

THE CRUCIBLE

Ah yes, the choice is meagre— Between two evils at best— Pain is the price of living And death is the price of rest.

LIPSTICK

Sitting by the fire in the barren comfort of furnished chambers for gentlemen, Michael Brayde tried to understand women.

The chambers were situated in the Jermyn Street district because Jermyn Street above all suggests to the wanderer from an alien shore: 'I am Memory and Torment— I am Town; I am all that ever went with evening dress.'

The sitting room displayed a sort of male luxury expressed in deep armchairs and a Chesterfield, thick carpet, curtains of distinct richness; unfortunately, it lacked books and the pictures on the walls confined themselves mostly to episodes of the chase.

One received an impression of ingrained dustiness such as no vacuum cleaner might conquer. Michael Brayde, with his feet extended towards the blaze and a pipe between his teeth, thought this dust might be a fine psychical deposit from the arid souls of transient tenants like himself who had come home only to find that home really meant a big shady bungalow by an African river in the stillness of the bush and the blaze of the equatorial sun.

Outside, a bitter rain slashed down into the icy street. Michael Brayde glanced at his wrist watch and observed that it registered six-fifteen p. m.

"Half an hour," he reflected, "before I need begin to change. Ann said I was to collect her at eight. Let me see, it's tails and a white waistcoat nowadays, and white gloves are not worn when dancing. But I can't help wondering why I should be taking Ann out and what I'm doing in England at all. These modern girls are simply beyond me, for the rest I just don't belong."

He lay back in his chair, a tall, lean figure with the yellowish tinge of Africa still obvious in his face, and harked back over the course of his life. When war broke out he had been twenty-two, still at Oxford.

After two years in France and a dose of shrapnel the old general at the War Office who knew his father had suggested that machine-gun officers were badly needed in the East African show.

Consequently, the rest of the war comprised service with the King's African Rifles, eternal trekking through the bush after the elusive von Lettow, that intimate acquaintance with the African native which led him when peace was declared to listen to the insistent call of Africa, and afterward to become an assistant district officer in northern Nigeria.

The slow process of time brought promotion to the district officer; England and Europe faded; life represented merely the development of his district, the semi-paternal rule over strange races, that queer, difficult, somehow satisfying life of the white man administering justice in a black country as remote from his own conventions as the moon. And then, nine months ago, his father died and Michael succeeded to the baronetcy and ten thousand a year. Naturally his sense of duty led him to resign, come home, live on the family acres, and play the part of an English country gentleman.

At thirty-seven Michael felt no call to this state of life. For thirteen years Africa had laid on him the spell of her enchantments. His mother still remained at Brayde Manor, and he couldn't very well push her out. She was always going and went not. Her tactics explained these furnished chambers for gentlemen in the Jermyn Street district, and a dinner engagement with Ann. Michael possessed only the faintest notion who Ann was. Some girl temporarily linked with some man on leave had asked her to make a fourth, because the man wanted to bring Michael along and Ann and he drifted into what represented for him a device against boredom. And confound it, he really must get up and dress.

Michael rose, knocked out his pipe and told himself: "In Nigeria my boy would just be bringing me the first gin and bitters of the evening. I should drink it, and perhaps another, and then I bathe and change and then I have a dinner which would be served. The cook would have prepared exactly what I liked and the house boys would serve it with a sort of military precision. The sun would have set long ago and the lamps would glow like stars in the dark. I should be living a clean, orderly, despotic life, such as gives a man self-respect."

"Here I pay a ridiculous rent for these filthy rooms, put my cuff links in my dress shirt myself, and go forth to entertain some come-by-chance girl to whom, out of sheer loneliness, I cling as if she were a prince's daughter. Frankly I consider these amenities expensive at the price of a title and ten thousand a year."

Ann's apartment lay in a quiet square off the Brompton Road. She

opened the door herself, draped in some delicately ethereal silk wrapper, a tall dark girl with impeccably shingled hair, singularly pretty in the boyish modern manner.

Her dark eyes glinted momentarily at the sight of this man who walked like a ruler, and carried the best clothes in London as though they were nothing more than string and brown paper.

"Come in, Michael," she said. "My daily woman leaves early if I'm going out. I shan't be long. We've had the most frightful rush today and that's why I'm late. There are the cigars. Would you like a drink?"

He held her hand in his firm clasp, knowing that if he had kissed her she would have made no fuss. Unfortunately, six months' residence in England had not accustomed him to easy kissing.

"That's all right, Ann. I booked our table for eight-thirty and they'll keep it anyhow. Go and paint your face and fix your hair and put on your best frock, because it's a foul night and you'll need all your comforts. I told the taxi driver to wait. I won't have a drink, thanks."

She nodded and went out. Lighting one of his own cigars he told himself it seemed a queer world nowadays. There she was in that silk dressing gown, and yet she expected a man to remain unruined and well-behaved.

No doubt that accounted for the female dominance he noticed everywhere; they just vetoed normal masculine instincts as bad form. Moreover, she kept him waiting deliberately, for of course that yarn about a frightful rush of business deceived no one.

He seemed to remember her telling him she was a partner in a dress-making firm. Probably they had luck about one gown a week and would go bankrupt directly their capital came to an end.

At this point Ann entered. She wore a plain frock of smoke-blue velvet marvelously cut, the skirt short enough in front to show her knees when she walked, its irregular hem declining to midway between knee and ankle at the back. Her legs were perfect in the thinnest of flesh silk stockings. Over one arm drooped a supple fox coat with an enormous white fox collar. She threw down the coat, sat on the edge of the table and asked for a cigar.

"I've been as quick as I could, Michael, but I'm afraid the taxi must have ticked up a fortune. We'd better hurry before you're ruined."

He smiled, and she liked the line of his mouth under the dropped mustache, gave her the cigar and lighted it. If she had known the cause of the smile she might have liked it less. He was thinking that if a lady of no reputation had appeared on the street wearing that frock in 1914, the nearest policeman would have arrested her for indecency.

"I didn't want to hurry you, Ann. I told the driver to wait because on a wet night you never can get a taxi."

She stood up and he held her coat; the tall, slender form, faintly fragrant, rested in his arms for a moment. Then she was walking beside him along the corridor, coat clutched together at the waist to emphasize the curve of breast and hip, a beaded bag in which colors blended miraculously against a dull-gold jeweled frame dangling from one hand.

"Twenty-three or twenty-four, perhaps, possibly pretty, and all she knows of me is that I'm a friend of Jack and Jack steps out with Mary, and Mary's her friend," Michael was thinking. "And if it were a fine summer night and I owned a fast car and suggested having supper and dancing in Brighton, I'll bet she'd do it like a shot if she felt like it."

"These girls have no morals or scruples, yet they manage to save themselves by complaining that they thought you were a gentleman, whereas of course it would be just because you were a gentleman and not a plaster saint if any trouble arose."

Now he shepherded her under an umbrella to the door of the dripping taxi, directed the driver to the Carlton and followed her into the cab. Inside, in the gloom, he took her left hand in his right, because that is the sort of thing one does in cabs and is expected to do.

"You've got good hands, Ann."

"Thank heaven for something! That's the first charming thing you've said so far. Hitherto, you might have been a youth of stainless virtue forced to take out a scarlet woman as a penance."

In her tone there lurked no malice; the words implied merely well-bred comment on an interesting situation. Michael grinned because she had come so near the truth.

"I'm not young, Ann; I'm thirty-seven and my virtue isn't stainless. I'm just a poor lone man dragged away from my life-work by the poky baronet's forbears. I can't even get on with the job because my mother remains in occupation. Therefore I turn to you for comfort and you aren't to say cruel, cutting things; you look sweet and decent—like what we are told it is to die for our country."

"My dear Michael, no man would take out any girl who looked either sweet or decent, let alone both, and I get taken out quite a lot. It isn't only buyers and representatives of the hook and eye industry who do it, either. I have several gentlemen friends unconnected with my business."

"Darling, I adore you for your business pose. Confess that you'd probably be better off at this moment if you'd lived on your capital until it lasted and then gone gracefully to the workhouse, instead of investing it in a musical-comedy frock shop."

Ann took away her hand in order to discipline a stray curl. "I don't know how much unearned income you've just fallen into my dear, but I doubt if they paid you more to be a commissioner in Nigeria than I drew last year. My portion of the profits came to over a thousand and I only have a third share. Don't say you're one of those men

who have to despise a woman's brains before they can appreciate the rest of her, 'cause I shall think you stayed long enough in the bush to get a prehistoric mad."

The taxi drew up at the Carlton's entrance, and after Michael had surmounted overcoat and silk hat, he escorted her through the long ante-room to their table by a wall of the oval dining room. She slid out of her coat, sat down and smiled at him.

"I'm only a girl, Michael, and consequently a fool, but do spoil me because any fool girl loves being spoiled. And don't give me champagne because it's so obvious and I'd rather have a dry Graves."

Ann sat back and drifted on a dreamy river of contentment while he ordered dinner. It was so restful to be entertained by the right kind of man. If men only knew how essential they were to a girl's enjoyment of life through giving her just the right stimulus and removing the aching necessity of stage-managing her own playmate, they might become intolerably despotic. She said obligingly as the wine waiter went away:

"Now tell me about lions and crocodiles and how you quelled a native rising single-handed by sheer personality, only a woman, but men get things done."

"I shan't. I'd rather tell you how pretty you are, and what a jolly frock you've got on, and how I'm enjoying myself."

"This frock isn't 'jolly,' my poor friend. It's a Paris model, and a poem. One advantage I have is that at least I display creditably the goods I sell. I wore it for you, and in the midst of an English winter, with Christmas only a few weeks away, nothing cheers up a lonely empire-builder more than a good frock worn by a true-blue girl at home."

"You mayn't believe it but I've hardly seen any frocks since 1914. I went straight out to Africa in 1916. I've spent most of my leaves in the wilds. Rather in a way because in 1914 I queer for frocks and girls and so on. However, Africa teaches you simplicity of life."

"In 1914 I was nearly nine years old. The Great War means no more to me than the Peninsular War or the Wars of the Roses. No wonder you find me so demoralizing and improper, Mike. As for me, I keep a bride and bit on my tongue all the man's over there. They'd mean something to you then."

"The dance band began to croon irresistibly. Michael invited her with a look and she rose and gave herself into his arms."

"Don't be too hard on me, will you?" she pleaded. "I know you learned to dance in the days when when dancing was dancing. Heavens, how I try sometimes when I realize I was born too late for the lancers, and the schottisch!"

He only laughed and held her in a light, sure clasp, and they began to weave gay, effortless patterns on the parquet floor. Ann felt careless and happy. He was rich enough to spend money on her without any need on her part for scruples of conscience, and he had a definite appeal for her in his detached, speculative fashion. She felt he could take the next ship back to Nigeria without giving her a second thought and longed to deprive him of this splendid immunity. Besides, so far he had neither kissed nor attempted to kiss her.

"The crowd of ninety-nine men out of a hundred," she thought, "I'd say that proved definitely that I hadn't been a success, but then if you aren't a success they don't ask you again, and this is our third party; but Jack and Mary complicated the other two. I wonder!"

They drifted back to their table. The waiter brought coffee. Gazing around that charming room, Michael discovered one of the few people whom he had troubled to rediscover, chiefly on his mother's account. Mrs. Severill, who lived in the neighborhood of Brayde Manor, was in London for the little season so that her daughter Joyce might find her feet before being presented at one of the next year's courts. Mrs. Severill smiled at him more or less approvingly.

Evidently Mrs. Severill had given a party for young people and to Michael's eyes it dropped a little. Three dull-looking young men preserved a stolid attitude in the presence of Joyce and two other girls of her vintage, and he scarcely could blame them.

Michael's gaze went back to Ann and his mind became engrossed with a queer problem. He knew why Mrs. Severill had given him only a conditional smile. An eligible bachelor would have been occupied better, in her view, paying attention to Joyce. Her experienced eye took in the perfection of Ann's frock, the miracle of the self who Ann was and found no answer to the question. Mrs. Severill saw in Joyce the salt of Dorset's best, and could not approve Michael's taste.

Michael put his problem into words: "Why are the Anns of life, obviously an unscrupulous race so attractive; and why are the Joyces a virtuous sisterhood, so deadly dull?"

Then he heard Ann's voice murmuring gently: "Don't rack your poor brains any more, Michael dear. Nobody knows where your nice friends over there get those amazing clothes. Give it up, and teach me to dance like grandpa instead. I particularly like this tune."

Once more he held that smoke-blue form in his arms, so imponderable, so obedient to the least hint of guidance. She danced like a leaf before the wind.

Mrs. Severill, beneath her bland efforts to make her party go, thought swiftly: "I must ask him to

dinner. That girl's simply an infatuation. He will see that Joyce is different." Then the remorseless logic of experience caused her to think further: "He doesn't want Joyce to be different, and it won't do any good, but I must make an effort and so I shall ask him to dinner."

Shortly before midnight Ann wished to be taken home. She must consider, she said, tomorrow and the toiler's need of a night's rest. Cloaked and powdered, she met him in the entrance, and a moment later they were gliding through the rain-swept night.

For a while neither spoke: Ann sat gazing ahead at the string of lamps along Piccadilly and Michael sat gazing, at her profile. What, after all, could you understand from the expression in a girl's eyes when it was put there specially to deceive you? She might be thinking how marvelous or how kind-hearted he was, or whether she should have a pink frock or a green frock, or a poor fish he must be not to kiss her when he had the chance. Well, it was a lonely life and at least he owed it to himself not to earn the reputation of being a poor fish.

Very sweetly let herself be tendered about her, a desire to help so that a beautiful rite might be performed beautifully. They were rather breathless kisses faintly flavored with lipstick. He had only begun to kiss her when the cab drew up outside her flat.

She sighed, smiled and gathered up the hand bag of miraculously shaded beads from the door a slim white hand met his.

"Good night, Michael, and thanks ever so much. You make a delightful play-fellow. You're a darned sight younger and more frivolous than you imagine."

The door clicked behind her. Heady with male righteousness Michael steadfastly ignored the essential adorableness of Ann, that slender figure so heartbreakingly in smoke-blue velvet, that voice like a caress, that beautifully shaped head with its mop of shingled curls. He remembered only her unchaperoned appearance in a silk dressing wrap and her idiomatic tenderness in the taxi when her kisses tasted faintly of lipstick.

Therefore he neglected her for ten days, refraining from manifesting himself by even so much as a telephone call and refusing to be disappointed because she also gave no sign. Subconsciously he longed for the moral superiority of knowing that she was in pursuit.

He thought cold, cruel things of her on his way to dine with Mrs. Severill. Tonight at least he would tell her, he demonstrated that blood must tell and Joyce Severill, before the solid background of a home and a parent, would convince him that the girls of England were still sound at heart, and replete with modesty, maidenliness and seemingly behavior. Moreover, it would be pleasant to dine at someone's house instead of in a restaurant, with the port gleaming on the ancient mahogany and a stately butler lending dignity to the business of eating and drinking.

Mrs. Severill had taken a house in Lawndes Square, and the majesty of that sacred neighborhood descended on Michael as he rang the doorbell. He still lived more or less in a dream of days before the war when people really inhabited large houses and kept many devoted servants. Thus entering what he supposed to be a fairyland, he found he had arrived at the precise moment when the coach was turning back into a pumpkin and the horses into mice.

The servant who took his hat and coat struck him as a trifle quaint, but what else can be expected of a temporary staff hastily mobilized by an agency? The house struck him as dimly barren, but the owner locks up the doors of his possessions before letting his home furnish.

The quaint servant took Michael to the drawing-room on the first floor, an apartment destitute of furniture save for a few gilt chairs and a large phonograph. Joyce and two other girls were dancing to the music of this instrument, parting and reuniting young men in the last stages of boredom and another man who was, inevitably, a retired colonel.

Michael greeted Mrs. Severill with old-world politeness. Across a dim of the phonograph she screamed a welcome. The young ladies' attention gradually came to an end, the butler arrived with a tray of cocktails, and the dancers flocked around the cocktail tray.

Mrs. Severill introduced Michael to Joyce and Meriel and Pamela. The colonel exclaimed: "Ha! Pleased to meet yer!" and the young men made mooring noises. The young ladies, Michael also, causing them to seem not only intrigued but almost alarmed.

A sort of butler announced dinner. Michael found himself between his hostess and Joyce.

While he ate the very bad dinner provided by a temporary cook of the meanest intelligence, Michael arrived gradually at an estimate of the situation. He was the prize and prize money had been nominated prize winner. Mrs. Severill flattered him from one side and Joyce threw herself at him from the other. Pamela and Meriel watched her in scarcely disguised envy.

Joyce was a healthy restless young animal, neither pretty nor plain. Her high voice kept addressing him in a series of imperatives. "Oh, Sir Michael, do tell me about Africa. Oh, Sir Michael, you must hunt this season. Oh, Sir Michael, you've simply got to live at the Manor. It's practically on our doorstep. It would be too thrilling."

After dinner he danced with the girls to the music of the phonograph. They seemed so alike in their skimpy frocks with their skimpy minds, but each contrived to assure him without putting it in so many words that no one had bespoken her, and if his thoughts moved in the direction of marriage he need look no further. Never before had he realized the terrible result of a man-shorage. He began to feel like a hunted animal. Finally, at an early hour, he left.

In the morning he told himself

that to be alone in London is no life for a man and departed to spend the week-end at a South Coast town where the golf was renowned. But a steady rain drove him to bridge in the clubhouse; afternoon bridge, drinks, dinner, more bridge and more drinks and so to bed. The return journey on Monday morning seemed a release from purgatory.

The almost affectionate attitude of all the staff at his chambers for gentlemen reminded him that Christmas lay hardly more than a week ahead. He supposed he would go down to Dorset. The necessity presented itself for buying Christmas presents, for he could not go empty-handed.

The blataney of the shopping crowds in Regent Street irritated him vaguely, and the contents of the shop windows irritated him still more. Who on earth wanted to buy all this rubbish, and who first conceived the idea of commercializing Christmas? The world seemed to have changed out of all recognition. The Christmas he remembered were essentially family affairs—church in the morning, with a brother and sisters and cousins and uncles home from the ends of the earth, a walk through the woods in the afternoon, and then the Christmas dinner, with old stories out of the past and old wines from dim corners of the cellar, and improvised games or charades afterwards. Now the mode seemed to be to eat your Christmas dinner in a restaurant and dance later with a lot of waiters looking on.

It was then that the idea came to him to find a present for Ann.

He paused, almost startled at his own inspiration. One half of his mind explained this apparent inconsistency in the case of a girl who came to the door in her dressing gown and allowed herself to be kissed in a taxi. The other half of his mind explained this apparent inconsistency.

"True, she must be termed unsexed and immodest, but at least she isn't predatory. Compare her, for instance, with Joyce and Meriel and Pamela. They as good as proposed to me and their mammas handed out invitations and invitations ever since that awful evening at Mrs. Severill's. Now Ann never attempted to propose and not one word have I heard from her since I took her out to dinner, over a fortnight ago. Therefore she deserves a present even if it only bears the resemblance of a thank offering."

The question as to what form the present should take puzzled him a little. But finally he decided: "She has a home and she is a girl of taste, so I will give her something for her home." There-upon he sought a dealer in old silver who knew him, and bought a pair of Georgian-silver saltcellars, frail and delicate and beautiful.

Having lunched at his club he decided to deliver the saltcellars in person. After all, she would be at her place of business but there resides a subtle compliment in the personal delivery of a gift. Her maid would report the fact and it might give her pleasure.

Yet when he had climbed the stairs to Ann's apartment, it was she who opened the door and uttered a cry of surprise.

"You!" she said with an intonation he found difficult to describe to himself. It seemed compounded of satisfaction and pleasure, blended with hesitation. "It's very nice of you to call to see me," she went on. "Do come in, Michael. I'm glad I happened to be here."

He entered and she closed the door. They stood facing each other in the tiny rectangular hall. Instead of leading the way of her sitting room she indicated a chair and said: "Won't you sit down? I seem always to open the front door when you, Ann, I called to leave a Christmas card, you oughtn't to open it till see. One has to do such a lot of shopping for Christmas."

"Yes," he agreed. "Much of it seems pure waste of time and money but a little of it one enjoys. I've enjoyed doing some shopping for you, Ann. I called to leave a Christmas present for you. Strictly speaking, you oughtn't to open it till Christmas Day."

He offered her the parcel and as she took it a faint color came into her face.

"You're very kind, Michael, but I didn't think you approved of me enough to give me a Christmas present. I'm one of these dreadful modern girls who go out with men on the slightest provocation."

"That means you've gone farther and fared worse since I saw you. Oh, Michael, and I thought you were so faithful! I'm almost afraid to open this parcel, because directly I see what's in it I shall understand what you really think of me."

She was pulling off the string and unfolding the brown paper. When at last she drew out the first of the silver salt-cellars, she held it gently in the manner of one appreciative of beautiful things.

"You know," she told him, "you have charming thoughts of me sometimes. I can't explain why, but I have hated to have you give me silk stockings, for in my view this of course is perfect, and besides giving me a perfect thing you assume this is the kind of present I'd like best. Thank you ever so much."

Michael was thinking: "By heaven's mercy she isn't going to offer me a kiss for it. If she did I'd test her: that sort of thing goes with silk stockings but not with Georgian saltcellars."

Ann stood fingering her treasures, and then a smile broke over her face.

Michael felt now that I can risk asking you into my sitting room. You've been awfully good about being lent in this wretched little hall. You see, there's something queer in the sitting room, and I was afraid

you might laugh at me if you saw it. Now I'm not sure you will."

"What makes you think I won't?" "Who knows? But I'll take the risk."

She pushed open the sitting-room door and he followed her. The soft glow of an orange-shaded lamp revealed a tall Christmas tree standing by the window. The branches were decked with colored glass globes, colored candles and small toys.

"You see," he heard Ann's voice saying, "I ran out of crackers to tie for more. That's why I opened the door for you. Do you think I'm a great baby to have a Christmas tree, Michael?"

He shook his head. "Only this morning I asked myself how Christmas in London could have come to mean nothing but restaurant parties and dancing and a concentrated effort on the part of shopkeepers to sell a lot of absurd things nobody wants. Whom will you ask to your party, Ann?"

"Well, I know heaps of young marrieds who aren't too well off, and they haven't the space and the leisure to arrange Christmas trees. So being a so-called idle spinster I've a party just before Christmas, and the kids love it and it gives their mothers an afternoon off and a chance to look at the shops."

"You know, Ann," he said thoughtfully, "you really are rather a dear. Am I? Then if I am, will you do something for me? Will you be Father Christmas and give away the presents? I'll get you a red gown and white beard and all you'll have to do is speak in quietly and put them on. Then I'll announce you and when it's all over you can sneal out and come back as your own self for a badly needed drink."

"No, Ann, I'll get my red gown if you'll let me. That will be my contribution to the party. When it's over?"

"The day after tomorrow. Father Christmas should appear at about four."

"Splendid. And if I do my job faithfully well, would you dine with me afterwards?"

"I'd love to. Thank you, Michael. As he went down the stairs he reflected ironically: "Somehow I can't see Joyce or Meriel or Pamela having a tree for the children of young marrieds not quite so well-off as themselves."

Suffering acutely from the emotions which afflict the more nervous burglars, Michael stole through the half-open door of Ann's apartment and tiptoed in, under the guidance of a giggling maid. From the sitting room came a murmur of small, de-lighted voices.

Feverishly he adjusted the long white beard, the fur cap and the scarlet gown sacred to Father Christmas, and sat down to await his summons. At last he heard Ann's voice saying: "Come on, Michael. It's yer hour."

In her sitting room he found a charming assembly of guests, little boys displaying a mixture of shyness and truculence, little girls already at the age of five or six, reproducing the pretty assurance and exquisite social tact of their mothers, dream babies still harking back to the mysterious world from which they came. All in a moment Michael found himself in an old Dorsetshire manor with a brother and sisters and grown-ups uncles and cousins, even one of them a child either in year or by temperament on account of Christmas.

Instantly he became a great success, so that even the smallest baby welcomed him. He saw gratification in Ann's eyes. This was a new Ann. Presently she allowed him to escape deposit the disguise in a suitcase and return to the party merely as some man who had strayed in out of the cold.

When the last mother or nurse had collected the last child Ann offered Michael a cocktail and sat in the arm of a chair, weary yet triumphant, viewing him with consoling eyes.

"You were very sweet to those I fancy," she said at last. "You're quite a different person from the man who took me to dine at the Carlton. Life's very difficult."

"You're quite a different person from the girl I took to the Carlton. You ought to be ashamed of deceiving me."

"I deceive you? I like that! Was just what you expected me to be, and then you went away despising me."

"How dare you say I despise you?"

"But Michael, you did. You wanted a party girl and you asked me and I was a party girl according to my lights. I believe in earning my money. I was my most flippant frock and I let you kiss me as much as you wanted to."

"Not as much as I really wanted to."

"Some people are very greedy, felt all your conscientious scrupulous through your kisses; you were proaching yourself for stooping to take out a girl who permitted this kind of thing, and angry with you for permitting it."

"You cast me out of your memory for weeks, and then in a moment of Christian charity something made you to buy me the sort of Christmas present a really nice girl might love to have. And as you haven't monopoly of Christian charity I gave you, not because of your saltcellars but because of your bet-nurse."

There was a flush of shame. Michael's face because he knew spoke the truth.

"You deliberately gave me the impression!"

"My dear, if one's expected to be a joy girl, one is a joy girl. It doesn't matter. I earn my own living. If I'm kissed I can always wash my face afterwards, except that one generally uses cleansers cream nowadays."

"These things don't hurt a man. You think we're made of gear but it's only your vanity. We're so good-natured we take our own from the men we're with. It's dog I assure you."

(Continued on page 3, Col. 5.)