

# The TYRANTS

*In which Fred Fox makes a magnificent deed and  
a rebel learns the meaning of brotherly love.*

By BERYL GRAY

*Illustrated by E. J. DINSMORE*

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# The Tyrants

by

## Beryl Gray

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Out of the stillness of the autumn night a violent snort, a series of staccato explosions, an agonized rattle—and dead silence.

Jack Rainsford rolled over in the darkness and pulled the thick grey blankets more closely about his ears. Confound that wretched kid! Racketting home in the old boneshaker at this ungodly hour. What was it? Two, anyway, he'd be bound. Waking the family with his nonsense. From the next room he heard Charles' low rumble of annoyance. And Henry, too. If he were thoroughly aroused there'd be the deuce to pay.

He sat up suddenly, and his square brown face grew intent. He listened almost unbelievably a moment. And then, slipping quietly to the floor, he moved softly out into the hall and turned the handle of his brother's door. "Charlie!" There was an incredulous throb of interest in his voice. "I'll swear the kid's got a woman with him down there."

"Rats!" Somewhere out of the blackness there was a swift movement, a groan of bedsprings, and a second pair of long, pyjama-clad legs swung outward.

"Listen!"

Through the quiet of the rambling old farmhouse came another thud, heavy padded footsteps down the long passage, and the sudden gleam of a flashlight through the room.

"Hear that!" A third deep voice was harsh with outrage. "I just saw them. Barney's bringing a woman into this house."

Three faces gleamed palely, tensely in the dim light, waiting, and listening to stealthy sounds below. Silence, and three pairs of sharp ears were strained to catch the faintest murmur. And then Charles clutched Jack's arm and whispered, and there were even more stealthy movements. A grim smile played about three firm-set lips.

“Just a minute.” Barney’s voice was a mere whisper. “For gosh sakes, don’t let’s wake the boys now. I’ll light the lamp.”

Silence again. A fumbling in the narrow room beneath the eaves, and a sudden touch of low illumination. Barney turned the smoking wick carefully and gave a jump of swift alarm.

“Ha!” Henry’s voice was curtly exultant. “You thought so.”

“Hmmp.” Charles’ bright blue eyes held piercing depths. “You’re out of luck.”

“Good gosh!” Jack shook his black curly head. “You devil.”



*Three strong pyjama-clad figures in a row on the bed. Barney flung an awkward arm about the girl who clutched his coat—who stood in still white terror at those apparitions risen from the darkness.*

Barney’s grey eyes were wide and frightened as he looked from one to the other of those three grim faces—those faces which inspired a certain terror he could never shake. Three faces stern and set. Three strong pyjama-clad figures in a row on the bed.

Grey eyes in a thin young face, thick sandy hair; a body lean with the rapid growth of his eighteen years. Barney flung an awkward arm about the girl who clutched his coat—who stood in still white terror at those apparitions risen from the darkness.

“Who,” Henry pointed an accusing finger at the slender, shrinking form, “is that. . . person?”

“What,” Charles’ eyes swept over the mop of red-gold curls, the pale little face, “do you think your home is?”

“How?” Jack sprang to his feet. But Barney interrupted him fiercely. Jack, of them all, he hated for his virile strength and dominance. Henry and Charles had always been very much his elders, very much to be obeyed. But Jack was only five years his senior and had no right. . .

“You shut up.” His voice was tense. “Lucy here’s my wife and you might as well get used to the idea.”

“Your what?” It was a simultaneous outburst.

“I told you once, didn’t I?” a low defiance. “My wife! Want me to spell it. W-i-f-”

“Hold your tongue,” Henry rapped. He also rose to his feet, tall and lean and muscular; dark eyes beneath his stiff black hair, long jaw out-thrust. “You mean you’ve married this. . .” He surveyed her from the top of her bare head, down the length of her scanty blue coat, to her cotton stockings and thin shoes. “This individual beside you?”

“Yes, he has.” The girl flashed with sudden courage, out of Barney’s silence.

“Who asked you to talk?” Charles, fair, freckled and thickset, wrinkled his crooked nose in disdain.

“Without even an introduction?” Jack’s blue eyes were scornful.

This time the silence held, and only Barney’s arm tightened. His other hand sought cold, trembling fingers that clutched at him desperately.

“When did you marry this—er—wife, and where?” Henry demanded. “Speak up, boy.”

“S ‘afternoon.” It was little more than a low mumble. “Burnside.”

“I see. You have to sneak to a town fifty miles away where you think you can pass as a man. Preserve us! Well, why did you marry her? Tell us that.”

Barney faced Charles savagely. “Because I—I—” but he shrank from that gaze. “Because she’s alone in the world,” he amended, “and the people on the farm where she worked were rough to her. Her name’s Lucy. . .”

“Help!” Jack sank back on the bed. “You bringing a. . .” But there was a certain breeding behind all the Rainsfords, even if oddly disguised at times, and he could not quite bring himself to express his distaste of hired women help in her presence. But Barney was quick to catch the implication. “Well, what are you, anyway!”

“Shut up.” Henry was curt. His light eyes pierced the girl. “Did you force my brother to marry you?”

“No.” Both young voices were sharp and indignant. The girl wheeled about. “What’s more, he said he loved me, and now he as much as says it was just pity. If I’d known that, I’d never have. . .”

“Aw, gee.” Barney grew red. “You know I do. But they. . . they don’t seem to be able to understand things like that.”

“No, we’d expect you to marry a girl because you hated her. Be just as sensible,” Jack laughed shortly. “Well, what are you going to do about it now?”

“Get as far from you as. . .”

“How are you going to get away?” Henry asked abruptly. “Answer me that.” He pointed to the girl. “What did he tell you about that end of it? Yes.” His eyes held a sardonic light. “You thought you’d come whining for us to start you up somewhere. Anything to get out of school next week, eh?”

“It wasn’t. You know I’m through with that. If you’ll lend me five hundred. . .”

“Five hundred,” Charles gasped. “My lord, and where will you go, then?”

“To the coast,” sullenly.

“Yes? Dig sewers? Or were you thinking of applying for city councillor?”

“Oh, be quiet.” Barney swallowed with difficulty. “Why can’t you leave me alone. You’re beasts. . . to sneak like this. Get out of here. You’ve got no business . . . leave us alone tonight, for heaven’s sake. We’ve been driving hours and Lucy’s tired.”

“That may be.” Henry was dangerously quiet. “You’re a fool, Barney. We’ll go into this thoroughly in the morning. Here, let’s see the license first.”

Barney dug into his pocket, flung a sheet of paper across the room. “Rotten. . . suspicious. . . you. . . you. . .!” He choked with wrath.

Henry handed the paper back. “Thanks. But one can’t credit you with intelligence, the way you’ve flunked your exams these last two years. You’re not fit to marry anyone—that end of it alone. Well. You’ll both stay here, of course. There’s nothing else you can do yet. This—er—young woman—can look after the house for us; be useful that way at least. Shut up. We’ll treat her well enough. And you’ll skip back to high school. Later on we’ll see.”

Charles and Jack gazed astonished. Benevolence from Henry!

“Oh, I won’t, I won’t!” There was sheer horror about Barney now. “They all know I’ve quit. Gosh, they’d rag me to death. I won’t. Henry, don’t be crazy. I won’t, I tell you.”

“You will.” Henry moved toward the doorway. “Come on, boys, we’ll leave them now. Only remember, Barney, you can’t pull anything round here without suffering for it.”

“I won’t go back.”

“You will.” Jack’s black curly head showed around the door an instant. “You’re too cussed scared not to.”

“Don’t swear.” But the brief spurt of courage left him almost immediately, and he faced the white, trembling girl alone in the tiny room. “Oh, gosh, Lucy, I’m sorry. I might’ve known.”

“I won’t stay here with those beasts. I hate them all.” She shrank away—but her stiff, frightened anger changed to helpless, nerve-racked tears as she saw his tortured face, heard his shaking voice. “Lucy, I never knew they’d be so bad. . . oh, please dear, don’t. It won’t be long, honest. Lucy, they’re always like that. You shouldn’t pay any attention. Aw, gee, you know I love you. . .”

“But you can’t. . .” Then all at once her arms went up about him. “I know you do. But it’s so awful here. Barney, you will think of something soon, won’t you?”

But long into the night the unhappy bridal couple lay awake, and their thoughts, even though they gained a certain comfort in proximity, were almost paralyzed by the low, unceasing murmur of voices from the next room.

**T**hink of something—yes. But it was neither Barney nor his bride who did the thinking. And a week later Lucy saw her boy husband, pale and tight-lipped, set out in an antiquated motor car, with a pile of battered books slung on the seat beside him; watched, as the car rattled its way over the low lying hills, and she slowly turned from the wide window, eyes pitying, defensive—and yet, somehow. . .

Jack, watching her from a late breakfast table, caught that expression. “Not so good, tied to a school kid, is it?” He leaned back, hard and supple, his neck bare and bronzed against his blue shirt. “Well, you can fry me a couple more eggs.” His hard, bright eyes watched her intently. “Oh, don’t bother to look at me like that. Maybe you do hate me. . .”

“Well, I do, Jack Rainsford.” She leaned against the far end of the table. “You’re hideous, the whole three of you.” Her voice was curiously sharp.

He tapped the plate before him with a hard, brown finger. “Eggs, I said, please,” curtly.

Lucy’s cheeks were darkly flushed. Almost viciously she splashed the eggs into the thick black frying pan on the stove. But in the bottom of her heart she was terrified of those three monsters, of their slow deep voices, their cynicism, their confident air which somehow she knew raised them above the average farmer. They were rough but not uncouth. Cruel in words, but even those who hated them were forced to admit the clean healthiness of their lives. The Rainsford boys had always been singularly aloof. And when, thirteen years ago, Henry and Charles, at seventeen and sixteen, had been left orphaned in the world, they had taken over the responsibility of the big ranch themselves and asked aid from no one, other than their solicitors. They had done a man’s work. They had hired their laborers well and showed themselves hard-headed and courageous beyond their years. Kindly neighbors, who would have cared for the younger children, were definitely repulsed. The three elder boys had grown rapidly to firm manhood, and in between times they had attempted to bring up Barney with all the criticism of which they were capable. Barney, more delicate than the rest, sensitive and timid, fearing his brothers, had tried to defy them and had ended up by obeying them implicitly. And because he could not stand up for himself, they delighted in leading him a life of misery.

At eighteen they allowed him a certain independence. The old car, for instance, while a new sedan reposed in the big farm garage. A good suit, new shirts instead of Jack’s castaways, and an increased freedom of time.

“Fool!” Henry expressed himself curtly. “And then he does this.”

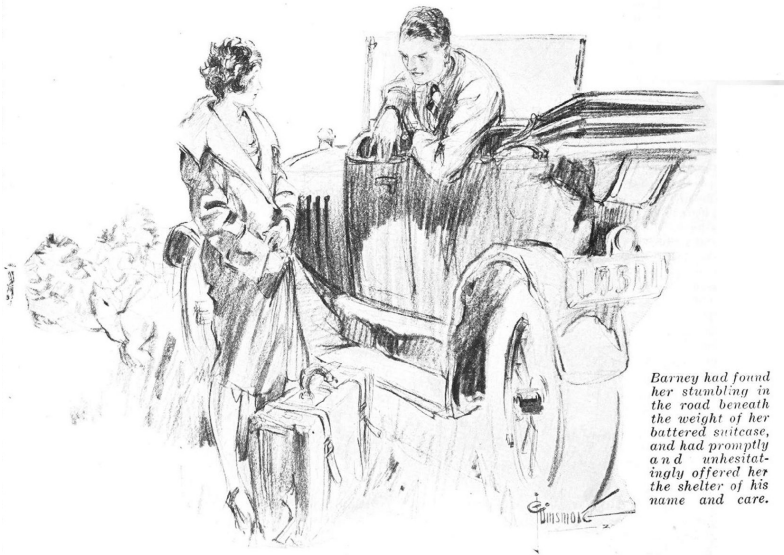
**F**or a week now Lucy had lived, a pale unassuming shadow in the big house of the Rainsfords, the house that Cyril Rainsford, thirty-five years ago, had built in the first success of his ambitious and rather turbulent youth. She had moved through the shadows quietly, touching the heavy furniture with timid fingers. Making order out of a vast chaos, and living in constant dread of three deep voices.

Of course, it was infinitely better than Bullens, where in answer to an advertisement, after the death of her mother in a neighboring city, she had labored for ten half-grown sons and daughters. Red and buxom young life—a mixture of coarse language and unending labor. Here, the voices held a



certain culture. They rarely swore, and their suggestions, though in the nature of implicit demands, were couched in careful phrases.

She had loved Barney from the first, when she had met him in her all too few spare hours of freedom. He had driven her in the moonlight far across the hills, and had talked shyly of his hopes and aspirations. Not a farmer—oh, no! Something in the business line down in the city, somewhere by the sea which he had never seen. He had seemed big, strong, full of life, protective and understanding, infinitely different from the uncouth murmurs which fell from the lips of the elder young male Bullens. And when in desperation she had fled from the too amorous clutches of Sam Bullens, Barney had found her stumbling in the road beneath the weight of her battered suitcase, and had promptly and unhesitatingly offered her the shelter of his name and care.



*Barney had found her stumbling in the road beneath the weight of her battered suitcase, and had promptly and unhesitatingly offered her the shelter of his name and care.*

Now, as she watched Jack's eggs slowly turn up at the edges, she knew it was little more than a name. Barney was a nonentity in the house of his brothers. His strength faded into insignificance beside those others. She loved him—how could she help that? But he was so very young, so pitifully helpless before them. This house was more protection than he. She knew instinctively that none of the three Rainsfords would ever lift a hand to insult her. They seemed to live in a hard-bitten, womanless world.

“Henry was engaged once,” Barney had told her. “But she turned him down at last. I don't wonder, with such a mug.”

Nor did Lucy wonder. She only wondered how the girl had ever accepted him in the first place. And whether Henry had particularly cared or not, none of his brothers ever knew.

Charles, it was rumored, loved a woman on a farmhouse twenty miles away. A tiny, uncomplaining woman tied to an invalid husband and three children. The rumor had never been actually verified. His brothers only knew that sometimes he set off in the truck, laden perhaps with apples, feed or potatoes, and came home driving furiously, tight-lipped and uncommunicative.

Jack steered clear on principle. At eighteen he had made a visit to a big eastern city, and while staying with relatives there, had met more girls in a few weeks than he had ever seen in the whole of his life before. A life of gaiety—and he could hold his own among the best. And then he had returned to the farm, flung away his good clothes, pulled his oldest shirt over his black head, and laughed whole-heartedly in reply to Henry's query "Girls! Lord preserve me!" Not that he entirely avoided feminine society. He was sometimes seen at local dances. He never failed to offer a girl or woman a ride in his car. But his manner was cool, and there was not a girl in the whole neighborhood who would have dared to be anything but entirely impersonal with Jack Rainsford.

He was buttering toast as Lucy laid the plate of eggs before him, and did not look up. "Thanks." He spoke briefly.

Lucy stood behind him a moment, and watched the back of his brown neck where the dark hair grew to a well shaped point. She wondered whether she had ever hated young Bullens as she hated his calm contempt. For she felt an indefinable contempt in every movement. There was a gleam of fury in her dark eyes, and she longed for strength, strength to crush this autocratic power of the Rainsfords.

He wheeled about sharply and she stepped back. But there was not the challenge she expected—merely a casual interest. "Where were you born?" he asked abruptly.

"Charlottetown." Against her very will she was forced into reply.

"Been out West long?"

"Ten years." She hesitated, but his eyes were impelling. "My father died, and my grandfather lived at Lakeside," mentioning a town some eighty miles distant. "He was a butcher," she continued, with a certain deliberation and a desire to see his black brows draw together. "And my father was a shoemaker. We've always been poor, and had to get along as well as we could. I meant to

be a teacher, but all my people died, so I had to do something and went to Bullens. . .” She stopped short, her cheeks aflame. After all, what was this to Jack Rainsford? Those brief sentences which held memories.

“Lucky for you, eh?” Jack spoke out of a brief pause, quietly. “I mean. . . meeting Barney.”

Silence again, and now Lucy was white. The impassive loathsomeness of this man—for she knew exactly what he meant. Protection of their home, their name; protection to her, who counted for less than nothing. All brought about through the folly of a stupid boy—a stupid, unthinking schoolboy.

She loved Barney. Yes. But that was nothing compared to her hatred of Jack Rainsford. And suddenly, like a small furious child she bent as he turned back to his eggs, and her small white teeth met sharply in his ear. “Beast!” she panted, before the horror of what she had done struck her. “You think you’re so superior . . . but I’m just as decent. . .”

A swift movement, and Jack, with crimson face, turned about. A swifter movement, and Lucy found herself outside the kitchen door, and her being tingled with the memory of one short sharp smack. A fading glimpse of that set face through her terror and indignation . . . Good heavens! Was it possible to hate one solitary man so much!

**T**he young bridal couple sat on the edge of their bed that evening and regarded each other with hot faces.

“My gosh!” Barney spoke with singular lack of humor. “You might have picked on anyone but Jack. We’ll never hear the end of it.”

Probably they would not. Supper had been a miserable meal, with three stern faces fixed on the trembling offender.

“To think that Barney would bring home a biting—female!” Henry’s most severe criticism in the face of woman.

“Better muzzle her. Rather dangerous about a house.” Charles shut his teeth with a decisive click.

“Dangerous,” Jack snorted and displayed a patched ear. “If you’d felt it. Loving little lady, isn’t she?”

“Barney!” Lucy was almost desperate now. “I can’t stay here. We’ll have to go away.”

But Barney shook his head. He had been thinking, too, during all the long hours of that day—thinking, so that only his body moved, and to all outward

intents his mind remained a blank. "We can't go just yet, dear. The boys are right, really, apart from their rottenness. To go off without a cent. I've simply got to try and get something together first."

"You can't. . . while you're at school." It was only a gentle accusation now, for she could read the misery in his eyes, but his face grew dully red. "If you'll only wait just a little, Lucy, I'll do something about it. Honest, I will."

"But, Barney, how?" she persisted. "They don't want me here."

"Well, what can I do, yet?" There was a set tightness about him. "I tell you I'll do all I can. You've got a good home for now. . . oh, gosh, Lucy. Don't feel like that about it." An answering note of despair crept into his own voice. "You know I only meant. . ."

She lay awake into the far hours of the night, cold, even with the warmth of his body close to hers, and his arm about her. Loving him, of course, for he had given her all he could of his rather helpless youth. But she shivered beneath the hatred of a square brown face, a thick head of black hair, hair which terminated in a well shaped point. No, she was not sorry she had bitten him. Her last conscious thought before she finally dropped into troubled sleep was the wish that she might miraculously be transformed into a tigress and shut alone with Jack Rainsford.

Life settled into a certain routine, and to all intents Barney had thought of no way out. He arose, tired and heavy in the first paleness of morning, dragged himself away with his books, and returned at night, sullen beneath the glances of his brothers. Only presently an indifference replaced the sullenness, and he turned the pages of his books each evening listlessly.

"Going to flunk a third time?" Henry asked curtly. "You. . . with a wife! How do you expect me to help you?"

"Aw, shut up." And even the combined glare of the three did not lessen the scowl on his face.

Lucy found Barney strange these days, silent and uncommunicative, sometimes tender, but there were no more plans for the future. Finally she ceased to ask.

"Barney." One night she found a certain courage. "If you're tired of me, I want to know. I can go away easily. You mustn't think. . ." But he stopped her with such a mixture of fright and something she could not quite understand in his grey eyes. "Lucy. Don't ever think that. Gosh, you know you're the only worth-while thing I've got." And that night he had held her very closely and

had spoken again in low, eager whispers of the city by the sea, and the promise to go there, yes, when he could get a little money together.

Lucy's days became more intensely filled with hating Jack. She went about her duties silently and her thoughts centred on the casual depth of his voice, the hard straight stare of his eyes, the firm set of his lips. Jack, who rarely spoke to her; who, like Charles and Henry, treated her as a young, unruly child—she, who had become a voiceless shadow in the depths of the farmhouse. She had learned restraint with Jack, and met him impassively even though something within her stirred madly at the mere sound of his footsteps.

Hated him madly. Longed, as a wild cat longs, to destroy. Until one day in mid-October—a cold, crisp day when he sat to a lunch later than the rest, and she carried a bowl of steaming soup to him. Somehow, she had stumbled against the back of his chair, and the contents of the bowl had slipped across his neck and streamed hotly down his arms.

He sprang up, and instinctively she recoiled. “Oh, I’m sorry.” Her voice was a frightened whisper. Would he kill her now? He seized her hands. “Good lord, did that catch you?” His voice was curt.

“No. Oh, no. It’s nothing.” Her voice trembled beneath the suddenness of that. “Jack, take off your shirt quickly and let me rub something on.”

“Sure, in a minute. I’m too tough to hurt.” But he held her hands, and rubbed butter over the deep red marks that had arisen. “Lucky you didn’t get any more.” The dark head was bent close to hers. “There you are.” He dropped her hands and smiled. “Never mind, kid. You didn’t mean it that time. Sure, you can massage me if it’ll make you feel any better.”

And that night there was only the briefest allusion to the incident over the supper table. Lucy’s hands and Jack’s neck bore tales which could not be hidden, but Jack ignored the matter and turned the conversation on Barney.

“And why any young man like you wants a bath every evening beats me. The idea! Do you want to run the river dry?”

“Perhaps you’d like me to spend the day hauling in wood for the stove so that you can boil yourself properly. We never need baths, of course.”

“That’s what comes of higher education He’ll be wanting a dress suit for dinner next.”

“It might be a darned good idea if we all had one,” Barney flared back. “Might help you to learn better manners.”

“Ha,” Henry laughed curtly. “Even our manners offend you now. What next!”

Jack’s attitude toward Lucy barely changed. He was perhaps a little more polite, and, seeing she was capable of taking an intelligent interest in the farm, sometimes briefly spoke of routine matters. And she, who had touched his hard, firm back; who had gently rubbed that spot where his hair tapered to a point, remembered every word. Of course she hated him; at least something inexplicable stirred her, and her eyes widened at the mere sound of his voice. Sometimes she deliberately avoided him, and the color ran high in her cheeks at a chance encounter. It was almost torture to hate quite in this way.

And then, when in the winter Charles caught pneumonia through exposure on one of his long truck journeys, and Lucy with a trained nurse watched him night and day, she caught strange glimpses of a different Jack. A Jack who made himself unobtrusively helpful, and who was always ready at a call. Barney was frankly frightened at the shadow of hovering death, and, though willing, was almost sick with nervousness on that night when hope fell to a minimum, and further tormented by the knowledge that it was more terror of the unknown than love of Charles which sickened him. Henry was vile-tempered, scowling, and saw fit to lash them all with a caustic tongue. But Jack was calm and showed no outward sign of nerves. He even laughed quietly at Henry. “Hold it, fellow. No one wants to hear you now. Take a drink and see if that helps.” He held Barney silent with a look. “For heaven’s sake, lock yourself away and lose the key. If you aren’t the most useless thing I’ve ever encountered!”

But much later that night, Lucy entered the kitchen as the three of them waited tensely, and after one look at the three set faces, and particularly at the ghastly pallor of her husband, went straight to Jack. He was sitting by the stove, idly turning the pages of a farm catalogue, and was the only one who spoke. “Well.” He looked up sharply. “What is it?”

Her voice broke with weariness. “The doctor says he thinks. . . perhaps he hopes. . . you see, Charles is asleep now.”

And then something went limp in Jack, and his arms went out swiftly, and after a startled moment, involuntarily her own arms held him. She looked down on the rough dark head against her, in a silence which was unbroken. And in that moment a realization came to her that left her weak and trembling, more than she had ever been in those last few days of tense anxiety. Jack, of them all, to turn to her, to know now, at such a time that there was something in her that could care for any man like this!

In the days that followed Charles's convalescence a vague fear clutched her heart each time Barney mentioned the city. The time was far away, but some day he would finish school, and then she knew Henry would take matters into his hands. Henry was kinder to her now, and the combined scorn of the three seemed to centre on Barney. She wished desperately that she could feel more in sympathy with the boy. For after all, he had done what he could, and he loved her. She was haunted by his thin young face and unhappy grey eyes. But he was so hopelessly immature and useless—against her newly awakened womanhood,—against the straight sturdiness of Jack.



*She would not forget that night when he had seized her by the shoulders, almost roughly, at the foot of the stairs. "If you'd only married me!"*

Jack's conduct was little changed. But his voice had lost much of its dominance, and he talked to her more frequently. Of them all, though, he was



the most impersonal, except. . . she would not forget the night when he had seized her by the shoulders, almost roughly, a moment at the foot of the stairs. “Why did you pick a kid like Barney?” He had thrust her away savagely and then had pulled her to him. She could feel him trembling. “If you’d only married me!” Lucy lived for days with the memory of that swift embrace. . . God forgive her for loving Jack like that, for glorying in that moment when she had felt his lips. God forgive and understand them both, when she was Barney’s wife. Barney, who was so little of a husband, so little more than a timid shadow in the house. She pitied him, yes. But how could her heart yearn now, when she had felt those other strong young arms—that was too much for any mere human.

Quite suddenly the comparative peace of the days was terminated. Henry, in reply to an urgent summons, drove furiously to a distant town one mid-December morning. He returned late that same afternoon with a white and stubborn Barney at his side.

“The idiot!” He stamped into the kitchen and flung hat and coat across the table. His brow was dark and lowering as he paced the floor. “Gets mixed up in a Chinese raid and lands in the lock-up! The trouble I’ve had! And dragging our name into the filthy business.”

“Well, you don’t understand.” Barney stood with coat collar upturned, and held his hands over the top of the stove, tight-lipped, and grey eyes hard. “I’ve done nothing. I only worked there.”

“Worked where?” Charles’ voice had lost none of its vigor through illness, and he sat upright in the easy-chair before the fire. “In an opium den or the police station? What d’you mean, work?”

“What d’you think I mean?” Barney snapped back. “I know you haven’t got much sense.”

“How long have you been skipping school, then?” Jack leaned against the boiler and his dark brows drew together. “Yes, I know that, my lad. Ages ago. Met a school friend of yours. Oh, no, he thought you’d quit. Pretty cute! I’ve said nothing so far. I merely wondered. . .”

“Oh, yes, mighty smart.” Hatred gave Barney courage, turned his lips cynically. “Well, think I care what you wonder. I’ve got a hundred and fifty saved.”

“Where’s he been working, for the love of goodness?” Charles turned to Henry, eyes enquiring.

Henry wheeled about and snorted. "At some stinking, low down hotel in Corona. Orientals, and heaven knows what sort of women about. Been there since the day school started, if you please."

Lucy stood behind Charles' chair immovable, eyes wide. And now Barney's glance sought hers desperately. "I did it for us. Lucy, honest, you believe that, don't you? I've done nothing. . . I'm not in on any crooked game, I swear. . ."

"Well, don't swear," Jack cut in briefly. "Why didn't you tell us?"

"Because. . ." Barney turned to Henry, even though his brow was darkest of them all. "Because I knew you'd raise the roof. Me, serving and working in some rotten joint. Well, I know. I can't help it. I had to do something. I went as far away as I could, so you wouldn't know. But you're crazy; you are, too, so shut up!" His eyes met Jack's savagely. "I told you I wasn't going to school. Me! With a wife. And I haven't done anything wrong."

"Barney, why didn't you tell me?" His eyes dropped before the paleness of her face, the wonder in her voice. No. He could not look at her again—not now.

"Yes, why the devil not? That's pretty queer."

"Answer up, boy. Why didn't you tell her? I know you're not implicated in that mess. We'll fight that clear." Something of the extreme scowl had left Henry's face. "It's just the disobedience and secrecy. What do you mean by not telling her?"

Barney's face grew dully red. "Well, why should I?" But then at something in Lucy's eyes his voice dropped, and only Jack who was nearest, and the girl who had moved hesitantly to his side, heard. "Because. . . it was a dirty job. . . and everything smelled so much. I thought I wouldn't tell her till I'd finished. I thought. . . maybe. . . she wouldn't want me near her at nights. . ."

He turned away, stiffened beneath her impulsive touch.

"What!" Henry spoke sharply. "Speak up." But Jack cut in abruptly. "Let up, Henry. It's not our business." There was something that might have been contempt or might even perhaps have been a shade of pity in his dark eyes. The stupid intricacies of a sensitive mind—good heavens!

"Let up nothing. He's a common sneak, preying on our good nature. . ."

Charles suppressed a sudden, involuntary laugh, and Henry glared.

“I didn’t. I bought my own gas for the car, and meals. And I won’t be dictated to by you any more. Think it was fun!”

“You idiot!” They got it out of him by degrees. The long hours, drudgery, foul surroundings, and terror lest they should find out too soon that he, a Rainsford, should defy them and have so little respect for their good name. But there was finally slow amusement behind Charles’ eyes. “Well, I don’t say it wasn’t coming to us, when we’ve privately been thinking you a gol’darn fool to take orders from Henry. You’ve got some nerve, thank heaven. What do you plan to do, now you’ve got this hundred and fifty cached away. Better hand it over here, eh?”

“Aw, heck, how do I know?” Barney’s voice was gruff, and he had hardly caught Charles’ levity of tone. Deliberately he would not look at Lucy, even though, with her hand on his arm, she had tried to speak. Instinctively, he avoided something that was dark and tortured in her eyes. There was something hard and rather old about his whole appearance then. “I planned to get away. Drive down maybe, and get some sort of job on the coast. But now,” he swallowed hard, “now that I think Jack and Lucy love each other. . .”

“What!” A chorus of amazed incredulity.

Lucy clutched his arm more tightly. “Barney! Oh, Barney, dear, don’t be silly.” Her voice was pleading.

He held her back, roughly. “No, you needn’t think I’m blind. You just put up with me. But you don’t care. Jack. . . he. . . he would do something like that.”

Jack stepped forward and shook him suddenly; shook him until the white misery of his face turned red. But beneath the searching glances of the elder Rainsfords his own face was only frowning. “Fool!” He spoke sharply. “Me love Lucy! Good lord. . . me love your shrinking violet. Pull yourself together, boy. Don’t be such a little rotter as to accuse the kid of liking me. Have you ever known me such a fool as to love a woman in my life? And then you have the nerve. . .” His voice broke off in a laugh and he turned to the others. “Charlie, you too, maybe. Sick bed proximity. Sure you don’t entertain a secret passion? And Henry. Lord, yes. Confabs over the breakfast ham and eggs. It’s a foregone case.” He gave the boy a final shake. “Don’t be silly, Barney.” And then he relaxed his grip, and his voice grew unexpectedly kind. “Never mind, old kid, you’re all right. Only don’t let those other tough guys rag you so much. And you just ask that wife of yours if she loves me. Why, good lord,” he laughed again. “Think I’d want to rob you?” He shook his dark head. “Not for me,” emphatically.

For one brief moment Lucy's eyes met Jack's. But they were hard, bright and compelling, as they had been in those first days. Eyes that turned her heart sickeningly within her, even while she knew. . . but she had forgotten that Jack could ever look like that. And then her head lifted, and with a fine disregard of those present, her arms went up around Barney's neck. "You silly," she whispered. "You know how much I care. You know I would have gone with you at any time. You know I'll go anywhere now. Barney, dear, you know. . ."

Henry stopped his more reflective pacing and spoke curtly. "Go on upstairs and tell him what you know. Think we want to hear?"

But Barney, after one look into her eyes, pulled her into his arms, and looking over the top of her bright head actually dared to grin at Henry—for almost the first time in his life. "I'll just say you won't hear," he challenged.

"Idiots!" Charles grunted, when a few minutes later the three Rainsfords were alone.

Jack was silent a long moment. "Poor kids," he remarked quietly at length—the memory of Barney's awkward, "Sorry, Jack," still in his ears. "But they'll pull through—away from us."

"Hmmp," Henry grunted. "I suppose so. Oh, sure, I'll help him out. I always meant to. Anything for a quiet life. Say!" He regarded his brother sharply a moment "Nothing in that. . . what Barney said . . . is there?"

Jack laughed again, and he met Henry's gaze quite steadily. "Think I'd want to cherish a—biting female!" His dark eyebrows were raised, and suddenly, for the first time that day, Henry's features relaxed into something approaching a smile. For a moment he had been afraid, for if Jack loved, it would be a serious matter. That much he knew. But no one with a face as impudent as that. . .

Late that night, as they were going to bed, Charles laid his arm a moment over Jack's shoulder, one of the rarest movements of his life. "I know, Jack," he said quietly. "It's damnable. But we've just got to stick these things."

And Jack just stared a moment, and then dug his fist into his brother's chest. "Oh, go and chase yourself, you jackass!"

But he paused a moment as he turned his bedroom door handle. "Thanks, Charlie." And his voice was more gentle than even Lucy had ever heard it.

THE END

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

Inconsistency in accents has been corrected or standardised.

Illustrations have been relocated due to using a non-page layout.

When nested quoting was encountered, nested double quotes were changed to single quotes.

Space between paragraphs varied greatly. The thought-breaks which have been inserted attempt to agree with the larger paragraph spacing, but it is quite possible that this was simply the methodology used by the typesetter, and that there should be no thought-breaks.

[The end of *The Tyrants* by Beryl Gray]