

Chained

The Story of Joan Crawford's New Film

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Richard withdrew his hand from the gun, turned and looked at them both. He had heard it then—from her own lips!

Of a sudden he felt spent and weary; his knees sagged a little. He who prided himself on his physical fitness, knew, in that clairvoyant moment, that this crisis had aged him more in a few seconds than would all the changes of the next ten years to come. But when he spoke a quiet serenity had replaced his earlier fury.

"I know," he said, calmly. "I just wanted to be sure."

Mike and Diane heard him in stunned amazement. What had threatened to be a scene of violence and even of bloodshed had passed into one of peaceful quiet.

"James." Richard opened the door and spoke out the hall door.

"Sir?" James appeared, his unflinching eyes betraying no vestige of the perturbation he felt, for he had heard every word.

"Set another place," Richard directed him, coolly. "Perhaps Mr. Bradley will have breakfast."

It was the closest James had ever come, in all his years of servitude, to a personal display of feelings in regard to his employer's actions. But with admirable restraint he merely nodded and went towards the table.

Richard followed him. Mike, in silent wonder, waited expectantly, while Diane could only gaze at him. Did Richard really mean this? Or what did he mean? Her head spun. Things had happened with such dizzying rapidity that she seemed to be in a fog of bewilderment.

As James set another place for Mike at the table, Richard held his hands over Diane's shoulders. "Your jacket, my dear." In fine consideration he preferred not to look at her as he spoke. Everything else he could manage, but there was a pain in his heart that he knew his eyes reflected and it was this that he wanted to save her.

He removed her jacket and Diane tried to meet his glance, still unable to believe what his every action seemed to be telling her. She slipped off her beret, and dropped it, with her jacket, on a chair.

"Now—some breakfast," Richard said. He went to the table as Mike and Diane's eyes still followed him. He held Diane's chair, and she, after a second's hesitation, dropped into it. With a quick gesture her hands went up to her face, covering it.

"Mr. Bradley," Richard indicated the other chair and Mike mechanically seated himself. Before taking his place at the table Richard stopped by a small radio set in a corner of the alcove back of his chair. He turned a volume dial.

"Wonder what's on," he murmured, manipulating the selector dial. Gradu-

ally the station came over. "While a blanket of ice covers the city this morning in the most severe storm since—" The practical, matter-of-fact voice smote the ear incongruously in this room that had so recently been witness to the tensify of their varied human emotions. Richard quickly changed the station.

The dignified crescendo of an organ filled the room. It swelled like a soft mantle of peace over all of them. Richard nodded his appreciation and sat down.

They were placed on three sides of the square table, Diane between them. Her face was still in her hands as she sat there—rigid. For one—or two—or even fifty seconds her consciousness could not grasp the fact that this thing had happened. Detachedly she tried to stand outside herself—to clarify to herself its full import.

Richard waited while James placed the grapefruit for her and Mike, then he motioned to them with his spoon.

He addressed Mike pleasantly. "You say you have a ranch down in the Argentine?" The effort that his every word and gesture had cost him in the past few minutes was beginning to repay him in dividends. For he could speak now with a naturalness and relaxation that was quite genuine.

Mike wanted to shout his admiration for Richard—for his gallantry and courage. Instead he said, "That's right. Like to have you see it some time," he added with simple unaffectedness.

"Like to," Richard replied heartily. "What do you raise, cattle?"

"Some. Mostly horses. Thoroughbreds and ponies."

"Oh," Richard stopped, remembering poignantly a night some months past at Madison Square Garden. "Er—you don't happen to have a pure white horse down there, do you?" he asked, deceptively, in an over-casual voice.

"Sure have." Mike's eyes snapped enthusiastically. "Good stock horse. Arabian, too."

"Did he ever stumble with you?" Richard asked, smiling slyly.

Mike grinned. "Not yet."

"Well," and Richard glanced at Diane, "just a word of caution. Don't let him. I don't think she'd like it."

He smiled at Diane and she slowly lifted her eyes to him. They were filled with tears and a tender, grateful love. She knew that he was thinking of the incident of the horse show, and she returned his smile with a strange and reminiscent one that said, "I did do that then. Even then I gave myself away."

In this silent communion she and Richard were closer together than they had ever been before. For a curious, suspended minute Richard tried to imagine what it would have been like to have had her for a daughter, and

with a gladness that he did not try to analyse he knew that Mike was just the sort of young man he would have been happy for her to have loved. He looked away now so that she could let her eyes receive the tears which had been pounding at him like a flood-gate.

"How's the climate down there, Mike? Still good for raising children, too?"

"None better."

Diane impulsively took Richard's hand. He patted it paternally.

"I've a pair of great boys, Mike," he boasted. "Last time I saw them they couldn't decide whether to go to Harvard or Yale. Guess their mother and I ought to get together and help 'em." He chuckled ruefully. "I was Princeton '06." He nodded to Mike in slow conscious acknowledgment of the futility of his age against this youth. "That's a long time ago, Mike."

Diane sobbed openly. "Richard—I can't say—anything—"

"You aren't supposed to. Is she, Mike?"

Mike grinned, although there was an odd catch in his throat. "Nope." He suddenly extended his hand. "Say—we didn't shake when I came in."

"That's right." Richard grasped his hand firmly across the table. Both turned to Diane, who looked from one to the other, tears running down her cheeks, a mixture of emotions in her face, of joy and admiration for both these two splendid, dearly beloved men of hers.

"Here—start eating," Richard admonished them. "She won't get grapefruit like that down in the Argentine. Will she, Mike?"

"Not unless our best friend in the States sends us some now and then," Mike topped him.

They all attacked the grapefruit. Richard smiled back at Diane, glad for her happiness, then grinned at Mike. All three felt their hearts expand with love and generous admiration for each other. It was a rare and beautiful moment—this spiritual commingling of three strong souls who had hurdled a major crisis in their lives with bravery, delicacy and decency.

Another place, another climate, and Reno was just a fast-fading memory as Diane sat back in the car that was rapidly bringing her and Mike nearer to the ranch. Dreamily she noted again the great wide spaces and thought to herself that this time they meant home.

As the car drove in the gate, Pablo and Johnny excitedly ran out to meet them. After their loud and hearty greetings Mike shooed them away. He wanted to be alone with Diane these first few moments.

The new wing caught her eye. "Why, the house has grown up, Mike," she exclaimed, delightedly.

"Sure." He lifted her out of the car. "Like us."

At the very door of the house Diane stopped him and murmured in his ear, "Do you remember what you said, Mike? No matter how you spell it—whether there's a sun—or a moon—or it's raining—"

"It's love," he finished for her with a soft kiss. Then he carried his bride across the threshold and shut out the world.

THE END.