The COAST of CHANCE

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SYNOPSIS.

At a private view of the Chatworth Company, Kerr, who is a suitor of Flora Chatworth, falls in love at first sight with a mysterious disappearing Harry Cleaver, who was present, described the case to Kerr, Flora, Gilsey, and her chaperon, Mrs. Ryder, who thought Harry "a little, little, little bit beautiful, spiritual yet big head." Flora meets Mr. Kerr, who is "Kerr of Kerr," and who is "making the rounds of the Chatworth in the opinion of an English chief." Flora's father, Mr. Chatworth, and Kerr are arranging about the journey. Kerr tells Flora that he has "fallen in love with a girl he saw in the Chatworth." Flora's father, on his return of the trip, Harry admits to Kerr that he is "Harry Cleaver, who used to be a Chatworth professional," as an engagement ring. An exquisite sapphire ring, which Kerr has purchased for Flora, he has not yet found it until it comes. The possessor of the ring seems to cast a spell over Kerr. Flora meets Harry at a Chatworth. Flora meets Kerr at a tea party.

CHAPTER VIII.—Continued.

She felt of the ring. She drew off her gloves and tried to look at it in the slim light, but couldn't get a gleam out of it. She was as impatient for the fights to go up that she might secret. Yet she couldn't help wondering why she had been that afternoon to get back from the luncheon and make sure it was still in the drawer. She must see it in spite of Clara at her right hand, whose little chiseled profile might turn upon her at any moment a full face of inquiry.

She held her left hand low in the shadow of her chair; and if as the lights went up again, there was any change in the sapphire, it was merely a sharper brilliance, as if, like an eye, it had moods, and this was one of its moments of excitement. In its extraordinary luster it seemed to possess a beauty that could not be valued; and she wanted to hold it up to Kerr, to see if she couldn't startle him out of his mood—to see if he wouldn't respond to it, "Yes, there is more in it than you can touch."

She turned to him with the daring flash of timid spirits. It was so sharp a motion that he started instantly from his reverie to meet it, but his alarmity was mechanical. She felt his smile he summoned was slow, as if he returned, from a long distance, a little painfully to his present surroundings.

The intermezzo was playing, and to speak under the music he leaned so close to her that the space between Turnbull and Gilsey, who sat beyond them, that he could see the pulse beat in her throat. Clara had offered him a cigarette, she had lighted herself one, and he had accepted it, but had not offered it, he had let it out of her.

He "behaved" somewhat stiffly—by-days, second and fourth.

He looked at her with a humorous twist of mouth. "What? So soldiers? Is that important? He wouldn't be mutilated, but at the worst she wouldn't be crippled. "Oh, dear, another people who come at other; sometimes it takes a chance."

"Does that mean that I may take a chance tomorrow?"

He was pressing her too hard. Why was he so anxious to see her again as he had not been the first night or yesterday or even ten minutes ago, when ten minutes ago, when she had been glad, was glad, was doing her best to put him off. She was absent a moment, considering the consequences and then, like him, she abandoned them. "I know a word she turned away from him. Her only desire now was to be with him, but to shield force her out of her non-committal attitude her "I wanted to shield herself from further pursuit."

He drew her glove over the ring. The lights were imminent. It would palely pink in the warm reflections of the red velvet curtains.

And what could Clara have seen, if she had seen at all, but Flora a little paler than usual with a hand that trembled; and blind worse could she conjecture than that she was being silly about Kerr? She turned slowly toward Kerr and looked at him with a courage that was part of her fear. But wasn't she, in a way, being silly about Kerr? What had happened? There was nothing left of it but her vague, unfounded fear.

And yet the thing had actually happened. Kerr was gone. Now he was back. He had been absent. Now she thought she had never seen him more distinctly present with the moment. Yet for all his cool looks and diffuse talk around her, but she felt uneasily that his concern was pointed at her. He only waited for the cover of the lights to come back to her single-handed.

She would have deflected his attack, but it was too quick, too unexpected for her to do more than sit helpless and let him lift up her left hand delicately between thumb and finger, as if in itself it was some rare, fragile, and, healing object, contemplate the sapphire unwinkingly. She had an instant when she thought she must cry out, but how impossible in the full publicity of her place—a pinnacle in the face of thousands! And after the first fluttered impulse came a certain reassurance in such a frank and trivial action. For all she knew, it is how could it be contrived otherwise? Was it not a commonplace interest? It must have been her fancy that discovered anything more than that in his first look. And even now, he had her hand lightly held, and reassured his monocle, and looking away from him, across the black house, she didn't know whether she was more reassured or troubled because he had not spoken a word. Yet he next moment he looked around at her.

"We shan't meet every evening in such a way as this," he said, and left the statement dangling unanswerable between them. It sounded portentous. Was he going to leave her? She could only look at him with a reflex of her trouble in her face.

"Are you surprised that I thought of this?" he inquired, and, as she nodded as you seem to think that I should want to see you again. I don't want to leave it to chance, do you?" He put the question at her so politely, with such a casual eye, and such dry politeness, that it was a little, a little, a little,