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" BELOVED INFIDEL "

by Sheilah Graham

"I'm having a few people in for drinks," Doug told him apologetically in the elevator. "Drop in."

John O'Brien hesitated, then said, "Sure -- thanks --."

His dislike of Douglas Taylor dated from their Freshmen days at Yale. They lived in the same apartment building overlooking the East River. They were continually meeting in the elevator. It was simpler to keep up a show of friendship.

Douglas was thirty-nine, fat, popular at parties because of his reputation for wit and his booming laugh. He ~~wrote a smart, but brief piece for a smart, weekly magazine.~~ He was never tired of telling that he had not tasted liquor or kissed a woman until he was thirty-one. Nowadays he did ~~too~~ much of both.

John O'Brien was thirty-eight, but looked thirty, particularly when he smiled. It was a charming, slow smile that lingered in his thickly lashed ~~blue~~ eyes several seconds after his mouth had reverted to its normal, rather sad lines. He had the build of a lightweight boxer, ~~broad well-developed shoulders, narrow hips, strong, well-shaped legs.~~ He walked like a fighter with his head slightly tucked into his neck, his arms swinging, and fists closed as though ready to strike. ~~He had~~ been the best looking man of his class at Yale. ~~If you wanted to annoy him in those days, you called him 'Beautiful'.~~ The lines and coloring of his face was still like a masculine edition of Priscilla Lane.

At twenty-one he had ~~been persuaded to~~ exhibited his drawings at Knoedler's New York Galleries. He ~~was the first~~ had gone ~~American artist to go no~~ further than home -- West Virginia -- for his models. ~~The critics raved over his~~ A pictorial weekly brutal, realistic portrayals ~~of decayed Virginia gentlemen, their land, their negro servants.~~ ~~Life magazine had~~ Life magazine used his picture on the cover and ~~used~~ six pages to eulogize and reproduce his work.

Shortly afterwards, he married beautiful ~~auburn~~ ~~haired~~ Alicia Sanders. They were the most popular couple of ~~that crazy decade~~ the early Thirties. ~~You didn't count unless you knew them -- or said you did.~~ No party of the intelligentsia or rich Long Island set was considered a success unless John and Alicia O'Brien were there. He was glamour boy number one and his gay vivid wife trailed happily along in the cloud of his glory.

Alicia ~~had died~~ was dead six years now ago. Since then, John had been variously reported as dying of tuberculosis, living ~~with~~ a ~~brood of native women and children~~ cannibal in a South Sea Island, shot as a spy by Franco's soldiers in Spain, and running an opium establishment in China. He had turned up in New York six months ago, taciturn, unobstrusive, with an unexpected line of defeat round his sensitive mouth.

He decided not to go to Taylor's cocktail party. But he went.

"You must have guessed I'd be there," Mara Mackenzie told him later.

There were not many people in the room. "It's a small party," Doug explained, ~~with his habitual air of apology.~~ John sat down in a corner, took a long time to light a cigarette, and through the smoke glanced acutely around the room.

~~Usual bunch of dull people, he decided.~~ There was a bald movie actor, who laughed in between the pauses of Douglas' anecdotes. Another painter whom John knew slightly. Three women he did not know ~~-- hard masculine types.~~ A ~~short, blonde~~ French-man who discussed the ~~high~~ awful prices of New York ~~very~~ earnestly with an Englishman -- and, listening to them with an expression of fascinated interest in her vaguely up-slanting eyes, a blonde girl of about ~~21~~ twenty-one, with a ~~cream~~ skin ~~as fine as smooth note paper~~ like peach-colored note paper.

~~Douglas thrust a drink into John's hand. He put it on a table and wondered why in hell he had come.~~ One of the hard, masculine women tried to draw him out:

"Are you living in New York now?" she asked with sterile vivacity.

He said, "Yes," -- ~~And "No," when she wondered whether he had seen the Linders lately.~~ and after ten minutes stood up.

"You're not going, John," Douglas said with a great show of disappointment when John walked towards the door.

"I'm expecting a long distance call," he lied ~~glibly~~.

"Come back afterwards," said Doug by the door. "We'll wait for you."

~~"Like hell I will,"~~ John said to himself ~~and escaped.~~

~~He called~~ Doug ~~from~~ his apartment, ~~but Doug wouldn't accept his excuses.~~ called him immediately an

"Come on, we're all going out to dinner." And he mentioned ~~a feminine~~ Ruth Somerby — a name that seemed to belong to the ~~attractive blonde girl~~ peach-colored note-paper blonde girl. An unexpected flicker of anticipation touched John.

"All right," ~~he said,~~ I'll be right over."

But Ruth turned out to be one of the hard, masculine

women. And the other blonde girl had gone. He had a miserable evening that was not bettered in retrospect when he heard a few days later from Eddie Barnett, ~~one of the few men he still liked,~~ that Ruth was dining out on the lie of how John had ~~tried to seduce~~ made passes at her, and of how she had repulsed him.

"There was a lovely blonde girl at Doug's party," John told Eddie. "Round face, ~~questing lips~~, extraordinary sheer Mongolian looking eyes -- "

Sounds like Mara Mackenzie," Eddie laughed.

"Anything wrong with her?"

"No -- she's going to marry Lord Mulhaven -- or rather the Earl of. Doug was giving the party for them."

"Oh," said John and would have dismissed her from his ~~mind~~ thoughts -- but Eddie said:

"He went back to London the day after the party -- I'll call her and see if she's free tonight."

She was not free.

"Put off your concert," Eddie persisted on the telephone. "A friend of mine -- Carter John O'Brien -- ~~wants to meet you --~~ Oh, you won't come for me -- but for him --" Eddie laughed, put the receiver down -- "She's coming, ~~-- you made a hit with her too.~~"

They went to the Stork Club.

"She's passionate," John decided, ~~enjoying her glowing face.~~ Her slanting eyes weren't grey after all, they were green, rimmed with gold.

He asked her to dance. She was

~~Here was~~ about half a foot ~~six inches~~ shorter than John and when she jerked her head back, her thick, ~~yellow-brown~~ dark, gold hair tickled his chin.

"Is it getting in your mouth?" she asked him once with a soft ~~giggle~~ chuckle and quick throw-back of her head. She stared confidently ~~into his oval eyes. He~~ a turn and he smiled, enjoying her coquetry.

"I like your nose," he told her.

She self-consciously touched it, and opened her mouth with a quick intake of breath ~~that made John want to kiss her.~~ Their eyes held together and the smile left both faces, leaving behind a faint anger.

~~"I'm sorry my fiance had to leave -- I'd like you to have met him," Mara said breathlessly.~~

"When are you getting married?" he asked absently.

"In about three months." ~~The words had a sobering effect on her. Why did George leave her exposed to attractive men like this? She must watch her step.~~ Watch your step? A working girl didn't have a chance to be a Countess every day. She followed John as he they weaved in and out of tables ~~until they reached~~ To their own.

Mara looked at her diamond and platinum watch, a gift ~~from~~ of George Mulhaven.

"Don't go yet," John ~~pleaded.~~ pled.

"One more highball," Eddie ~~said~~ objected and went to the bar. ~~When she looked at John again, his smile had a warm, friendly quality.~~

"I could talk to you and you'd understand," she said. And Under his ~~almost naive~~ questioning she told him the highlights of her existence. How she had been married at eighteen ~~to an~~ and ~~service~~ Army officer -- that they were divorced five years later, that she was now twenty-seven and for the past four years had worked for Conde Nast. ~~She was now~~ been an assistant editor of ~~Vogue~~ two fashion magazines.

"Eddie says you're very clever and make a fabulous salary," John said with the smile that started in one corner of his mouth and travelled with his head in a semi-circle towards her.

"I've been lucky -- and clever," she laughed. "The fabulous salary is $150 a week."

"Where do you live?"

"Just around the corner -- 55 East 54th Street.

"Alone?"

"I have a day maid -- will you come to see me?"

"When?"

"Tomorrow?"

"About six o'clock?"

Eddie re-joined them, and Mara suddenly felt extremely tired and they took her home.

The next day, Mara's maid awakened her at nine o'clock with a telegram. From John. He was going away, didn't know when he would be back.

"The man's lying," she said aloud, and was surprised at her disappointment. She broke every rule in her code or how to deal with men. She telephoned him.

He was embarrassed, but insisted he was going away.

"I'm meeting my son --" he mumbled.

"When will you be back?" she persisted.

"Friday." It was now Tuesday.

"Let's all have dinner on Friday -- I'd like to meet your son." She was amazed at her persistence.

He hesitated, then agreed.

"She's damn sure of herself," he said after replacing the receiver. He smiled. Then sighed.

Mara called Eddie.

"Let's have dinner tonight," she said very authoritatively.

Eddie was suspicious.

"What do you want?"

She affected to be hurt.

"To see you, of course."

"You're a fake, Mara, but a delightful fake. Seven-thirty." seven-thirty."

There was nothing subtle about Mara when she was on the track of information, and they were barely seated at Voisin's when she plunged into the subject of John O'Brien. Eddie was willing to talk. Most people were about John O'Brien.

"He wasn't just a success -- he was a legend. Once I saw him almost kill a man, and he was

"How and why?" breathed Mara, her eyes alight.

"It was Harrison -- John Harrison -- the actor. He was who died."

drunk and slightly unpleasant to Alicia, John's wife. There wasn't much left of him after they scraped him away from John."

"Don't tell me men still fight over their women," said Mara skeptically.

"They don't, dearie -- this was ten years ago."

"What was his wife like?" Mara asked casually.

"Very much like you," Eddie said.

"Oh."

Eddie glanced at her quickly, then looked away.

"I warned him against you." he said

~~Mara threw her head back and laughed.~~

"What did you say?"

"That you were ~~fickle, unreliable, and --~~" kind of a tramp" he teased her.

"Shut up. Does he like me?"

"Yes," ~~you little devil.~~"

"I like him -- tremendously."

"Leave him alone, Mara."

"~~But~~ Why? Can't a girl have a ~~nice~~ friendship, ~~with a~~ she threw back her head and laughed. ~~She opened her eyes widely and pouted her lips into a soft~~ ~~oval~~.

"Not when you look like that. What about the Earl?"

"Oh, him?" She ~~moved~~ dropped a match over the table's edge her head backwards and tossed George out of her life. "I don't see myself as a belted Countess, do you?"

Eddie looked at her with a regretful smile, ~~on his homely face.~~

"I'm not sure what I see you as, darling. I only know I love you."

She pressed his hand sympathetically, started a speech that began with, "Eddie --" and trailed off into distressed silence.

II

Carlo's
~~John's~~ son was a smaller replica of his father -- he except for his hair, which was a rich auburn. ~~He~~ had the same quiet charm that would suddenly transfigure his face, and the same ~~twisted~~ smile. ~~He had inherited his father's oval blue~~ and rain-blue eyes. There ~~There~~ was another good-looking boy and two ~~handsome~~ girls, ~~aged around~~ of fifteen.

"We'll go to the Louvre." The kids want to dance," said the elder John. ~~"There's a good band there."~~ Said

The younger Carter was suddenly solemn.

"No gambling, Dad."

"I'm merely a looker-on," said Carter legally. Mara "That's not your business." ~~Mara was surprised at the irritation in John's voice. She~~ suddenly remembered ~~now~~ some fantastic stories she had heard of John's gambling ~~orgies~~ -- one of them was said to have lasted two weeks without John leaving the roulette table night or day. ~~But like most of the legends about John, she supposed it had been exaggerated.~~ She rather hoped he would play tonight, but ~~It would be exciting to watch. But~~ when she suggested this he shook his head emphatically.

"~~I've~~ Sworn off ~~gambling~~."

~~Mara found~~ The evening was almost a strain. John was less exciting in the role of a father, ~~He seemed nervous, and~~ too watchful of his son. He forced ~~the~~ conversation, while the ~~The~~ four youngsters talked "down" to Mara and John, ~~and~~ they only seemed ~~completely at ease~~ natural when they were dancing.

"They make me feel old," Mara told John when they were alone at the table. She

"~~Me, too,~~" ~~he confessed.~~

~~She praised John Junior and his father was pleased.~~

~~But Mara felt dull. She~~ was glad when he suggested taking her home.

"Don't be late," John cautioned his son. In the taxi, she ~~Mara told John of the numerous~~ wrenched herself for her feeling of dullness by quoting for John a detailed picture of her men she had been in love with. ~~She~~ was annoyed at his refusal to be shocked. At

~~"Good-night," Mara said coolly at~~ the door of her apartment, she said good night coolly — then looked at him once more. ~~"Good night," John said just as coolly.~~

~~Mara looked up quickly. He~~ was smiling. The shadow of the door made deep holes under his high cheek bones ~~The~~ outlines of his face were lost. ~~She smiled at him challengingly~~ and put up her face ~~to be kissed~~.

"You look like a ~~rare~~ blue rose," he ~~told her softly. His voice was like a low-toned song.~~

~~His~~ face ~~came~~ out of the shadows ~~and he~~ kissed her ~~warm~~ lips, ~~gently at first, then hard as passion dropped them into a delicious whirlpool.~~

She pulled him gently inside the room. The curtains had been left open and the light from the street softly illuminated the grey and pink Marie Laurencin over the fireplace, ~~and the wide, dark green settee~~.

"You couldn't get away ~~from me~~," ~~Mara~~ she boasted exultantly.

~~"I was doomed from the second I saw your lovely face -- let's sit down."~~

Holding hands tightly, they found the settee. ~~Mara was excited and happy, as always when she made a conquest~~.

"I believe I'm in love with you," she ~~told him~~ whispered.

"You sound surprised," ~~she shifted her body from the uncomfortable position in his arms~~.

"It's unusual," she sighed breathlessly and found her handkerchief to wipe the lip rouge from his face. He put her hand aside, and kissed her eyes.

~~She let him go at two o'clock.~~

~~A great content remained with Mara during her sleep. And she woke up smiling.~~

III

They were married at the City Hall two weeks later. ~~It~~

~~Was a quiet affair~~ with two strangers for witnesses. They walked round the square afterwards, ~~the~~ with love ~~in their hearts~~ flowing ~~between~~ around them like a great friendly river.

John pressed her arm and smiled ~~widely~~ into her bright face.

"You beautiful girl."

She smiled exultantly.

"I am beautiful, aren't I?"

"I love you, Mara."

Passers-by were stopping to stare and grin. Mara giggled.

"We'd better go home."

They drove out to the Connecticut farmhouse they had rented for the summer. ~~John was a fast driver, swinging crazily round corners, hooting loudly.~~ There were

~~She liked the~~ lofty eucalyptus trees shading the square wooden house with its blue painted shutters. On one side was a ~~wide~~ stone flagged terrace with a blue and white awning and ~~green~~ garden chairs, and under ~~Under~~ a large tree bloomed a newly painted ~~was a~~ ping-pong table. ~~that had been newly painted.~~

~~An~~ extremely black negress ~~had been bequeathed them by~~ Stephen Brooks, the ~~sculptor-owner~~ of the house. They followed ~~her~~ up the polished wooden stairs. John's bedroom was starkly white, ~~with big comfortable mahogony furniture. A brief passage~~ was painted ~~opened into~~ Mara's ~~bedroom which was painted in a pale~~ salmon pink with white rugs ~~were~~ strewn haphazardly on the dark wooden floor.

~~She~~ Obediently she entered the circle of his arms. Over

her shoulder John said to Lucy, "Leave everything now -- we'll ring when we want you." A double row of milk white teeth shone dazzlingly on the black face.

"Come on," said John quietly.

Mara was the first to awaken. She lay still, afraid to interrupt John's steady soft breathing. There was the ~~It made a precious symphony with the~~ muted bird cries outside. ~~It was getting~~ darkness and a faint chill came in through the open windows. She ~~felt suddenly depressed and~~ moved closer to John. He was awake. He turned to her and whispered: "Such a sweet face to wake up ~~and find~~," he ~~said~~ languidly, "I'd like to walk into your eyes and close the lids behind me," ~~she whispered and kissed them~~.

~~They faced each other in the candlelight across the big table~~ in the cool, dark-panelled living room. ~~Lucy was an exquisite cook.~~ They were not hungry, but to please Lucy, took two helpings of the baked chicken and found room for the wedding cake fashioned with Lucy's ~~own black~~ hands, the day before.

"I'm going to make you glad you married me," John told Mara. A sympathetic sigh emanated from Lucy in the kitchen.

~~III~~ IV

Monday meant work again. Mara was to continue with her job. ~~If~~ John had wanted her to give it up she would gladly have done so, but he preferred ~~that she~~ should have outside interests.

"Alicia," ~~he told her,~~ "would have been happier if she'd had some ~~way of expressing her personality.~~"

Mara was glad he talked so easily of Alicia. It brought Mara into his past. She wanted to possess every thought, every memory of his life.

"He, that was the least possessive woman in the world!" Mara told Eddie when he visited them two Sunday's later. They had asked half a dozen friends to a belated wedding celebration. There was a young couple --the girl had been to Spencer with Mara, and Eddie, Paul Maxwell, the writer, who brought the wife from whom he had just legally separated. They were extremely polite to each other -- embarrassingly so. Stephen Brooks had come to see how his tenants were doing. And there were a couple of intellectuals who would marry when the man's wife got the divorce. They were very much in love and quarrelled most of the afternoon.

John insisted on everyone drinking champagne with lunch. He was utterly charming, and fascinating, drawing them all into bright conversation, making everyone, even Mrs. Maxwell, seem witty and important to themselves. His blue eyes were almost feverish in their sparkling gaity.

Mara was vaguely worried. She wished John would slow down a little. He didn't have to work so hard to amuse them. Or was she being wifely and apprehensive through wanting him to shine. That must be it, she thought, looking at the others who were now laughing hysterically at something John had said.

John organized a ping pong tournament. He was very funny, looking one way and hitting the ball the other. He lost all his games. Mara won the tournament. The intellectual couple were drunk. Mara watched John apprehensively. Was he drunk too? She kissed him suddenly. There was no smell of liquor. He smiled gratefully for the kiss.

Paul Maxwell said, "We must go." His ex-wife nodded grimly. But John said "No" very decisively. He took Paul upstairs

to see some sketches. Mara made forced conversation with the ex-wife who didn't listen.

"Let's go and get them," she finally suggested. Mara pretended she had something to show John in the garden and took him to the window. While his back was turned, Paul said "Goodbye." John didn't turn round or reply. He stared at a fly zooming on the window-pane.

"What's the matter, darling?" Mara asked. He came back from his inner nightmare, took her tenderly in his arms and kissed her passionately.

"Oh, Mara, I love you."

"What's the matter, dearest?" she persisted.

He looked at her with his head sideways, a cynical grin flooding his handsome face.

"I didn't sleep here last night," he told her.

She didn't believe him. He was playing one of his practical jokes.

"I drove to town about two o'clock."

"When did you get back?" she asked derisively.

"About six."

"I don't believe you." But she did.

"Why -- where?" The solidity of her existence was smashed.

"I went to the Louvre -- I lost two thousand dollars."

She felt cold, but relieved.

"I'm going again tonight -- now," he told her defiantly.

She didn't understand, but it was all right when John kissed her again tenderly. Now she wanted the others to stay for supper -- but they seemed uncomfortable and made excuses,

except Eddie. While they were going, Eddie whispered to Mara:

"What's the matter with John?"

"He's been gambling," she told him. Eddie's face lengtnened. "That's not so terrible," she insisted.

He didn't reply and John came back. The golden brown of his face had pinkened against his high, white , woolen sweater.

"You and I," he said firmly to Eddie, "are going to drive into town."

"I'll come with you," Mara said quickly.

"No, just Eddie," John said.

"If that's what you want." Mara turned and ran inside. The day had been a strain and she didn't want to cry in front of Eddie.

John came to her bedroom, kissed her gently. "I'll only be gone a little while."

She kissed him passionately, tried to hold him, but felt the resistance in his body. They walked down the stairs together.

"When do you want supper, Mrs. O'Brien?" Lucy's voice roused Mara from her brooding reverie. She looked at her watch. Nine o'clock. Two hours since they had gone. She was suddenly furious with John. It was cruel of him to leave her behind.

"I'm not hungry," she told Lucy.

"Can I go and see my boyfriend then?" Lucy giggled.

Mara nodded and smiled absently. But when she was alone her anger returned.

"Damn John, damn him, damn him," she walked up and down the big living room. She turned on the radio. A "Blues" singer

was moaning frustratedly. She snapped the voice off.

"I'm an idiot," she said with a short laugh and went into the garden and slowly picked up the ping-pong balls. They looked like stars on the dark ground.

"I'm a fool to worry," she said and went to bed.

She must have falled to sleep immediately.

At two o'clock and stumbled into his room.

He had not yet returned. She sat on his bed and sobbed. "I should have gone with him. Why did I let him go?" She rocked herself miserably to and fro.

At five o'clock she telephoned the Louvre. A cold impersonal voice said he didn't know whether Mr. O'Brien had been there, but he certainly wasn't there now. She called him a liar and slammed the receiver down. She was very angry now.

She was telephoning for a taxi when she heard voices outside.

"Steady, sir," She tripped down the last three stairs and twisted a toe on her unslippered feet.

"Damn!"

A young man was helping John out of a taxi. His white sweater had been cut all down one side. His coat was over his shoulders like a cape.

"It's my arm -- I've broken it."

"Oh, darling," was all Mara could say. They helped him into the living room.

"What happened?" she asked tenderly.

John grinned suddenly. He extricated a wad of notes from his coat pocket and

threw them on the floor.

"The wages of sin," he chuckled. "Help yourself," he said to the boy. "Take a hundred dollars -- go on," as the boy hesitated.

"No -- don't." Mara protested sharply.

"Give him a hundred dollars," John told her. She shrugged her shoulders and counted out the money. "Go away," snapped John. The boy grinned. They heard the taxi drive off.

"Don't say anything," John said hastily.

"But your arm -- "

"I've been to a hospital, had it set -- it's my left, luckily -- so I can work a little. I'll get a nurse to help me dress and bathe."

"I'll do that."

"Not on your life."

"I'll telephone for a nurse," said Mara quietly.

He wept unexpectedly and Mara was by his side.

"Your arm -- it hurts," she began.

He shook his head.

"Your feet -- your poor little feet -- you'll catch cold." He wanted to rub them.

She kissed his twisting mouth, and slowly they walked up the stairs to his bedroom. He took a strong dose of sleeping medicine and slept until two in the afternoon.

He was furious when he saw Mara with a tray of food.

"The nurse can do all that," he said.

Mara obediently turned the tray over to the quiet-mannered, pretty nurse -- she had insisted on a pretty nurse.

"Oughtn't you to be at your office?" John ~~said peevishly~~ suggested.

"How can I?" Mara's voice trembled and she looked quickly away.

"Come here," he commanded. She went to him. "Look," he said quietly, "I don't want to be ~~baby-ed~~ babied. ~~This is my fault,~~ ~~and~~ I'm going to get out of it by myself, with the nurse to help. I don't want you to worry about me. ~~Understand?~~"

She nodded and kissed him.

"But it's too late to go to the office today." she said ~~shakily~~. "Can I read in here? I won't bother you."

"Of course," ~~darling~~. Sit at the end of the bed where I can see your sweet face."

~~IV~~ V

That summer was the happiest ~~of Mara's life.~~ ~~Occasionally~~ in the evening they went to a movie in Stamford. They saw ~~very~~ few people and didn't want anyone. The weather was beautiful, the heat cut off by the big trees. John worked ~~four~~ hours a day. She loved the way he twisted his hair to a turnip-like point while he painted. She was back by six-thirty, and he showed her the work he had done during the day and talked about her job, as ~~eager and~~ enthusiastic for her as for himself.

Before her marriage to John, ~~Mara's~~ standards of right and wrong had fluctuated according to how she personally was affected. Her horizon had been limited to "what do I get out of this?" Looking at life through John's eyes, she saw a new world ~~in which self mattered least, integrity most.~~

~~He gave her a new appreciation of art.~~ On Saturdays they ~~usually~~ lunched in town as a prelude to spending the afternoon

in a museum or ~~picture~~ gallery. Under John's ~~eager~~ teaching, Mara ~~discovered~~ the greatness of Bellini, Velasquez, Goya, and Manet.

~~She had always~~ considered herself well ~~read~~ because she ~~liked~~ Dickens, Thackery, and Tennyson, and had been able to discuss the ~~best sellers~~ of the day, but John's wide knowledge of literature made her feel inadequate for the first time in her ~~self-satisfied~~ life. Her new reading ~~course~~ included, ~~Shelley, Joyce, Dostievsky, and~~ Proust. ~~The latter~~ was hard going at first, but when she finished ~~the last~~ of "A la Recherche du Temps Perdu," it was hard to ~~tell~~ who was the prouder, she or John. He was her Bible and her encyclopedia -- anything she wanted to know, right from wrong, history, politics, architecture, John knew the answer.

Eddie was one of the few visitors that summer. Mara walked round the garden ~~with him and gloated~~. "You thought I couldn't stick to any one man, didn't you? ~~I'll be faithful to John the rest of my life.~~"

Eddie kicked a small stone. Then casually, "How's the gambling?"

"What really happened that night?" she asked. He evaded a direct answer.

"It's like liquor, ~~with some men.~~ John just can't take gambling. ~~And~~ Alicia was worse ~~," he laughed.~~ "She once tried to give ~~them~~ her clothes when they had no more money left. ~~She was arrested and John fought~~ the entire police department of Monte Carlo. But don't worry, I've never known him so happy ~~and content~~. You're good for him."

"Who's good for who?" John had heard the last words. He hated to be discussed, Mara changed the conversation immediately.

But she was glad when Eddie had gone. There was no room for a third person in their paradise.

In September, John's son returned from a tour of Europe with five St. Paul's boys and a master from the school. He was to stay with them two weeks before entering Yale.

Mara heard the two John's quarrelling in the garden one evening. She caught the word 'liquor' and then young John said angrily, "If you can ruin us with your gambling, I suppose I can drink." She longed for him to leave.

The following evening, the boy went to New York. There was a telegram from him next day. He had decided to visit a friend in Georgia. "I was afraid you wouldn't let me go," he explained. Mara had never seen John so angry.

The glorious peace of the summer was gone. John had promised a mural for the State Capital at Albany, but Monday came and the job was at a standstill. Young John's trip abroad had cost $1500 and new bills poured in for clothes that John had already given his son money to pay for.

"He's like me," John said in the softness of the evening. He showed Mara the stack of bills. "I've never had a money sense."

And then just as life look d peaceful again to Mara, a letter came from young John stating that he had definitely decided against Yale and with or without his father's permission would get a job instead.

"What are you going to do?" Mara asked apprehensively after reading the letter twice. She dimly remembered the time when she was the centre of John's universe. Now she was a shadow eclipsed by a willful boy of 16.

"I'm not sure," John kissed her absently and said, "Let's

forget him."

She was relieved and went slightly comforted to her train, but he called her at the office as she was about to leave.

"I'm coming in -- we'll dine in town," he said.

"It's hot, darling. I was looking forward to the country."

"I'm coming in."

"All right. Where shall I meet you?"

"The Louvre."

The gambling rooms were invisible to those who dined and danced in the blue and silver restaurant. But there were always four or five phlegmatic foreigners, standing aimlessly in the egg-shell blue antrance foyer.

John was already there when Mara arrived.

"He's a gangster," he said in a stage whisper after introducing her to the pasty, dark-haired manager. Mara looked at the 'gangster', expecting an answering smile. But his features were as blank as an unrelieved wheat field. John wore a dinner jacket with a stiff shirt. His face looked freshly laundered. His chin seemed more pointed than usual and more impudent.

When the waiter said, "Good evening, Mr. O'Brien," John replied coldly:

"I suppose you mean my twin brother." The waiter stared at him.

"The likeness is remarkable," he said slowly. John's acting was so good even Mara was ready to believe he had a twin brother. He was like a little boy in his delight when the waiter, convinced, gave him a message of regard for the non-existent twin brother.

They danced. John looked at Mara calculatingly.

"New dress?"

Mara glanced ~~down~~ at the blue and white print ~~dress~~.

"I've had it a year."

"Then it's you that's new tonight." He held her closer, ~~He danced~~ dancing in a loping, collegiate way, ~~looking at her with a non-explainable smile on his thinned lips.~~ Mara brushed his ear

"I love you tonight," Mara whispered in his ear and brushed it with her warm mouth. Then he danced her out of the restaurant, they were in the foyer again. A ~~large~~ fat man led them through an unexpected doorway, through a thin passageway cluttered with trays of dirty glasses and silverware. An elevator at the end took them up to the gambling rooms.

~~Mara was intensely disappointed.~~ The room into which they were admitted by the two men who guarded the elevator exit was supremely drab. Not even the ~~three~~ heavy crystal chandeliers suspended from ~~the~~ high white ceiling could impart elegance to the bored croupiers chanting in nasal ~~American~~ sing-sing, "Place your bets." There were four trente-et-quarante tables, Three Bird-in-Cages, two craps tables, two roulette wheels. ~~and~~ Around them were ~~dull, ugly people, making~~ lined, silent, solemn discordant noises as they placed their bets. John ~~grinned at Mara and~~ steered her into a small adjoining room.

A haze of smoke gave a watery outline to the men and women -- there were about thirty ~~—mostly men—~~ slumping on thin-backed chairs around the oval green ~~baize~~ topped table. There was no other furniture in the room.

John's ~~say~~ "Hello, ~~everybody~~," was like the crashing of glass. Mara ~~smiled~~ apologetically for him. A few heads nodded, but most of them ~~continued~~ remained to frown into ~~their~~ cards. John seemed taller and broader. He filled the air with glowing vitality, making everyone else seem dark and sallow. There ~~was no~~ were no chairs left

down, and Mara followed him round the backs of the chairs. He said table "banco" a wizened bald man, and won $500. The old man shook his head. Mara thought it would never stop. John crammed the chips into her hands.

His face had changed. His eyes became faintly bloodshot. And he had difficulty in making his lips meet. His pastel complexion coarsened. Tiny crystals of perspiration covered his nose and upper lip. He was aware of her scrutiny and turned quickly from her.

Two players left, and John and Mara sat in their chairs.

"You're not to play," he commanded.

On the right of Mara was a middle-aged woman with a grey crepe complexion and skeleton hands. She stared at the ripeness of Mara's bloom and gave her what was meant to be a friendly smile. John won steadily from the crepe-faced lady and from the man on his left. Soon there was a pile of $100 chips in front of him. It was fantastic but terrifically exciting. Mara calculated there was $10,000 worth at least. Now was surely the time to transfer them into cash and go home. Her head was splitting, but when she told this to John, he was callous to her pain for the first time since they had met.

"You can't go."

His luck changed. He lost to his left-hand neighbor, a pencil thin Italian with a beak profile.

She took advantage of this to urge, "Let's go now -- it would be a pity to lose all this money."

Over his shoulder he said, "Maybe you had better go," and twisted round angrily. Her face crumpled and he softened, "Stay if you like, but behave." She nodded and tried to smile brightly.

When the 'shoe' came to the Italian on John's left, the

Italian won from the man on his left, 9 and 6. John ~~triumphantly~~ turned up 9 and 8. The Italian had two nines. John stood up suddenly and scattered the cards on the floor.

"I want new cards, ~~--~~ This ~~damned wop~~ is cheating," ~~he said.~~

There was a quick arrested movement in the room. The Italian grinned and a couple of men who had been nebulous as background, were now behind John's chair. One of them gently touched his arm. John swung at him and the man slid noisily to the floor. Mara pulled the other man's coat as he was about to hit John. He pushed her ~~roughly~~ and she fell hard against the table.

"You --"shouted John. His fist banged against the man's mouth, drawing blood. And then John collapsed. Mara thought he had fainted. Then she saw a ~~little~~ pistol ~~that was smoking~~ in the Italian's hand. Magically, the room was empty except for herself and John. She felt passionless and unfeeling. John had been ~~shot~~. How absurd. ~~And why wasn't she upset?~~

"~~A doctor,~~ Get me a doctor," John whispered. She looked blankly at his white face ~~with~~ its delicate texture ~~again~~ restored. ~~And~~ a hot tearing at her heart made her feel pain again.

She shouted, "~~Get a doctor,~~ Someone get a doctor. Come back someone, and help me!"

Three men -- one of them had been playing chemin-de-fer -- came back into the room. They dragged John towards ~~a concealed~~ door, his blood staining the grey carpet. Mara begged them to stop.

"You'll kill him -- he shouldn't be moved!" ~~They~~ they continued to drag him.

"Stop it, stop it!" ~~Mara screamed,~~ pulling first at one man, then another. ~~She might as well not have been there for the notice taken of her.~~

John's car was in the alley outside. They slumped him into it.

One of the men put his face close to Mara's. "This didn't happen here, ~~you understand?~~" ~~It wasn't a query. It was a statement.~~ She would deal with them later. She mustn't say anything now -- they might stop her getting to a hospital. She drove slowly so as not to jerk John. He was smiling when she looked at him.

"Cigarette?" she asked ~~tenderly~~. He nodded. She lit a ~~'Lucky'~~ and put it between his lips.

"We'll soon be at the hospital," ~~she told him weeping.~~

The cigarette dropped from his lips and smoldered on his coat. She threw it out the window. John was whispering something. She bent her head.

"I'll make this up to you somehow -- "

"Sure," she said jerkily, "Sure."

His smile left a small glow on his pale face.

He was dead before the hospital, ~~was reached~~. Mara remembered saying to the surprised porter, "I'm going to faint."

~~She~~ did not know how much she had lost until three weeks later and the doctor told her she ~~was~~ all right now.