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Third Instalment

MOVIE MADNESS

BY

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Chapter X.

When Jane awoke, the radiant California sunlight was pouring into the room. Joybelle was up and moving about the kitchenette. Jane reached for the Ingersoll watch. ~~Eight~~ thirty! She would be late for work. Mere readers at Filmo were required to punch the time clock. She hurried with her shower and dressing. She had a longing to stay home that day---to sit by the window and just dream. Even while dressing, her mind was dancing along with the glorious thing that had happened to her.

Joybelle called:

"Coffee ready--you got to hustle, kid".

"Joy, I have'nt time for coffee. I'm late".

"Late nothing. Its only 8.40 and Jim'll run you out. Listen to him honking his horn--the nerve of him!"

"Jim" was Joybelle's "Gentleman friend".

"Here you, eat that egg and don't answer back either".

With some people Love is a secret, jealousy to be

guarded. With others it is a song that must be chanted aloud. It brims over like a full cup of joy. Jane could not keep her marvelous secret. She told it to Millie Cohen, when that very serious faced young person dropped in at her office.

"Millie--I've got to tell it. Millie--Mr. Blanton and I are in love with each other. He told me so last night, and Oh! I'm the happiest girl in the whole world".

Millie's expressive eyes were registering amazement and profound worry. She hardly knew what to say.

"Jane, listen--don't let a whisper of this get around the lot. Its not as easy or as lovely as you think. I'll talk to you at noon---lets have lunch in the Inn today--what do you say?"

"That'll be fine".

Jane was too happy to puzzle over the strange way in which Millie received her confidence. She did not go immediately to work, but stood at her window, looking out at the scores of people passing like busy bees through the studio streets.

A company of cowboys on horse went clattering over the cobbled ~~streets~~. One of them was singing, and the others yipping and halooing as they swept by.

Jane felt as if she were in some beautiful dream that had somehow come true. To think that she was the same girl who had lived in the little eastern college town all of her life. Her mind wandered lovingly back to her home; clung tenderly about her father, her mother, her five little brothers and sisters. She dashed her hand across her eyes.

Miss Dutton, the story editor, came in, manuscript of a

play in her hand.

"Miss Mercer" she said crisply, "I've been watching your work. I like the way you write your synopses; now I'm going to try you out on treatments. Let me see what you can do with this".

"Thank you so much " said Jane, surprising Miss Dutton by her eager kindling glance. When the Editor had left, Jane, her eyes starry bright, tried to concentrate upon the manuscript. She turned the pages of "The Immense Pearl", but could not read. The words fled before her like a meaningless thread on a kaleidoscope. She glanced at her wrist watch. Why--it was nearly 11.30 already. She recalled that Blanton had said he would telephone her first thing in the morning. She realized that almost unconsciously she had been waiting for this. She had an intense longing just to hear his voice.

"Well" said she gaily, to herself, "If the Mountain won't speak to Mahomet, Mahomet will speak to the mountain". And she lifted the receiver from her phone and called Edmund Blanton's office. There was a pause and a ~~man's~~ voice answered:

"Edmund Blanton Productions".

"May I speak to Mr. Blanton?"

"Name, please?"

"Miss Mercer".

She heard her name repeated by the henna haired stenographer, and a moment later, quite distinctly she heard Blanton's voice. It sounded strained, harsh.

"Say, I'm busy".

Then:

"Mr. Blanton's busy. Any message?"

Jane could not answer. She put the receiver back on the hook and a frightened shadow crept into her eyes. She had the look of one listening to a faraway, warning voice. Suddenly she shivered; tried to smile then --to carry the thing off nonchalantly. Why should'nt he be busy? All directors were.....She should'nt have called him.

Questions, doubts, intolerable fears began to creep over Jane Mercer, gripping her heart with their clammy fingers.

Why was his voice so strange--harsh?

If he could tell his assistant he was busy, why could he not have said that to her?

Why had he not telephoned as he had said he would do.

Desperately she sought to reassure herself.

Making mountains out of molehills!

It was just his way. He was abrupt and short like that. Just his queer, dear way. She was too sensitive, placed too much importance on little things.

She closed her eyes, a sick surge of terror enveloping her. She opened them wide and said aloud:

"Oh, Oh, I must'nt let things engulf me."

And then:

"What is wrong? What am I to do? What am I to do?"

Millie was tapping at the door. Millie did'nt look her usual self. What was the matter with Millie? What was the matter with everyone?

"Ready?" asked Millie dully.

"Oh yes--Millie--I want to ask you something?"

"Shoot". The usually garrulous Millie was singularly reticent and dull.

"That woman--Sylvia Laurence--tell me about her".

"You've been here six weeks now" said Millie evasively.

"You ought to know".

"But I don't. You see, I've stuck rather closely to my work--I don't know any of the people here".

"Say, we better hustle" said Millie with sudden briskness. "Theres a crowd of extras and if we want a seat in the Cafe, we'd better get in before they grab everything".

The Studio Inn was in fact crowded, as Millie had surmised. A horde of extras filled the place to overflowing. Most of them were herded along one side of the restaurant, where they picked their meals from various dishes displayed and cooked on a long counter.

In the main dining room every table was taken. The two girls paused by the door, looking for a ~~vacant~~ place. At a round table, midway of thw room, a man stood up and waved to the girls. Millie said:

"Theres a couple of seats over there. Lets nab them".

When they reached the table, they found Harron with a couple of his gag men there. Extra seats were dragged to th table and Harron welcomed the girls boisterously.

"Sit here baby. All kinds of room".

Officiously he held the menu card before Jane.

"Now what does the little girlie like?"

She loathed the way he called her by familiar and endearing names. The table was small, meant only for four. With six of them around it, they were crushed quite closely to each other. Harron's knee pressed heavily against Jane's. He maneuvered his foot very insidiously around about till it practically closed ~~about~~ Jane's.

Millie ordered their lunch, and bade the waitress make it snappy. Jane was scarcely aware of Harron, for she was looking for Blanton. She had an aching longing to have even a glimpse of the man who had held her in his arms the night before.

Harron's heavy face came in between her and the plate the waitress had set before her. His loose mouth hung slightly open. Under the cover of the cloth his hand stole to her knee, smoothed it with a slow, sensuous stroke, his eyes on Jane's. She jerked back.

"Take your hand off my knee" she said. "How dare you? Millie--let's go".

Harron burst out laughing.

"Whew, what a little sweet spitfire we are. No offense meant, baby".

"I wish you'd call me by my right name" said Jane sharply.

"Boo! I call all the girls dearie and cutie and baby and sweetie, and none of them mind when Daddy Harron puts his hand on their knee".

"Well I do---" said Jane. "Millie, aren't you through yet?"

Hurrying across the little park, Millie adjured her:

"Careful that you don't offend Harron. He's no end influential here".

"I don't even know he's alive" said Jane.

"He's alive all right--and Oh---don't look back--walk quick as you can--he's following us".

He overtook them just as they were about to enter the Scenario building. He came between the two girls, slipping a soft, flabby hand through the arm of each.

"How about a little party tonight?"

"Gee ! I'm sorry" said Millie swiftly, "but Jane and I are all dated up".

"Uh-huh! How about letting me see some of your stories, girlie. Hear you dosome pretty nice originals".

Slightly stirred, as always by any reference to her stories, Jane said:

"Oh they're not much".

"Let me see--judge for myself. Maybe we could do a bit of collaboration together? I'm in the market for some good old fashioned slush. Got it?"

"I don't know---yes--maybe I have" said Jane. A fleck of color had come to her cheeks. A ray of hope lightened the heaviness of her heart. In a dim sort of way Jane realized that the Director was offering her a rare opportunity. Her mind however was in a state of chaos. "I'll --pick out something and send it to you" she said.

She freed her arm from Harron's grasp and trying to smile said:

"Goodbye--and thanks very much".

She had the sense of fleeing, though from what she could not have said. She wanted to get to her office--away from all prying eyes--away even from Millie.

She locked the door; sat down breathlessly. A confused medley of things swept in a tumultuous flood through her mind.

Edmund Blanton! He had held her in his arms only the night before. As long as she lived she would feel the pressure of his warm lips on hers. She visualized his eyes gleaming tenderly at her in the semi light of the car. Why had he not telephoned?

Martin Harron! A big director, in spite of his odious character. A chance to have her name on the screen---to become at last a real scenario writer.

Why had not Blanton telephoned?

What had she done to offend him?

Sylvia---Sylvia --Sylvia Laurence. Was she the same Sylvia whose name the woman at the author's club had mentioned so meaningly. What was she to Edmund Blanton? Why had the mere mention of her name so startled and changed him?

LOVE WAS A TORMENT!

Love did not make life joyful.

Bliss was illusory!

She must see him. She must know the truth!

She must demand a reason for his strange treatment of her. She had the right to know. He had given her that right when he had held her in his arms and told her that he loved her.

Her heart was aflame; her mind filled with a hungry



desolation.

Now she was crushing her hat on her head again, touching her eyes--there were no tears--her lips with her little handkerchief; glancing even, wide-eyed at the unhappy young face in the little mirror; unlocking the door and out into the long cool hall.

Jane was running across the studio loy. She did not mind who might see her as she passed. Down the main avenue, through several little lanes, past the Film Library, the Art Department, through the electric plant. A camera man called after her:

"Where are you going my pretty maid?"

Jane went on and on, cutting down the distance by going through two stages, where no longer the music from the ~~pianos~~ miniature pianos on the sets caused her to stop, fascinated and thrilled, as she watched a picture in process of "shooting".

The henna haired stenographer in the outer office half rose in her seat as Jane came in. There were several people waiting to see Director Blanton, but Jane went swiftly by them, ignoring the stenographer, and making straight for Blanton's door.

The stenographer called sharply:

"You can't go in there. Mr. Blanton said he was'nt to be disturbed by anyone or anything".

Jane paid no heed to her. Without knocking, she opened his door, stepped inside.

In spite of the people waiting to see him in the outer office, Blanton was alone in his office, his two clinched hands resting on the blotter on the desk before him. He

was staring out in some painful concentration when Jane burst in, and a spasm of pain twisted across his face and turned it grey.

Her back to the door, breathlessly, Jane faced him.

"Now you are going to tell me why you are offended with me? What have I done?"

"You've done nothing, Jane" he said hoarsely.

"Its I--who am to blame".

"Blame--for what?"

"For what happened last night" he replied in a low voice.

"You did 'nt mean it?" she asked in an agonized whisper.

"I had no right to mean it" he said hoarsely.

After that there was a long pause, and Jane's breath caught in a frightened sob. Her hand went to her throat, almost as though she held it there to control that insufferable lump that rose and threatened almost to choke her.

"I s-suppose" she said, speaking in short, jerky gasps--"this is an ordinary --thing--in your life---making love --to a girl and then hurting her cruelly. I've heard of men like you----"

He groaned--made a motion as if to reach out to her; suddenly covered his face with his hands.

"Oh--Oh----"

Her face was tense, vivid with her emotions--the anguish that wracked her. She put her two hands to either side her

The man and the woman left in the office stared at each other. Then the woman ~~laughed~~ began to laugh softly.

"So-o, we've got a sweetie at last, have we!"

Her mocking laughter rose triumphantly.

With a half suppressed oath, Blanton seized her by the arm, roughly swung her away from the door, jerked it open.

He tried to pick up Jane's trail--to overtake her. He saw ahead the flicker of her pink smock and he hurried down the little alley between stage D and dressing rooms, stumbling over pulleys and waving aside and almost knocking over a stage carpenter who tried to speak to him.

At the back of an old cutting room he came upon Jane. She was standing against the wall, a dazed look on her face--almost as if she did not know where she was or what she was doing. There was something pitifully distraught about her expression--as if the sensitive fibre of her mind had momentarily been shattered.

He did not know what he was saying to her. The words poured out in a torrential disjointed stream--bitten off--flowing on again--and again.

"Jane--listen to me. Jane! For God's sake try and believe the best you can of me..... I know I've been a dog to hurt you like this.?.....I never meant to hurt you, my little Jane. I swear that ~~pank~~ to you. I only wanted to help you.....to take care of you....to watch over and cherish you. Jane---I did'nt mean to injure you.....my poor little one....I would sooner kill myself than cause you a single pang....W

face and stared down wildly at that bowed head.

Someone knocked on the door. The stenographer thrust in her head, called:

"Miss Laurence waiting to see you Mr. Blanton".

Miss Laurence waited for no one; least of all for Edmund Blanton. She pushed by the office boy and stenographer and stepped into Blanton's office. She was tall, very beautiful, with heavy lidded eyes, the lashew of which wre thickly beaded. ~~Behind those eyes~~ Behind that beaded fringe golden eyes gleamed with the dangerous light of a pythoness. Her every movement was the embodiment of studied grace--an insolent, arrogant grace. Beside this radiant star, Jane Mercer, with her flower like face, her slight long lissome limbs seemed ~~pathetically~~ strangely slight and pathetically young. The older woman's glance swung from Blanton, now standing up, to Jane, her hand upon his desk, a stricken look on her face.

"I followed you across the lot, Miss Mercer. You see I know your name. You may as well know mine. I'm Sylvia Laurence Blanton, and Edmund Blanton happens to be my--husband".

Jane stared at the women. Her lips parted. She seemed to be seeing her as from some great distance--through a fog; yet the woman's words had struck deep. Jane knew ~~not~~ exactly what she had said--who she was? She was Edmund Blanton's wife! What a joke---what a mad, fantastic joke! She tried to say something--to smile even; but it was a most tragic mockery of a smile.

She went out blindly.

As he spoke she moved her head from side to side, as if trying to avoid meeting that agonizing, imploring gaze.

"Jane, you see, that woman... there's much to explain. We haven't lived together for seven years.

~~Never really were man and wife.~~ She belongs to a man named Chris Cleveland, an actor. She's belonged to a dozen men. She's absolutely nothing to me. She cares nothing about me. Never has. Her action is merely that of a dog in a manger--- blackmail.....so she can control and use me for her own ends. She's been living with Cleveland for nearly a year and expected to marry him when her contract with Filme expired. Oh don't you see, dear---it was all a matter of a Movie contract. Not uncommon in Hollywood. I agreed not to divorce her---I signed an agreement to that effect---I was not to divorce her till the expiration of the contract. And it didn't matter to me what she did, where she went, who she lived with. I had no use for her or any other woman in the world, until you came into my life--you, Jane--my little Darling, whom I have so terribly hurt.... Deer---I didn't realize what I was doing--didn't realize what it would lead to. I should have waited until I was free before I spoke to you. Jane---when love comes to us we cannot muffle it, can we, my dearest little one? Now I know I can never give you up. You're the only thing in the world I have ever loved. I'm going to take you away from all this. Jane. We'll go away together--escape from the shackles of convention--contracts---everything--just you and I, Jane!"

In a voice that seemed to come from some

unknown depths within her, Jane replied:

"We could not escape --from ourselves!"

"We wouldn't need to, darling--we'd be always together---we'd go away---"

Jane said brokenly:

"I --could'nt do anything like that, Mr. Blanton".

Someone was calling her name, halooing it across the lot.

"Jane! Jane!"

Millie had found Jane at last. She rushed up to her, interposed herself rudely between Jane and Blanton.

"Mr. Blanton" she said--"Leave Jane to me. Suppose someone passes this way--it'll be all over the lot. She'll lose her reputation--"

Blanton said hoarsely.

"Look here, Millie--I'll get my car. We'll take Jane home, and we'll talk and plan it all out there".

"No sir-- Jane's going with me. I've got my flivver right here and I got the day off especially. I was expecting something like this".

She was leading Jane along, her arm about her. Her own shabby little Ford was parked only a short distance away. Blanton followed. He tried to come to the other side of Jane, but Millie kept her close to the wall of the buildings. He scarcely knew what he was saying or doing. When Millie ~~opened~~ helped Jane into her car, Blanton got on the running board.

"You can't take her away like this. I've not told her half--I must explain-----"

Millie stepped on the starter. The car roared.

"Get off the car, will you" she said, and then as she caught a glimpse of the man's face, she added:

"Ah, be a sport, Mr. Blanton. Let me get her home; then you can figure out some way out of this mess".

"All right" he said. "Take her then. I'll follow. I'll be there probably ahead of you---"

He tried to entrap Jane's gaze. She was looking straight before her.

"Jane---Jane---" he said, in a muffled voice.

The car moved out along the sunny roads of  
Filmo City.

## Chapter XI.

There was just one light going in the little living room where Joybelle and Millie Cohen kept a sort of faithful vigil. The room was in darkness on purpose, so the two girls could see through the blind the man on the curb below. He had been there for hours, looking up at Jane's apartment. He wrote numerous notes--wild, passionate, imploring appeals and sent them across by the sombre faced chauffeur.

Blanton left his post long enough to go to the corner drug store again to call up the little flat. Joybelle answered.

"Ye-eh?"

"Mr. Blanton speaking. Will you let me---"

"I won't let you anything" said Joybelle viciously.

"You got your nerve to stand outside our house. I know all about what you done to my friend".

Millie interposed.

"Don't talk to him like that. Let me speak to him".

Joybelle relinquished the telephone.

"Its Millie speaking Mr. Blanton" said Jane's friend.

"Millie, is it true that Jane is very ill?"

"She's ill".

"Where is she?"

"She's in bed. Doctor says she's got to stay there".



He began to plead for permission to come over. Said he would do nothing to upset or disturb her--just wanted to be near Jane. Millie was touched:

"I'm sorry, but the doctor says its best for her not to see anyone; besides it'd only make things worse".

"Who's her doctor. I'll see him at once".

"Don't butt in. She's asleep anyway--he gave her some dope to quiet her---she was nearly off her head, poor kid---

"Millie, if I send some letters to her, will you promise to deliver them?"

"No. If you keep on like this we're going to wire her folks".

"For God's sakes don't do that".

"Well, you know how it is. She'll never be able to go back to work with you there. She'll lose her job!

"Not on my account. Listen to what I am saying:"

"Yes, Mr. Blanton".

"Tell her, as soon as she's able to understand-- that I'm going away---off somewhere on location. Tell her not to worry--that everything will work out right. I'll make it!"

As Millie turned from the 'phone she was crying.

"I'm sorry for him" she said.

"Well, I'm not" said Joybelle emphatically. "I'm not sorry for any married man that chases after a young girl".

"There were mitigating circumstances in his case."

"Hmph! He knew darned well he was tied up. I get sick and tired of married men trailing after kids like Jaye. "

~~When I get married I'm going~~

"Well you know how it is---he was that woman's

Director and there was a contract and all the rest. Besides you know how it is in Hollywood. Everybody anybody's wife or husband. Its a sickening mixup".

Millie added with a sigh:

"When I get married I'm going to some little innocent town where there won't be any shuffling around of husbands and wives. Its the very limit here. No one knows who's who's wife.

Jane was coming out of a dreamless peace to a dim world of dizzy chaos. Things seemed to move around the room like the fantastic figures of cubistic drawing. Nothing was stable--everything slipping and sliding. She felt as if she were drowning--sinking, and she called:

"Joybelle!"

Presently she heard Joybelle's voice above her.

"Its the dope. I'll make a cup of black coffee".

Jane said drowsily:

"I'm not dying". She made an effort to smile.

"Course you're not. The idea!" said Joybelle roughly. "When one's young they don't die from any love bunk, believe me".

"We have to go on living" said Jane.

Millie said gently:

"You've had a shock, dear. It'll all come out right".

"Sure it will" agreed Joybelle. "You'll forget all about the darned thing soon. Its just part of the days work. I'd like a dollar for every time I been crossed in love. Why one fellow threw me down so hard I nearly jumped off the roof, but

just as I was about to do it, I says to myself: 'Whats the use? There's other fish in the sea', and that's how it turned out, beca because it was 'nt no more t an a week before I met Jim Nolan, and I would'nt change ~~kkkk~~ Jim's little finger for the whole of the hide of the one I was going to throw myself from the roof for".

"I think we're talking too much" said Millie.

"Oh are you here, Millie?" asked Jane weakly.

"You betchu. Mother telephoned and I told her you were a bit under the weather, and she says for me to bring you over there and that she'll cook you a real kosher dinner. Wait till you taste gefelte fish".

A smile that was strangely piteous came across the girl's woeful young face. A single tear brimmed over. ~~She smiled~~ She put out her hand weakly, searching for Millie's.

"How good you are to me!" she said faintly, and buried her face in the pillow.