

# The COAST of CHANCE

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CHAMBERLAIN  
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## SYNOPSIS.

At a private view of the Chatworth personal estate, to be sold at auction, the Chatworth ring, known as the Crew Idol, mysteriously disappears. Harry Crossy, who was present, describes the ring to his fiancée, Flora Giltsey, and her chaperon, Mrs. Clara Britton, as being like a heathen god, with a beautiful sapphire set in the band. Flora meets Mr. Kerr, an Englishman, at the club. In discussing the disappearance of the ring, the exploits of an English thief, Farroll Wand, are recalled. Flora has a fancy that Harry and Kerr know something about the mystery. Kerr tells Flora that he has met Harry somewhere, but cannot place him. \$30,000 reward is offered for the return of the ring. Harry admits to Flora that he dislikes Kerr. Harry takes Flora to a Chinese goldsmith's to buy an engagement ring. An exquisite sapphire set in a hoop of brass, is selected. Harry urges her not to wear it until it is reset. The possession of the ring seems to cast a spell over Flora. She becomes uneasy and apprehensive. Flora meets Kerr at a box party.

## CHAPTER VIII.—Continued.

She felt the stone. She drew off her glove and tried to look at it in the dim light, but couldn't get a gleam out of it. She was impatient for the lights to go up that she might secretly be cheered by its wonder, as she had been that afternoon to get back from the luncheon and make sure it was still in the drawer. She must see it in spite of Clara at her right hand, whose little chiseled profile might turn upon her at any moment a full face of inquiry.

She held her left hand low in the shadow of her chair; and if, as the lights went up again, there was any change in the sapphire, it was merely a sharper brilliance, as if, like an eye, it had moods, and this was one of its moments of excitement. In its extraordinary luster it seemed to possess a beauty that could not be valued; and she wanted to hold it up to Kerr, to see if she couldn't startle him out of his mood—to see if he wouldn't respond to it, "Yes, there is more in it than you can touch."

She turned to him with the daring flash of timid spirits. It was so sharp a motion that he started instantly from his reverie to meet it, but his alacrity was mechanical. She felt the smile he summoned was slow, as if he returned, from a long distance, a little painfully to his present surroundings.

The intermezzo was playing, and to speak under the music he leaned so close his shoulder touched her chair. Through that narrow space between them, almost beneath his eyes, she moved her hand—a gesture so slightly emphasized as to seem accident. He had started to speak, but her motion seemed to stop his tongue. He looked hard at her hand, and something violent in his intentness made her clutch the side of the chair. Instantly she met his look, so fiercely, cruelly challenging, that it took her like a blow. For a moment they looked at each other, her eyes wide with fright, his narrowed to a glare under the terrible intentness of his brows. What had she done?

She was as shaken as if he had seized hold of her. If he had snatched the ring off her finger she wouldn't

have been more shocked. The whole box must be transfixed by him, and the whole house be looking at nothing but their little circle of horror! She was ready for it. She was braced for anything but the fact which actually confronted her—that no one had noticed them at all. It was monstrous that such a thing could have been without their knowing! But there was no face in all the orchestra, the crowded galleries, or the tiers of boxes to affirm that anything had happened; no face in their own box had even stirred, but Clara's, and that had merely turned from profile to the full, faintly inquiring, mild, and palely pink in the warm reflections of the red velvet curtains.

And what could Clara have seen, if she had seen at all, but Flora a little paler than usual with a hand that trembled; and what worse could Clara conjecture than that she was being silly about Kerr? She turned slowly toward him, and looked at him with a courage that was part of her fear. But wasn't she, in a way, being silly about Kerr? What had become of his expression that had threatened her? There was nothing left of it but her own violent impression.

And yet the thing had actually happened. Its evidence was before her. He had been silent. Now he was talking. He had been absent. Now she thought she had never seen him more vividly concerned with the moment. Yet for all his cool looks and diffuse talk around the box, she felt uneasily that his concern was pointed at her, and that he would never let her go. He only waited for the cover of the last act to come back to her single-handed.

She would have deflected his attack, but it was too quick, too unexpected for her to do more than sit helpless, and let him lift up her left hand, delicately between thumb and finger, as if in itself it was some rare, fine curio, and, bending close, contemplate the sapphire unwinkingly. She had an instant when she thought she must cry out, but how impossible in the awful publicity of her place—a pinnacle in the face of thousands! And after the first fluttered impulse came a certain reassurance in such a frank and trivial action. For all its intensity, how could it be construed otherwise than a lively if unconventional interest? It must have been her fancy which had discerned anything more than that in his first look. And yet, when he had laid her hand lightly back, and readjusted his monocle, and looked out, away from her, across the black house, she didn't know whether she was more reassured or troubled because he had not spoken a word. Yet the next moment he looked around at her.

"We shan't meet every evening in such a way as this," he said, and left the statement dangling unanswerable between them. It sounded portentous—final. She couldn't answer. She could only look at him with a reflection of her trouble in her face.

"Are you surprised that I thought of that?" he inquired. "It's not so odd as you seem to think that I should want to see you again. I don't want to leave it to chance; do you?" He shot the question at her so suddenly, with such a casual eye, and such dry gravity of mouth, that he had her admission out of her before she realized the extent of its meaning.

"Then when are you at home?" he

asked her; and by his tone, he conveyed the impression that he was only making courteous response to some invitation she had offered him; though, when she thought, she had not offered it, he had got it out of her.

She answered somewhat stiffly: "Fridays, second and fourth."

He looked at her with a humorous twist of mouth. "What? So seldom?" She was impotent if he wouldn't be snubbed; but at the worst she wouldn't be cornered. "Oh, dear, no—but people who come at other times take a chance."

"Does that mean that I may take mine to-morrow?"

He was pressing her too hard. Why was he so anxious to see her, as he had not been the first night or yesterday, or even ten minutes ago? She, who, ten minutes ago, would have been glad, now was doing her best to put him off. She was silent a moment, considering the conventions, and then, like him, she abandoned them. Without a word she turned away from him. Her only desire now was to evade him, lest he should force her out of her non-committal attitude. She wanted to shield herself from further pursuit.

She drew her glove over the ring. The lights were imminent. It would be hard to hide the great flash of the jewel. And besides, she didn't trust it. She couldn't tell in what direction it might not strike out a spark of horror next.

The rustle of final departure was all over the house. The people in the box were stirring and beginning to stand up; and Flora saw Kerr turn and look at her. She wanted some one to stand between herself and Kerr, and it was to Harry that she turned; not alone that he was so large and adequate, but because she thought she saw in him an inclination to step into that very place where she wanted him. She saw he was a little sullen, and though she didn't suspect him quite of jealousy, she wondered if he had not a right to blame her for the appearance of flirtation that she and Kerr must have presented. Then how much more might he blame her for what she had actually done—for deliberately showing the sapphire to Kerr! The very thought of it frightened her. She talked the harder, she even took hold of Harry's arm to be sure of keeping him there between her and what she was afraid of, as they came out on the sidewalk and stood waiting in the windy night for the approach of their carriage lights.

Row upon row of street lamps flared in the traveling gusts. The midnight noises of the city were at their loudest; and half their volume seemed to be a scattered chorus of hoarse voices yelling all together like a pack of wolves. What was this fresh quarry of the press, Flora wondered, that made it give tongue so hideously?

She had stooped her head to the carriage door, when Harry stopped and took one of the damp papers from a crier in the pack. She saw the headline. It covered half the sheet—the great figure that was offered for the return of the Chatworth ring.

## CHAPTER IX.

### Illumination.

Just when the two ideas had coalesced in her mind Flora couldn't be sure. It had been some time in the first dark hour that she had spent wide awake in her bed. There had been two ideas distinctly. Two impressions of the evening remained with her; and the last one, the great figures that had stared at her from the paper, the fact that had been Harry's secret, made common now in round numbers, had for the moment swallowed up the first.

For all the way home that sum was kept before her by Clara's talk. She remembered nothing of that talk except that it hadn't been able for a moment to leave the Chatworth ring alone. It had been aimed at Harry, but it had fallen to Flora herself to answer Clara's quick speculations, for Harry had been obstinately silent, though not indifferent, as if in his own mind he was as unable to leave it alone as Clara. One with silence, one with her talk, they had written the figures of the reward so blazingly in Flora's mind that for the moment she could see nothing else. Yet now she was alone her first adventure recurred to her. As soon as she was quiet in the dark there came back with reminiscent terror the look that Kerr had given her in the box. She was afraid of the meaning of his look which she didn't understand. It only established in her mind a great significance for the sapphire, if it could produce such an expression on a human face. It had given him more than a mere expression. It had given him an impulse for pursuit, as if, like a magnet, it was fairly dragging him. He had covered his impulse by his very frankness, but she knew he had pursued her—that for the matter of seeing her again he had hunted her down. And what had followed? Why, she was back again to the great figures in the paper.

At first it seemed as though she had taken a clean leap from one subject to another. She had in no way connected them. But all at once they were connected. She couldn't separate them. She didn't know whether she had been stupid not to have seen them so before, or whether she was stupid to see them so now. For the thought that had sprung up in her

mind was monstrous. It startled her so broad awake that she sat up in bed to meet it the more alertly.

The room was dark except for now and again the yellow square of light, from some passing cable car, traveling along the ceiling. The four walls around her, their dark bulks of furniture and light ripple of moving curtains, shut her up with this monster of her mind. It had sprung upon her from the solid actualities of the night. And, yes, of the day before—and the night before that. Oh, she had known well enough that there had been something wrong at the goldsmith's shop. She had felt it even before she had seen the sapphire; and afterward how it had held them, both herself and Harry! To have moved Harry it must be something indeed! Had he suspected it then, or had he only wondered?

If he had suspected why hadn't he spoken of it? Well, her appalling fancy prompted, hadn't he spoken of it?—though not to her. There flashed back to her the memory of him there in the back of the shop with the blue-eyed Chinaman. How furiously he had assailed the little man! She could be almost sure that the monstrous idea which had just overtaken her had, however fleetingly, flashed before Harry's mind in the goldsmith's shop. But surely he couldn't have entertained it for a moment. That was impossible, or he would never have let her take the sapphire—Harry, who had seen the ring, the very Crew Idol itself, within the 24 hours.

"A little heathen god curled round himself with a big blue stone on the top of his head." Harry hadn't said what sort of stone it was; but Kerr had said it was a sapphire. There was a sapphire on her, and now. She touched it with her finger tips cautiously, as if to touch something hot. So near to her! In the same room with her! On her own hand! It was too much to be alone with in the dark! She reached out softly, as if she feared to disturb some threatening presence lurking around her, and lit the small night lamp on the low table by her bed. The shade was yellow, and that contended with the blue of the sapphire, but couldn't break its light. With the first flash of its splendor in her face she felt certainly threatening her. She shook the ring quickly off her finger and it fell with a light clatter on the table's marble top—fell with the sapphire face down, and all its light hidden. She took it up again a little fearfully, as if it might have got some harm; and again while she looked at it it seemed to her that nothing that happened about this jewel could be too extraordinary. If only it had been less wonderful, less beautiful, she would not have felt so terribly afraid! She put it back on the table and for a moment held her hand over it, as if she imprisoned a living thing.

Then, without looking again, she got out of bed and went to the window. It overlooked the dark steep of the garden, the moving trees and the lighter plane of the water. She leaned out, far out. Black housetops marched against the bay, and between them, light by light, her eyes followed the street lamps down to the shore.

Oh, to escape out of this window into the innocent, sleeping city, away from the horror at her back! To look in from the outside and be even sure there was a horror! And if there was, to run away into the wide soft dark!

But there was another way to be rid of it. The real idea occurred to her. How easy it would be to take it—that beautiful thing—and throw it; throw it as hard as she could, and let the night take care of it. The window was open, as if it stood ready, and there was the ring on the table. She went to it, looked at it a moment without touching it, holding her hands away.

Then with a little shiver she backed away from it and sat down on the foot of the bed. She looked pale and little, as if the eye of the ring, blazing under the feeble lamp, like the evil eye, had sapped her fire and youth. She hugged her arms around her updrawn knees, and resting her chin upon them eyed the sapphire bravely.

"I suppose you know I can't throw you away," she murmured, "and yet I can't keep you!" She pondered, chin in hand. To take it to Harry! That seemed the natural thing to do—the simplest way to be rid of it. She hesitated.

"If I only knew! If I only were sure!" She locked her fingers closer, staring hard. If it had been the whole Crew Idol, the undismembered god himself, then there would have been less terror, and one plain thing to do. She looked hard at the sapphire setting, as if she hoped to discover upon its brilliance some tell-tale trace of old soft gold; but there was only one great, glassy, polished eye, and out of what head it had come, whether from the forehead of the Crew Idol, or from that of some unheralded deity, who was there who could tell her?

She tried to summon a coherent thought, but again it was only a flash out of the darkness.

"Kerr! Why, he knows more than I." She looked at this stupidly for a moment as if it were too large to take in at once. Of course he must have known! Why hadn't she thought of that before?

What series of circumstances might have led up to Kerr's knowledge she could not dream. He was one of whom

nothing was incredible. From the first moment his face had shot into the light, from the moment she had heard his voice, like color in the level voices around him, she had been bewildered by his variety.

And where, she asked herself in a summing up, might such a man not be found? But there were few places, indeed, in even the broadest plain of possibility, which could hold knowledge of so particular and piercing a quality as his look had implied. There had been so much more than curiosity or surprise in it. She could hardly face the memory of it, so cruelly it had struck her. There was no doubt in her mind that Kerr had seen the ring. Somewhere in the pageant of his experience he had met it, known it—but what he wanted of it—

She broke off that thought, and looked long at the little flame of the lamp. It was strange, but there was no doubt in her mind but that he wanted it. That had been the strongest thing in his look. She felt herself picking her way along a very narrow path, one step over either edge of which would plunge her chasms deep. Now she snatched at a frail sapling to save herself. The fact that Kerr knew her stone didn't prove it belonged to the Crew Idol. And if it didn't—if it wasn't the crown of the heathen god, then her whole dreadful supposition fell to pieces. But she hadn't proved it, and the simplest way was just to ask Kerr. Her chance for that was the chance he had fought so hard for, the chance of their meeting the next day.

It seemed it should be simple, it should be easy to face Kerr with her question; but she was possessed by the apprehension that it would be neither. Would the question she had to ask be a safe thing to give him? And if she dared undertake it and should be overpowered after all—then everything would be lost.

## CHAPTER X.

### A Lady Unveiled.

She awakened in the morning to some one knocking. She thought the sound had been going on for a long time, but, now she was finally roused, it had stopped. This was odd, for no one came to her in the morning except Marrika, and it was tiresome to be thus imperatively beset before she was half awake. Now the knocking came again with a level, unimpatient repetition, and she called, "Come in!" at which Clara, in a pale morning gown, promptly entered—an apparition as cool and smooth and burnished as if she had spent the night, like a French doll, in tissue paper.

Clara's coming in in the morning was an unheard-of thing. Flora was taken aback.

"Why, Clara!" She was blank with astonishment. She sat up, flushed and tumbled, and still blinking. "I hope I didn't keep you knocking long."

"Oh, no, indeed; only three taps." Clara looked straight through Flora's astonishment, as if there had been no such thing in evidence. She drew up a chair and sat down beside the bed. It was a rocking chair, but it did not sway with her calm pose.

"It isn't so very late," she said, "but I have ordered your breakfast. I thought you would want it if you had that ten-o'clock appointment; and there is something I want to ask you



before you go out. Had you any idea the Herricks were in straits?"

"The young Herricks?"

"Oh, no! The old Herricks, the Herricks, Mrs. Herrick whom you so much admire! Of course, one isn't told; but they must be, to be willing to let the old place be."

"Not the San Mateo place?" said Flora, with a stir of interest.

Clara complacently nodded.

"Why, I should love that!" Flora frankly confessed.

"Well," Clara conceded, "at any rate we know it's genuine, and that's a consolation. The number of imitations going about and the way people pick them up is appalling! While I was getting that rug for you at Vigie's yesterday, Ella Buller came in and bought three imitation Bokharas, with the greatest enthusiasm. She buys quantities, and she's always taken in. It is enough to make one nervous about the people one sits next to at dinner there. One cannot help suspecting them of being some of Ella's bargains. I wonder, now, where she picked up that Kerr."

This finale failed to take Flora off her guard. "At any rate, he is odd enough to be genuine," she said with a gleam of malice.

"Oh, no doubt of that," Clara mildly assented, "but genuine what?"

"Why, gentleman at large," said Flora, and quickly wanted to recall her, for Clara's glance seemed to give it a double significance. "I mean," she added, "just one of those chronic travelers who have nothing else to do, and whose way must be paved with letters of introduction,"—she floundered. "At least, that was the idea he gave of himself." She broke off, doubly angry that she had tried to explain Kerr, and tried to explain herself, when the circumstances required nothing of the sort. She was sure Clara had not missed her nervousness, though Clara made no sign. Her eyes only traveled a second time to Flora's hands, as if among the flare of red and white jewels she was expecting to see another color. To Flora's palpitating consciousness this look made a perfect connection with Clara's next remark.

"At least his manners are odd enough! There was a minute last night when he was really quite startling."

Flora felt a small, warm spot of color increasing in the middle of each cheek. She drew a long breath, as if to draw in courage. Then Clara had really seen! That smooth, bluish look of hers, last night, had seen everything!

"I am afraid he annoyed you, Flora."

The girl looked into the kindly solicitude of Clara's face with a hard, almost passionate incredulity.

"These continental," she went on, now lightly swaying to and fro in her chair, "have singular notions of American women. They take us for savages, my dear."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)



Instantly She Met His Look, So Fiercely, Cruelly Challenging.



"I Wonder, Now, Where She Picked Up That Kerr?"