

The COAST of CHANCE

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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 Cressy, who was present, describes the ring to his fiancée, Flora Gilbey, and her chaplain, Mrs. Clara Britton, as being like a heathen god, with a beautiful sapphire set in the heart. Mr. Kerr, an Englishman, at the club, in discussing the disappearance of the ring, the exploits of an English thief, Farrall Wand, are related. 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. \$20,000 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. She is startled by the effect on him when he gets a glimpse of the sapphire. The possibility that the stone is part of the Crew Idol causes Flora much anxiety. Unseen, Flora discovers Clara ransacking her dressing room. Flora refuses to give or sell the stone to Kerr, and suspects him of being the thief. Flora's interest in Kerr increases. She decides to return the ring to Harry, but he tells her to keep it for a day or two. Ella Butler tells Flora that Clara is setting her cap for her father, Judge Butler. Flora believes Harry suspects Kerr and is waiting to make sure of the reward before unmasking the thief. Clara seems to be intent about something.

CHAPTER XVII.—(Continued.)

Beyond the looming roofs as they descended the hill she saw white sails sink out of sight. All the panorama upon which she had looked down sprang up around her, large and living. He whistled to the car as he helped her down the last steep pitch, whistled and waved, and they ran for it.

This was never the car one went out the front door to take. This creaked and crawled low, taking the corners comfortably, past houses with all their windows blinking recognition. Hadn't it passed them so for 20 years? Old houses in long gardens, and little houses creeping back behind their yards, not yet encroached upon by fresher ties of living. Past all these and gliding down under high, ragged banks, green grass above with wooden stairways straggling up their naked faces; past these again; past lower levels; past little gray and cluttered houses; past loaded carts of vegetables; past children playing shrilly, bearing down always on the green square of the plaza wide, worn and foreign, and the Greek church "domed" with blue and yellow, bearing down as if it had fairly determined to make its course straight through this stable center. Then in the very shadow it swerved aside to clatter off in quite another direction along a wider street with whiter shops, and more glittering windows with gilded letters flashing foreign names, with more marked and brilliant colors moving in the crowd, with a clearer stamp on all of Latin living.

Then suddenly for them the sliding panorama ceased. The car had stopped and they had left it, and were standing upon the corner of a still street that came down from the high hills behind them and crossed the car track and climbed again a little way to curve over into the sky. Dingy houses two blocks above them stood silhouetted against the blue. They were walking upward toward this horizon, leaving color and motion behind them. With every step the street grew more empty, lonely and colorless. Many of the windows that glimmered at them, passing, were the blank windows of empty houses. Were they taking this way, this curious roundabout, out-of-the-world way, of dropping over into the shipping which lay under the hill? For all she knew this might really be his notion, for since they left the garden gate, though they had looked together at the light and color of the pictures moving past their eyes, they had not exchanged a word.

But all at once he stopped at the intersection of two dusty streets, and his eyes veered down the four perspectives like a voyager taking his soundings. Elegant as ever and odd enough, yet he wasn't any odder here at the jumping off place of nowhere that he had appeared in the box at the theater or in the picture gallery. She had the clear impression all at once that he wasn't too odd for anything.

"Here we are!" he said, and indicated with his glittering stick straight before them a little house. It was low, as if he crouched against the wind, faded and beaten by the sun to the drab of the rock itself, and made so secret with tight-drawn curtains that it seemed to have shut itself up against the world forever. She wavered. She wasn't afraid of herself out here, out-of-doors under the sky, but she was afraid that those four walls might shut out her new unreasoning joy, might steal away his new tenderness, and bring her back face to face with the same ugly fact that had confronted her in her drawing room.

"Oh, no," she said, and put her hands behind her with a determination that she wasn't going to move.

"Oh, yes," he said, but he didn't smile. He looked at her quite gravely, reproachfully, and the touch of his

fingers on her arm was fine, was delicate, as if to say, "I wouldn't harm you for the world."

She flushed a slow, painful crimson. She hadn't meant that. She hadn't even thought of it; but, since he had, there was nothing for it but to go in. The door shut behind her sharply, with a click like a little trap; and she breathed such an atmosphere, flat, faint and stale, the mere ghost of some fuller, more fragrant flavor. In the little anteroom where they stood, whose faded ceiling all but brushed their heads, and in the larger little room beyond the Nottingham lace curtains, prevailed a mild shabbiness, a respectable decay. Curtains and table-cloths alike showed a dull and tempered whiteness as if the shadow of time had fallen dim across the whole. The little restaurant seemed left behind in the onward march of the city, and its faded, kindly face was but a shadow of what had been of the vigor and flourish of bourgeois Spain 30 years before. There was no one eating at the little tables, no one sitting behind the high cash-desk in the anteroom. Not a stir of human life in all the place.

"Hello," said Kerr among the tables looking around him, "we've caught them asleep." He rapped on the wall with his cane. Flora peered at him between the curtains, all her fascinated apprehension of what was to follow plain upon her face. "Shall it be a giant or dwarf?" he asked her. "There's nothing I won't do for you, you know."

The door opened and a little girl with a long black braid and purple apron came in.

"A dwarf," cried Flora. She laughed with a quick relaxing of her strained nerves. It might almost have been the truth from that old little swarthy face and sedate demeanor that hardly noticed them. The child walked gravely up to the desk and mounting to the high stool struck a faint-voiced bell.

"There," said Kerr, "ends formality. Now let the real magic begin!"

"Not black magic," Flora took up his fancy.

He had drawn out a chair for her. "That depends on you. I'm not the magic maker. I have no talisman."

She felt the conscious jewel burn in her possession. She looked up beseechingly at him, but he only laughed, and, with a swing, lifted the chair a little off the ground as he sat her up to the table, as if to show how easily he could put forth strength. There was nothing defiant in him. He was taking her with him—taking her upon the wings of his high spirits; but mischievously, obstinately, he would not show her where the flight was leading, nor let her listen to anything but the rustling of those wings. He was determined to make holiday, whatever was to follow. For the glimpse of blue through the dim window might be the Bay of Naples; and, ah! Chianti. Perhaps the sort one gets down Monte Video way, where France fades into Italy—perhaps, at least if her fancy could get the better of the reality.

"She wouldn't care if you jumped up and threw me out of the window," he affirmed. "That's why this hole is so harmless. Oh, isn't that harmless? What's more harmless than to let one alone? There's only one dangerous thing here," he grinned and let her take her choice of which.

She came straight at it.

"You know I can't let you alone." He laughed. "Well, isn't that why we're here at last—that you may dictate your terms?"

"I have. Didn't you get my letter?" "Oh, indeed I did. Haven't I obeyed it? Haven't I kept away from your house? Have I tried to approach you?"

"Haven't you, though?" she threw at him accusingly.

"Ah," he deprecated, "you came to me. I was down in the garden."

She looked at him through his persiflage wistfully, searchingly. "But there were other things in that letter."

"There were?" He regarded her with grave surprise. Oh, how she mistrusted his gravity! "Why, to be sure there were things—things that you didn't mean—one thing above all others you couldn't mean, that you want me to drop out when the game is half done, to sink away and leave it all like this—abandon you and my idol to each other! My dear, for what do you take me?"

She burst out. "But can't you see the danger?"

He met it quietly.

"Certainly. I have been seeing nothing else but the danger—to you. Do you think I've been idle all these days? Every line I have followed has ended in that. It's brought me finally to this." The gesture of his hand included their predicament and the dingy little room. "You'll really have to help me, after all."

"Oh, haven't I tried to? That is why I wrote. Don't you see your own danger at all?"

"No, but I'd like to." He leaned toward her, brows lifted to a quizzical peak.

"Oh, I can't tell you," she despaired. "But somehow I shall have to make you go."

"That will be easy," he said. Leaning back, nursing his chin in his hand, he watched her with a gloomy sort of brooding. "You know what it is I'm waiting for. You know I won't go without it." His words came sadly, but doggedly, with a grim finality, as

if he gave himself up to the course he was following as something he knew was inevitable. The faintness of despair came over her. Only the narrow table was between them, yet all at once, with the mention of the ring, he seemed a long way off.

"Do you care for it so very much?" she asked him, trembling but valiant. "I care so very much," he repeated slowly, and after a moment of wonder: "Why, don't you?"

"Oh, not for that," she cried sharply. "Not for the sapphire!"

He stared. She had startled him clean out of his brooding. "In heaven's name, for what, then?"

Oh, she could never tell him it was for him! In her distress and embarrassment she looked all ways.

His quick white finger touched her on the wrist. "For Cressy?"

The abrupt stern note of his question startled her. She held herself stiff and still for a moment, then: "For every one in this wretched business. I have to."

"Ah," he sighed out, the satisfaction of his long uncertainty, "then Cressy is in it."

"No, I didn't mean that—you mustn't think it—I can't discuss him with you!" She was hot to recapture her fugitive admission.

"Don't let that disturb you. You haven't given him away to me. I had all I'm likely to get from the man himself."

"He—he told you?" she faltered.

"He told me nothing. Don't you know that he misadmits me? I got it out of him, by sleight of hand—where we had met before. Has he never told you anything of that morning when we left your house together?"

"Never." The admission cost her an effort.

He mused at her. "As I said, he told me nothing, but it occurred to me when he came in that we might be there on the same errand."

She paled. "You mean—?"

"I mean I thought it might be safer all around that you should not see him that morning; so I got him away. He hasn't asked you for it since?"

"The sapphire?" she faltered. "No!" The more her instinct warned that it had been the jewel Harry had returned for, the more she repudiated the idea to Kerr.

"Why should you think he came for that? What has he to do with it?" she murmured.

"My God! how you do champion him!" He leaned forward sharply across the table. "What is this man to you?"

He was going too far. He had no right to that question. "The man I have promised to marry." Her hot look, her cold manner defied him to command her here. Yet for a moment, leaning forward with his clenched hands on the table, he looked ready to spring up and force her words back on her. The next he let it go and dropped back in his chair again.

"Quite so," he said. "But I didn't believe it." He stared at her with a dull, profound resentment. "Yet it's most possible; since it isn't the sapphire it would be that." He mused.

"But, you extraordinary woman, why on earth—" he broke off, still looking at her, looking with a persistent, sharp, studying eye, as if she were the most puzzling and, it came to her

gradually, the most dubious thing on earth.

"Then what are you doing here with the ring on you?" he demanded solemnly. "Why are you dealing with me? What do you think you'll get out of it? Great God! women are hideous! How can you betray the man you love?"

"Oh," she cried, with a wail of horror. She stood up trembling and pale. "I don't—I don't—I don't! I've kept it from them. I'm standing against them all. I shall never give it to them. When have I ever betrayed you?"

He drew back, away from her, as if to ward off her meaning, but she leaned toward him, her hands flung out, holding herself up to him for all she meant. He got up slowly and the creeping tide of red, dusky and violent, rising over his face, swelling his features, darkening his eyes, hung before her like a banner of shame.

"I didn't know, I didn't know," he repeated in a low voice. His eyes were on the ground. Then, with a sharp motion, as if merely standing in front of her was unendurable. "Oh, Lord!" he said, and, turning, walked from her toward the window. He went precipitately, as if he meant to go through it, but he only leaned against it and stood motionless; and from her side of the table, trembling, breathless, she watched his stricken silhouette black upon the gray, fading light.

The knowledge of how far she had gone, of how much she had betrayed herself, swelled and swelled before her mind until it seemed to fill her life, but she looked at it hardly and unabashed. All the deceptions in the world should sink before he thought her a traitor. She came softly up beside him.

"Don't be sorry for what I told you."

"I'm not," he said. His voice sounded muffled. He did not look at her, only held out his arm in a mute sign to her to come. She felt it around her, but it was a mere symbol of protection. It lay limp on her shoulder, and he continued to stare through the window at the street. "I'm not sorry for what you said," he repeated slowly. "I'm glad; but, child, I wish it wasn't true."

"Don't, don't!" she besought him, "for I don't."

He gave her a look. "That's beautiful of you, but"—and he turned to the window again and spoke to himself—"it puts an awful face on my business. All along you've made me think for you, and of you, more than you deserve, more than I can afford." The stare she gave this forced out of him a reluctant smile. "Why, didn't you know it? Do you think I couldn't have had the sapphire that first night I saw it on your hand, if it hadn't been—well, for the way I thought of you? I fancied you knew that then." He made a restless movement. His arm fell from her shoulder. "There's been only one thing to do from the first," he said, "and I don't see my way to it."

"Oh, don't take it! Leave it!" she pleaded. "Leave it with me! What does it matter so much? A jewel! If only you would leave it and go away from me!"

He whirled on her. "In heaven's name, a fine piece of logic! Leave the sapphire to people who can make no

better use of it than I? Leave you to go on with this business and marry this Cressy? Even suppose you gave me the sapphire, I couldn't let you do that!"

"If I gave you the sapphire," Flora said, "oh, he wouldn't marry me then!" She couldn't tell how this had come to her, but all at once it was clear, like a sign of her complete failure; but Kerr only wondered at her distress.

"Well, if you don't want to marry him, what do you care?"

"Oh, I don't, I don't care for that." She sank back listlessly in her chair again. She couldn't explain, but in her own mind she knew that if she lost the sapphire she would so lose in her own esteem; so fail at every point that counted, that she would never be able to see or be seen in the world again as the same creature. Even to Kerr—even to him to whom she would have yielded she would have become a different thing. She realized now she had staked everything on the premise she wouldn't have to yield; and now it began to appear to her that she would. His weakness was appearing now as a terrible strength, a strength that seemed on the point of crushing her, but it could never convince her. That strength of his had brought her here. Was it to happen here, that strange thing she had foreseen, the end of her? Was it here she was to lose the sapphire, and him?

She looked vaguely around the room, at the most impressive aspect of the place, as at a place she never expected to leave; the darkening windows, the fast-shut door, the child leaning on the desk, watching them with sharp, incurious eyes—this would be her niche forever. She would be left forever with the crusts and the dregs. And Kerr's figure in the twilight seemed each time it moved to be on the point of vanishing into the grayness. He moved continually up and down the narrow spaces between the tables. He troubled the dry repose of the place. Sometimes he looked at her, studying, questioning, undecided. Once he stopped, as if just there an idea had arrested him. He looked at her, as if, she thought, he were afraid of her. Then for long moments he avoided her, until, as though he had come at last to his decision, he walked straight up to her and stood above her. She rose to meet him. He was smiling.

"Don't you know that you could easily get rid of me?" he demanded. "Cressy would be too glad to do it for you; and there are more ways than one that I could get the sapphire from you, if I could face the idea of it—but really, really we care too much for each other. There's only one way out for you and me and the sapphire. I'll take you both."

Her clenched hands opened and fell at her sides. A great wave of helplessness flowed over her. Her eyes, her throat filled with a rush of blinding tears. She put out her hands, trying to thrust him off, but he took the wrists and held them apart, and held her a moment helpless before him.

"Oh, no," she whispered. "But I love you."

Her head fell back. She looked at him as if he had spoken the incredible.

"As I love you," he repeated, "though God knows how it has happened!"

The blood rushed to her heart.

He was drawing her nearer.

She felt his breath upon her face; she saw the image of herself in his eyes. She started to herself on the edge of danger, and made a struggle to release her wrists. He let them go. She sank down into her chair.

"Why not? Why won't you go with me?" she heard him say again, still close beside her.

"I can't, I can't!" She clung to the words, but for the moment she had forgotten her reasons. She had forgotten everything but the wonderful fact that he loved her. He was there within reach, and she had only to stretch out her hand, only to say one word, and he would cut through the ranks of her perplexities and terrors, and carry her away.

"Why not, if you love me?" he insisted. "Are you afraid of those people? Are you afraid of Cressy? He shall never come near you."

She shook her head. "No, it isn't that."

He stooped and looked into face. "Then what keeps you?"

She looked up slowly.

"My honor."

"Your honor!" For a moment her answer seemed to have him by surprise. He mused, and again it came dreamily back to her that he was looking at her across a vast difference no will of hers could ever bridge.

"Don't you see what I am?" she murmured. "Can't you imagine where I stand in this hideous business? It's my trust. I'm on their side; and, oh, in spite of everything, I can't make myself believe in giving it to you!"

He pondered this very gravely.

"Yes, I can see how you might feel that way. But is the feeling really yours? Are you sure they haven't put it on you? Might not my honor do as well for you, if you were mine?"

It struck her she had never connected him with honor, and he read her thought with a flash of humor. "Evidently it hasn't occurred to you that I have an honor."

She looked at him sadly. "In spite of everything I'm on the other side. I belong to them."



"You belong to me." His hand closed on her. "Mine is the only honor you have to think of. Can't you trust that I am right? Can't you see it through my eyes? Can't you make yourself all mine?" His arm was around her now, holding her fast, but she turned her face away, and his kisses fell only on her cheek and hair.

"Oh," she cried, "if only I could!"

"Don't you love me?"

"Oh, yes, but that makes me see, all the more, the dreadful difference between us."

"You silly child, there is no difference, really."

"Ah, yes, you know it as well as I. You were afraid of it, too. All that long time you were walking around you were wondering whether you dared to take me."

He denied her steadily. "Never!"

She loved him for that gallant denial, for she knew he had been afraid, horribly afraid, more afraid than she was now; but that strange quality of his that gave to a double risk a double zest had set him all the hotter on this resolution.

He sat for some long moments thoughtfully looking straight before him. She, glancing at his profile, white and faintly glimmering in the twilight, thought it looked sharp, absorbed, and set. She could see his great determination growing there in the gloom between them, looming and overshadowing them both.

"I see," he said at last. "I simply have to take you in spite of it." He turned around to her, and reached his hands down through the dusk. She was being drawn up into arms which she could not see. Her hands were clasped around a neck, her cheek was against a face which she had never hoped to touch. Her reason and her fears were stifled and caught away from her lips with her breath. She was giving up to her awful weakness. She was giving up to the power of love. She was letting herself sink into it as she would sink into deep water. The sense of drowning in this profound, unfathomable element, of shutting her eyes and opening her arms to it, was the highest she had ever touched; but all at once the memory of what she was leaving behind her, like a last glimpse of sky, swept her with fear. She made a desperate effort to rescue herself before the waters quite closed over her head.

She pulled herself free. Without his arms around her for the first moment she could hardly stand. She took an uncertain step forward; then with a rush she reached the white curtains. They flapped behind her. She heard Kerr laugh, a note, quiet, caressing, almost content. It came from the gloom like a disembodied voice of triumph. Her rush had carried her into the middle of the anteroom. At this last moment was there to be no miracle to save her? There was no rescue among these dumb walls and closed-up windows. The purple child gave her a sharp, bird-like glance, as if the most that this wild woman could want was "change." Flora looked behind her and saw Kerr, who had put aside the curtains and was standing looking at her. He was bright and triumphant in that twilight room. He was not afraid of losing her now. He knew in that one moment he had imprisoned her for ever! She saw him approaching, but though all her mind and spirit strained for flight, something had happened to her will. It tottered like her knees.

He stooped and picked up an artificial rose, which had fallen from her hat, and put it into her hand. A moment, with his head bent, he stood looking into her face, but without touching her.

"Sit down over there," he said, and pointed toward a chair against the wall. She went meekly like a prisoner. He spoke to the child in the purple apron, who was still sitting behind the desk. He put some money on the cash-desk in front of her. It was gold. It shone gorgeously in the dull surrounding, and the child pounced upon it, incredulous of her luck. Then he turned, crossed the room, soundlessly opened the door, and went out into the violet dark of the street.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

One Trip Nearly Paid for Schooner. Dealers at T wharf were given a surprise when Capt. Horace Hillman of the 14-ton schooner Eliza Benner of Edgartown offered 20,000 pounds of fish to buyers at the exchange. No one believed that a schooner the size of the Benner would attempt rounding Cape Cod at this season so deeply loaded. But the captain had recently purchased the vessel and thought if he could reach Boston at a time of high prices he might be able to nearly pay her purchase price.

With five young men belonging on Martha's Vineyard Capt. Hillman took the schooner out on the ocean side of Nantucket and in a short time filled the craft to the hatches. The venture proved so successful that the crew earned about \$30 each and the Benner almost paid for herself.—Boston Herald.



"Are You Afraid of Cressy?"