

## OVER THE BORDER FOR HER

MADGE MACBETH

CHRISTINA CONWAY laid the letter down, and looked uneasily at the screen made by the morning paper. It was held by two thick white hands that somehow made her think of Miles in his stubbornest mood. Usually, however, she was able to manage him, so perhaps this time, too...

Feeling his wife's gaze upon him, Miles suddenly lowered the paper and demanded:

"What did you say, my dear?"

"I didn't speak."

"Oh! Finished your letters already?"

"No. Only the one from Diana."

"Diana?" Miles wondered what was up. Queer, the way Christina behaved whenever the girl was mentioned. He'd never seen her, himself. He'd like to, in a way; just to satisfy his curiosity. "What's her news?" he asked, casually.

"Well, dear, it's rather a long letter. Odd. She sort of suggests that we have her, here."

"Oh?"

"It's this war," Christina complained. "So upsetting. I thought I had everything settled, and now..."

Miles nodded. He knew how capably Christina settled things. Had she not settled him among the top-flight men of his profession? Had she not kept him from the diversions and distractions which he would have enjoyed and which but for her would have settled him in the large group of good but inconspicuous lawyers who were over-running the country? Undoubtedly! He had rebelled often enough in the old days, but now he admitted that she had been right, and he was reconciled. Mostly.

"How do you mean 'settled' "? he questioned.

Christina filled his cup, broke a lump of sugar, putting half on his saucer—he was a little over-weight, perhaps—and observed that Diana always seemed to be unlucky about her trips. "Even coming here. Something's happened, every time."

Miles said he didn't know they had asked her.

"Oh, yes, dear! Well, not quite definitely, perhaps, but Diana understands. One's own sister, you know..." Christina's voice trailed off, vaguely.

She was not the exquisitely-fragile creature he had married. She had thickened and strengthened with the years, but she hid these facts; the one under cleverly-cut clothes, and the other under an air of pretty helplessness. Although Miles was no longer deceived, she still made him feel that his was the deciding voice, that he was masterful and protective, and a brute when he opposed her. Besides, she made him comfortable; oh, exceedingly comfortable.

"Expect the poor little thing's lonely since her husband died." He spoke gruffly into his paper.

"Likely," agreed Christina, wondering if Diana were actually a little thing or if she, too, had put on weight. And gone grey. Christina's hair was a lovely white, but she hated it. Her chin was not exactly double, but then her face never had been heart-shaped—sharp, she called it—like Diana's. And she really didn't look fat. She could appear almost slender.

"Well, perhaps a little visit..." Miles was saying.

But Christina talked on, as though unconscious of the interruption.

"As you say, dear, the poor child's probably lonely. She talks sentimentally about family ties, but I'm bound to say that they didn't seem so vital to her before Horace's death. She didn't care so much about me, then. I've been hurt more than I can tell you." A plaintive note suited Christina.

"But it must have been difficult to go visiting while what's his name—her husband—was alive. A chronic invalid."

"Her own fault," cried Christina, more sharply than she realized. "What could she expect, marrying a man thirty years older than herself? I warned her, but she wouldn't listen. She's hard to help; so headstrong."

"We might help by having her..."

"She inherited poor father's weaknesses," Christina sighed, "or maybe she caught them, living with him so long. A pair of vagabonds they were; impractical, irresponsible, incorrigible. They used to wander about the woods with sandwiches instead of eating proper meals at the table, and they read poetry half the night when Diana should have been studying mathematics, or something. They gave away their money—what little there was of it—and their decent clothes, wearing the rags themselves. And this, to them, was happiness. Mind you, happiness! An awful upbringing for a child! I've always been so thankful that mother left them and took me away to live with her."

Miles said nothing, politely.

"And where do you think Diana is, now?" Christina demanded, savouring the triumph with which she would watch her bomb explode.

"No idea," muttered her husband.

"Why, she's practically *stranded* in some weird West Indian island!"

"Good Lord!" Miles stared across the table. Then, after a pause, "Is she—er—alone?"

Christina admitted that no one was mentioned, not that that proved anything.

"I didn't mean that kind of alone," Miles hastened to explain. "I only meant that she oughtn't to be alone. War is war. Anything might happen. Why the devil did she go travelling at this time?"

"Well, you see, dear," Christina made her large blue eyes look larger, "some little while ago, Diana wrote that she'd rented her house for a year. It was too big, and too empty, and her nerves were bad, and she felt that we should know each other better, and could she come here and..."

"Yes?"

"Of course, it goes without saying that I would *love* to have had her, but I'm not always the one to be considered. Your big case was coming on, and any house guest at that time would have created a disturbance that would have been hard on you, so..."

"Yes?"

"...so I wrote her a most tactful and affectionate letter, sending our love and advising her to try yeast for her nerves—three cakes daily—and for distraction, to take a trip to Paris."

"Oh!"

"I don't know about the yeast, but she started on her journey, sailing on some ridiculous foreign ship—poor father to the life!—that took her first to the West Indies. She was there when war was declared, and now this has happened!"

"I see."

"Her house is rented for the year, so she can't go home, and has nowhere else to go. Neither she nor poor father ever saw the importance of making useful friends."

"Oh!"

"I wish, dear, you wouldn't keep on saying 'Oh,' that way. Can't you make some suggestion?"

Miles suggested again that Diana come immediately to them, especially as their previous invitations never had amounted

to anything. "Seems very queer, though, you couldn't have worked her in," he said.

Christina sighed and looked hurt. "Nothing queer about it," she contradicted. "Once," she checked the items on her pretty useless fingers, "we were just starting on a motor trip. I knew you were dead tired although you didn't say so, and a change always benefits me... Then, another time, we were having your room done over, and I didn't want to put you up in the third floor while Diana used the guest room. It's so hot and stuffy up there, even in this kind of weather."

"But..."

"Oh, yes, dear, you *could* have come in with me, but I never sleep well when we share a room. Oh, do let's think of something that will help the poor girl!"

Miles thought it would help to have Diana here.

"All right, dear. I'm simply delighted. Naturally, I want her. After all, she is my sister, but you..."

"What about me?"

Christina looked down at her plate, hesitating. "It isn't exactly you, dear, as much as it's Diana. I do so want you to enjoy her, make allowances for her—er—peculiarities, find her a pleasant companion rather than a distraction and a nuisance. You always have to remember her upbringing, poor child."

Miles said he would remember, and read a few lines of his paper.

"I'm so afraid you'll find her difficult," Christina's crooning voice flowed on. "She's not a bit like me, you know; so casual and unconventional. No sense of system or routine. Likely, she'll be late for meals. Diana's an impetuous sort of person, rushing into things, upsetting fixed plans, creating situations..."

"Oh, well..."

"For me, her gaiety will be a joy, but I'd hate to feel that you found her unrestful. Poor father used to call her vivid, or vital, or something of the kind. He said she was whimsical, whatever that might mean. And worse. He encouraged her to believe that she was bright and amusing, so she laughs and chats and sings—or at least, she did the last time I saw her. Heavens, can that have been eleven years ago?"

Miles looked forward pleasantly to a little gaiety.

"Precisely, dear, so long as you don't think it *noise*. After all, you're not used to it. You've never had to live with an entertaining person, or be talked to through your meals, called

up at the office, met and walked home with. And a thought has just popped into my head, Miles. . . ."

"Yes?"

"I'm wondering if she will find *us* dull, if we'd better not think of some more lively place for her to go. Apparently, she needs diversion."

Miles thought this over and presently said what about the West? He rather fancied the West, himself; the climate and all.

"No-n-no." Christina didn't think the West would do. "She wouldn't feel that she'd gone anywhere, if you know what I mean. Think again, dear."

Miles thought as he'd thought all along, that Diana had better come to them.

"Then, it's all settled," sighed Christina. "I'm so glad you feel that way. She'll probably arrive during the Bar Association meeting when the Telfords are with us, but that won't matter, will it? One of you will have to go up on the third floor. Do you mind, dear? It's not very nice to put a guest—the first time—you know what I mean—It may not be stuffy, but on the other hand. . . ."

"I don't quite see. . . ."

"And another thing," Christina put her finger-tips to her temples and closed her eyes, "will you round up some extra men? You see, we'll be five instead of four—I mean, we ought to be six; and you had better see about extra tickets for the dinners and things. Mercy!" She opened her eyes and looked helplessly at her husband. "I'm not nearly clever enough to cope with so many complications."

"What now?"

"Only the question of her clothes. She's probably given away what she had to indigent West Indians, and while she's *welcome* to anything of mine, the last time I saw her she was not only thin; she was scrawny. However, jumping back to the Telfords. . . Please be firm with the Judge, dear. If he should be impressed. . . ."

"What?"

"Well, there's no denying that Diana can be quite attractive, and she sort of calls attention to herself. You'll have to be prepared for that, Miles, dear. So, I say, be firm with the Judge, and get him off to yourself where you can discuss all the matters you planned."

Miles looked a long moment at the paper without seeing it.

"Hum. . . ." He hesitated. He hadn't pictured Diana as

making any particular demands upon him, creating situations, impressing Telford. And as for crowding him out of his room and his comfortable routine! Probably, Christina was exaggerating, but. . . With a shock, he realized how fixed in his habits he had become, how unprepared he was for impetuous changes in plans, delayed meals; for being met down town and deprived of his visits to the Club. And it was usually as hot as hell up on the third floor.

"Of course, if it's going to be inconvenient," he began, again.

"Unwise is a better word, dear," cooed Christina. "You've convinced me. Disappointed as I am, I see exactly what you mean. It's necessary for you to have an uninterrupted opportunity to put a little pressure on Judge Telford and do something about these appointments. I'm quite willing to do as you say and have Diana another time. As you so cleverly suspect, first thing we knew, it would be her party!"

"Very awkward," muttered Miles. "I don't see where. . ."

"I have an idea," cried Christina, almost gaily. "Give me that pencil, dear. I'll write out a cable which you can send on your way down town. We must catch her before she has a chance to leave."

Miles watched the clear, angular characters forming on the back of an envelope.

"Sorry, dear," Christina wrote: "Try Mexico."