Two Can Sing

By JAMES M. CAIN

CHAPTER VIII

About eleven o'clock Nils came home. He was the housemar. He had been out taking the children to school, he said, and buying some stuff at a market. He said he was glad to see me back, and I shook hands with him and asked for Christine. Christine is his wife and does the cooking, and in between acts as maid to Doris and nurse to the children. He said Christine had gone with Mrs. Borland. He acted like I must know all about it and I hated to show I didn't, so I said, oh, of course.

About a quarter to twelve the phone rang. It was Lorentz: "Borland, you'd better come down and get your wife."

"What's the matter?"

"I'll tell you."

"Where is she?"

"The Cathedral Theater. Come to the stage door. I'll meet you."

I had a glimmer, then, of what was going on. I went out, grabbed a cab, and hustled down there. He met me outside, took me in, and showed me a dressing room. I rapped on the door and went in. She was crouched on the floor leaning her head against a chair and a theater nurse was with her, and Christine. She was in an awful state She had on some kind of theatrical-looking dress, and her face was all twisted and her hands were clenching and unclenching, and I didn't need anybody to tell me she was giving everything she had to fight back hysteria.

I went out in the corridor with Lorentz. "What's this about?"

"She got the bird."

There it was again, this thing that Cecil had said if I ever heard I'd never forget. "She sang here, then?"

"It didn't get that far. She went out there to sing. Then they let her have it. It was murder."

"Just didn't like her, hey?"

"She got too much of a build-up—in the papers."

"I haven't seen the papers. I've been away."

"Yeah, I know . . . Socialite embraces stage career — that kind of stuff. It was all wrong, and they were ready for her. Just one of those nice morning crowds."

I began to get sore. "It would seem to me you should have had more sense than to put her on here."

"I didn't."

"Oh, you did your part."

"I pleaded with her not to do it . . . Listen, Borland: I'm not kidded about Doris, and I don't think you are, either. She can't sing for buttons. I tried my best to head her off. I even went to Leighton I scared him, but not enough. You try to stop Doris when she gets set on something."

"Couldn't you tell her the truth?"

"Could you?"

That stopped me, but I was still sore. "Maybe not. But you started this, just the same. If you knew all this, what did you egg her on for? You're the one that's been given her lessons, from 'way back, and telling her how good she is, and—"

"All right, Borland; granted. I'm in love with your wife. And if egging her on is what makes her like me, I'm human. Yeah, I trade on her weakness."

"I've socked guys for less than that."

"Go ahead, if it does you any good. I've about got to the point where a sock would be just one more thing. If you think being chief lackey to Doris is a little bit of heaven, you try it—or may be you have tried it . . . This finished me with her, if that interests you. Not because I started it. Not because I egged her on. No— but I saw it. I was there, and saw them nail her to the cross, and rip her clothes off, and throw rotten eggs at her, and ask her how the vinegar tasted—and all the rest of it. That's unforgivable."

He walked off and left me. I found a pay phone, put in a call for a private ambulance. When it came I went in the dressing-room again. Doris was up and Christine was helping her into her coat. She was over the hysteria, but she looked like something broken and shrunken. I carried her to the ambulance, put her in it, made her lie down. Christine got in. We started off.

At home, I carried her upstairs, undressed her, and put her to bed, and called a doctor. Undressing Doris is like pulling the petals off a flower, and a catch kept coming in my throat over how soft she was and how beautiful she was, and how she wilted into the bed. When the doctor came he said she had to be absolutely quiet, and gave her some sleeping pills. He left, and I closed the door and sat down beside the bed. She put her hand in mine. "Leonard."

"Yes?"

"I'm no good."

"How do you know? They didn't even give you a chance to find out."

"I'm no good."

"A morning show in a picture house—"

"A picture house, a vaudeville house, an opera house—it's all the same. They're out there, and it's up to you. I'm just a punk who's been a headache to everybody she knows and who's got wise to herself at last. I've got voice, figure, looks—everything but what it takes. Isn't that funny"

"For me, you've got everything it takes."

"You knew, didn't you?"

"How would I know?"

"You knew. You knew all the time I've been just rotten to you Leonard. All because you opposed my so-called career."

"I didn't oppose it."

"No, but you didn't believe in it. That was what made me so furious. You were willing to let me do whatever I wanted to do, but you wouldn't believe I could sing. I hated you for it."

"Only for that?"

"Only for that. . .Oh, you mean Hugo and Leighton and all my other official hand-kissers? Don't be silly. I had to tease you a little, didn't I? But that only showed I cared whether you cared."

"Then you do care?"

"What do you think?"

Doris took my head in her hands, and kissed my eyes and my brow and cheeks, as though I were something too holy for her to be worthy to touch, and I was so happy I couldn't even talk. I sat there a long time, my head against hers, while she held my hand against her cheek, and now and then kissed it, " . . . The pills are working."

"You want to sleep?"

"No, I don't want to. I could stay this way forever. But I can't help it."

"I'll leave you."

"Kiss me."

I kissed her, and she put her arms around me, and sighed a sleepy little sigh. Then she smiled, and I tiptoed out.

I had a bite to eat, went down to the office, and had a look at what mail there was. Then I sat down at the desk, hooked my heels on the top, and tried to keep my head from swimming till it would be time to go back to Doris. I was so excited I wanted to laugh all the time, but a cold feeling began to creep up my back, and pretty soon I couldn't fight it off any more. It was about Cecil. I had to see her I knew that. I had to put it on the line how I felt about Doris and how she felt about me, and there could be but one answer to that. Cecil and I, we would have to break. I tried to tell myself she wouldn't expect to see me for a day or so, that if I just let things go along she would make the move anyway. It was no good. I had to see her, and I couldn't stall. I walked around to her hotel.

She had the same suite, the same piano, the same piles of music lying around. She had left the door from the lobby, and when I went in she was lying on the sofa, staring at the wall, and didn't even say hello. I sat down and asked her how she felt after the trip. She said all right. I asked her when her rehearsals started. She said tomorrow. I said that was swell.

"What is it, Leonard?" Her voice sounded dry, and mine was shaky when I answered, "Something happened."

"Yes, I heard."

"It—broke her up."

"It generally does."

"It's—made her feel different—about a lot of things. About—quite a few things."

"Go on, Leonard. What did you come here to tell me? Say it."

"She wants me back."

"And you?"

"I want her back, too."

"All right."

She closed her eyes. There was no more to say and I knew it. I ought to have walked out of there then. I couldn't do it. I at least wanted her to know how I felt about her, how much she meant to me. I went over, sat down beside her took her hand. "Cecil, there's a lot of things I'd like to say."

"Yes, I know."

"About how swell you've been, about how much I—"

"Good-by, Leonard."

"I wanted to tell you—"

"There's only one thing a man ever has to tell a woman. You can't tell me that; I know you can't tell me that; we've been all over it—don't offer me consolation prizes."

"All right, then. Good-by."

I bent over and kissed her.

She didn't open her eyes, didn't move. "There's only one thing I ask, Leonard."

"The answer is yes, whatever it is."

"Don't come back."

"What?"

"Don't come back. . . You're going now. You're going with all my best wishes and there's no bitterness. I give you my word on that. You've been decent to me and I've no complaints. You haven't lied to me, and if it hasn't turned out as I thought it would that's not my fault, not yours. But— don't come back. When you go out of that door, you go out of my life. You'll be a memory, nothing more. A sweet, lovely, terrible memory, perhaps—but I'll do my own grieving. Only—don't come back."

"I had sort of hoped—"

"Ah!"

"What's the matter?"

"You had sort of hoped that after this little honeymoon blows up— say, in another week—you could give me a ring, and come on over and start up again just as if nothing had happened."

"No. I hoped we could be friends."

"That's what you think you hoped. You know in your heart it was something else. All right, you're going back to her. She's had a bad morning and been hurt, and you feel sorry for her, and she's whistled at you and you're running back. But're going back on her terms, not yours. You're still her little whimpering lapdog, and if you think she's not going to dump you down on the floor or sell you to the gypsies just as soon as this blows over, you're mistaken. That woman is not licked until you've licked her it's more than I do."

"No. You're wrong. Doris has had her lesson."

"All right, I'm wrong. For your sake, I hope so. But—don't come back. Don't come running to me again. I'll not be a hot towel— for you or anybody."

"Then friendship's out?"

"It is. I'm sorry."

"All right."

"Come here."

She pulled me down and kissed me, and turned away quick, and motioned me out. . . .

(To Be Continued)

MAINTAINING GARDEN WATER SUPPLY OFFERS A PROBLEM

The problem of maintaining an adequate water supply in the garden soil is important but often difficult, especially in some of the poorly drained clay and light sandy soils which are found in certain sections of Maryland, according to Walter R. Ballard, Specialist in Horticulture for the University of Maryland Extension Service.

He points out that an adequate water supply is one of the most important factors in plant growth because the root system cannot use nutrients in the soil unless they are in a very dilute solution. Injury may even result from high concentrations of fertilizer in the soil when the water supply is reduced during dry periods.

Among the factors which influence water supply in the soil is the character of the soil and the relative height of natural water table. A deep, sandy loam soil with an abundance of organic matter is easier to manage and retains the moisture content better than a heavy clay soil that is usually poorly drained and leaves a hard crust after it dries out. Clay soils also have a tendency to hold moisture too well in wet spells, which may be as injurious to plants as too little water.

Another factor to be considered is the contour of the land because rains are more likely to run off than soak into sloping ground. Running the rows across the slope and ridging the land slightly will often prevent excessive run-off.

Water may be kept in the soil by using mulches, keeping the soil crust broken through cultivation and by artificial watering. When plants are set out, the ground around them should be soaked and "starter" solutions may be found helpful. If dry weather continues, the ground may be soaked with hose or permanent sprinkling devices at intervals of a week or 10 days but frequent light sprinkling are not advised. After the plants have become well established and the surface soil covered with roots there should be little loss of moisture through evaporation.

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE SERVICES

"Adam and Fallen Man" will be the subject of the Lesson-Sermon in all Churches of Christ Scientist, on Sunday, May 10. The Golden Text will be from Hosea 14:1—"O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God, for thou art fallen by thine iniquity."

Among the citations comprising the Lesson-Sermon will be the following from the Bible—Gen. 1:27—"So God created man **in his own image, in the image** of God created he him, male **and female created he them."**

The Lesson-Sermon also will include passages from the Christian Science textbook, **"Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures," by Mary Baker Eddy** among which is the following, page 282—"Whatever indicates the fall of man or the opposite of God or God's absence, is the Adam dream, which is neither Mind nor man, for it is not begotten of the Father."

Services are held every Sunday at 11 A. M. Sunday School at 9:45 Wednesday evening meetings at 8 P. M. in the Church Rooms 111 Dover Street.

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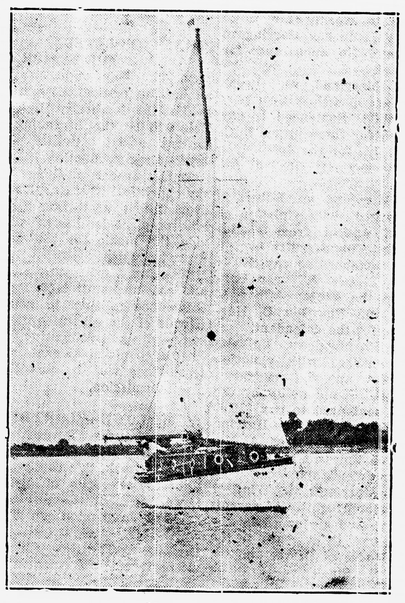

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