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The Leading Lady

(Continued From Page Three)

"That's right," Bassett nodded in agreement. "She'd never have made a date with him. She shunned him like the plague. If you knew her you wouldn't see anything in that going out. She was restless and unhappy and the place here—the sea, the views fascinated her. It was our last evening and it was like her not to want to miss any of it, slip out for a minute to enjoy the end of it."

"And came upon some one waiting for her—lying in wait and—Rawson did not finish. A thud and crackling crash came from the living room. The three men rose with a simultaneous leap and ran for the door.

CHAPTER VII

Of all the people gathered in the house that evening Anne had been the most silent. Her raving face, the contours broken by great hollows, bearing the stamp of shock and horror, had been unnoticed among the other faces. Now and then a pitying glance had been directed to her, grief as Sybil's friend must have added a last unbearable poignancy to the tragedy.

After her question to Flora, her mind had seemed to blur and cease to function. She had run from the house not knowing what she did, gone hither and thither with the others, looking, speaking, listening in a blind daze. It was not till they returned to the living room that her faculties began to clear and co-ordinate.

Her thoughts circled round the image of Joe as she had last seen him—the vision of him as some one

might have been on the boat, Joe might have got off the island some other way. Tomorrow something might come to light that would make these hideous fancies seem like the dreams of delirium. That was the state of mind she tried to maintain when she went upstairs and overheard a man was on guard at the causeway.

With that knowledge her outlook changed. Her passive role was over. If Joe had done it and if he were on the island he would try to get off at low tide. It was safe to assume that he was outside, hidden till the causeway was open. To go out to find him would be useless; he would never reveal himself to her, and if she was seen suspicion would instantly be aroused. She must get somewhere that would command the causeway and its approaches. The best place—the only place—was the living room entrance. From there she could see in all directions, the balcony end, the kitchen wing, the pine grove. She would try to walk him back, possibly get to him before he had to take her chances and trust to Heaven.

The tide was at full ebb at midnight. At a quarter before, she made ready. She took from the bureau a book she had been reading—if she saw anyone she could say she had come down to find it and opened her door with the stealth of a burglar. A dead silence reigned as she stole down the stairs and into the living room.

At the entrance, pressed against the door, she looked down. It was a world of white enchantment, breathlessly still. She could see the patterned surface of leaves, the cracks and fissures of the rocks. Below, the channel lay almost bare, pools glistening like dropped mirrors, mounts of mud casting inky shadows.

She could hear the murmur of the men's voices from the open library windows, and like the throbbing of a muffled engine, the beating of her own heart.

Into that deep enveloping quietude came a sound, so faint, so infinitely small and hushed, that only expectant ears could have caught it. It came from the room behind her, and turning, she slid sleekly against the wall, her body black against its blaclness. The sound continued, the opening of a door opposite, the door into the kitchen wing. It seemed no door in the world had ever opened so slowly—creaking, stopping, resuming, dying away. She could see nothing, for the darkness of the gallery lay impenetrable over that furtive entrance.

There was a footstep, light as the fall of a leaf, and she saw him coming toward her in that high luminous pallor from the windows. He was like a shadow, so evenly dark, a shape without detail, moving with a shadow's noiseless passage. She saw the outline of his cap on his head and that he carried his shoes in one hand.

He came forward with a hand raised for caution, sending her voice before her in an agonized whisper:

"Go back, Joe. The causeway's watched. You can't get over that way. Go!"

He was gone, a fleet flying, vanishing back into the darkness under the gallery. Out of it came the soft closing of a door.

The room swayed, pale light and darkness swam and coalesced. She knew she was near a table and put her hand to steady herself by it, something solid to hold to for

strange and sinister. And the boat—the boat with only Gabriel in it—kept coming up like a picture revolving on a wheel—going and returning, going and returning. Had he stayed, and what for? That question revolved with the picture of the boat.

She thought of telling Bassett and gave that up—with the police expected she could not get him alone, and why add to his burden with her suspicions? Yes, that was what it was—nothing but a suspicion. She had no certainty; Joe

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