of Breakwater as the limit.”

Galorey smiled frankly. “You are right, my dear chap,” he accepted, “and I stand by it.”

A page boy knocked at the door and came in holding out on a salver a card for Mr. Ruggles, and at the interruption Galorey rose and invited Ruggles to go out with him that night to Osdene. “Lady Galorey will be delighted.”

But Ruggles shook his head. “The boy is coming back here to-night,” and Galorey laughed.

“Don’t you believe it! You don’t know how deep in he is. You don’t know the Duchess of Breakwater. Once he is with her – ”

At the same time that the page boy handed Mr. Ruggles the card of the caller, he gave him as well a small envelope, which contained box tickets for the Gaiety. Ruggles examined it.

“I have got some writing to do,” he told Galorey, “and I’m going to see a show to-night, and I think I’ll just stay here and watch my hole.”

As soon as Galorey had left the Carlton, Mr. Ruggles despatched his letters and his visitor, made a very careful toilet, and after waiting until past eight o’clock for Dan to return to dinner, dined alone on roast beef and a tart, and with perfect digestion, if somewhat thoughtful mind, left the hotel and walked down the dim street to the brilliant Strand, and on foot to the Gaiety.

CHAPTER VII – AT THE STAGE ENTRANCE

Ruggles, from his stall, for the fourth time saw the curtain go up on *Mandalay* and heard the temple bells ring. One of the stage boxes was not occupied until after the first act and then the son of his friend came in alone and sat far back out of sight of any eyes but the keenest, and those eyes were Ruggles'. Letty Lane, delicious, fantastic, languishing, sang to Dan; that was evident to Ruggles. He was a large man and filled his stall comfortably. He sat through the performance peacefully, his hands in his pockets, his big face thoughtful, his shirt front ruffled. To look at him, one must have wondered why he had come to *Mandalay*. He scarcely lost any of the threads of his own reflections, though when Miss Lane, in response to a call from the house, sang her cradle song three times, he seemed moved. The tones of her pure voice, the cradling in her arms of an imaginary child, her apparent dovelike purity, her grace and sweetness, and her cooing, gentle tone, to judge by the softening of the Westerner's face, touched very much the big fellow who listened like a child. At the end he drew his handkerchief slowly across his eyes, but the tears, or rather moisture, that rose there was not all due to Miss Lane's song, for Ruggles was extremely warm.

He could see that in his box the boy sat transfixed and absorbed. Dan went out in the second entr'acte and was absent when the curtain went down. Ruggles, as well, left before the performance was over, to make his way outside the theater to the stage exit, where there was already gathered a little group, looked after by a couple of policemen. Close to the curb a gleaming motor waited, the footman at its door. Ruggles buttoned his coat up to his chin and took his place close to the door, over which the electric light showed the words "Stage Entrance." A poor woman elbowed him, her shabby hat adorned by a scraggly plume, a gray shawl wrapped round her shoulders. A girl or two, who might have been flower sellers in Piccadilly in the daytime, a couple of toughs, a handful of other vagrants smelling of gin, a decent man in working clothes, a child in his arms, formed the human hedge Letty Lane was to pass between – a singular group of people to spend an hour hanging about the streets at the exit of a theater well toward midnight. So the naïve Ruggles thought, and better understood the appearance of the young fellows in evening clothes who hovered on the extreme edge of the little crowd. Dan, however, was not of these.

"Look sharp, Cissy," the workingman spoke to his child, holding her well up. "When she comes hout she'll pass close to yer, and you sing hout, 'God bless yer.'"

"Yes, Dad, I will," shrilled the child.

The woman in the gray shawl drew it close about her. "Aw she's a true lidy, all right, ain't she? I expect you've had some kindness off her as well?"

The man nodded over the child's shoulder. "Used to be a scene shifter, and Miss Lane found out about my little girl last year – not this lass, not Cissy, Cissy's sister – and she sent 'er to a place where it costs the eyes out of yer head. She's gettin' well fast, and we, none of us, has seen her or spoken to Miss Lane. She doesn't know our names."

And the woman answered: "She does a lot like that. She's got a heart bigger'n her little body."

And a big boy in the front row said back to the others: "Well, she makes a mint of money."

And the woman who had spoken before said: "She gives it nearly all to the poor."

Ruggles was evidently on the poor side of the waiting crowd; the handful of riffraff around him with its stench of dirt and gin. A better looking set collected opposite and there was the gleam of white shirt fronts.

"Now, there she comes," the father saw her first. "Sing out, Cissy."

The door opened and a figure quickly floated from it, like a white rose blown out into the foggy darkness. It floated down the few steps to the street between the double row of spectators. A white cloak entirely covered the actress. Her head was hidden by a white scarf, and she almost ran the short gantlet to her motor, between the cries of "God bless you!" – "Three cheers for Letty Lane" – "God

bless you, lady!” She didn’t speak or heed, however, or turn her head, but held her scarf against her face, and the man who slowly lounged behind her to the car, and put her in and got in after her, was not the man Joshua Ruggles had waited there to see. He hung about until the footman had sprung up and the car moved softly away, the stage entrance door shut, then he followed along with the crowd, with the few faithful ones who had waited an hour in the cold mist to cry out their applause, not to a singer in *Mandalay* but to a woman’s heart.

CHAPTER VIII – DAN’S SIMPLICITY

The Duchess of Breakwater was not sure how close Dan Blair’s thoughts were to marriage, but the boy from Montana was the easiest prey that had come across the beautiful and unscrupulous woman’s range. He had told her that he stayed on up in London to see a man from home, and when after four days he still lingered in town, she found his absence unbearable, and sent him a wire so worded that if he had a spark of interest in her he must immediately return to the Park. She had never been more lovely than when Dan found her waiting for him.

She had ordered tea in her sitting-room. She told him that he looked frightfully seedy, asked him what he had been doing and why he had stopped so long away, and Blair told her that old Ruggles, his father’s friend, had run over to see him with a lot of papers for Dan to read and sign and closed with a smile, telling her that he guessed she “didn’t know much about business.”

“I only know the horrid things of business – debts, and loans, and bills, and fussing.”

“Those things are not business,” Dan answered wisely; “they are just common or garden carelessness.”

She asked him why he had not brought Ruggles out to Osdene, and he told her he couldn’t have done a stroke of work with the old boy down here at the Park.

Stirring his tea, he appreciated the duchess. The agreeable picture she made impressed him mightily.

“Do you know,” he asked suddenly, “what you make me think of?”

And she responded softly: “No, dear.”

“A box of candy. This room with its stuffed walls, and you in it are good enough – ”

“To eat?” she laughed aloud. “Oh, you perfectly killing creature, what an idea!”

And as he met her eyes with his clear ones, with a simplicity she could never hope to reach, he put his tea-cup down; and as he did so the duchess observed his strong hands, their vigor, well-kept and muscular, but not the dandified hands of the man who goes often to the manicure.

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