

TOMORROW'S PROMISE

by Temple Bailey

(Continued from last week)

Anne waked the next morning with a sense of impending disaster. Hitherto her wakings had been a sort of resurrection. Each morning had brought its mood of anticipated joy. Now nothing was right. The fear that had oppressed her the night before in the garden was intensified.

There is no such heartbreak for the young as disillusionment. Anne had known that the world that claimed her father and mother was not the world in which she lived with Vicky. But she had thought of it as a gay and irresponsible world to which Elinor and Francis belonged by right of their beauty and brilliance.

But now she wanted none of that world which belonged to her father and mother, for with the evil that had come into the garden, her own Eden had been lost. Here were David and her mother, two beloved beings thrown from their pedestals. There was left unsmirched only her adored father. And he must never know what she knew.

She bathed and began to dress for her ride, tying her hair with a black ribbon and donning riding breeches and a soft white shirt. It was when she looked for her pin that she found her pearls were missing.

She remembered seeing them last night, a little white heap in the moonlight. She couldn't be mistaken, yet she opened drawer after drawer, searching. At last she decided that Vicky had put them away and there was no need for worry.

There were other things, indeed, to think about. The ride with her mother, for example. She knew now why she and Garry had been asked to play propriety for Elinor and David.

She was pulling her hard little hat down to her ears when there was a tap on the door. "Mr. Garry is here, Miss Anne."

"I'll be down in a moment, Marion."

The maid had a letter on her tray.

"Wells found this in the box." Anne tore open the letter and saw a sheaf of closely written sheets. She turned to the last page and looked at the name "Charles." He had written:

"I wish you were here, without your belligerent squint. I wish you were here because I have some things to tell you. I told you my name was 'Charles' and let it go at that. But I want you to know that the name that follows is a good name, and one I shall not disgrace. But it is one that is at the moment in the daily papers and in the mouths of men.

"And the reason it is there is because I loved a woman and couldn't make her love me enough. So she found someone else. And now she is dragging it all through the courts that some day we may be free. But I shall never be free. For a thing like that smirches and binds a man's soul in chains. And I shall always be bound. But the thought of you lessens my hurt.

"I wish you were here so that I might tell you not to marry Garry. Love is more than you give him. More than he can give you. And marriage is a sacred thing. I can tell you that though I have missed the standards and chose a woman who laughed with me. We said that when we ceased to love we would go our separate ways. Now she has gone her way, but I cannot go mine in peace.

"So don't marry Garry, even though you never marry. For you are what you are by the grace of God. May He have you in His keeping!"

When she had finished reading, Anne stood very still with the letter in her hand. A strange letter. A wonderful letter. The things that Charles had said to her seemed to lift her heavy heart to a quickened and happier rhythm.

The maid was again tapping at the door. "Mrs. Ordway says she is waiting."

"I'm ready, Marion." She stuck the letter in her blouse, then as a thought struck her she said, "Ask Miss Vicky if she put away my pearls."

Vicky came back with the maid to say that she had seen nothing of the necklace. "But it will undoubtedly turn up."

Elinor and Garry were in the living room before the fire, with the coffee on a little table.

"David has been waiting half an hour at the crossroads," Elinor said impatiently. "He said he's come around by way of the club and meet us. What kept you, Anne?"

"I couldn't find my pearls."

Elinor's hand, as she passed Anne's cup, shook a little, but her voice was calm. "You'll find them. Now drink your coffee."

Garry, very handsome in brown whipcord and shining boots, said, "I'll bet it was that fellow in the meadow."

"Garry?" Anne demanded.

"I'll bet he took them."

Elinor glanced from one to the other. "What man?"

"Last night. We saw his fire and went to look, and Anne sat and talked to him."

"Mother, he was delightful."

"Don't stop to argue," Elinor led the way to the horses and in a few moments they were off.

David was waiting at the crossroads as they came up and he and Elinor, a stunning pair as they sat their horses, led the way.

In the years that followed Anne often wondered what her life would have been had she not thundered across the fields to the highway that clear November morning.

Up one hill and down another went the speeding horses. The river was in sight, but before they reached it they had to cross the highway that led to Baltimore. And coming toward them down that highway was a small shabby car driven at breakneck speed by a wild-eyed youth.

He jumped out as he saw them. "There's been an accident. Back there. A car went over the embankment. It must have skidded."

A moment later the four of them were looking down at an inert form in white flannels and a white sweater, crumpled up at the foot of the hill.

Anne's heart seemed to stop beating. She saw David jump from his horse and run. She heard Garry's voice. "By jinx, it's that man."

And Elinor was saying, "He seems badly hurt."

Anne neither moved nor spoke. She had a strange feeling that she was surrounded by a great space in which sounds seemed to come from a thousand miles away, faint and far. David's voice. "My dear fellow,

drink this."

Elinor was off her horse now and helping competently. They had brought water from the stream and David had his flask between the pale lips.

Then again the voices, far and faint.

David's. "His heart is beating stronger than it did."

And Elinor's. "Look, David, he's coming back!"

And now in all that empty space Anne saw only the lashes that flickered up and down and up again, and the blue eyes that passing all the others rested on the girl sitting immovable on her horse.

She dismounted, crossed the road and knelt beside the prostrate figure. "It's Anne," she said simply and was rewarded by a fleeting smile.

"You know him?" There was amazement in David's voice.

"Garry and I met him last night in the meadow."

There was a movement of the still figure, a quiet voice speaking. "My name is Charles—Charles Patterson."

Anne saw a quick look flash from David to her mother. "Charles Patterson of Cecil?" David asked.

"Yes."

"Of course. I met you one year ago, but I haven't seen you since."

"I've lived abroad a lot." He winced as David tried to lift his head. "I think my arm is broken."

"We're going to get you up to Mrs. Ordway's."

Garry stopped to ask Elinor, "Who are the Pattersons of Cecil?"

"My dear boy, they are everything that is old and entrenched."

"Oh, well, I'll bet he's a black sheep," and Garry went off with a last furtive look at Anne.

The shabby boy proved to be strong, and with David's help got Charles into the car. David sat beside him and the boy drove. Elinor and Anne followed on their horses, leading David's mare.

As they rode along Elinor said, "So that's Charles Patterson! Have you been reading about him in the papers?"

"No."

"His wife is getting a divorce. It's created a great sensation. She charges him with cruelty and desertion and the sympathy it appears, is all on her side."

"Why?"

"Oh, a man like that! Rich and good looking. The chances are that he's found somebody else."

"Why should you think he has found somebody else?" Anne faltered.

"Well, men do. It's a man's world, Anne."

Charles Patterson, racked with pain, was glad of the drug that dulled his senses. He slept for three hours after his arm was set and waked to find himself in a big old-fashioned room, and by his side a young woman in white linen.

"I'm Vicky," she said. Vicky rose as Francis Ordway entered. He came up to the bed and spoke heartily. "Well, look who's here! Do you remember me, Patterson?"

Charles took the outstretched

hand. "I'll say I do. You visited our old house in Cecil when I was a boy."

"Yes. After that I lost track of you. You went abroad, didn't you?"

"Yes. Foreign correspondent."

"I remember. You did a good job of it."

There was a moment's awkward pause before Charles spoke again. "Of course you've been reading about me in the papers. My divorce and all that. You needn't hesitate to speak of it. I'm hardened." But he could not hide the flush on his cheeks.

Francis said, "The doctor tells me you had better stay in bed for a few days, and I want you to feel that the house is yours." He walked toward the door. "I have to dress for dinner. Vicky will look after you. The rest of us are dining out party."

As he went out he said to Vicky, "What's this about Anne's pearls?"

"We can't find them anywhere," she told him. "She says she left them on the dresser last night. They were gone this morning."

"What have you done about it?"

"Nothing. Mrs. Ordway is sure that Anne has mislaid them. She went to Baltimore after her ride and I didn't like to act without her sanction."

"Elinor was in Baltimore?"

"Yes."

"Did Drake drive her?"

"No. She went with Mr. Elliott."

"When did she get home?"

"At tea time."

A frowning silence. Then, "I'll speak to her about the pearls. It's probably a case for the police. Anne just told me, I picked her up at the country club."

He went off and Vicky followed, Charles lay listening to the beat of the rain against the window, his mind in a turmoil. So that was what had happened the night before in the moonlight! He saw once more the

woman on the stairs—that flash of pink and silver!

(To Be Continued)

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