

Chained

The Story of Joan Crawford's New Film

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Mike turned to Diane. "Apologies—ing to squeeze through the gate. "This for anything that wasn't quite right. As I said—we're not used to fair visitors."

"It's a situation I've been trying to correct!" Johnny assured her. He was suddenly very Southern. "But old Cunnel Bradley, he's a man's man—with his hosses and dogs and his pipe—"

"And hopes Majah Smith will sho' nough continue to entertain his loud and shrill lady friends in town," Mike interrupted.

Diane laughed. "Ol' plantation needs womenfolk—"

"Not like the last one he turned up with."

"But she had such pretty gold teeth," Johnny pointed out.

"Uppahs—and lowahs," Mike retorted.

Diane held up her glass of milk. "Anyhow—here's luck to Mike Bradley and Johnny Smith—and that's in the wine of the country," she finished with unaffected sincerity.

Before he drank, Mike's eyes fastened on her in puzzled inquiry. But why so impersonal? they seemed to ask.

A few hours later Johnny and Diane were watching Mike in the roundup at the corral.

Mike rode toward them, turning this way and that seeming, centaur-like, to be part of the horse. "It's a sight to carry away with you, eh," Johnny said meaningly, as he started to walk off.

Diane's reply came slowly after him, "Yes, Johnny. It is."

Mike rode up and dismounted from the white horse he was riding. Then he grabbed a little foal that was try-

ing to squeeze through the gate. "This one's Chili Beans. Her grandma once won the Del Fuego Sweepstakes for me and saved the mortgage. He's got a lot of horses to show his hocks to." Diane was watching his face. His hold on the colt relaxed. "You see—pretty harmless out here, aren't we? Like a day nursery. And you had to lie and run away." He studied her. "Why?"

"Mike—" At this moment, the foal, loosened, broke away with a leap and a swish of its tail.

"Whoa—"

"I'll head him off," Diane cried, and went after him.

She and Mike spread, each to one side, following the colt into the pampas. Laughing and running, they followed the colt's darting movements. But of a sudden he made a dash past Diane in the direction of the corral. Her plunge after him brought her to the ground. Mike, right behind, stumbled down beside her. Then their laughter died in their throats as their eyes met.

As Mike gathered her slowly to him, her arms went around his neck, and, with an inarticulate little murmur of endearment, her lips answered his kiss. Moments later she moved back. Flushed with an exquisite ecstasy, she looked at him, starry-eyed.

"That's why I lied and ran away," she said softly.

Mike tipped her chin. "That's nothing to run away from, is it?"

Diane shook her head. "Just then you and I rushed high above the earth." She looked at the sky. "I

don't know where—but we were all alone together—where nobody else will ever be—"

Mike kissed each finger separately. "We're going to settle down up there—"

"Right in the sun—where we can feel it beat down into us."

"However you spell it," Mike murmured into her hair, "it's love—whether there's a sun or a moon or it's raining."

Then, like all lovers, they asked the immemorial questions.

"On the boat—did you really know so soon?" Diane asked.

"I've known about somebody like you ever since I could think. When did you know?"

Her finger traced his lips. "I never thought about anybody like you. So I guess it must have been the minute I saw you."

Mike pressed his lips half against hers. "You're going to see me from now on Mrs. Michael Bradley."

His words brought her to herself with a jar. Reality again faced her. She averted her gaze. "Now I know that's what I've wanted to hear you say—but I've never dared let myself think about it."

Mike touched her gently. "What have you dared think about?"

Diane writhed inwardly with pain. "Everything, your arms around me—everything, except being Mrs. Mike Bradley."

"Why?" Mike was frankly perturbed.

Diane's voice was laden with woe. She lowered her head. "Because perhaps I'm that kind of a girl. You see—" her words came in a frightened rush. "There's another man—and he has a wife. But he pays my bills, too. Now—" her voice became a little shrill, "—what do you think of your future Mrs. Mike Bradley?"

Mike sucked in his breath. It made a harsh loud noise in the outdoor stillness. Not a muscle of his face moved. Diane drew back frightened now at what she had done.

(To be Continued.)

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