

# This Dark Adventure

By  
Ellen Hogue

## THE STORY TO DATE

Ann Robinson, pretty New York stenographer, is jilted by Joe Marsh, wealthy young man about town, who becomes engaged to Marcia Emmett, society girl and heiress, who by a coincidence was a playmate of Ann's when they were children together. Marcia asks Ann to a pre-nuptial house party at her home near Boston. Ann, heartbroken, accepts. When she arrives Joe makes love to her again, and although Ann resists, Joe kisses her. Marcia and Philip Olmstead, a guest at the party and a former sweetheart of Marcia's, see them. Ann runs into the house, determined to return to New York next day.

## INSTALMENT III

THAT Marcia would not let her go without speaking her mind Ann was quite sure. Well, that had to be borne. But at least she would never have to see Philip Olmstead again, she told herself feverishly over and over. She knew what he thought of her—he thought her a cheap little stenographer caught kissing her hostess' fiance, and nothing more. Somehow the memory of his quick disgust and disillusionment hurt her more than anything that had happened. If she could only make him understand only make him know—turning, tossing, unable to sleep, she planned a little speech that she might make should she encounter him by chance before she left this house forever. Something very casual and convincing. Joe had been just a little sentimental! The moon had been too much for him. It didn't mean anything, what Marcia and Philip had seen—it didn't mean anything to Joe, it certainly didn't mean anything to her—

She woke, heavy eyed and heavy hearted, to brilliant sunshine, to the singing of birds and the fresh, clean aroma that meant apple blossoms and lilacs were opening and the good earth was being plowed and the wind was blowing over salt water and all the world was engrossed and absorbed in the glory of country spring. Not ten o'clock, her wrist watch said, and that was early in a house where everybody had stayed up past the small hours the night before. Yet it was a tapping on her door that awakened her—could it be Marcia come this early to say her say?

Ann, sitting up in bed, haggard and unrefreshed by sleep, called "Come in!" in a voice determinedly level steady. The door opened and one of the maids appeared with a breakfast tray. She brought, however, a message. Miss Marcia was awake and restless, she said; would Miss Robinson get up and come out with her? And she'd better wear heavy clothes.

"I'll be right down," Ann promised. She drank her coffee and forced herself to eat a piece of toast—she was not hungry, but she did not want to be tremulous. MARCIA was waiting for her in the wide lower hall. Ann, dressed in her smart, cheap little red sweater and skirt, descended the stairs with dread in her heart. The other girl was friendly enough—not at all the raging fury that Ann had expected her to be. She jumped up from the wing chair in which she had been lounging and smoking and greeted her guest as casually as though there were nothing ugly between them.

"O—hello, there. I thought you wouldn't mind being called. This is about the only chance we'll get to talk while you're here, and I had an idea it might be fun to paddle over to the island—there's not much wind today, and I haven't been there this year."

She added: "You remember the island, don't you? We used to tease Hallam—he was the gardener then—to row us over for picnics."

Ann said: "Of course I remember, and of course I'll go if you want me to. But do you—are you sure?"

"It's the only way I can be sure of not being interrupted," Marcia said with a little laugh. "Leave the house and preferably leave the land. I had cook pack a lunch—I thought we might get hungry. And listen, Ann, you'd better take an extra jacket if you've got one—or take one of mine. It's still cold."

"Marcia, I'm so sorry about what happened last night!" Ann said earnestly and suddenly. "I'm so terribly sorry. I want you to believe—"

"Let's save that," Marcia said with a queer oblique look from

under her long lashes. She flushed, her mouth tightened.

"We've got to thrash it out, I suppose, but not here. We don't want the house around our ears. Let's clear out before somebody comes falling down those stairs."

The two of them went together down to the little dock and boat-house. Marcia ahead, very handsome and silent in her rough, shaggy country clothes, carrying a blanket and a thick coat or two. Ann followed with the lunch basket—afterward she was to remember that lunch basket and how absurdly, unaccountably heavy it was; she was to wonder at herself and at her own blind naivete. Heavy jackets, a heavy blanket on an April day as sweet and warm as June! Terrified and lost, she was to have a clear, vivid mental picture of Marcia.

They talked but little while they were actually on the water. The sea was calm, but even in a calm sea there are waves, and Ann, sitting in the bow and using the unfamiliar paddle, was occupied in doing her share of the work of the trip without getting too wet. Marcia guided the canoe; she paddled skilfully and strongly—she was excellent at all sports.

"I still come to the island now and then," she said to Ann. "The whole crowd comes. For beach picnics. And do you remember the smugglers' cave we found up in the rocks?"

Ann, a little breathless, said over her shoulder: "O, do I! Weren't we excited? Your governess was along, remember? And we didn't even tell her what we'd found. I remember we'd been reading 'Treasure Island,' and we planned we'd come back and dig for gold."

"There's no gold," Marcia told her, "but the cave's still there. I stayed in it during a storm last summer. Phil and I had to wait for more than an hour. It's a swell place. Nothing can get at you."

Afterward Ann remembered that piece of information, too.

THE island itself loomed before them, only a rock sprinkled with dark green from the shore if your eyes were good; it was nearly a mile from the mainland. Seen close by, it was rock upon rock, and you wondered how anything could grow upon it.

Every rock in the little cove was covered with old barnacles, and there was a narrow, meandering little footpath that led to the tumbledown ruin of a hut. A hermit fisherman had lived and died here—his bones had been found at the end of one dreadful isolated winter. Since then the island had been a lonely place except for the gulls.

Marcia beached the canoe on a narrow spit of sand that stretched like a long pointing finger into the sea. Here was a tiny bay, natural and safe, with a deep channel. "A yacht could come in here!" Marcia said, surprised. "Look, Ann, I can't touch bottom with my paddle, and yet I'm right at the shore."

For a moment the two of them were little girls again, bathed in sun and wind, curious, interested, investigating. Then the moment died. Ann helped to pull the pretty laden craft up on the beach, helped to lift out the basket and wraps. Marcia was queerly abstracted, queerly absent-minded, yet purposeful, too.

"Well, here you are, kid," she said to Ann.

"Here we are," Ann said.

And quite suddenly, quite unaccountably, she was horribly frightened. There was no reason for her fear; the sun shone, the sea was blue, gulls screamed and wheeled, white and gray, overhead. It was Marcia, only Marcia who was with her, a tall blonde girl whom she had known all her life, who had reason enough to dislike her, but was, after all, the same person grown up with whom she had played jacks and I spy and run, sheep, run. There might be, would be, hard words, of course; Ann was expecting them. "Sticks and stones will break my bones, hard words won't hurt me," her mother was fond of declaring; Ann did not entirely agree with the old saying. She had been hurt by words. But not physically, and this was a physical, earthly fear.

Why should Marcia, blonde and beautiful and sophisticated and civilized, seem suddenly menacing? Was it a change in the expression of her eyes, in the general look of her as she prowled about, pointing

things out? Surely what she said was harmless enough!

"Look, Ann, there's the path to the cave! Here's high tide mark—high tide's at one. We'll have to drag things up out of the way."

Casual. Commonplace. Meaningless. Nothing to set your heart thundering. And yet it was as if an actual emanation of evil came from her—perhaps it did. She was so nervous, so restless. She didn't sit down on the blanket Ann spread on a hillock of tufted grass. Her glances were all side glances; there was a queer flush on her cheeks.

"She hates me, and I'm here all alone with her!" Ann thought, horrified. And then, more sensibly: "Well, what of it? She can't do anything to me."

It was she herself who precipitated things. She was ashamed of her own foolish fears and she meant to rout them. She said: "Marcia, I know what you want to say to me. Some of it. Go ahead. That's what we came out for, really, isn't it?"

Marcia was busy with the canoe. She was placing the paddles neatly, meticulously, seeing that everything was safely out of reach of the water, yet where it would be easy to push off into the water again. When she was finished she sat on the bow seat, but without getting into the craft; her expensive, sturdy, sensible shoes were in wet sand. She leaned forward, elbows on knees, regarding her old friend thoughtfully. Ann sat on the blanket, perhaps ten feet away; she looked a

little haggard in the morning light.

"We'll go around the island later on, won't we?" she asked with a tremulous, friendly little smile. "But before we do, isn't it better to get things cleared up between us?"

She had made up her mind not to defend herself, no matter what was said to her. After all, Marcia had a right to her anger. And it seemed—well, more decent to be silent. How could she explain to this girl who was going to marry him that Joe had forced his kisses on somebody, on a nobody, really, who had tried her best to stop him? Marcia wouldn't believe it; it would only make her angrier. And Ann was going away on the afternoon train; she would never see either of them again.

"I'm awfully sorry about what's happened, Marcia," she said. "I'm bitterly, bitterly regretful."

Marcia said, "I should think you might be!"

SHE went on after a long, significant pause while gulls cried and the peaceful water lapped against the rocks.

"I'm going to say what I think, Ann," she declared, "because that's the kind of a person I am. I always say what's in my mind—why shouldn't I?" she asked with a sort of splendid arrogance. "Why should I shilly-shally around and pretend I'm crazy about the way you act when I know and you know you've done the best you could to ruin my life?"

"I haven't tried to ruin your life," Ann began, but she got no farther.

"Don't lie to me, my dear," Marcia said magnificently, "because I'm not going to lie to you. I can't. I could commit a crime, I think, but I couldn't lie about it."

"I quite understand," Ann said, white to the lips, "that I was honored in being asked at all. I can imagine what a trial I was to the rest of them. You can tell them—"

"No, but listen," Marcia interrupted quickly and reasonably. "I'm not a snob, Ann; I've never been a snob. I've always been fond of you. I wouldn't think anything of it—but you don't understand these things. How could you? That's what I'm trying to make you see—just how inexperi-

enced and thoughtless you've been. You don't know how big a thing this wedding of mine is—not just to Joe and me, but to everyone we know and everyone my father knows! My father is just about as important as any man in the east—I think you'll find that to be true if you look us up," she admitted with quiet dignity and a little smile.

"I think you'll find my father is—well, when a daughter of his decides to marry, honestly, Ann, it's almost like royalty. You can't guess what it's been like. Presents and messages from all over the world, letters from people who—but you wouldn't even know their names."

"Marcia, I know it's been terribly exciting, I was terribly excited about coming, but—"

"But that's what I'm getting at, Ann," Marcia declared patiently and judiciously.

"I ask you up here, I give you a chance to meet all these people you'd never even see any other way! I was hoping, you know, that somebody'd get keen about you—you're pretty, you've got charm," she admitted. "You could learn whatever you had to know. You dance well and I suppose you play bridge. And listen, Ann, I think Reddy's really crazy about you. He told me last night—"

Ann lay as if she had been flung face down on the sand. To be marooned in a great gray waste of sea is not an experience which comes to the ordinary young woman; coming, it is scarcely to be believed. "This is a dream," Ann told her hammering heart. "This is a dream. A bad dream. I'll wake up in a minute. I'll come to life again. This isn't so!"

Presently sanity returned to her in some small degree. She was exhausted; her heart was bursting, breaking. This wouldn't do, she told herself. She must use her head, she must try to think that someone would come or that of course she could bear it if no one came!

SHE took off her rough, red

little sweater and climbed, cutting her hands and scratching herself from head to foot, into a pine on the edge of the cabin clearing. The tree was not tall enough for a good mast; the sweater, tied by its neat belt, did not flutter as a banner should, but it was better than nothing. It was possible that one of the fishing smacks coming in might stop to investigate that bright spot of color, and at least it was a little of a relief to take what might be an entirely useless action.

As Ann went back down to the beach she picked up sticks for a fire—she could keep a blaze going when it got dark, and that might bring some curious soul over. At least she would make herself comfortable, she decided, and she would be as self-controlled as she could be.

Had Marcia remembered, she wondered, that there was no way of getting water on the island? There was a deep well in the clearing, but the bucket was gone—there were only two or three links of rusty chain hanging to the windlass. People said that the hermit fisherman hadn't needed water—he had lived on whisky.

Ann made her lips twist into a grin at the thought, fought the craven fear that rose in her heart. She was thirsty now, her lips were dry, her throat felt dusty—there must be water in a thermos in the basket!

There was no water. Marcia, who had not intended that Ann should die, had forgotten about the water. And there were no matches.

There was a slab of bacon, and bread and butter neatly sliced, and fruit, and a package of coffee. There was a small roast chicken, cigars, and a can of tomatoes. Marcia, who was a smoker, undoubtedly had had matches in her sweater pocket, but she had taken them with her when she went.

Somewhere Ann had read that prospectors and trappers carried tomatoes to quench thirst in the desert. She set about opening the can—she had nothing but a small kitchen knife to help her, and she snapped it almost at once, to the hilt. Her hands were shaking, but she had managed to make a little hole in the tin, and when she put her lips to it a small amount of juice, only a drop or two at a time, trickled between her lips. It was better than nothing.

"I can eat the chicken and the bread and the fruit even if I can't cook," she told herself. "And even if I can't have a fire, I'll be perfectly safe in the cave. I must move my things up. I must keep busy. I mustn't let myself think."

The cave was really only a deep hole in the rock. You couldn't stand up in it, but you could stoop or you could crawl into it on your hands and knees. It opened on a

wide ledge that overlooked the beach on the mainland side of the island; the afternoon sun lighted it at the entrance, but the back was in deep gloom, and Ann thought with a little shudder of how terribly black it would be at night.

She made herself go into the cave. After a little, when her eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, she could see the wind-beaten sandy floor. Nothing here, no sign of animal or man. The place was safe enough, a refuge. But she could not enjoy her safety.

She went to the ledge again and looked out over the sea; there was not even a wisp of smoke on the horizon that might mean a steamer passing miles away. If only, if only she should hear the muffled sound of oars, the blessed, blessed sound of a human voice!

What would her mother say or do if she knew what was happening to her girl this very instant?

Was anyone in the world even thinking of her? Could she drop from sight like this without anyone even asking casually about her disappearance? The cook, for instance. The cook must know where Ann was going. She had packed the basket. And perhaps some of the other servants had seen the two girls go down to the boathouse.

Presently she made herself eat a little of the chicken and some bread—her mother always said there was nothing like a good square meal to steady your nerves, and God knew her nerves needed steadying! And then there was nothing more to do. Her blanket was in her cave, her basket was there; she had set up housekeeping. It was all very well to want to keep busy and brave, to pray that she might keep busy and brave.

She walked again. The island was about a half mile across; she scrambled down to the west beach and followed the water's edge around it. She would walk until she got tired, until she was exhausted. Perhaps if she did that, when dark came she could sleep.

It was when she turned south to where the water broke on the shore in a froth of surf that she saw the footprints on the sand. Like Crusoe's, she stopped and stared, terrified and thrilled. They had not been there, those marks, when she came by before. She thought that she was suffering from a hallucination.

And then, with a great lift and throb of the heart, the knowledge came to her that she was no longer alone. Someone was near her, someone, something human. Someone who would take her home. Her hands pressed against her heart, she wheeled, staring above her into the meager little woods that crowned the island. She cried, "Help! Help! Help!" and then nearly fell to the ground.

THE man who came running down the beach was Philip Olmstead. She cried his name chokingly, incoherently; ran to meet him, sobbing, shaking, dazed with relief. Until this moment she had hoped she would never see him again; now her cold little hands clawed at him; he might well have been an old friend, someone she had loved and trusted all her life. She said his name over and over.

"Philip! Philip! Philip—"

"I didn't mean to go for you like that. But I've been dying, dying with this thing that's happened to me!"

Apparently he was faintly amused by the sight of her.

"Look here, if this isn't my good luck!" he said.

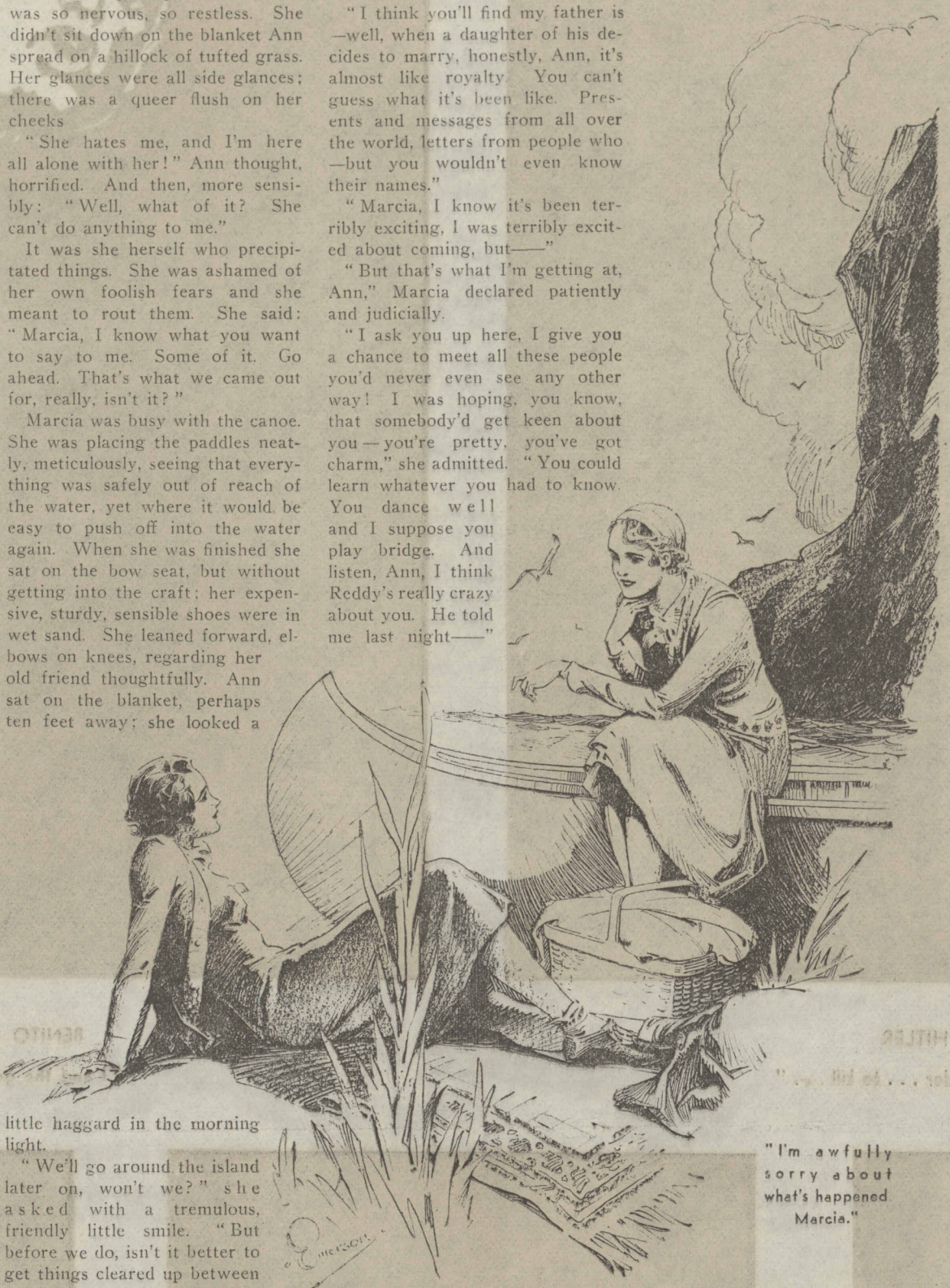
She babbled at him. "Good luck? It's said."

"What's the matter with you?" Philip asked gently. "Were you afraid to paddle back? How did you happen to come along? You poor kid, don't cry! It's the Lord's mercy I found you. I'm sorry you were scared, but I can't help being glad to see you. My fool canoe—I thought I had her tied. She drifted out on me. I was afraid I was going to have to spend the night."

Ann stared at him. There he was, big and broad and reassuring. He was, comparatively speaking, safety. He had a thin, hard young body and a lean jaw. He was strong. He would take care of her.

She said, "Philip, you are going to have to spend the night!" in a voice between laughter and tears. (Copyright, 1933, by Ellen Hogue.)

(To be continued.)



little haggard in the morning light.

"I'm awfully sorry about what's happened, Marcia."