

The COAST of CHANCE

By **ESTHER & LUCIA CHAMBERLAIN**
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SYNOPSIS.

At a private view of the Chatworth personal estate, to be sold at auction, the Chatworth ring mysteriously disappears. Harry Cressy, who was present, describes the ring to his fiancée, Flora Gilsey, and her chaperon, Mrs. Clara Britton, as being like a heathen god, with a beautiful sapphire set in the head. Flora discovers an unfamiliar mood in Harry, especially when the ring is discussed. She attends "ladies' night" at the club and meets Mr. Kerr, an Englishman. It comes out that the missing ring has been known as the Crew idol. Its disappearance recalls the exploits of Farrell Wand, an English thief. Flora has a fancy that Harry and Kerr are concerned in the mystery.

CHAPTER IV.

Flowers by the Way.

Flora liked this funny little dining room with walls as frail as box-boards, low-ceiled and flooded with sun. It recalled surroundings she had known later than the mining camp, but long before the great red house. It seemed to her that she fitted here better than the Purdies. She looked across at Kerr, sitting opposite, to see if perhaps he fitted too. But he was foreign, decidedly. He kept about him still the hint of delicate masquerade that she had noticed the night before. Out of doors, alone with her, he had lost it. For a moment he had been absolutely off his guard.

She rose from the table with the feeling that in an hour all three of them had become quite old friends of his, though without knowing anything further about him.

"We must do this again," Mrs. Purdie said, as they parted from her in the garden.

"Surely we will," Kerr answered her.

But Flora had the feeling that they never, never would. For him it had been a chance touching on a strange shore.

But at least they were going away together. They would walk together as far as the little car, whose terminal was the edge of the parade-ground. But just outside of the gate he stopped.

"Do you especially like board walks?" he asked.

It was an instant before she took his meaning. Then she laughed. "No, I like green paths."

He waved with his cane. "There is a path yonder, that goes over a bridge, and beyond that a hill."

"And at the top of that another car," Flora reminded him.

"Ah, well," he said, "there are flowers on the way, at least." He looked at her whimsically. "There are three purple irises under the bridge. I noticed them as I came down."

She was pleased that he had noticed that for himself—pleased, too, that he had suggested the longer way.

The narrow path that they had chosen branched out upon the main path, broad and yellow, which dipped downward into the hollow. From there came the murmur of water. Green showed through the white grass of last summer. Sauntering between plantations of young eucalyptus, they came to the arched stone bridge. They

leaned on the parapet, looking down at the marshy stream beneath and at the three irises Kerr had remarked, knee-deep in swamp ground.

"Now that I see them I suppose I want them," Flora remarked.

"Of course," he assented. "Then hold all these."

He put into her hands the loose bunch of syringa and rose plucked for her in the Purdies' garden, laid his hat and gloves on the parapet; then, with an eye for the better bank, walked to the end of the bridge.

She watched him descending the steep bank and issuing into the broad shallow basin of the stream's way. The sun was still high enough to fill the hollows with warm light and mellow the doubles of trees and grass in the stream. In this landscape of green and pale gold he looked black and tall and angular. The wind blew longish locks of hair across his forehead, and she had a moment's pleased and timorous reflection that he looked like Satan coming into the Garden.

He advanced from tussock to tussock. He came to the brink of the marsh. The lilies waved what seemed but a hand's breadth from him. But he stopped, he reached—Oh, could anything so foolish happen as that he could not get them! Or, more foolish still, plunge in to the knees! He straightened from his fruitless effort, drew back, but before she could think what he was about he had leaned forward again, flashed out his cane, and with three quick, cutting slashes the lilies were mown. It was deftly, delicately, astonishingly done, but it gave her a singular shock, as if she had seen a hawk strike its prey. He drew them cleverly toward him in the crook of his cane, took them up daintily in his fingers, and returned to her across the shallow valley. She waited him with mixed emotions.

"Oh, how could you!" she murmured, as he put them into her hand.

He looked at her in amused astonishment. "Why, aren't they right?"

They were as clean clipped off and as perfect as if the daintiest hand had plucked them.

"Oh, yes," she admitted, "they're lovely, but I don't like the way you got them."

"I took the means I had," he objected.

"I don't think I like it."

His whole face was sparkling with interest and amusement. "Is that so? Why not?"

"You're too—too"—she cast about for the word—"too terribly resourceful!"

"I see," he said. If she had feared he would laugh, it showed how little she had gauged the limits of his laughter. He only looked at her rather more intently than he had before.

"But, my good child, resourcefulness is a very natural instinct. I am afraid you read more into it than is there. You wanted the flowers, I had a stick, and in my youth I was taught to strike clean and straight. I am really a very simple fellow."

Looking him in the eyes, which were of a clear, candid gray, she was ready to believe it. It seemed as if he had let her look for a moment through his manner, his ironies, his armor of indifference, to the frank foundations of his nature.

"But, you see, the trouble is you don't in the least look it," she argued.

"So you think because I have a long

face and wild hair that I am a sinister person? My dear Miss Gilsey, the most desperate character I ever knew was five feet high and wore mutton-chop whiskers. It is an uncertain business judging men by their appearance."

As soon as silence fell between them she saw that wave of preoccupation which had submerged him during their walk from the parade-ground to the Purdies' rising over him again and floating him away from her. He no longer even looked at her. His eyes were on the ground, and it was not until they had crossed the open expanse of the shallow valley and were climbing toward the avenue of cypress that she found courage to put her question.

"Have you and Mr. Cressy met before?"

He raised his head with a jerk and looked at her a moment in astonishment.

"Do you mind if I answer your question American fashion by asking another?" he said presently. "What put it into your head that we may have met before?"

"The way you looked at each other at the club, and again this morning."

Kerr shook his head. "You are an observant young person! The fact is, I've never met him—of that I'm certain, but I believe I've seen him before, and for the life of me, I can't think where. At the moment you spoke I was trying to remember."

"Was it in this country?" Flora prompted, hopeful of fishing something definite out of his vagueness.

"No, it was years ago. It must have been in England." He looked at her inquiringly, as if he expected her to help him.

"Oh, Harry's been in England," she said quickly; and then, with a flashing thought, came to her the one scene Harry had mentioned in his English experience. Was it at a ball? The question came to her lips, but she checked it there. She remembered how Harry had stopped her the night before with a nod, with a look, from mentioning that very thing.

"So you're not going to tell me?" Kerr remarked, and she came back to a sudden consciousness of how her face must have reflected her thought.

"No—not this time!" she said, smiling, though somewhat flushed.

He knitted his brows at her. They had reached the arched gate, and the car that would carry her home was approaching.

"Ah, then, I am afraid it will be never," he said.

Was it possible this was their last meeting? Did he mean he was going away? The question formed in her mind, but there was no time for words. He had stopped the car with a flick of his agile cane, and handed her in as if he had handed her into a carriage; and not a word as to whether they would see each other again, though she hoped and hesitated to the last moment.

CHAPTER V.

On Guard.

He had so disturbed her, his presence had so obliterated other presences and annihilated time, that it took an encounter with Clara to remind her of her arrangement for the evening. The dance? No, she had given that up. She had promised Harry to be at home. Clara wanted to know rather astutely what she intended to do about the dinner. This was dreadful! Flora had forgotten it completely. Nothing to be done but go, and leave a message for Harry—apology, and assurance that she would be home early. She wondered if she were losing her memory.

She appeared to be changing altogether, for the dinner—a merry one—bored her. What she wanted was to get away from it as soon as possible for that interesting evening. When she had made the appointment with Harry she had been excited by the thought that he might tell her whether he had learned anything from the major that morning in the matter of the ring. But now she was more engrossed with the idea of asking about Kerr—whether Harry had really met him—if so, where; and, finally, why did not Harry want her to mention that embassy ball?

Primed with these questions, she left immediately after coffee, arriving at her own red stone portal at ten. But coming in, all a-flutter with the idea of having kept him waiting when she had so much to ask, she found her note as she had left it. She questioned Shima. There had been no message from Mr. Cressy. Her first annoyance was lost in wonder. What could be the matter?

She went into the drawing room—a dull-pink, stupendous chamber—kneeling a moment before the flashing wood fire, then rose, and crossing to the window, looked anxiously out. She had a flight of fancy towards accidents, but in that case she would certainly have heard. The French clock on the mantel rang half-past ten. The sound had hardly died in the great spaces before she heard the fine snarl of the electric bell.

She restrained an impulse to dart into the hall, and stood impatient in the middle of the room.

He came in hastily, his lips all ready with words which hesitated at sight of her.

"Why, you're going out!" he said. She had forgotten the cloak that still hung from her shoulders.

"No, I've just come in, and all my

fine apologies for being out are wasted. How long do you think Clara'll let you stop at this hour?"

"Clara isn't here," he said.

"Well, then your time is all the shorter." She was nettled that he should be oblivious of his lapse.

"I'm sorry," he said, arriving at last at his apology. "I couldn't help being late. I've had a day of it." He drew his hand across his forehead, and she noticed that he was in his morning clothes and looked as rumpled and flushed as a man just from the office.

She retorted, "Poor dear! You do look tired! Don't take that chair. It's more Louis Quinze than comfortable. Come into the library. And remember," she added, when Shima had set the decanter and glasses beside him, "you are to stay just 20 minutes."

He took a sip of his drink and looked at her over the top of his glass. "I may have to stay longer if you want to hear about it."

"Oh, Harry, you really know something? All the evening I've heard nothing but the wildest rumors. Some say Maj. Purdie couldn't speak because some one 'way up knows more than she should about it. And somebody else said it wasn't the real ring at all that was taken, only a paste copy, and that is why they're not doing more about getting it back?"

"Not doing more about getting it back?" Harry laughed. "Is that the idea that generally prevails? Why, Flora—" He stopped, waited a moment while she leaned forward expectant. "Flora," he began again, "are you mum?"

She nodded, breathless.

"Not a word to Clara?"

"Oh, of course not."

"Well—" He twisted around in his chair the better to face her. "To-morrow there will be published a reward of \$20,000 for the return of the Crew idol, and no questions asked."

"Oh!" she said. And again, "Oh, is that all!" She was disappointed. "I don't see why you and the major should have been so mysterious about that."

"You don't, eh? Suppose you had taken the ring—wouldn't it make a difference to you if you knew 24 hours ahead that a reward of \$20,000 would be published? Wouldn't you expect every man's hand to be against you at that price? If you had a pal, wouldn't you be afraid he'd sell you up?"

Flora leaned forward with knitted brows. "Yes, I can see that, but still, just among ourselves, this morning—"

Harry smiled. "You've lost sight of the fact that it is just among ourselves the thing has happened."

"Oh, oh! Now you're ridiculous!"

"I might be, if the thing had happened any where but in this town; but think a moment. How much do we know of the people we meet, where they were, who they were, before they came here? There's a case in point. It was not quite 'among ourselves' this morning."

"Harry, how horrid of you!" She was on the point of declaring that she knew Kerr very well indeed; but she remembered this might not be the thing to say to Harry.

"My dear girl, I'm not saying anything against him. I only remarked that we did not know him."

"Don't you, Harry?"

He gave her a quick look. "Why, what put that into your head?"

"I—I don't know. I thought you looked at him very hard last night in the picture gallery. And afterward, at supper, don't you remember, you did not want me to mention your connection with something or other he was talking about?"

"Something or other he was talking about?" Harry inquired with a frowning smile.

"I think it was about that embassy ball—"

"I didn't want you to mention the embassy ball!" he repeated, and now he was only smiling. "My dear child, surely you are dreaming."

She looked at him with the bewildered feeling that he was flatly contradicting himself. And yet she could remember he had not shaken his head at her. He had only nodded. Could it be that her cherished imagination had played her a trick at last? But the next moment it occurred to her that somehow she had been led away from her first question.

"Then have you seen him, Harry?" she insisted.

"No!" He jerked it out so sharply that it startled her, but she stuck to her subject.

"And you wouldn't have minded my telling him you had been at that ball?"

There was a pause while Harry looked at the fire. Then— "Look here," he burst out, "did he ask you about it?"

"Oh, no," she protested. "I only just happened to wonder."

He stared at her as if he would have liked to shake her. But then he rose from his frowning attitude before the fire, came over to her, sat on the arm of her chair, and, with the tip of one finger under her chin, lifted her face; but she did not lift her eyes. She heard only his voice, very low, with a caressing note that she hardly knew as Harry's.

"It isn't that I care what you say to him. The fact is, Flora, I suppose I was a little jealous, but I naturally don't like the suggestion that you would discuss me with a stranger."

She raised her eyes. "Certainly I shall not discuss you with him."

"Is that a promise?"

"Harry, how you do dislike him!"

"Well, suppose I do?" he shrugged. "You've used up twice your 20 minutes," she said, "and Clara will be scandalized."

"Now, really, you must go home," she urged, trying to rise.

"But look here," he protested, still on the arm of her chair, "there's another thing I want to ask you about." And by the tip of one finger he lifted her left hand shining with rings.

"You will have to have another one of these, you know. It's been on my mind for a week. Is there any sort you haven't already?"

She held up her hand to the light and fluttered its glitter.

"Any one that you gave me would be different from the others, wouldn't it?" she asked prettily.

"Oh, that's very nice of you, Flora, but I want to find you something new. When shall we look for it? To-morrow, in the morning?"

"Yes, I should love it," she answered, but with no particular enthusiasm, for the idea of shopping with Harry, and shopping at Shrove's, did not present a wide field of possibility. "But I have a luncheon to-morrow," she added, "so we must make it as early as ten."

"Oh, you two!"

At Clara's mildly reproving voice so close beside them both started like conspirators. They had not heard her come in, yet there she was, just inside the doorway, still wrapped in her cloak. But there was none of the impetus of arrested motion in her attitude. She stood at repose as if she might have waited not to interrupt them.

"Don't scold Flora," said Harry, rising. "It's my fault. She sent me away half an hour ago. But it is so comfortable here!"

Flora couldn't tell whether he was simply natural, or whether he was giving this domestic color to their interview on purpose. She rather thought it was the latter.

"To-morrow at ten, then!" he said cheerfully to Flora. The stiff curtains rustled behind him and the two women were left together.

CHAPTER VI.

Black Magic.

The memory of Clara's incredulous glance remained with her as something curious, and she was not unprepared to be challenged when, the next morning, she hurried down the hall, drawing on her gloves. Clara's door did open, but the lady herself, yawning lightly on the threshold, had this time no questions for her. "Remember the luncheon," she advised, "and by the way, Ella wants us to sit in their box to-night. Don't forget to tell Harry."

Flora threw back a gay "All right," but she was in danger of forgetting even the object of their errand, once she and Harry were out in the bright glare of the street. The wind, keen and resinous from the wet Presidio woods, blew at their back under the short block of pavement, and buffeted them broadside as they waited on the corner for the slow-crawling little car.

It was a continuous progress backward toward the old, the original town. There was no stately nucleus. This town was a succession of widening ripples of progress, each newer, more polished than the last, but not



different in quality from the old center that still teemed—a region of frail wooden rookeries full of foreign contending interests, haunted by the adventures of its feverish past. It had built itself on the hopes of a moment, and what spread from it still was the spell of the new, the changing, and the reckless.

And now, as they slipped down the long decline into the foreign quarter the pungent oriental breath of Chinatown was blown up to them. She breathed it in readily. It was pleasant because it was strange, outlandish, suggesting a wide web of life beyond her own knowledge. She wondered what Harry was thinking of it, as he sat with his passive profile turned from her to the heathen street ahead. She guessed, by the curl of his nostril, that it was only present to him as an unpleasant odor to be got through as quickly as possible; but she was wrong. He had another thought. This time, oddly enough, a thought for her.

He gave it to her presently, abrupt, matter-of-fact, material. "That Chinese goldsmith down there has good stuff now and then. How'd you like to look in there before we go on to what-you-call-'em's—the regular place?"

"You mean for a ring?" She was doubtful only of his being in earnest.

"You have so many of the Shrove kind," he explained. "I thought you might like it, Flora; you're so romantic!" he laughed.

"Like it!" she cried, too touched at his thought for her to resent the imputation. "I should love it! But I didn't know they had such things."

"Now and then—though it is a rare chance."

"But that will be just the fun of it," she hastened, half afraid lest Harry should change his mind, "to see if we can possibly find one that will be different from all these others."

She kept this little feeling of exploration close about her, as they left the car, a block above the green trees of the plaza, and entered one of the narrow streets, that was not even a cross-street, but an alley, running to a bag's end, with balconies, green railings and narcissi taking the sun.

A slant-eyed baby in a mauve blouse stared after them; and a white face so poisoned in its badness that it gave Flora a start, peered at them from across the street. It made her shrink a little behind Harry's broad shoulder and take hold of his arm. The mere touch of that arm was security. His big presence, moving agilely beside her, seemed to fill the street with its strength, as if, by merely flinging out his arms, Samson-like, he could burst the dark walls asunder.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

The Reason Why.

"Can you tell me why singers and actresses make farewell tours?"

"That's the reason—that they may fare well."



He Draw Them Cleverly Toward Him in the Crook of His Cane.



"Harry, How You Do Dislike Him!"