Two Can Sing

By JAMES M. CAIN

CHAPTER IX

When I got back to the house the kids were home and came running downstairs and said did I know we were all going that night to hear Mamma sing. I said there had been a little charge in the plans on that, and they were a little down in the mouth, but I said I had brought presents for them, and that fixed it up and we went running up to get them. I went in the nursery, where I'd left my bag. It wasn't there. Then I heard Doris call, and we went in the bedroom.

"Were you looking for something?"

"Yes. Are you awake?"

"Been awake . . . You might find it in there."

She gave a funny little smile and pointed to the dressing-room I went in, and there it was. The kids began jumping up and down when I gave them the candy, and Doris kept smiling and talking over their heads. "I would have had Nils unpack, but I didn't want him poking around."

"I'll do it."

"Where did you go?"

"Just down to the office for the mail."

"No, but I mean—"

"Oh — Rochester, Chicago, Indianapolis, and around. Thought it was about time to look things over."

"Did you have a nice trip?"

"Only fair."

"You certainly took plenty of glad rags."

"Just in case. Didn't really need them."

Christine called the kids, and they went out. I went over to her and took her in my arms. "Why didn't you want Nils poking around?"

"Well—do you want him?"

"No."

We both laughed, and she put her head against mine and let her hair fall over my face, and made a little opening in front of my mouth and kissed me through that. Oh, don't think Doris couldn't be a sweet armful when she wanted to be.

I kept letting her hair fall over my face and holding her a little tighter, and then all of a sudden she jumped up.

"Oh, hell! The cocktail party!"

"What cocktail party?"

"Gwenny Blair's cocktail party I said I'd drop in before the supper show, and I had completely forgotten it. The supper show—think of that! Wasn't I the darling little of that then? My, that seems a long time ago. And it was only this morning."

"Oh, let's skip it."

"What! And have them think I'm dying of grief? I should say not! We're going, and we're going quick, so we can leave before the whole mob gets there. Hurry up! Get dressed!

I always loved Doris when she dropped the act and came out as the calculating little wretch that she really was. She heard me laugh, and laughed too. "Right."

She was dressed in five minutes flat, and for once she had to wait for me.

"How do I look?"

How she looked was like some nineteen year - old flapper who had spent her first day at the races, cashed $27.50 on a $1 ticket and was feeling just swell.

It was only four or five blocks away, so we walked. On the way Doris kept damning Gwenny and all of Gwenny's friends under her breath, and saying she'd rather take a horsewhipping than go in and face them. But when we got there she was all smiles. Only a few people had shown up by then, and most of them hadn't heard of it.

So they were all crowding around her with their congratulations and wanted to know what it felt like to be a big headliner. Of course, that made it swell. But Doris leveled it out without batting an eye: "But I flopped! I'm an ex-headliner."

"You— Come on. Stop being funny."

"I flopped. I'm out. They gave me my notice."

"How could you flop?"

"Oh please, please, don't ask me—it just breaks my heart. And now I can't go to Bermuda. Honestly, it's not the principle of the thing, it's the money! Think of all those lovely, lovely dollars that I'm not going to get!"

She didn't lie about it, or pretend that she had done better than she had done or pretty it up in any way. She had too much sense for that. But in twenty seconds she had them switched off from the horrible part and had managed to work it in that she must have been getting a terrific price to go on at all, and had it going her way. Leighton came in while she was talking, and said the publicity was all wrong and he was going to do something about it. They all agreed that was it, and in five minutes they were talking about football.

She drifted over to me. "Well, that's over. Was it all right?"

"Perfect."

"Damn them."

"Just a few minutes, and we'll blow . . . We've still got my bag to unpack."

She nodded, and looked at me, and let her lashes drop over her eyes. It was Eve looking at the apple, and my heart began to pound and the room swam.

Lorentz came in. He didn't come over. He waved and smiled, and Doris waved back, but looked away quick. "I'm a little out of humor with Hugo. He must have known. You did, didn't you? He could have given me some little hint."

I thought of what he had said, but I didn't say anything.

We got separated then, but pretty soon she had me by the arm, pulling me into a corner. "We've got to go. Make it quick with Gwenny, and then—out!"

"Why, sure. But what's the matter?"

"The fool!"

"Who?"

"Gwenny. I could kill her. She knows how crazy I've been about that woman and how I've wanted to meet her, and now, today of all days, she had to pick out—she's invited her! And she's coming!"

"What woman?"

"Cecil Carver! I can't meet her today. I can't have her—pitying me! Can I?"

"No. We'll blow."

"I'll meet you at the elevator—oh, my! There she is!"

I looked around, and Cecil was just coming in the room. I turned back to Doris, and she wasn't there.

She was with Wilkins—Cecil, I mean. That meant she was going to sing. There wasn't much talk while Gwenny was talking her around. They piped down, and waited. I was still in the corner and she didn't see me until Gwenny called me out. She caught her breath. Gwenny introduced me, and I said, "How do you do, Miss Carver," and she said, "How do you do, Mr. Borland," and they went on. But in a minute she came back. "Why didn't you tell me you were coming here?"

"I didn't know it."

"Is she here?"

"Didn't Gwenny tell you?"

"No."

"It was on her account she asked you."

"Her account?"

"She's wanted to meet you. So I just found out."

"Gwenny didn't say anything. She called an hour ago and said come on up—and I wanted to go somewhere . . . Why has she wanted to meet me?"

"Admires you. From afar."

"Where is she?"

"Back there somewhere, in one of the bedrooms, probably! Hiding."

"From what?"

"You, I think."

"Leonard, what is this? She wants to meet me, she's hiding from me—what are you getting at?"

"Gwenny asked you, as a big favor to her. But Gwenny hadn't heard about the flop, and on account of the flop, she'd rather not. Just—prefers some other time."

"And that's all?"

"Yeah, but it was an awful flop."

"You're sure you haven't told her about me? Gone and got all full of contrition, and made a clean breast of it and wiped the slate clean—have you? Have you?"

"No, not a word."

She turned and headed back toward the bedrooms.

"Cecil!" I called.

"She had a flop, didn't she? Then I guess I'm the one she wants to talk to." She went on back.

I went over and had a drink. I needed one.

I was on my third when she came back, and I went over to her. "What happened?"

"Nothing."

"What did you say?"

"Told her to forget it. Told her it could happen to anybody—which it can, baby, and don't you forget it."

"What did you say?"

"Asked if it had ever happened to me . I told her it had . . . She's not bad. I halfway like her."

She still didn't look at me, but I had the same old feeling about her, of how swell she was, and thought I'd die if I couldn't let her know, anyway a little. "Cecil can I say something?"

"Leonard, I cut my heart out after you left. I cut it out and put it in the electric refrigerator, to freeze. So if you've got anything to say you'd better go down there and see if it can still hear you. Me, I've got other things to do. I've got to be gay and sing tra-la-la-la, and get my talons into the first man that—"

She saw Lorentz then, went running over to him, put her arms around him and kissed him, and pulled him into a corner. It was gay, maybe, but it didn't make me feel any better.

Doris came out then and I hurried to her, and asked if she was ready to go.

"Oh—the tooth's out now. I think she's going to sing. Let's stay."

"Oh--you saw her, then?"

"She came back to powder. I didn't start it. She remembered me. She came to my recital, you may recall."

"Oh, yes. Well—did you like her?"

"Leonard, she's everything I ever thought she was and about a thousand times more. She had heard about it. My flop, I mean. One minute, Leonard, and she had made a different woman of me."

"Poured oil in the wound, hey?"

"Wound, my eye! Leonard, nothing has happened! It's just something that can happen to anybody. It has happened to her; it happens to them all. You take a drink and you forget about it."

A maid came around with a tray of Martinis. Doris took one, drank it, and set the glass on a table. "So that's what I'm doing. I don't have to quit. I don't have to give up my career just because some movie audience may-be hoped for a dog act instead of something good. It's just as she said. It's all in the day's work, and you just forget it-- and go on."

I could hardly believe my ears. Here it had been only that morning that she was broken on the wheel and had heard the gong ring for her if anybody ever did. And now, just because Cecil had handed her out a little line to make her feel better, she was standing there with her eyes wide open, telling herself that nothing had happened, that it was all just a dream. A little chilly feeling crept in on me, and I tried to fight it off. Well, had anything happened? Wasn't it all just a dream? Wasn't she the same old Doris, and wouldn't it be just about a day before we were back right where we started, with me having the career rubbed into me morning, noon, and night? I wondered if that was what they call pluck. To me, it was not having enough sense to know when you've been hit with a brick.

(To Be Continued)

SIX INCH SERMON

Tuesday: The Day of Conflict. Lesson for May 17: Matthew 21—41—23:11.

Golden Text: Mark 12:10.

There is a legend of men rebuilding an ancient city who came upon a curiously wrought stone which they left in the rubbish. But by and by they found its place; in Psalms it is written, "The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner." These words were originally written of David but they were more fittingly applied to the Messiah as we find them recorded by Mark in the verse which is used as the Golden Text of this lesson. The words present in one sentence the tragedy of a people who rejected their Messiah and also the hope of men for better things in the world through Christ.

The scribes and Pharisees, in their bitter enmity toward Jesus were no match for him in their cunning questions and on the occasion of which the lesson first tells he put them to silence with a question about David and the Messiah.

His critics silenced, Jesus spoke to the mulitude concerning the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees, who said but did not, who would not devote the pressure of a finger to the grievous burdens which they bound upon others, who wore the insignia of the pious and loved the salutations of those who addressed them as masters.

Out of this day of conflict between Jesus and his critics comes the warning against self-righteousness, a religion of profession without inward grace and good works. And it closes with the injunction to true disciples to seek only that greatness in life which comes in great service.

—Buy War Savings Bonds—

The Navy Department Bureau of Aeronautics and its various divisions was established September 1, 1921.

The Secretary of the Navy is in direct charge of every matter relating to the Navy both afloat and ashore.

In the absence of the Secretary, Under-Secretary, and Assistant Secretary, the Chief of Secretary of the Navy.

Congress in 1850 sounded the death knell for two long honored customs of the sea when it abolished flogging and the issuing of "grog."

In 1870 Congress authorized the Navy to furnish New York with a vessel for use as a nautical school for the merchant marine.

It was not until 1899 that the Office of Naval Intelligence was established by Act of Congress.

The Juice Department is the designation given the Department of Electrical Engineering at the U. S. Naval Academy.

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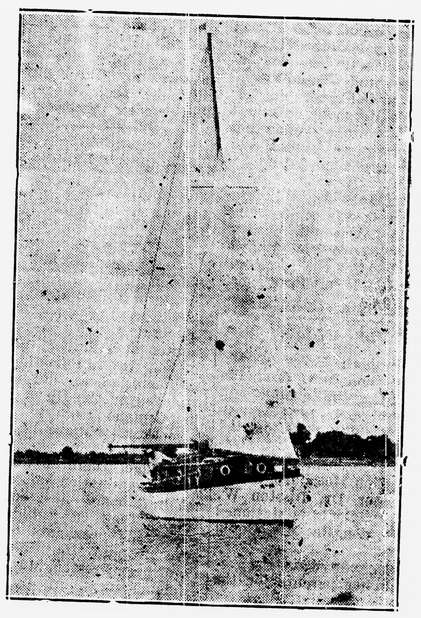

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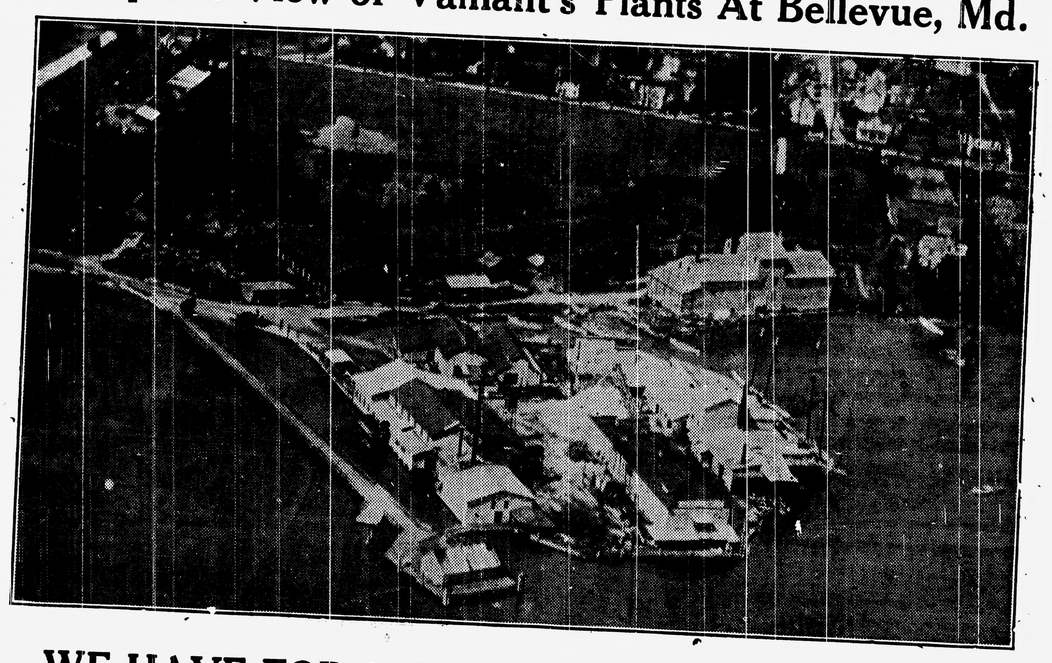

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