

Fourth Serial instalment

M O V I E   M A D N E S S

by

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Chapter XII.

Hearts do not break from shock or pain. Youth and work are vital antidotes. Jane's work was her salvation. She clung to it as a veritable life-saver.

She had been assigned to adapt and treat a story whose title was "The Immense Pearl". It was a preposterous, bloodcurdling melodrama of the old type. Jane made it a throbbing, living drama of the present day. She imbued its puppet like figures with real life--made them human beings. She so adapted the antique plot that it became comprehensible and thrilling.

For two weeks she worked steadily on the adaptation, and when she put the last word to the script, a faint glow spread over her face; she felt that pulse of relief and joy that only the creative writer knows when he puts the last word upon his story.

When she put the manuscript into Miss Dutton's hands, the story editor smiled at her approvingly.

"You seem to have made a quite complete job of it" she said.

"Yes. I took some liberties with the story--as it needed life injected into it".

"That's the idea. We like flash in our stories. I'll read it right away".

Jane hesitated.

"What shall I work on now, Miss Dutton?"

"Take a rest between stories".

"I don't want a rest. I want to work".

"Is that so? Hm!"

The Editor glanced at the girl's face, then looked away. Some small echo of Jane's story had filtered back to the editor ~~through~~ through one of those mysterious channels peculiar to a Movie studio.

"Suppose you work on one of your own stories. I like that one 'Rose Petals'. We'll see if we can't interest a director in it".

Jane's heart leaped with renewed hope.

Immediately after reading Jane's adaptation of "The Immense Pearl", Miss Dutton despatched it with a memo attached to her chief. The note was characteristic for its brevity, ~~Edward~~ but of an enthusiasm uncommon to the story weary editor.

~~This~~ "Edward Mayle:  
Supervising Scenario Editor.  
This is a corker. Recommend you read it  
at once.

Edith Dutton  
Story Editor".

Mayle who had considerable regard for his story editor's opinion glanced through the script, then turned back and read it through from beginning to end. He ~~then~~ made a personal trip across the lot to the Administration building, first telephoning to summon several men to a conference in the General Manager's



office. Bennie Minton, the General Manager, in spite of his business ability, knew very little about stories. He thought Maeterlink was a patent medicine and that Victor Hugo kept a restaurant in Los Angeles. For "Bennie" the Movie Game had both its joys and miseries. There were the hundred and one pretty girls. He licked his lips over these delectable morsels. Then there were story conferences. They were the bane of Minton's life. Besides Minton, there were present at the conference to consider "The Immense Pearl", ~~two~~ a supervisor, a director and Fulton.

Mable threw the script down on Minton's desk.

"There's a knock-out" said he.

The Director, by name of Lyndel Lavotsky, an importation from Russia, spoke only a few words of English. He had a strained, anguished look and a habit of literally tearing his hair when excited. He had suffered agonies of soul since coming to Filmo. In Europe his great picture, "Passionate Love" had been a sensational success. His great forte was palpably pictures that stressed the ninth degree SEX. He wanted to make pictures in his own way, about countries and people he knew. The stories submitted to him by the supervisors and editors drove him to explosive protest. For seven months Filmo had been training him, and his main tutor was a youngster of twenty one years, a relative of Minton's. He was not hampered by any knowledge of stories or picture making, but he had a glib tongue, the persistence of a flea, and no end of "Pull" at Filmo. His assurance was positively amazing and painful. The huge, ungovernable and impatient Lovotsky could barely restrain himself from laying hands upon this cocksure, self confident youth and



physically manhandling him.

Minton was making a painstaking effort to concentrate upon a subject that irritated and bored him to extinction.

"Whats the title?"

"The original title was 'The Immense Pearl. I suggest 'The Pinnacle'".

"Peenuckle" repeated Minton, raising his voice virtuously. "What for Peenuckle. The censors won't stand for pictures about card games".

Mable stared.

"I said: 'The Pinnacle'".

"Sure I heard you. Peenuckle's a gambling card game. Do you want to get Filmo into trouble again with Mr. Hays? What for do we have a Scenario editor for?"

Whenever Minton became excited he lapsed into his mother tongue, which was not English.

Mable could barely keep a straight face, as he explained the difference between "Pinnacle" and "Peenuckle".

~~Minton presented~~

"Well, well whats it all about?"

"About a Dame that steals a big Pearl from---"

"Cheesis! Cut out the details. How much is it?"

Mable drew his chair up to Minton's. Minton's hand went to his ear. He nodded as the Editor explained that they need'nt buy the rights, as he had so rewritten the story that they could produce it <sup>partially</sup> as an original. ~~Of course he'd have to make some change through a dummy author---say, about \$7500. and lowering his voice to a whisper. Of course, there's be a fifty fifty break between them.~~

"O.K." said the General Manager of Filmo. "Suits me".

A strange, raucous noise was pulsing through the room. On a large soft couch, stretched out full length, the much harassed great Russian director snored stertorously.

Minton and Mable laughed. Just as he was about to leave the manager's office, Mable turned back.

"By the way, I'm recommending a raise of \$5. a week in the salary of one of the readers".

"What for?"

"She's worth it".

Minton gave him a sly wink.

"Friend of yours?"

"No, no--nothing like that" replied the other impatiently. "Don't even know her by sight".

"Whats her name?"

"Mercer--Jane Mercer".

Minton scratched his head. Where had he heard that name before. His eyes suddenly jumped; he grinned like a coyote.

"You mean Blanton's girl?"

Mable frowned. He had little sympathy with Minton so far as his woman ~~madness~~ craze was concerned.

"Don't believe theres anything to that story. He gave her a boost when she first came on. Thats about all. He's been on location now several weeks".

Minton's tongue moistened his lips softly.

"Send her in to me, will you. I'd like to look her over".

"I'd keep hands off, if I were you" said Mable.



"Theres someone else on the lot thats nuts about her".

"You mean Harron?"

"Harron---and he's got ~~got a great~~

~~you know~~. I'd rather have him on my side of the fence than  
the other".

"O.K. then".

Minton made a notation on a pad.

"Three dollar raise" said he. "Name?"

"Jane Mercer".

"J. Merson" wrote the General Manager.

~~Which explains the way in which Jane Mercer's salary  
was raised from \$30. a week to \$33.50.~~

## Chapter XIII.

Every day Jane studied the Production sheet. Not even to herself would she admit that ~~through~~ through this sheet she was enabled to check up on the whereabouts of Blanton. He was "on location" in Nevada, doing a picture entitled "The City of Restless Love". Singularly enough, Jane had not realized that he would probably return to Filmo. "Rushes" of his picture were coming in each day, and the director was due at any time to go over them with his cutter.

~~She was walking through~~

She was crossing the little street before the Studio Inn. The screen doors swung open and a number of men came out. Millie felt the tense clasp of Jane's hand on her arm. There was a short, breathless pause. The blood came and went in Jane's cheeks. Millie saw her lips forming in a mechanical smile and following the direction of Jane's violet eyes she saw Edmund Blanton. He was lighting his pipe. His hand was cupped about the lighted match, and his eyes looked out above the pipe straight into Jane's. Jane smiled as she bowed, but Blanton's face was like a mask as silently he touched his cap. The screen door snapped behind the girls. Jane was still smiling strangely as the waitress pulled out the table and they took ~~their~~ seats against the wall.

"It's all right Millie" she said. "I lived through it".

Lived through it! She had imagined this moment, when once again she would see Blanton. Oh, she had assured herself that she would smile--never let him know how terribly he had



hurt her.

Now it was all over. They had passed each other with a smile and a nod. That was how it was in life. A smile and a nod.

His face, cold as steel. No unsteadiness in the hand that touched his cap. He had pulled on his pipe. That was all her passing had meant to him. Oh! Why should she agonize and analyse over this man's mere glance. She had a fierce desire that he too might feel a dagger in his heart. Then, instantly she took back that ~~holy~~ wish. She tried to drive her mind to a consideration of other matters---the food on the plate before her--what Millie was saying.

Suddenly she said:

"Millie--he looked awfully thin--did'nt he?"

"I only glanced at him" said Millie.

Jane took a sip of iced tea. She tried to eat the sandwich Millie had ordered for her. She set it back on the plate.

"I've got to quit" she said. "You may as well know the worst. I've only been pretending that nothing matters--- that we're just poor little pawns on the checkerboard of fate, and we move this way and that, and its of no consequence whether some of us become crushed and broken and stepped on or swept away or whether we go up or whether we go down. I've been tryi to pretend that this thing we call Love is just a delusion-- autosuggestion---but now I know it all does matter! It terribly matters! Love is real! Its torture. I feel uprooted and torn. I'm talking and talking because if I don't I'll break down--c(y--scream---Oh--Millie--Millie!"



"Sit sideways Jane" said Millie. "That bird by the post is watching us, and whatever you do don't cry. Keep a stiff upper lip till we get out of here. Come along!"

A boy brought Jane a note. The words swam before her. She tried to steady herself, to re-read that note from Edmund Blanton:

"Jane:

I have talked with Tillie. She has told me that you do not wish to remain at Filmo. I shall only be in Hollywood a few days, and I promise you I will stay off the Filmo lot. I will return to location very soon again.

Jane---I deserve the worst you can think of me. Its not on my account I ask you to stay; but on yours. Miss Dutton has told me of the splendid work you are doing. Atta, little girl! You must not stop now. You are due for a place at the top. God bless and keep you.

Edmund Blanton".

She put her face down upon that sheet of paper. No tears came, for now Jane was conscious of a strange exhilaration and excitement. She had a passionate longing to do something powerful and beautiful; to make her mark in the Movie world world---his world. To justify his faith in her!

## Chapter XLV.

Jane's telephone rang. Miss Dutton was on the wire. She spoke with her usual brevity.

"I've interested a director in your story. He's on his way to your office now. Sell him the idea of doing it".

Jane was so surprised and thrilled that she forgot to even thank Miss Dutton. With considerable excitement she awaited the director, and started nervously when she heard his tap upon the door. Harron stood beaming upon her from the threshold.

"Oh how do you do" said Jane. "Won't you come in?"

She had forgotten Harron's existence. He had been away for several weeks.

"Sure will. May I sit?"

"Certainly".

"Smoke?"

"Yes, do. No--" as he extended the case.

Harron watched Jane through the rising smoke haze. He knew she was anxiously waiting for him to say something about her story. He leaned his elbows on the desk-- gave her the benefit of his dull attention.

Pretty little serious dear she was! Talented too.  
~~Great~~ Rare combination that in Hollywood--beauty and brains!

He squashed out the light from his cigarette.



"Tied up on this job?"

"Tied up?"

"Under contract?"

"Don't make me laugh. Fancy me under contract".

"You will be--some day. That was a pip of a story you wrote. I'm going to do it. I'll have Minton transfer you to my office. We'll do a bit of collaboration upon the treatme and then get at the continuity".

Jane was so thrilled and excited she could hardly than thank him. Harron's inconstaht gaze scanned her office.

"Got anything else?"

Jane pulled down from the shelf a number of manuscrip Her eyes were shining; her heart was dancing. She did not th think of Harron as a man; he was the great director who would give her her opportunity. Blanton's prejudices no longer affected her. She would prove, through this very director that his belief in her was justified.

With several of her stories under his arm, and with a friendly smile, Harron flapped a soft hand in her direction and said:

"Bye-bye--till we meet again".

Jane sat down, her chin pillowed on her hand. She tried to visualize different Filmo players in her "Rose Petals". Little Marion Forrest for the lead. George Harriman for the young doctor.

There was a rat-tat on her door.

"Johnny Heglin calking!" announced Johnny himself.

"Busy?"

"Not especially".



"How about a dip in the ocean at Santa Monica?"

"Love it!"

As he was helping her into his Roadster, Johnny stared at her quizzically.

~~She~~ "Can I believe my eyes. Are you actually smiling?"

Jane laughed.

"All of a sudden I feel young and foolish again" she said.

The Bearcat (Johnny's roadster) made a spurt forward. They went tearing down the narrow Filme street, just escaping bumping into a truck by a hair's breath. Jane said breathlessl

"Stop speeding. You sc~~are~~<sup>are</sup> me to death!"

"Good for you to get scared. Jerks your liver into shape".

Holding on to the wildly careering Bearcat, Jane cried above the rattle of the car (the muffler was open)

"Theres nothing the matter with my liver. For goodness sakes slow ~~up~~! Besides I've something terrifically important to tell you".

Johnny slowed down to the normal speed of forty miles.

"All right McGinty. Whats on your chest?"

"I'm to have one of my stories produced?"

"How come?"

"Well a certain director is interested in my 'Rose Petals'"

"Thats a slush title".

"I know, but its sure fire box office" said Jane, laughing at her ability to reel off the studio jargon terms.



"Who's the director?"

"Martin Stuart Harron".

"Harron! Great gods and little fishes".

The Bearcat spun around in a temperamental circle and then resumed its bumpety course.

"We'll be in the ditch first thing you know".

"By heck I'd rather dump you in the ditch than see you working for that swine".

"Don't be silly"?

"You don't know what I know about him. His reputation stinks. Keep a million miles from him I'm advising you".

"You can't believe half the stories one hears in Hollywood. Besides all, I know about him is he's done some splendid pictures and is a famous director".

"Beans! What's being famous amount to anyway? I'm damned if I would'nt just as soon be a top notch carpenter or ditch digger as some swell headed egomaniac on a Movie lot. By God! I'm fed up with this Movie Mania---setting up a lot of tin gods and falling down and worshipping them".

"My! you are sore are'nt you?"

"Sore? I'm fed up with the whole crazy patchwork game. Everybody's half mad in it, anyway".

"Well nearly everything big or new that ever sprang into being was usually denounced as mad. Its not such a bad sign that we all seem mad in this business of the Movies".

"Bah! It is'nt the business thats wrong---its the people in it-- the parasites and blood suckers and the rest have fastened themselves like octopuses upon the industry. The They're exploiting what might have been the greatest of all



arts. Pick me out one truly great and inspired executive on our lot and I'll match you with a dozen petty second and third raters who should be running honky tonks or gents furnishings. They are the fellows astride the industry, strangling it. And whats the result? Theres no order, no morale, no system. Its all chaos. Nobody knows or cares what they're striving for. Its all hit and miss. No one has any legitimate end in view. They're just leaping after straw and feathers".

Jane said rather sadly:

"Whats life anyway but a leaping after straws and feathers?as you call them?"

Johnny was sunk in a deep gloom; his young wrathful face completely clouded over. Presently, put of the tail of his eye he gave a glimpse at the girl beside him.

"Look-a-here---what does a nice kid like you want to be mixed up in this game for anyway?"

"Well, in the first place, I have to work, and this is the pleasantest work I know of".

"I tell you something a damed sight pleasanter".

"What?"

Johnny paused, took a breath, made his momentous proposition:

"Marrying a man --like me, for instance".

"Johnny! You take my breath away. Are you proposing to me?"

"Thats just exactly what I'm doing".

She had an inclination to cry. Her bright, gay moment had passed. She realized that behind Johnny's kidding there was a depth of real feeling.



"O Johnny, I'm so sorry".

He took his rejection manfully, though he was dogged enough to persist.

"While theres life theres hope" he said, with a resumption of his usual light tone.

He stared solemnly ahead, and then, not looking at Jane he put the question:

"Any one else, Jane?"

She was silent.

Johnny said then, very softly:

"Well he's a damned lucky dog, whoever he may be; but if he's responsible for that look of hurt I've seen in your eyes, Jane, I hope he dies with his boots on. That's a cowboy expression, meaning the worst ever".

"Don't wish it then, Johnny" she said gently.

## Chapter XVI.

Jane was reading the technical continuity of her own story. Stretched out in a luxurious overstuffed arm chair, Harron watched her. Her long lashes made a shadow upon her flushed cheeks. The lovely outline of her form showed through the sheer georgette of her dress. She was entirely unconscious of the devouring gaze of the man watching her through half closed, smouldering eyes.

He had boasted once that he was "the waiting kind". She was worth waiting for. He never doubted that sooner or later she would be his. It was merely a matter of trapping her at the psychological time and in the right place.

He shifted his position to get a better view of the white neck that suggested the virginal young bosom below. Hot waves of fire seemed to course through him. He would have liked to tear the script from her hand; to drag her to his knees. He was mad about her. Her cool detachment; her impersonal contact with him, inflamed and baffled him. He had found most women easy; but not this girl--not this Jane person.

"Well, how about dinner?" he demanded. "Do you see that clock"?

It was nearly seven. Most of the Film employees had long since gone home. A couple of office boys still were in the outer office.



For two weeks she had been having daily "dinner conferences" with Harron after the day's work. He well knew that she was being talked about. He took her always to such public places as the Marathon, "Larry's", patronized mainly by the Motion Picture people.

He was something of a glutton, though epicurean in his selection. ~~after~~ He would give the dinner ~~slowly~~ order slowly, and in detail to the deferential waiter, whom he would dismiss finally with a flip of his hand. Then he would concentrate upon Jane. They would go over certain scenes and sequences. This night, he became affected by the music and clapped his hands.

"Shall we have a dance, dearie?"

She no longer minded being called "dearie". Movie people used endearing terms to each other quite freely.

~~She didn't want to dance~~

The dancers were loudly clapping for a repetition of the number just ended. Harron's voice was quite loud, and the man at the table next to them, moved his chair back.

quite suddenly Jane had a strange psychic feeling. Though she had not turned her head, she knew that Edmund Blanton was at that table next to theirs. She was over-taken by a surge of panic. She was afraid to ~~turn her~~ move. Her eyes grew wide and dark, and she was scarce conscious of what she was doing, as the insistent Harron drew her to her feet. They were on the dance floor.

Like one in a dream, Jane moved to the swaying strains of the music. Though she could not see him, she knew that Blanton was standing up--that he was looking at her. Floods



of emotion swept over her.

Now she knew that all if these months she had been deluding herself with the fancied thought that her work sufficed, compensated. The ~~mere~~ knowledge of his mere presence had the power to set her heart aflame. She had a passionate longing to escape from the dance floor---to go to him---to hear his voice again--yes even if in condemnation---to look into his eyes---ah! to feel his lips--even though it be a sin of sins.

The dancers were dancing so closely together on the limited floor space that they barely seemed to move. The promiscuous crush of bodies around her; the strains of the music, the hot breath in her face of the man holding her closely, nauseated her.

"I've had enough. Oh lets go back".

She broke from his arms, moved back, collided against a couple crushed in each others arms and moving to the simous and suggestive motions of the new dance. At that moment some inspired fool turned off all the lights. Jane found herself penned in and crushed. Someone reached out grasped her. She was being hugged fiercely. Animal arms encompassed her. Hot lips pressed hers madly. She struggled wildly, savagely.

~~She wanted to~~

The lights went on again. She was one of a milling mass of people; some of them still dancing; others battling their way to tables. A breathless pandemonium of laughter and screams of relief or regret when the lights went on. Harron pushed his way through the crush,



cleared a passage and escorted her back to the table.

"All right, baby?"

She answered faintly:

"Oh this is terrible--terrible!"

Her hand covered her lips, as though they were unclean. Her eyes darted wildly about the room. Where was he? Oh where was Edmund Blanton? She could not find him. She felt soiled, ravaged.

"I can't stay here. I want to get home" she said.

Harron was all concern and consideration.

When they were seated in his car, he put his arm about her and bade her rest against him. She did not resent the arm, but no longer felt the need of it.

"The air was stifling in there. "

"I've been working you too hard" he said tenderly.

"We'll call a let up".

"I don't mind the work" said Jane, thinking that the lighted streets seemed like those in some fading dream. Suddenly she had a poignant recollection of that other night, when she ~~was~~ ridden down Hollywood Boulevard in Blanton's car. ~~Hundreds of lights flashing and glaring all around them.~~

~~The halt.~~

How happy she had been! What a gorgeous sense of warmth; of sheer trust and joy. How safe she had felt. His whole personality had emanated strength and something big and fine. She remembered how his hand had reached for hers.

At the door of her apartment, Harron said sympathetically:

"Poor baby, you're all in. Now get a good night's sleep!"

His lips grazed her cheek. A "fatherly" goodnight kiss, at which she took no offense, because she was scarcely aware of it of of him .