

GAY NOVELETTE AND 14 COMPLETE STORIES

Breezy Stories

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Gay Novelette

LOVE
GAME

PASSION RIDES

IN THE BLOOD

ONE OF THOSE KISSES

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Inside Front Cover

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When answering advertisements please mention BREEZY STORIES

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The Love Game

By OLIVE WADSLEY

ONE lives and learns. And all sorts of learning go to make up a living, specially a girl's. Extra bits are thrown in if the girl happens to be pretty, and extra special bits if she happens to be entirely on her own. I can vouch for this; I belong to that last-mentioned class.

To ask for sympathy is inexpedient; to expect to get it at all is young and pathetic and idiotic. I do not want it—now.

Right at the beginning I had no tragic background to use, as it were, as a jumping-off board. Most unsheltered girls can do the eye-lash trick to the whimper of cruel parents, a hard home life, misunderstanding, and so forth and so on, to weariness.

I could not have done it for the simple reason that I had endured no early hardships, and also I cannot be bothered to lie unnecessarily. There are so many really important occasions when a lie is vital to success that I should never dream of making a talent a threadbare drudge. This may be unmoral, but it is sense.

As I have said, my background was quite ordinary and kindly; at any rate no one could call carelessness of life a harsh thing when it merely took the form of free and easy expenditure, free and easy hospitality, free and easy everything, I think, looking back.

My mother died when Denning and I were kids; Denning, whose real name is Darrington, was twelve, and I was ten. My father was, quite simply, a sport and nothing else. It's odd how often people who have always taken the sporting chance leave a somewhat unsporting one behind



Cecilia was no saint.

them when they die, for their children!

Father had been a cheery liver and he died taking a fence, which pleased him on the whole, but proved bad luck

for Denning and me, because hunting accidents had not been included in his life insurance policy.

Denning had just left school, and after the wind-up decided that we must migrate to London.

I don't know why, but I have never managed to be really fond of my only brother. He is abominably clever, though he seems guileless. His appearance helps him, he is pale and thin and not very tall, and has a most gentle voice, and incidentally, the most vicious vocabulary I have ever heard.

"What are we to do?" I remember saying to him in the shabby bedroom of the second-rate hotel where we were staying.

Denning laughed softly, lit a cigarette and said:

"I have a scheme on. You'll be all right, Cis. You can hang on here; I'll send some funds when I get 'em."

"And if you don't?" I asked, lighting a cigarette, too.

"Good Lord," he said lightly, "you've got looks; you're not so much a child now. Get hold of a man, my dear; marry him. It's all your sort can do."

He came and sat down on the bed beside me.

"Look here, Cis," he said in his low, attractive voice, "get this drilled into you. Looks can do anything for a girl, if she has the sense to use 'em. You're not a fool; look how mad that silly Wilmington was about you down at Tenbury; you know how to put the 'come-hither' on a man. Use your head."

He looked into my eyes, smiling a little.

"Get me?" he added, rising and laughing again.

"I suppose so," I said carelessly.

That was not really true. I was rather bewildered; I did not under-

stand clearly, but I hated to seem a fool before Denning.

To say that about him somehow describes him; he was just that, the type of man before whom one hates to seem a fool! And that type is generally suavely clever, utterly selfish, quite ruthless, and never, save on the rarest occasions, discourteous. Denning had all those qualities.

Father had called him a "close one," but he had been proud of him because he could ride straight, and never lost his nerve.

When he said good-by to me before departing to develop his "scheme," he said:

"Play up, Cis, for God's sake. We really are dashed down on our luck. There's all I can spare. Don't spend it on food if you can help it. You needn't, y'know. You can rope in lunches and dinners and suppers, off some man, surely. What about that barrister boy you had on a string last night? He's good enough for a few free feeds, I should think."

He ran down the steps, and waved as he turned away.

I watched him, wondering how he seemed to outsiders. He walked easily, and he looked smart, he had a certain air despite his thinness. He hailed a taxi and I saw his profile, pale, disinterested, self-possessed. Then he vanished, and I was left to digest his advice.

I had all the day until dinner time in which to meditate.

This is the way one meditates at eighteen when one is out to live and has no special talent, and has been advised to exploit one's self.

First, I hated Denning for his beastly advice.

Secondly, I was somehow pleased that he seemed to think I had looks enough to be worth while.

Thirdly, I was afraid, and it wasn't a fear of something I knew, for if I wasn't ignorant of life, I was whitely innocent of all the evil of it then, and the idea that through my looks I had to win power, made me feel a little breathless, a little ashamed. It was that sort of fear.

Lastly, it all seemed a game, and because I knew it was a fifth rate sort of one, I defiantly ignored that knowledge.

Besides, what assets, other than myself, had I with which to set about making a career?

I had had no training save that the circumstances of birth gave you, and that very sort debarred me then, in my ignorance, from going out as a servant, or going into a shop.

About the only two careers open to the uneducated, penniless and pretty are the stage or—not the stage.

So there you are.

I could not have said that at eighteen; looking back, I know it has a certain truth.

Lots and lots of girls and women will cry out at this, I am sure, but I suggest, before they hurl condemnation, that they picture themselves nearly penniless, quite alone save for the help (?) of a rotter, quite useless, quite untrained, with just as much moral sense as other girls, and quite as keen a horror of sin; and absolutely no idea of what to do, or how to set about the study of that branch of learning.

Let them be alone in a shabby hotel with no friends, no scrap of help, and just a rotter's advice to go on: "Use your looks!"

I wonder how many of them would have obtained a living wage in some employment, or have done as I did—played up!

I had just a few pounds, and I tried

to get a job at first, and I couldn't. I tried everything at last, but "no experience" seems as final a death blow to an appointment as a ton weight on a human being's head!

I used to meet Balliol Franks at dinner each night; he sat next to me.

He had a face rather like a satyr; his eyes were amber between very black lashes, and wide open, and brilliant; his hair was black and thick and bushy, and his underlip, very thin and mobile, projected a little.

He had good manners, and nice clothes, wit and devilishness. All the world was his oyster, and he hacked at it from sheer diabolical vitality.

I don't believe he cared who paid for his pleasure as long as he took it; he was quite ruthless, a little feline in his ways.

I liked his acid wittiness, and he liked my looks.

He said one evening in the silly little conservatory, with its dustiness and its paper plants, or India rubber one, and its smell of cigar smoke, and the dinner:

"D'you know, your skin is like a cream rosebud, like the leaves that are wrapped tightly round the heart of it, if you tear off the outer ones."

I smiled at him through the cigarette haze, and said:

"Go on."

"Thanks," he said deliberately, "I will. Your hair is rather alluring; it's odd hair, in a way, it's so fine and yet so thick, and I imagine you take a deuce of a time doing it, and are inordinately pleased with it. One rather wants—" he leant forward suddenly; "one rather wants, little Cecilia, without the Saint before it!—to take it in one's hands."

He was smiling the satyr smile, and I was wondering if he meant to take me out to dinner the next day; cash

was very low, and employment registry offices nearly exhausted.

"Your eyes," he said after a pause, "are just gray, but so damned attractive because their lightness is ringed with sheer black lashes. Oh, yes, you are pretty enough, and it's quite wise of you to smile with that mouth of yours, for in repose it droops a little at the corners. Why?"

"Life's so dull, perhaps?" I suggested.

His eyes glittered.

"It needn't be," he said, "I can give you rather a good time, if you care for that sort of thing. Like to do a dinner and show tomorrow evening?"

Here was my dinner for nothing!

"Thanks very much," I said.

"Right, meet me at—" he hesitated, then added swiftly, "no, be at the Carlton at seven, inside."

I felt excited all next day, it wasn't for a dinner I was getting, it was amusement, and feeling alive, and I was deadly sick of registry offices and buses, and seeing myself in shop windows where every woman, I should think, looks her plainest.

I don't know what there is about a strip of glass between two great spaces of crammed goods, but I do know that one glimpse of oneself is a nightmare, and I've always noticed every shop glass has the same effect!

Visions of myself at the Carlton were more satisfactory.

I felt deadly shy as I waited, and every woman, girl seemed smarter.

I had never been in a night club to dine before, or ever at all to the Carlton.

I told Balliol Franks so, and he screwed up his eyes and laughed and said: "So much the better! My luck is in."

We talked of hundreds of things during dinner; and the people, the

women in lovely gowns, the leisured-looking, well groomed men, the pink and gold and white scheme of decoration, all helped to make me feel excited.

The luxury of it all went to my head.

Balliol Franks said suddenly:

"How on earth do you live?"

I stared at him.

"How?" I echoed.

"Yes. D'you work, or have you an income, or what?"

Denning flashed into my brain for no reason, the sort of answer he would have made.

"Oh, what, I think," I said gaily, meeting his eyes and laughing.

"Which means?" he persisted.

And suddenly I felt a queer little fear.

"Oh, there's my brother Denning," I said, trying to speak carelessly, "and—and my father left us something, of course."

"I see. I only wondered."

He leaned forward again:

"I didn't mean to seem impertinently curious, but when one's interested, y'know— And I should hate for you to be bothered. If ever you were, I hope you'd come to me."

"Thank you," I murmured.

Denning had apparently, for once, spoken the unvarnished truth when he had said that it was "easy for a girl with looks" to live.

In the taxi, on the way to the theater, Balliol Franks said:

"Cold?" sliding an arm behind me to close the window.

The play was very good; I laughed at it.

"I love to see you laugh," Balliol Franks said; "you seem as if you 'laughed life'; it's so effortless and young, and somehow vital!"

On the way home he held my hand.

I let him; it was fair payment, and I knew I should have to let him kiss me. After all he had given me a dinner and a show, and I wanted another if I were not to be stony before Denning, whose address was undiscoverable, came back!

He did kiss me, and it was rather a bore, and I hated it feebly.

But when he said:

"What are you doing tomorrow at lunch time?" I knew I meant to go out with him.

"Meet me at the Temple," he said.

It was rather an adorable day, an early summer day of lilac and laburnum, and acacia trees in the park, and when I passed girls walking together and laughing, I wished I were not alone, nor going out to lunch, and that kisses had not to take the place of money in my life.

I felt horrible lonely, and the summer day seemed so care-free, and I thought of all the people who were getting happily, gloriously married that day, or who were properly looked after and loved at home. I wondered miserably if I could get on to the stage. It's so easy for "stars" to write and talk about work, and only "work," counting in an actress's success, but there does seem to be a few girls who manage to live awfully comfly and happily, and who do not belong to the ranks of sweated labor!

I thought if I had two pounds a week I should be so happy, I should never bother any more.

The Temple was the queerest, most attractive place I had ever seen.

It is dark, and has the most awful little cork-screw staircases, and leaded windows, and old, old, oak-panelled rooms.

At least Balliol Franks' rooms were oak-panelled and below, if you leaned out of the window, a lilac tree tossed

and fluttered, and there was a garden all green and gold and exquisite.

"Here, in the midst of buses and business, and noise and dust!" I said.

"Yes," he said, coming and standing beside me, "here, as you say, in the midst of dust and noise. The garden's rather like you in a man's life, what you might be, if you were loved, don't you know!" he said; he was laughing, but his eyes were not.

He kissed me again at the door, and then went out to lunch.

And then at lunch he talked about the idiocy of marrying.

"It stands to reason," he said lightly, "that once two people are tied up together, they will get sick of each



Balliol Franks had money and good manners.

other. How can they help it? How can you go on wanting a thing you possess? Marriage is a hopeless muddle for modern people."

"I shall never marry," he told me emphatically, and he added, his satyr face suddenly, wickedly amused: "I shall love instead."

We sat in the sweet garden afterwards, and I wondered whether I should ask his help about the stage; he had spoken to an actress, a very well known one in the restaurant.

I did ask his help and he looked at me between half-shut eyelids and said:

"I'll see what I can do. I'll have a suggestion of sorts to make fairly soon, I dare say; I know Carton, the big manager."

Then he talked poetry and quoted to me. The poem began:

Crimson nor yellow roses,
Nor the savour of the mounting sea,
Are worth the perfume I adore—
That clings to thee . . .

And there was another, by whom I forget, but I remember some lines of it:

Catch me, then, close to your heart,
Whose throbs break like great waves on mine;
Blind my eyes with your maddening hair,
And forget with me all but just this:
The beat of the blood, and the burn of the kiss. . . .

He had a low voice, and it sounded beautiful as he spoke of poetry, and he said very quickly, very suddenly:

"It is like that, your pale gold, silky hair, maddening, adorable."

We walked together from the garden into a narrow passage, which led out into the street. In the dimness Balliol Franks bent back my head and kissed my lips once. No other man had kissed me until then.

He released me as swiftly and bade me good-by quite casually.

I went to a registry office to see if anyone would engage me as a governess.

Two women interviewed me, and one said: "Not been out before!" as if I were a dangerous freak, and the other said with a laugh:

"Too dangerous, my dear. I want a girl for use, not ornament."

So I walked back to the hotel in South Kensington and counted up my remaining money; it did not take long.

Denning, the undiscoverable, had said: "Get some man to marry you," at first, and had said at last: "Get some man to feed you."

Balliol Franks had done the latter at any rate; there seemed nothing for it but to encourage his generosity.

"And where is it going to end?" I asked myself, sitting before my mirror, powdering my face.

My eyes gazed back at me questioningly.

He did not mean to marry me; he had said all he had said about marriage in order to make me very sure on that point.

My face flushed very deeply as I remembered his kiss upon my lips.

Ken Wilmington, whom Denning had mentioned, had been the vicar's son at home. He had told me once that the lips of the woman a man loved were the gates of Paradise to him.

Ken had really loved me despite his people's opposition, and his youth (he was only twenty) and his pennilessness.

He had never once kissed me though, or touched me, or said odd, suggestive things.

That was why now I knew he had loved me.

"The gates of Paradise!"

But no woman's lips are that save to her own soul's lover.

To other men, I suppose, they are



Cecilia lived on her looks and wit.

just the entrance to a vaudeville, shall I say, or—no, I won't say it.

At dinner that night Balliol Franks was absorbed, almost sulky; he scarcely noticed me.

For three days he went on like that, and though I laughed, I knew it mattered to me.

It hurt my vanity horribly, and besides, no one else wanted to take me out, and Denning never wrote, so it frightened me a little too.

And then, on Sunday, quite early, he came and knocked at my door.

"I want you to come out," he said. "I've got a car. Do come."

It was another gorgeous day, a silky, soft wind, all scented, and splendid sunshine, and that feel of life being lovely and very keen in the air.

Balliol Franks told me the car was his own.

"I'm only living at this hotel place while a house I inherited is being got ready," he added carelessly.

So I knew he was rich.

We raced out into the country, and happiness seemed to race with us; at least I felt as if it did. Worries didn't matter any more, and Balliol Franks was no longer sulky, and one day more was provided for, and perhaps there would be a letter from Denning tomorrow.

We lunched on Banstead Downs, amongst the gorse and waving bracken; we found a little clearing where the grass was dry and tufty, and Balliol unpacked the hamper. There were champagne and sandwiches, and fruit and a chocolate cake.

When we had finished, Balliol lay back and smoked and talked poetry again, lovely stuff that made my heart beat a little, I don't know why.

I asked him if he had met his friend, the theater manager.

He said:

"Oh yes. By the way, he's to be at my house this evening. It's nearly finished. He wants to suggest a scheme to you. Will you come? We can drive straight there after tea."

I could have sung for joy.

"Rather," I said, "of course I'll come."

"Little sport," he murmured, and he told me that I was "lovely enough to sin for."

We had tea at Ripley in an old, old inn where Nelson used to go and meet Lady Hamilton.

Balliol Franks told me about them, and then went on and talked of other lovers, watching me through the pale-blue cigar smoke.

As we drove back the evening was falling like lovely colored veils, each fainter colored than the last.

People were starting for church; all the bells seemed pealing as we drove into London.

That old sense of loneliness caught me again.

"Are you ever lonely?" I asked Balliol, and he turned so swiftly that his face nearly touched mine.

"Are you?" he asked, almost in a whisper.

"Oh dreadfully," I said, and I caught his arm in my hands, "so lonely I feel as if—as if all the world were against me."

He did not draw his face away.

"So lonely are you?" he said, and his teeth showed in a smile, for a second. "Poor, little, lonely, loveless kid!"

His house was somewhere near Grosvenor Square, in Mount Street or Brook Street, one of those unostentatious, so expensive places, where houses, however small, mean fortunes. Ladders were roped against the little

balcony behind which the windows were open.

Balliol Franks opened the door with a latchkey and held it for me to pass in before him.

The hall was narrow and high, and the walls were covered with a sort of goldenly shining linen stuff.

"This way," he said, seizing my hand and running upstairs. He took me into the room with the open windows, and it was quite lovely.

There were masses of flowers, a piano, a gorgeous mirror, circular, in a frame of silver and mother o' pearl.

"Like it here?" Balliol Franks asked me.

"Yes, it's beautiful. Will your friend be long?"

Balliol laughed and sat down beside me suddenly on the gray couch with its masses of golden colored cushions.

"Cecil," he said, "don't be obvious, little girl, and pretend to be dense. You're too lovely to be stupid; though, by gad, I think one would even risk stupidity to possess you. But I know you aren't thank Heaven. Cecil, we stand a chance of happiness we two. I've money and brains; you've loveliness and I adore you. I think you like me, too. What have you to say about it? I'll settle so much on you, of course. I'll play the game—"

And suddenly he took me wholly in his arms and kissed me until the kisses were pain, they were so hard, so relentless.

He released me and laughed breathlessly.

"You lovely thing," he said in a whisper, "so white, so devilish sweet, so hesitant—"

I got to my feet.

"I don't mean to stay," I said faintly.

He laughed again and caught me in his arms, bending my head back

against his shoulder, kissing my throat.

"Doesn't that thrill you?" he said hoarsely. "I mean to waken you, Cecil. I adore you, do you hear? We're utterly alone, the place is empty. Don't be afraid of me!"

I thrust him back, stammering, nearly crying.

"I—I hate you," I gasped.

"What?" he shot at me.

"It's true. I hate you—I was hard up—I had to eat, to live, I let you kiss me—"

His face was very ugly, his eyes glittered at me.

"Go on," he said.

"You said you would help me—"

He burst out laughing noisily.

"So you meant to get all you could without paying?"

I was at the door; he came over to me in a flash and I ran down the stairs and tugged at the latch in the hall.

I pulled the door wide just as his arms closed on me.

Someone was passing; he had released me before they could see and had vanished into the obscurity of the hall.

His voice followed me out:

"You little rotter!"

I ran on and on, and came to the park.

His words burnt in my brain.

If I was a little rotter, I was out under the sky; even if I was lonely, I was free.

II

IT'S extraordinary what an awful thing the mere fact that one *has* to live, can become! It seems such an effortless affair, but the toil necessary to keep that effort in existence is limitless! Even to wake up in the morning

seems a sin when you have no money. And then one has a ghastly habit of feeling very hungry, when you have no right at all to any food, seeing you cannot possibly pay for it, and to take what is not yours, is stealing.

There are stacks of scarcely cheering little problems like the theft one to be faced, when you are without a cent, and have no friends, and are young, and have already been forced to realize there *is* a life in which you need not labor at all; indeed so toil-free is this existence that it is unnecessary to exercise your conscience even to the extent of wondering if *posses* one!

Another thing which arrests your attention is the tremendous quickness with which, once you are on your own, you learn. All sorts of knowledge, all sorts of information, all sorts of people. You take them like studies.

At eighteen I had "known" nothing, six months later I knew everything, from others' lives.

One man taught me I was afraid to be really bad; one woman taught me how hard it is to be really good when you love, and shouldn't; and my brother, who had the brain of a criminal, and the face of a tired angel, taught me a creed which held no mercy, and enunciated the maxim; never pay yourself, if you can get somebody else to pay for you.

"It is the best motto in the world," he said gently, "stick to it, Cis, and you'll never starve."

He had been absent since our father's death "on a scheme" as he expressed it, and he sat and told me his plans in the same bed-sitting-room in the cheap hotel in which, before his departure, he had advised me to trade on my looks.

I reminded him of that.

"Well?" he said, "I was quite right,

wasn't I? You are still here. I conclude you showed sense."

"I learned to feel ashamed instead," I told him, then I caught his arm suddenly, and said:

"Denning, be a sport and help me. It's so easy for a man to live; it's only girls who never stand a chance."

"Rot," he said, "you've got no nerve. No clever woman ever pays in full; therein lies her cleverness! The war cry of your sort, my dear, is 'get everything, give nothing.' Play up to it."

"It's a fair one, I think," I said stingingly, "judging by the only two men I've known well, yourself and the man who told me he didn't want to marry me, but loved me!"

Denning laughed again, then said abruptly:

"Any old way, you will have to manage on your own, Cis. I can't trail you about with me. And I'm off tomorrow."

He gave me a fiver, and went, just as he said.

I paid it to the hotel proprietress, all but ten shillings, and went out and walked to Oxford Street: I went to see the woman who had told me how hard it was to be good when you loved.

She was a divorcee.

Her husband had married her when he had been forty and she seventeen, and taken her to India; he was in the Civil Service there.

They went first to a place where their bungalow was the only house, and they the only white people for about forty miles.

Carmen told me that she used to listen to the silence until she thought she would go mad with sorrow.

Her husband was away nearly all day, hearing the native cases and when he came home, after the first year, he began to drink too much.

And that was all her life—loneli-

ness and drink and silence—until a man called Maynard came up as sub. He was twenty-three, and he was just young and alive and happy. He and Carmen fell in love and ran away, and Carmen's husband divorced her. Then, while she and Owen Maynard waited for the decree to be made absolute, he caught fever and died in her arms, his head upon her heart.

After that she just called herself by his name. She had a tiny flat over a china shop, and the noise of the buses was deafening sometimes and the dust came in rather a lot.

Carmen had scarcely any money, but the flat was furnished with lovely chintz covers on the chairs and sofa and there were generally flowers about, lots of them, and it was all comfy—the chairs were and the tea was, and the place was, somehow.

I said so and Carmen smiled at me with her lips, the sort of smile which does not mean amusement, but understanding. This time the understanding was cynical.

"I've got to live, you see," she said; she has a drawling, very pretty voice, "and all men like to be comfortable. Marriage would be an easier thing if all wives remembered that!"

She smiled at me again.

"I wonder if I know what you're thinking?" she asked me. "If you are, it's not quite right. I loved Owen, I love him still; I believe in my grave I shall know that, but—one has to live. And Kendrick Watts brings me books, takes me to the theater, dines me; he is bored with his life, and here he can meet a pal and we can make up a four, and he needn't dress for dinner. He's selfish, not unkindly, he only likes me well, and knows he need not stand on ceremony with me. Winton sends me game and fruit from his place. He can come and talk to me, and he knows I

shan't let him down over his confidences or at bridge. And so on and so forth. Anyone could think the worst; most would—but it wouldn't be true. Men are what you make them, when you are over thirty, Cecil—what you let them be, before."

I told her all about my brother and his rottenness. She seemed neither surprised nor shocked, but she said:

"If you can't get a job, don't go without meals; always come here. I can manage that sort of thing for you. I'll love to."

I didn't get a job, and I used to go to the flat for rare meals, but never unless I really didn't know what to do.

I got work at last, in a shop, a huge drapery place.

I was in the perfume department. It doesn't sound hard, I know, but at the end of the first week I felt so tired, I never wanted to get out of bed again. I spent my first Sunday in sleeping, and when I had to turn out at eight o'clock on Monday morning I felt as if I really wanted to begin undressing again and just curl up, and feel the glorious blessedness of sleep drifting over me. I stuck to that work all though May and June; and Denning never wrote, never sent me a *sou*, and so I left the hotel and got a tiny room in a little street in Pimlico.

We had a half-holiday on Saturdays, and I used to dress then in one of the dresses I had had at home and go off to Carmen's flat.

It was there, on a Saturday, that I met Derry Keene.

He was Irish, and thirty-five, and fascinating and rich, and I was Irish too, and just eighteen and impressionable, and lonely, and dreadfully poor.

Easy game!

Not quite fair game.

I think he did fall in love with me; I think I did with him—it is so diffi-

cult to say what real love is, or isn't. Love comes more easily into your heart when you are very lonely—I do know that. And does eighteen know what love means, after all? You think you do, and it means all the world, gloriously, *then*—but afterwards?



Derry Keene enjoyed life as he found it.

Anyway I believed I loved Derry, and I did love his bigness and fairness, his blue eyes that laughed, his generosity and gaiety. He had dear-darling ways with him; he treated me like a child, while he strove to make me love like a woman. He could be so young himself; he had imagination, that happiest gift, and understanding, too.

He did nothing, except enjoy life as he found it.

I don't believe anyone tried to resist liking him. He was the sort everyone, man, and woman, and child, and dog likes, and the queerest thing about it all was that he was so deadly honorable in his dishonor. I have often wondered since, if that is a trait many

men possess. I am inclined to believe it is. I believe, I mean, that it is absolutely possible for a man to be straight in his life and crooked in his love.

But, oh! that summer when I worked all day in the scent store, and met Derry in the evening, and was motored out into the country, where we picnicked in the moonlight, when Derry kissed me good-night on my lips, and was as tender over me as if I were indeed a little child.

I remember the evenings now, the sweet, clean smell of the dew-drenched fields, the swift perfume from some flower-laden tree in a garden we flashed past, and Derry beside me, sometimes talking, sometimes silent, sometimes weaving fairy tales, sometimes telling love tales.

We used to get home about midnight. He always drove me home, and watched me let myself into the airless, tiny hall, and waited until I looked out at him from my bedroom window and whispered a last goodnight. Then I used to listen to the very last "purr" of the car, until at last I could hear nothing.

Each evening was like a flower that went to form a crown of happiness.

"He *does* love me, doesn't he?" I asked Carmen.

I didn't really doubt, but it is so lovely to hear someone else is sure as well as you!

"Of course," she said with her faint, curious, little smile.

"Why are you smiling?" I asked instantly. "Has Derry said something to you, told you something that I don't know about him?"

"No, and no, and no," she said laughing lightly, dismissing all my swift anxiousness with that gay carelessness. "Oh, Cecil, what a baby you are, after all!"

She might have told me then—she

wanted to, I know now, and I believe that she was utterly down on her luck just then, and Derry paid her debts and made himself her chief creditor—for her silence.

So there you are!

When you come to think of it, she was merely providing another form of "comfiness," that was all.

And Derry and I loved and laughed, and motored on.

When it rained we went to the flat, or to a theater; whenever it was fine we went fairy hunting—we called it that, and it deserved the name. At any rate, it was all innocence and happiness.

I had "free food," as Denning had chosen to say, and I used all my little salary to buy shoes Derry would like, gloves, a hat. My old summer frocks were not very fashionable, but they were pretty.

"You look like a white rose set in the little golden leaves of your hair," Derry told me.

I tried to wonder what he would say when he asked me to marry him. It would be a marvelous moment, I felt.

I was a little fool!

He talked of his place in Castle Stuart, and my heart beat furiously. Would he tell me now? Instead he looked at me, stopped talking, kissed me.

So many of our talks ended that way!

Derry's were the first kisses I ever knew, kisses I mean which I *felt*, which I returned.

They seemed to go through and through me, and to make me forget thoughts, forget everything, save that little love shiver in my veins.

I suppose I was too happy to worry much, or else in my foolishness I accepted life as it was, because I was so sure. Nothing ever happened to touch

my sureness. Derry was never different, Carmen never breathed a syllable, that might have warned me.

Once, one evening when I was not seeing Derry, I went by myself to the pit of theater. The play was "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray," and Paula fascinated me so much that I cried and laughed, scorned, and hated with her.

I suppose everyone knows the story; a man marries a "lady of easy virtue," as Carmen described it, and after he has married her his own daughter falls in love with the man to whom Paula has formerly belonged. All the anguish of the play lies in Paula's love for her husband, a torturing love which makes her tell the truth and then kill herself.

I had never dreamt of such a play; never been so torn with emotion in all my life. I just sat on that hard bench, all huddled up, the tears streaking my face, all the misery of the wide world crowding into my heart, it seemed to me.

The lights flared up; before me, only a few rows away, over the barrier, in the stalls, Derry was sitting beside a woman.

I knew his fair, sleek head instantly, and I knew jealousy, too.

I hated the woman whose face I could not see, but whose hair was shimmering and lovely, and I hated the blue chiffon wrap she wore, which had a huge ruffle of black tulle round the neck.

I crept out of the theater at the end of the play, feeling worn, and torn, and insignificant. I had seen Derry, my Derry, wrap the chiffon cloak more closely about the woman's throat. I could not bear to see him do it.

I went home on the top of a bus, and I wished I were dead. I never told

him I had seen him, but I decided I would *make* him say we were to be married.

We went that Saturday to Burnham Beeches. People may say how "trip-per-y," how like a Bank holiday. Let them! We loved the beeches. We knew them, knew the little sandy paths which led into a still Paradise where the leaves met overhead like hands that blessed you, and where only the birds called, and it was heavenly sweet, and cool and peaceful.

We had tea first at the inn everyone knows, where you get water-cress, and cream, and jam and cakes galore, all for a shilling, or it may be ninepence.

When we had finished we went, Derry and I, and Gilbert, toward the little sandy path to have a rest.

Gilbert was Derry's dog, and he was a human being, too, a small, brave knight on four legs who would have died for his master, or even for me. He was my real friend.

In our enchanted glade we all sat down, and Derry and I smoked. We meant to rest for an hour or so, and then drive back and have dinner at a little restaurant, and then Derry would take me home and watch me in, and wait to whisper good-by, I from the window, he from the car.

He said suddenly:

"Kiddie, you've got blue flower petals under your eyes. You're overtired."

I was tired, and overworked, and for some reason, heaven knows why, I suppose it was self-pity really, tears came into my eyes. One splashed down horribly visible.

Derry was lying beside me, a little way away; I was leaning back against a silver smooth trunk of a beech tree.

He knelt and caught me close to him; I saw his face for a moment before I had mine on his shoulder—it

was white, and his eyes looked black.

His voice came to me, roughened, unsteady:

"Look here," he said, "this can't go on. My God, it shan't. Cecil, darling, sweetest, my little, little love, you must let me take care of you forever. You've got to, d'you hear?"

The wildest joy ran through me, it felt like new life surging, surging all the while.

"I want you to," I said, clinging to him. "I've been longing for you to."

He went on kneeling before me, holding me against his heart, and whispering the most wonderful things to me. He told me that I was the only woman he had ever loved, and that I possessed his body and soul; he told me that he had never dared believe I could belong to him utterly.

"But I want to—I want to," I said between kisses.

Driving home he said suddenly:

"Every cent I can spare shall be yours, darling; I swear. I can mortgage the place. I mean you to be cared for, surrounded with luxury."

And when he kissed me goodnight, he said:

"I'll be good to you."

He would not let me go, the little street was very dark and silent.

"Cecil," he whispered, his lips on mine, "when, next week? The week after—?"

What had I to wait for?

"Next," I whispered back, trembling a little.

I don't think I slept at all that night. I know I saw the dawn, heard the first birds, watched the sunshine grow and grow.

Derry came for me at eleven as usual.

In the car I said to him:

"I s'pose it will have to be a registry office, darling?"

He did not answer for a moment, and then very quickly he turned and looked at me.

"Derry," I faltered, "you—what have I said—"

His face was changed in one second, the love came back to it, the kindness.

"Why, nothing, you poor little frightened kid! I suppose the sun was in my eyes. A registry office? Yes."

All that day we were happy, and that night, when Derry had gone, we had had supper at the flat, I told Carmen.

"Shall you come to the registry office?" I asked her.

She was standing beside the window, she never turned round, but she said: "No," very quietly.

"Well, I'll have to be helped to get a dress," I said.

She came slowly back to the sofa where I was lying with my hands behind my head.

"Derry has left me fifty pounds to get you a dress with," she said, "has he told you what he means to settle on you?"

I shook my head.

"It doesn't matter—I'll have him. I'll be his wife, that's all that counts. Oh! Carmen, and when you think of my life before he came."

"Oh, you'd be a fool and worse, to give him up," she burst out. "He's a decent sort, a decent-souled sort, and he loves you utterly. He would be worth sinning for, Cecil!"

"Yes," I said absently; wasn't he mine, and hadn't he chosen me? I did not care what any living soul thought of him, of either of us.

Dimly Carmen's last sentence penetrated my mind. Somehow I was reminded of the man from whom I had taken lunches and dinners once, the

first man in my life, who had expected payment.

I shivered and frowned.

"Sin and Derry don't mix," I said.

Carmen laughed.

"Sin's the one thing that mixes with the very best of all of us!" she said curtly, and then packed me off.

All that week I did not see Derry; he wrote to me daily, sent me the loveliest ring, flowers, sweets, handkerchiefs—all sorts of little things which showed he never forgot me.

I was to see him on Friday night, and we were to leave for our honeymoon on Saturday afternoon. We were going to some place Derry knew, right away on the Norfolk coast, the poppy-land place.

On Friday night he took me out to dinner, he was very gay, and he looked handsomer than ever, younger, happier.

"To-morrow—to-morrow," he said, looking deep into my eyes until I saw myself mirrored in the depths of his.

I told him so.

"You are mirrored in my heart," he answered, "the imprint of you is on my soul, now and for ever."

Oh, to love, and be loved so!

For the last time he whispered good-by to me from the car, and I leant down from my dusty little window, and for the last time I listened to the noise of the car growing fainter and fainter.

Suddenly it grew louder, not fainter, Derry was coming back.

The car slid to a standstill beneath my window.

I ran down to him.

"What is it?" I asked him.

He put his arms about me; I could feel his heart thud-thudding against my side, like my own heart.

"You could not give me up? You would never give me up, would you?"

he said hoarsely, "never go back on me?"

"Never, never!" I said, pressing him closer. "Oh, Derry, how can you ask, when you know how I love you?"

I searched his face in the dim pale light.

"What is it?" I asked again. "Tell me, darling."

His voice seemed to shake, the words fell from it brokenly:

"It's this—I'm married. But it needn't make any difference. It can't—*now*. I can't, I won't give you up. From the first day—the first hour I knew I was meant to have you for my own. I can't live any longer apart from you, Cecil. In all but name you will be my wife. Oh, speak, can't you—say something. Say it is all right. I had to tell you. I meant not to till tomorrow, and then I had to somehow. Now I've told you, and I tell you, too, again and again, that I will never give you up. Kiss me—trust me—I'll be good to you!"

He kissed me until I cried out. I struggled to free myself, his arms were like iron bands imprisoning me.

"I'll be good to you," he kept saying desperately, "I love you with my life. You know that is true, and you love me. I can feel it, I tell you. You do—you do. D'you think I'll let you go, knowing that? *Never*. I'd get free if I could—I've tried till I'm simply worn out. I can't get free, but you can free me from misery. Do it, Cecil—come away tomorrow on our honeymoon. Oh God, I'll treat you well! You shall walk on rose leaves, be cared for like no other woman. Little, little love who holds my life, in your two small hands, be merciful—"

I was crying.

"Oh!" I said. "I shall be—later on, like that woman in the play—I'll have

no right to you—and other folks will know I haven't, and you will leave me—in the end—”

He only held me closer and tried to soothe me, tried to kiss me, comfort me.

Suddenly he said:

“I'll take you to Carmen—she'll be able to talk to you.”

The car seemed to sweep out into the darkness. We had to wait to get into Carmen's flat, and Oxford Street was like a desolate burial place, gray, winding, empty, forlorn.

At last Carmen opened the door. She had on some soft, silken wrap of blue and her hair was bound around with a swathe of blue ribbon.

“What on earth—” she said.

“I've told Cecil. I couldn't lie to her tomorrow,” Derry said huskily. “Explain—make her see sense somehow, Carmen.”

He thrust me gently into the hall.

“I shall come tomorrow at eight,” he said. There were tears in his eyes.

And Carmen talked and talked, and I said:

“Why didn't you tell me — long ago?”

And later on still:

“I should never have a real right to him.”

“Oh!” she said almost angrily, “don't be such a little fool, Cecil, pull yourself together. Derry adores you! He'll settle all he has on you; he'll be faithful—he's that sort. For the last time, don't be a little fool.”

That was the way she looked at it; she was sincere in her advice.

Yet, when the time came, I was a little fool.

I had loved as well as I knew how, and it was all I understood what to be, now love had gone.

III

THERE'S always that—the “other side” of the picture—the reason why you did a rotten thing, the quick, defiant shame you felt for having done it, your sick acceptance of the consequences, consequences for which you strove, and which you knew, all the while, would result.

They were simply part of your game, they had to be; they always have to be when all your life's stock in trade is your looks, your laughter, your “easiness” about things.

Half the wrong-doing of youth is born of loneliness, and only a girl quite alone, very poor and pretty, knows what loneliness can mean.

It is ghastly, beastly, terrifying.

My little room in Pimlico seemed like a prison all the winter; the fogs hemmed it in, the cold barred the door.

I had no friends at all. I knew one or two of the other girls in the scent store, but they had people and “boys,” they had no time for anyone outside.

“Specially,” Daisy said to me with a wink and a little gay laugh, “a looker like you, old dear! Not much! Never introduce your donah to a pal! Bert's none too steady any time, and I've seen you give the glad eye with effect.”

I had nowhere to go. So I went on the streets. I don't know quite what I meant to do at first, I was so utterly forlorn and wretched that all I felt I wanted was companionship, someone to laugh with me and talk with me, lights and food.

Food is another reason why girls “go wrong” (to quote that trite expression!) the lack of it, the bad, cheap sort which doesn't nourish.

It's extraordinary the awful power the most deadly ordinary, everyday, dull things have on life and your emo-

tions. Food seems so endlessly commonplace, not a bit the kind of thing to influence morals. You wait till you feel hungry and depressed and have about eighteen pence to go to the end of the week on!

I can remember that night very, very clearly.

It was in December and the first frost had come and the pavement rang like a little chime under your tread. The sky seemed glittering all over with stars; the lamps in the streets flamed high and clear. Victoria boomed and blazed not far away.

I hurried past it and I saw girls waiting there. My breath caught in my throat then; they were none of them pretty, and they all had too much powder, too much rouge, too much make-up.

I got a quick little scare—I felt afraid. I very nearly turned back; I meant to, and then a memory of that one cold, dark, tiny room, airless, cheerless, fireless swept the fear away. I would not go back; I went on.

The crisp wind seemed to be dancing in the air; people seemed to be laughing and talking all round me.

I took a penny 'bus to reach Piccadilly, and sat opposite a boy who was taking his sweetheart to the theatre. She wasn't pretty; he was rather shabby. He had the ostentatious tie which makes up for the three-day collar, but he looked clean all the same, and so gay and devoted; they were holding hands and whispering.

Oh! the unfairness of life that will not give you a chance.

I had been a child until the smash came and I'd never had one smallest bit of luck since. I had never met a man who cared for me and wanted to marry me.

I was fair game to men, because I was alone and penniless, on my own.

Being on your own, in those circumstances, means the payment to life of a debt you have never made. The boy and girl went on. I got out of the 'bus at Bolton Street; my penny was "up." The Green Park faced me; the Berkeley Hotel was on the left. Club porters were whistling taxis; cars were winding swiftly past the 'buses and slow traffic.

I loitered on, hideously nervous now. A girl came up noiselessly and touched my arm. I thought she was a man, and swung round shaking in every limb.

The girl was tall, and smart, and lovely, but her voice was rather odd.

"What the deuce are you doin' here?" she said. "What's your game?"

She had a gold chain purse, and used a scent I knew to be exorbitantly dear. I sold it over the counter.

"I—I'm here because I was lonely," I said.

She stared at me out of her large eyes, then she laughed:

"D'you know, I'm hanged if I don't believe you," she said; "you seem so green, somehow; you don't look it exactly, but it's there all the same."

"I am," I said bitterly. "I'm as green as you call it, about everything—green and unhappy, and down on my luck!"

"Oh, come and have a drink for luck, ducksie," she said, linking her arm in mine.

We went to a little room in a swagger public house, and I had coffee, to the girl's intense amusement.

She told me her name—it was Lalla—and gave me shrewd advice, actually blessed me, and then warned me off her "pitch." She was a queer being, but she was kind.

When we had parted I got lost in the maze of little expensive streets behind Piccadilly. A policeman looked

at me, looked away. Someone was playing the violin divinely in a lighted balcony room. I stood and listened. I held on to the railings, and tried not to cry, but the tender, wistful music seemed to be breaking my heart.

All the scent, and softness, and sweetness of summer nights seemed to be in its notes; the hardness and coldness of London was swept away. There was no such thing as loneliness—there was only tenderness and hope, and sympathy. Then the music stopped and men's voices began to talk, together.

I could hear, because I was directly under the window and it must have been open.

"I'm off," a voice said—rather a nice voice, a little hoarse.

"Play that Hungarian dance, and then you can go. Be a sport, Corran, play one last thing."

"I want to get back, I tell you," the hoarse voice said. "Because I've got a stack of work to do."

"Work!" someone exclaimed, "and you a bally millionaire."

"Oh, it's always the rich who are the greediest," a new voice laughed.

The laughter was drowned in the first notes of one of Brahms' Hungarian dances.

I stood and listened, I could not move away; it was so lovely, so light, so happy, the music that dropped into the night. But it ended dreadfully quickly, and a taxi spoilt the last part.

As the taxi moved away, the door near me opened and slammed, a man ran down the steps. He was in evening dress, and he was rather short and wore no hat. I caught a gleam of gold as he drew out a cigarette case and waited a moment beneath the nearest lamp.

Here was my chance, the chance for which I had come out!

I didn't think that in that moment; I had a sudden, quite insane belief in the goodness of mankind; it was born of the music, but it lasted just long enough to make me go up to the man.

Honestly, I thought in that second that any person must help another, if he or she realized the other was utterly down on his luck. After all, it's what one is taught to believe when one's a little youngster!

I reverted to my childhood's teaching at an awkward moment, for while I was believing all these good and beautiful things, the man looked up and stared at me, and said:

"Nothing doing, my dear!"

He said it quite easily, almost courteously.

Still I was not disillusioned; I looked at him and I said very simply:

"I adored your playing."

He laughed, and there was a glint of very white teeth above his cigarette.

"Did you, by Jove?" he said. "Flattered, I'm sure!"

"I like the first of the dances the best though," I said, "the one in D."

He laughed again.

"What do you know about Brahms?" he asked lightly, and added: "Any way, my dear, I haven't time to stay and discuss it. Here's something for luck! Goodnight."

He held out half a sovereign.

I think I gulped. I know I felt so ashamed I wished that I could die.

"What the—?" the man began, and I broke in vehemently:

"It's not that," I said wildly, "not exactly. I was so deadly lonely. My room began to frighten me, it was little, and dark and empty. I only wanted to talk—and perhaps have dinner—"

"Good Lord, you sound—you speak all right! What the dickens are you

here for, speaking to me here at this hour of the night, like this?"

He was staring at me in good earnest.

"I've told you," I said wretchedly.

I turned away.

"Don't go," he said; "at least, wait a minute. You said you had meant to speak to some man and make friends, didn't you? I'll do as well as another, won't I? Come on and dine with me, We can dine in my rooms."

He had caught my arm and was rushing me along before I could speak again.

"Adventure!" he said under his breath, laughing again. "Life would be damn dull without it!"

"I could live without it," I said wearily. "I suppose it's better a girl should. Adventure in my life would only mean trouble, I expect."

We had reached a house, and the man ran up the steps, still holding my hand, unlocked the door and ushered me in.

He led me straight into a low, narrow room where a huge fire was burning, and a little round table was laid for one for dinner.

There were roses in heaps of vases, and lots of bookshelves piled with books, and immense comfy chairs.

"Now, let's look at you," he said, tilting up my face with one finger.

I looked at him while he looked at me, and then we both smiled.

"I'm glad I met you, fair lady," he said in his abrupt way.

"My name is—"

"Corran," I said.

He lifted his eyebrows; they were funny peaked ones, very dark above gray eyes, and said in a voice which was not pleased:

"Ah! you have the advantage."

"Mine is Cecilia," I told him.

Now I know why his voice changed,

but I did not know till months after that first meeting.

There are certain acquaintanceships when it isn't necessary to give your real name.

"Ah," Corran said when I told him I was called Cecilia, "then we'll stick to Richard and Cecil, I think; it seems so friendly."

A man-servant came in when he rang, and he ordered dinner for two.

I wandered about the room looking at the books. There were some very good first editions; I recognized them because we had had a few at home. I said so, and Richard stared again.

We dined opposite one another, the man waited on us. When we had finished, he cleared away, and went out closing the door softly behind him. Richard pushed forward a deep chair for me, and flung himself down on the sofa with his hands behind his head.

"Now then," he said, his eyebrows moving incessantly, "now then for the history. Who are you really, and what on earth made you decide to try this game tonight?"

I told the hackneyed story of the smash, and my struggle since, and my brother's advice to get all I could from any man and evade the cost.

"Well, and have you?" Richard demanded.

"As much as I could," I said defiantly. "You men start it without a handicap, and you never cry pity on us when we're in your power. I've worked on the same plan."

"Tell me about it, golden hair and blue eyes," he said lazily. "What Samson have you slain, eh?"

I looked at him through my cigarette smoke, and laughed.

"There was a Jew boy," I said softly, "he lived in the same horrid little hotel as my brother and I. I practiced

on him. I learned, thanks to his aid, how to obtain free lunches and dinners. Shall I tell you the way? You choose your man (he must have money), and then you dress for him, and smile at him. You let him talk of himself, and you tell him how clever he is, and you go a little nearer to him than you need, and you use some sweet scent that is rather attractive, and you touch his hand when you need not, and you lift your head so that he must see the curve of your lips. And he does kiss you, does desire you a little, and the thing's done, except avoiding payment. *That's* the crux of the business, of course; *that's* where the skill comes in—"

Corran was looking at me between narrowed lids.

"In avoiding it," he suggested, "and you succeeded, I gather? Mayn't I know your means of success?"

"Oh! I run away."

He got up from the sofa and came and stood above me, staring down at me.

"Who's to blame?" he said. "We or you, I wonder?"

"No one, perhaps," I said, "just life, that's all."

He didn't answer; he turned away and caught up a violin I had been gazing at longingly and began to play.

He walked about as he played, and he was smiling.

I didn't know then that he was one of the greatest violinists in the world; I only knew that his playing seemed to heal all grief; make unhappiness happiness; hide away, as if forever, the hardness of life and loneliness.

When he had finished he came across to me and said:

"If I'd been the man you thought I was when you spoke to me, what about your payment to me?"

There was a silence. I did **not** know

what to say—I did not know what I had meant to do, really. Richard knelt down, caught hold of me, and kissed me.

"Kisses for hair that holds the sunshine," he said, "kisses for lips that love to lure, kisses for eyes that have wept for the loneliness of youth."

He looked at me.

"Is this payment?"

"Is it?" I whispered.

Two devils seemed to dance suddenly in his strange eyes.

"You've been believing you were safe with me, haven't you?" he said. "You've talked out your point of view; I'll tell you mine, the man's. We take your sort for what they are; we know all the moves in the game; we know quite as well as you who play them. We have one quality over yours; we pay up, not eventually, but beforehand! Ever thought of that? I bet you haven't. Ever thought that as a man thinks, so he's been educated to think? Ever grasped the fact that to take what isn't yours is stealing? You rely, your sort, on the honor of the men you go with, and do all you can to destroy any sense of honor in your own lives! Why should I play the game with you, tell me that?"

He had his hands on my shoulders; I could not rise.

Through the whirl of his words, the anger they lit in me, I saw still that little, dusty, fireless room that was my home, and a very passion of defiance against things as they were surged up in me.

I had gone out meaning to take my chance. Well, I would take it.

"You needn't," I said passionately. "You've fed me, and been quite decent to me in your way. And being good doesn't count. You never get anywhere through it—it doesn't feed you and get you clothes, and fire, and the

color of life. You've accused me of cheating. All right, I did cheat, but I'll pay my debt to you."

He pulled me to my feet, and dragged me across under the electric light.

"Yes, I mean it," I said desperately, "I don't care, I don't care any more."

"Don't you?" he said almost in a whisper, "but I do, you poor little lonely devil. It's all right. Cecil, do you hear? It's all right. I'll look after you, and you can be straight."

I clung to him then, and the tears I had been fighting back all the evening shook me like a storm.

Richard went on talking.

"Life's not rotten really," he said, "wait, and I'll show you."

We sat and talked on till it was nearly one, he told me of his beginning, and I told him things I had never cared to tell to any man.

He spoke quite frankly about taking life—love, just as it came.

"It's the world, my dear," he said, his queer eyes glinting, "like mud, and wind, and poverty and riches, and slaves and capitalists. You can't alter any of 'em, or human nature, either."

It was nearly dawn when he wished me goodnight.

"Well, you're going home good," he said, laughingly on the door step, "so, after all, playing the game's worth while, occasionally."

It all happened just like this, and he was neither saint nor devil, but he was human. We had a friendship, the best I believe my life has ever known. Richard gave me a little allowance; it may sound awful to confess that I took money from a man, but it's true, and after all why should it be such a deadly sin? He had heaps, I none, and he was fond of me. I suppose that sounds awful, and I know the usual point of view.

All I can say is, that if that view were done away with there would be a heap more charity in the world, and less evil-mindedness.

The winter crept into spring, and I was glad that year to see the birds. I was happy in a peaceful way. It was all owing to Richard and his allowance, and his friendship, which if it was fitful, was very good.

He was away a lot, and when he was home he generally slept all day, and wanted to talk all night, a thing rather difficult for me to achieve, because I had to be at the store by eight each morning, and required a little sleep!

He used to play to me in the still night, and then kneel beside me, and talk of his dreams of music, and kiss me sometimes.

"You're growing part of my life," he said once, almost angrily.

And he went away next day for weeks, and was just his old whimsical self when he came back, and scarcely affectionate at all.

"I like to kiss you," he used to say, "it's rather like kissing flowers. I wonder if I'll ever be in love with you, Cecil?"

I never dreamed he would; he always seemed so much his own property, and he was intensely selfish in the way all great artists are.

Then one night, when I was just going, he said:

"No, you can't go," and put his arms round me. "I don't know whether it'll last," he said thickly, "but I want you now—I love you in my rotten way! Cecil, you'll have to be mine!"

He released me as swiftly, and almost pushed me out of the door.

I made up my mind to marry him; I wasn't in love with him, but I was awfully fond of him, and I had had

enough of romance. He meant a home and lots of money, and some sort of companionship, anyway.

He left for Scotland next day, and wired me to be at St. James's one evening later in the week.

I was dressing to go when someone knocked at my door.

I opened it, a girl stood there.

"You are Cecil, aren't you?" she asked, "I am the girl Richard—cared for."

She was little and had lovely eyes, and nothing much else in the way of looks.

She came into my room, and sat down on the bed and looked at me.

"You don't love him," she said very gently.

"He loves me," I said.

Her face quivered and I didn't care.

She looked so "cared for"; it was easy to see she was looked after.

She got up and came across to me.

"Apart from the fact that I—I love him," she said, "it means so awfully much to all of us if Richard marries me. And he did love me till he met you. He's always had affairs, but he came back to me always. And I know, because he spends half his time with me still, that behind his feelings—I can't express myself properly, but I want to say that though you are so lovely and you have enchanted him, he is so near to me always; I understand him. My people are deadly proud, and we're poor. Richard had been going to help. If he doesn't marry me, he can't. What are you going to do?"

We stood looking at one another.

I knew nearly all she had said was true, and one thing made me know it: Richard had never breathed her name to me. He had spoken of heaps of other women, never of this girl.

If I gave him up, it meant loss for

me, loss of ease of life, friendship, comfort.

If I married him—

"Let him come back to me," the girl begged.

"What can I do?" I demanded.

"Tell him you don't care—tell him you are going to be married—"

She was pure, she was sheltered, she was very good; I'm certain, and she eagerly advised me to lie, and chose the very lie that would win for her!

It wasn't for her sake I did it, ultimately; it was because Richard had been so decent, such a good sort, and had played up so well.

And I know he didn't love me, any more than I loved him.

So I told him I was going to be married, and he went very white and said instantly, laughing as usual:

"Really, how ripping? When? This ends our little beano then, I suppose."

"I suppose so," I said.

He never kissed me good-by, he said instead:

"I wasn't wrong, after all."

So, in the end, I overpaid!

IV

KISSES are the danger signals on the road to—many things!

Kisses are the sweetest pledge in the world—sometimes. But not always the truest.

Kisses are supposed to be the gifts girls should give, as the miser doles out gold, or as the winter roses; rare and precious things that one remembers and treasures infinitely.

Kisses that girls do give are more like farthing change, or—to keep to the floral comparison, field daisies.

Kisses mean likewise, to some girls, lunches and teas, Sunday outings and chocolates.

That is the simple girl variety. When you come to the complicated sort, the exotic, not every-day sort of girl, then kisses begin to mean dances and theatres, pearls and diamonds, and a man's whole devotion.

Both kinds often lead to the safe road of marriage.

And there is another kind which doesn't, unless you have no end of luck.

The girl herself doesn't expect these kisses will—all she hopes is that they'll give as a result, a chance meal, and a little gayety and not too much chaff and too little courtesy. Oh, life's a funny thing, but very rarely humorous. At least, perhaps one is apt to miss the real wit of it, the brightness, if one has to live on twenty-five shillings a week, and "sleep out."

You get then to snatch at any smallest chance of escape, escape from the sight and sound and smell of perfume and powder, and people who buy both.

The store provided us with black dresses which had deep white lawn collars, and ordered us to keep ourselves "dainty."

If we didn't we were quickly requested to apply for work at some less fastidious department.

But we scent girls were chosen for our looks, and a poor, pretty girl generally has enough vanity to know how to take care of the one asset she possesses; enough shrewd common sense to find out how to do it best and cheaply.

Directly the store closed we had to change our black ninon dresses with their big, white tulle collars for our own humble attire.

The change made a difference! Dress is one tremendous pull which rich women have over poor ones. If you have all the loveliness in the

world, and can only buy a dress which is covering, you won't go far!

But if you're just ordinarily pretty and have an income which allows you to get your clothes in Bond Street, the odds are you'll marry a millionaire, or a peer, and live happy ever after, and he'll believe you as beautiful as your clothes will make you. Fact.

Twenty-five shillings a week to live on, that is, eat on, get a roof with, shoes and clothes, and travel on, does not permit you to dress exclusively in Bond Street, or exclusively, if it comes to that, anywhere. You dress in bargains, and everyone knows they are not hall-marked with great names, or composed of smart "creations."

We are warned of envy, malice and all uncharitableness, I know, but I affirm that to be able to obey that law all women should have been allowed to have equal dress money! I daresay none of us would believe the evil that's been wrought by a girl's inability to buy a new hat, and her hatred of going on wearing last summer's done up for the third time.

Life is made up of trifles in a way; many of them must have to do with millinery, I should think. I know the sight of my only hat drove me to ultimate revolt. I had bought it white a year before, so that I could black it black later on. I have fair hair, it is nearly golden, really, and so I choose white or black, and stick to them.

The hat was large, and simple, and all the trimming it possessed was a big tulle bow at the back, which stuck out like gossamer wings, on either side of my face. I was only nineteen then, and that year it was the fashion to wear a big black bow on one's hair, so I had one lower down, and that looked like dark wings.

But tulle goes flop, and straw breaks, and my hat looked odd when

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both these calamities began to happen. Still, I had to stick to it, for I hadn't a cent to buy another with, and my shoes were worn out, too, and though it's possible to do without a hat, unfortunately you must have shoes.

I walked to the store in the early morning sunshine hating life because of that hat and the cold feel of the pavement, which struck through the thin part of my shoe.

I felt desperate for no real reason, but it was springtime and I was shabby, and I wanted to meet the sunshine with a smile and couldn't. All that it did to me, I reflected bitterly, was to show up the rustiness of all my things.

I was glad to change into my black ninon, and remove the hat till evening. But all the morning I kept on remembering the sad, too-much-ironed tulle bows which drooped and the chipped edge of the straw which should have been flawless.

Girls came in to buy scent, and spent a few pounds on scientifically colored water as blithely as if there was no such thing as want in the wide world, and I had to smile and thank them as they paid.

I thought of the daisy-starred grass under the racing blue and white sky, out in the country, and the smell of the hawthorn, and the shrill singing of the birds, and that funny, dear, little cheep, cheep of baby birds when they are hungry.

Day-dreams are forbidden in a scent store—I nearly missed a customer. She was the loveliest thing and she had the most attractive hat on; a tulle one with gray chiffon roses on it—a hat so simple that one knew it must have cost pounds and pounds. The girl herself had fair hair, and that delicate loveliness which is so

English, and never lasts, but can never be eclipsed while it exists.

As I had expected the lovely girl bought violet scent and powder; that well-bred sort does buy violet, and never "goes in" for the exotic "queer," modern perfumes. Also, as I had expected, the violet had to be the most expensive possessed. All the scent and powder and soap and crystal bowls and so on, made a large parcel.

"Would you carry it out to the car for me?" the girl asked.

I followed her out into the white and gold sunlight of Regent Street.

A two-seater car was driven up by the curb, a young man jumped out of it as we appeared.

"Oh, give me the stuff to carry," he said to me, and wanted to lift the big parcel out of my arms.

"No, thank you," I said demurely, without glancing at him.

He helped the girl into the car, and I waited while she cleared a little place for the parcel. The young man waited beside me.

I had a glimpse of him from the door of the store, as the car moved away. He had a jolly face, rather brown, and "sporty" looking. The car swerved round the corner, the girl was bending down over the parcel, the young man blew a kiss to me.

I blushed, and saw him laugh, then the car vanished. I felt a little cheered, because I wasn't yet wholly dowdy and unpresentable, apparently. At any rate, the gay cavalier had smiled at me!

"Know who that was you carried the parcel out for?" another assistant asked me.

I shook my head.

"That's the famous Miss Muriel Charde everyone raves over, she takes the Queen of Beauty at all the pageants and things, and that man

with her was Archie Baird—the millionaire. They're engaged. Some folks have all the luck, haven't they? They say he's so rich he can't spend his money and she's the loveliest girl in London! Oh well!"

"Oh, I'm a socialist," I cried, trying to laugh, "one of that sort that doesn't want anyone to have anything except herself!"

That day seemed very long and tiring, but it was over at last, and I ran up to the dressing-room to change.

When I was putting on my hat, "all broken and torn," I happened to look out of the window, and I saw on the opposite side of the street, a car drawn up. Archie Baird's car; I was certain it was his, it had the same shaped bonnet and was a queer gray-green color, and had a little silver figure as a mascot.

Was Archie Baird there, I wondered?

I leaned right out of the window, and as I did so, a figure came from a shop entrance. Archie Baird. I *knew*. And I blushed deeply, laughed, and ran downstairs, and out into the street.

I saw Archie Baird staring. I would not look directly at him; I walked on very slowly, and then I crossed the road, and as I nearly reached the other side, just before the curb, a motor horn hooted.

A moment later Archie Baird was apologizing for nearly running me down.

"As a token of forgiveness, won't you let me drive you home?" he said. I did at once, and said:

"You are Mr. Baird, aren't you?"

"All my friends call me Archie," he answered, smiling his quick smile.

He bought me sweets that evening, and told me he had been "smitten" the first second he had seen me.

"We two ought to be pals," he said, holding my arm very tightly, just above the elbow; he was not smiling then, and his gray eyes looked rather hard between their short lashes.

He asked me my address, and told me he wanted to take me out to dine.

"Choose your own evenin'," he said, "write to me at my club, the Blue, Pall Mall."

He raised his hat and drove away.

I got my usual bus home, and sat on the top, clutching my chocolates.

I thought mainly about one thing: I had no hat to go out to dine in with Archie Baird!

So I did the obvious thing: I wrote and told him so, to that swagger club, and his reply came back by messenger, and contained a ten pound note.

He wrote:

Dear little Cissie, what rough luck! No hat for such a pretty head! Hurry up and get one. Meet me, wearing it, tomorrow at seven, at the Welcome Club at the White City.

I bought a hat which was almost a copy of Miss Charde's, only it was blue and silver, and I bought a dark blue dress too, of some soft stuff; it had a sash of blue and silver, too, and I bought white suede gloves and black silk stockings, and narrow open toed shoes.

Archie was waiting for me, and he looked tremendously clean and smart, so well-groomed was he, and well set-up.

We had champagne for dinner and liqueurs afterwards; I had some golden stuff which looked like apricots, but burnt like very soft fire.

After dinner we sat in the darkness and listened to the music. Archie took my hand first, then he slid an arm around me. The orchestra was playing "Beautiful Lady."

"Rippin' tune isn't it?" he said. His

voice was not quite steady: "Rum thing music, isn't it? the way it stirs you up."

"I know," I whispered.

"I'd like to kiss you," he said in a smothered voice, and suddenly he turned, and tilted my face back roughly and kissed me very hard on my mouth.

The mingled scent of some very good brilliantine and champagne came to me from his bent head. I wasn't frightened, I didn't care simply. I had made up my mind to take life just as it came. For the moment it came as "kisses."

I let Archie kiss me.

He released me suddenly and sat back, laughing oddly.

"By Jove, you're as cold as ice, Cissie," he said almost angrily.

I could see his eyes shining in the faint light of a colored lamp we passed.

He caught my hand in his suddenly.

"I believe I'm in love with you, you tantalizing little devil," he said softly, "and you don't care a hang for me, to you?"

"I like you awfully," I protested.

He laughed again.

"Oh well, we'll see!" he said.

He drove me home in a taxi and kissed me again. I began to think the hat had been expensive indeed!

It wasn't that I didn't like Archie, he was a decent sort, but—oh! if it were only possible to love the people whom it is most profitable to care for, what a much simpler world this would be, and how far fewer divorces!

At my door Archie said good night, and drove away without suggesting another meeting.

I was neither glad or sorry.

A week later he waited for me in Regent Street.

"Come along," he said, "I've got a

taxi. You're coming out to dine again. Glad to see me, eh?"

"I can't come like this," I protested, "let me just go back and change."

"Bosh," he said, "you look as pretty as paint. It's you I want, not the new hat!"

He whirled me away before I could argue; he overrode everyone always, I believe; the wonder of him was, not that he was the splendid arrogant animal he was, but that he was not out and out rankly selfish and bad. Everyone had spoilt him all his life, and he had been brought up to believe he had only to want to have.

He was constitutionally unfaithful, I should say—inherently so, and just as gay and good looking, and to lots of people irresistible.

I believe he had a passion for me simply because I did not adore him at first sight! At any rate, he made wild love to me that evening and kissed me until the lamp-lit waters seemed like a maze of gold and scarlet rose blossoms and the music of the band grew faint within my ears.

He was a tempestuous person, and my unconscious aloofness was a goad to him.

"Don't you feel anything?" he demanded savagely, as he looked deep into my eyes.

Later, he told me:

"You're the sort to hold a man faithful—my sort, anyway! You're so distractingly your *own* all the while!"

That night at my door he whispered:

"Where's it all goin' to end, you darling?"

I drew my hand away quickly and went indoors, and in the little stifling hall I could hear my heart beating loudly.

Then again, for a week he vanished, and taught me what pique was, and

jealously of a kind that wasn't fierce because it had no love in it, but which made me restless and unhappy all the same.

And then, one day at lunch time, he came into the shop, and walked straight up to me.

"Got some of that jolly French what d'you call it—brilliantine?" he asked, smiling into my eyes.

"Do you mean *l'heure exquisite*?" I asked him demurely.

"Wish I could get that," he said, "in reality! As it is, give it to me in a bottle. Women, and stuff in bottles—they're the joy and curse of life!"

Then he added lower: "Tonight at the Welcome. You're lookin' lovelier than ever."

He had gone before I could answer, and I was left feeling disturbed.

I met him at the Welcome and found he had ordered a special dinner, and there were roses on the table.

"I want a long talk with you," he said, his audacious eyes on my face, his jaw a little grim.

"As my lord wills," I said.

He laughed again then and said:

"Right! I'll hold you to that, I think!"

We left the club and walked beneath the chains of swaying lamps which seemed to link up the paths of fairyland. The geraniums starred all the flowerbeds palely, and their keen scent came to us as we walked. Archie caught my hand in his; it was very hot, it burnt mine.

"Look here," he said, "I want to put something to you, and I want you to try to believe I mean it decently. I mean, I want you to try and feel sure I'll be good to you."

He stopped, and I know I felt scarlet for a minute all over, it was just as if a hot wave went right over my head.

"Yes, go on?" I said in a low voice.

He stopped in his stride and pulled me round to him, and put his arms about me.

"I love you," he said, and it sounded as if he said it unwillingly. "I've tried to get away from it, from you, but I can't. You're like a fever in my blood, with your pale gold hair, and white velvet skin, and eyes that seem to question coolly. I fell in love with you when I saw you. I don't believe you care a curse for me, but I'd risk that. I'd make you love me if you belonged to me. And that's what I want you to do. I want you to let me look after you—get you a little place for your own; fit it up just as you like. I'll give you anything you want. I'll settle something on you naturally. I'll have it all done in order—"

His arms went round me more closely.

"Cissie, I'm in dead earnest, I love you, you darling, adorable thing. I'm mad about you. Will you consent? Will you come to me, and let me take care of you?"

"You mean—you mean—give up all my old life—" I stammered faintly.

"That?" he said contemptuously. "Rather, my sweet. We'd cut that out completely. You should have a flat in Knightsbridge, and a maid, and be looked after, loved—"

"Kept," I whispered.

He flung up his head furiously.

"Oh, damn it all, kept then!" he said, "but I swear I'd be faithful to you, and keep you as tenderly, as dearly as no other woman."

Visions swept through my mind of my life as it was, as it would be if I consented.

Archie kissed me suddenly, very, very gently, and I think that decided me, it was such a different kiss for him—it made me trust him.

"Yes, it's yes," I said.

He stayed like that, gentle and endlessly considerate, and we talked plans as if we were engaged and our marriage was at hand. I was to have five hundred a year for life settled on me, and the rent of the flat paid and the maids' wages.

Archie put me into a taxi at last, and I drove home alone, with two ten-pound notes in my hand "to settle any little bills you have, darling."

He rang up at the store next afternoon and said I was to drive to his lawyer's at once to sign the settlement papers.

Inside the office I felt like a thief or a forger, or criminal of some sort. I was ashamed—ashamed. The lawyer was old and courteous, almost kindly; he was to act for me, he kept the deeds.

Archie and I drove away together to see the flat he had taken. It was a dear little place, all green and white and dainty and clean, with pretty chintz curtains, and a bookshelf crammed with books, and actually a black cat dozing on the window sill.

"Get your maids in," Archie said, "and settle down, darling, and next week—next—week!"

He caught me in his arms and kissed me, and kissed me, before he left.

He was to be in Surrey before he came to the flat; he wrote to me from there.

I had my income now, I bought clothes in his absence, little pretty trifles for the flat. Archie sent me a dressing case initialled in gold. I was to be Mrs. Lomax—it was one of his names.

The last morning came, and I felt as if prison were closing in on me. There was no letter from Archie, I expected he would wire. I gave the maids their directions. I don't know

what they believed; I wore a wedding ring.

The afternoon came; I rested in the little dressing room with the sun blinds down. The bell pealed suddenly, and I leapt to my feet, I thought it was Archie. His lawyer came in.

We looked at one another, and I said stiffly:

"Won't you sit down?"

He looked ill, I thought, then, and I was sorry I'd seemed inhospitable.

"Let me ring for tea," I said shyly, "did—did Mr. Baird ask you to come? Is he back?"

The old man caught hold of the chair then, and said in a clear, but shaking voice:

"No—no—he—Mr. Baird will not come. He—I deeply regret—I—he was killed in a motor accident this morning."

I believe I fainted; I have a dim memory of a string of words about my income "going on"—and then a plea that I would put in "no further claim of any nature!"

Then the old man went and I was alone with my memories.

Poor, poor Archie!

I would have been willing to have lived in prison to have given him back his life—such a young, gay, self-willed, yet somehow kindly life.

I wished I had once kissed him with love.

V

THERE was once a play written about a poor little rich girl.

I might have been chosen to illustrate the title for just a short while. Then the glamour of the last adjective was ripped from me by a mine "petering out."

Luckily I had not spent a great deal of what did not, after all, belong to me. I had taken a flat near Wands-

worth. Common, and bought some clothes, and that was about all.

The smash came when I had been rich for about three months. I believe even the lawyers were sorry for me. I tried to be philosophical, and just, and all the things one is advised to be when a wave of trouble rises up and threatens to engulf you. I kept on telling myself that I had not loved Archie despite the fact of—well, everything, and that his death, by which I had profited, should have mattered to me heaps more than it had done.

It *had* mattered; no one could have known Archie, no girl at least, and not have loved his gay happiness. For you can love a quality in a person without loving them. I had loved many in Archie—his truth about things and unself-consciousness, his generosity and faith.

I felt, oddly enough, that though losing the income he had left me was hard, that it was somehow not unfair. I had given him so little, why should I take so much?

But I didn't go back to the scent shop where I had been employed until I had become rich. I let my little flat, with its view over the Common, all golden then with gorse, and its pretty, simple furniture, and decided to try the stage.

I know all girls on their own in fiction invariably gravitate theatrewards, but (fact is stronger than fiction often), as a matter of fact, the bourne of most girls "on their own" is the stage, in real life. It's almost inevitable, simply because genius is deadly rare, and a certain good looks deadly common, and the only place where looks count at so much per week on a contract, is the stage, and so much per week, be it ever so little, means a livelihood, or a help to one.

Besides, to the average girl there's

a glorious glamour about the stage.

I defy anyone to deny the assertion that most girls in their teens look upon it as a rose-strewn way to fame and wealth, and a title and endless admiration.

And the odd thing is, that even when they are actually "on" it, and find the rose to be thistles of the prickliest kind, and their pay weighs lighter than its envelope, and they have such humble parts that no one can distinguish them, and the nobility is non-existent, even then they cling to the life, and would not give it up, save in the rarest cases, for the "sure" dullness of a berth in some business, or even marriage with a youth who offers a little "semi" villa, and five pounds a week for income. The glamour still allures—the excitement of the life, its very hardness, because that is borne by many in company and in electric light, and amidst a dozen perfumes and the haze of powder.

A girl at the scent store had gone to the "Dukes."

I took her out to lunch at the Corner House, and asked her if she could help me.

"Shouldn't wonder a bit, old dear," she said, "you see you've rum looks. I mean they're different—those dark eyes and gold hair, and that white skin, and your lips being so red. Talking of style, as I said, it's rum looks that get there nowadays—there's too much curls and pink and whiteness and cupid's bow, and all the rest of it. I got on because I'd hair like cape gooseberries and eyes like the sea (I *don't* think) but any old way I got on on me looks, for I didn't know one step from another then, let alone a note of music. You bet I stuck to the learning job when I got started, and I've been taking my three-fifteen regularly now for two months. I'll speak

to old David about you—the boss. He likes me because I don't feel frightened of him, and I know he's wanting to fill in the big scene—that new Revue got some of his best girls. You'd best come along with me now, he'll be up at the theatre."

David was there, curt, and Scotch and bald.

He stared at me and said:

"What can you do, eh?"

"I can dance," I said nervously.

"Dance then," he said.

"Hi, you!" he called to a man who was sorting some music. "Start a tune, will you?"

The youth sat down and began to play a fox-trot, and I slid off all alone.

"That'll do," David ordered, and then demanded: "D'you sing?"

"A bit," I answered.

"Go on, tell the pianist what he's got you know."

I chose "Rose in the Bud" from a great pile of torn songs, and the youth muttered:

"Keep on the note even if you have to whisper—Dave's nuts on trueness."

I didn't whisper—no one could say I made the place ring, but I did sing true, and David, after listening to one verse, made no comment.

Instead he shot at me in his deep voice:

"Address—age—name. Parents living?" and added: "Here, sign this. Read it first."

I read the contract. It offered me two pounds a week for three months.

I signed gladly.

"Show her the ropes," David ordered Nina and dismissed us both.

"Well, that's slick," Nina commented, "you've got luck. Come on. I'll do the intro biz."

We went into a big room, where about twenty girls were sitting, sew-

ing, drinking beer or cocoa, reading, talking, laughing.

"Miss Cissie Maine," Nina announced, and then poured out a stream of names, all of which were ornamental, and began with Phyllis and ended with Geraldine.

For the first time, that night, I knew the thrill of being "watched." It sounds silly, but it isn't. We all, every one of us play to our audience, some of us to one, the best beloved, others to an office staff, others to buyers or sellers, but always, always, to someone. And playing to an audience of upturned faces had an excitement all of its own.

I just stood in a corner for a week, wearing a lovely gown of tangerine tulle which had a huge black satin sash. From my corner I grew to know one or two faces. There were two men in the right-hand box, who came in every night about ten. One of them, I learned, was Lord Mandon the "great" Mandon, and he was supposed to be in love with Marie Warde, the chief "star." She was the slenderest thing I have ever seen, and had the loveliest voice. Beyond that, she was quite stupid, she could sing and "look," and that was all. But she had diamonds which were real, and her own maid, and she rarely spoke to "us," who therefore spoke a lot about her!

I liked the look of Lord Mandon. Everyone had heard of him; he was the joy of the illustrated papers, and was to be seen weekly in two or three, either at one of his ancestral homes, or else riding in the park, or hunting, or motoring, or just, for once, ordinarily walking.

He always gave an impression of "just-so-ness"; his clothes were always superlatively right, and his hair superlatively brushed, and the horse he rode was always so thoroughbred

you had to notice it, and his car a Rolls-Royce of the very newest pattern.

Even when he was merely breathing the expensive air of Bond Street, his cane and boots extolled some famous maker's name in shining, but dumb show. In appearance he was rather short, and rather brown, and had the thick, sleek hair of the day, parted very much at one side, and as far as I could see, rather light eyes between short, dark lashes.

He looked such a gay and self-satisfied, happy being, so fat, and expensive, and "alive." His laugh rang out often when "George," the beloved comedian, gagged anew.

The second week I was advanced; at the end of the month I was in the front row and led a short dance.

You could hear what the people in the boxes said quite distinctly from the front dancing row.

I heard Lord Mandon say:

"Hello! think David's had a find. That girl on the left, daffodil sort of hair and narrow feet."

The man he was with drawled:

"Been watching that little lady for quite a time. New style, isn't it, and jolly fetching."

I could not hear Lord Mandon's answer, but when I danced over to that side of the stage, directly beneath his box, he called:

"Good evening, little lady of the daffodil curls!"

It was rather an attractive situation and I had smiled before I realized I had done so.

I just looked up, smiled once, and danced away again.

Nina, who was just behind me, said breathlessly:

"Look out, Cis, for Marie's temper. She'll skin you if you get Mandon away from her."

"That's very likely, isn't it?" I laughed over my shoulder.

It did seem absurd!

There was Marie Warde, ever so famous, perfectly lovely, with heaps of clothes, and the glorious voice, and there was I, at two pounds a week, with no voice, and not much else either, except, as Nina had said, "rum looks."

But when I danced over to the right of the stage again, Lord Mandon said quite audibly:

"Look up, and smile again, *please*."

I did. I hadn't been happy, to put it mildly, for a long time, and any little thing that broke the monotony of life seemed exciting somehow and nice and amusing.

Something else which was new too, but not amusing, happened when I was running along the passage to the dressing room to change after the play.

Miss Warde's dresser stopped me, and asked me if I would come and speak to her mistress in her dressing-room. I went into the room; it was papered with a sort of satiny gray paper, and there were roses piled high in vases, standing on the floor. It was lovely and very warm, and scenty, and tremendously luxurious.

Miss Warde, who was wrapped in an ermine cloak, was manicuring her hands. She put the little ivory and gold polisher down when I entered and said to the dresser:

"Clear out, Domer, just for a minute please." Then, as the door shut, she turned to me and said:

"I've noticed you so often, Miss Maine. I like all sorts of things about you. I believe you're like me, a lady. All these others are so hopelessly common, I sometimes feel. So one has to hide one's true self to them. I don't feel I need to you. I'd like us to be

friends. Shall we?"

I felt bewildered and very shy.

I said shyly:

"Oh—er—thank you." And then didn't know quite how to go on.

"I'm going to tell David you are worth more than you get," Miss Warde said decisively, "Oh, yes I am. Don't expostulate, dear. I can do anything with him, I assure you."

I hadn't expostulated; I'd said nothing at all.

She faced me altogether suddenly:

"And here's a little present, dear, from one friend to another!"

And she gayly handed me a ring.

"Oh, I can't take it," I stammered. "You—"

"Now, now!" Miss Warde said. "Of course you are going to wear it. I must fly, dear. Lord Mandon begged me not to be late. I wish I could make up my mind whether to marry him or not. How tiresome one's affections are, aren't they? But he's utterly devoted to me. You don't know him, do you?"

Then I guessed!

"Why do you ask me that?" I said, and, unfortunately smiled.

Miss Warde was spraying her hair with scent, she put down the big cut-glass bottle with its gold top, and bent down to powder her face.

I could only see the back of her beautifully dressed head, and occasional glimpses of eyes, lips, throat as the big puff passed and repassed.

Then she spoke, very slowly.

"I'll tell you," she said, "I rather thought you weren't so simple as you looked, but I wanted to be sure. Now I am—and if I were you, I'd listen rather carefully to the rest of this speech. I saw that fool, Mandon, smiling and talking to you and you playing up for all you were worth, and you can take it from me, my dear, that I am

not going to stand *your* antics whatever I may be forced to put up with from him. So you either quit this glad-eye business with Mandon, or I get David to sack you, at the week."

"But I haven't done anything," I said swiftly.

"Oh, haven't you?" she stormed. "All right, the one of us who lives longest'll see most, won't they? All I've got to say to you now is, leave Mandon alone, or I'll not leave you. See?"

"I see," I agreed, and I laid the ring on the dressing-table, and walked out.

In the passage Lord Mandon was waiting; he barred my way.

"My name is Mandon," he said quite gravely, "and I think you are Miss Maine. I wish there had been a friend to introduce us, but as there isn't, and as we know one another now, won't you be very, very kind and accept my invitation to sup with me? It would be so ripping."

He spoke pleadingly, almost with anxiety, only his eyes were dancing, and he looked somehow intensely pleased with life.

"Oh, but you are supping with Miss Warde," I said.

"No, no," Lord Mandon said, "no, there you are wrong, I assure you. If you will not honor me, I shall be lonely and friendless. Doesn't that thought touch your heart? Come!"

I laughed, I couldn't help it, and just then Miss Warde came into the passage, all ermine, and gleaming pearls, swirl of chiffon frock, and shining high-heeled shoes.

"Oh, Tim, how angelic of you to wait so patiently!" she said sweetly to Lord Mandon.

He looked very straightly at her, bowed very slightly, and said quite easily:

"You do me too much honor, Marie,

'pon my word, you do; but as you'd been so undecided in your decision to sup with me, I've made another engagement..So sorry!"

He was nearly laughing as he spoke, and did not look sorry a bit, and Miss Warde, after one stare, which would have done injury if it had been tangible, went on and vanished.

"So that's that!" Lord Mandon said comfortably. "Now do cut along, little daffodil lady, and change. I'll wait for you in the car. Be quick, like the angelchild you look."

All the girls fell upon me in the dressing room:

"What had Marie said? What had Mandon said? Was he on? Was I? Hadn't I better go jolly carefully?"

I told all I could as I dressed.

The girls were awfully nice and helped me, and one lent me a handkerchief and another scent, and another silk stockings, and at last I was ready.

The car was lit up inside, and lined with fawn stuff, and there were big black satin cushions to lean back against.

"We'll go to Harvey's," Lord Mandon said. "Ever been there?"

"I've never been to a night club," I said shyly.

"Oh, how ripping!" he exclaimed.

I liked him—he was so young, and nice, and happy in himself.

Harvey's was crammed, and nearly everyone seemed to know Lord Mandon.

Whispers of: "Oh, Tim!" and "No, Tim, not another!" reached me and I decided that Lord Mandon must be very popular indeed.

We had a table just far enough, and not too far from the band, which was a good one. They played splendidly, and Lord Mandon and I danced while waiting for our supper.

He told me I danced divinely.

"Like the flower you are!" he said, and added: "I say, won't you let me call you Cissie? And all my friends call me Tim."

He was extraordinarily calm in his way of taking things for granted that one couldn't object; it all seemed so harmless.

He drove me home, about three, to the rooms I shared with Nina, said "Goodnight, but not good-by, little dream lady!" on the doorstep and had vanished a moment later; his car seemed to slip into the darkness almost noiselessly.

Nina was sitting up in bed.

"Well?" she demanded, and listened without interrupting whilst I told her every detail.

When I'd finished she said:

"Men always are and always will be, beastly selfish!" and then went to sleep.

I knew what she had been thinking the next morning, when after rehearsal David told me he should not want me again after that week.

Tim's evening of harmless gayety had lost me my job, just as Marie Warde had threatened it would do, and Nina had feared.

I met Marie Warde on the stairs, and she smiled at me between her long, tinted lashes.

Then and there I determined I would make Tim care for me if I could, and make him hate her.

That night I danced for him, smiled for him, sang for him.

But he did not come to ask me to sup with him. The next night he was not in the box, and the night after that was my last night at the theatre.

I hadn't got another job, all the plays seemed booked up.

I scarcely expected Lord Mandon to be at the theatre on Saturday night,

and when I looked up at the box, it was empty.

I felt my heart sink.

It wasn't so much that I had liked him specially, but I wanted to use him now to anger and hurt Marie Warde who had out of deliberate viciousness made David dismiss me.

Suddenly, as I danced, a sheaf of daffodils fell at my feet.

I looked up and met Lord Mandon's eyes.

"Sweets to the sweet!" he said, as I clasped the flowers.

There was a tiny note twisted among the flowers. It said:

Please be sweet once again, and come to Harvey's tonight.

TIM.

I said carelessly in Miss Warde's hearing as we cleared after the first act:

"Oh, Nina, Tim's written *again!* I shall have to go, I suppose."

"S'pose so," Nina said, playing up like the sport she was, "how he pesters you!"

Oh, it was childish, and silly, and cheap, but I'd lost my living for nothing, and I was up against things.

I never told Tim, till just when we were leaving the night club, that I had been dismissed from the theatre.

We were dancing together, and he had caught my hand in his very tightly.

"Cissie," he whispered, "you are the loveliest thing."

He was a little pale, but his hand burnt mine.

"I wish this dance could go on and on," he muttered.

The music crooned over us, the scents and colors seemed to float past.

"Do you care for me just a little?" Tim whispered suddenly, wildly.

The music stopped, and it was time to go home, and he was laughing again instantly.

I don't know why, but the realization that to a man of his name and wealth, his "everything" that was social and important, I could never really mean anything, that I was just an amusement for the hour, a girl to dance with and laugh with, and part with and forget, seemed to whip my soul into revolt. I wanted him to have to share the indifferent position, the galling knowledge that some people glanced and said: "Oh, that girl? Yes, quite all right, of course, but only in the chorus, isn't she?" and all the rest of the petty irony and hardness of circumstances.

"Don't bother to drive me home," I said bitterly.

"Why not?" he said lightly. "Jump in, old dear. Come along, it's cold."

"Do you men *ever* think of anyone's comfort or happiness except your own?" I asked him passionately in a very low voice. "Does it ever occur to you that anyone else's life matters at all?"

"Great Scott!" he said. "What the deuce is up, my dear kid? I've done you no harm, I—"

"Because you are so important, and Marie Warde valued the importance, I have been dismissed from the theatre," I said uncontrollably.

"*What?*" he said incredulously.

"It's true," I answered, "but—oh! it doesn't matter to you. Why should it? Goodnight."

I ran as fast as I could—I knew the way home, but Lord Mandon ran faster.

He caught me up, and caught me in his arms. He was very breathless, and his heart was beating furiously.

"Look here," he burst out, "I never knew all this! It's a beastly shame. I

say, Cissie—oh! for God's sake, don't cry!"

But I had to and he kissed me.

"I'll make David take you back or get you another contract," he said urgently, I swear it."

He seemed oddly boyish and unsure.

"I say, Cissie," he said, "you do like me and all that, don't you?"

"Yes," I said miserably.

"Look here," he said hurriedly, "come back to the car. I'll drive you home. And in the car I want to put something to you."

That something was the proposition he should make good my loss.

"You can pay it all back when you're a 'star,'" he said, beginning to laugh.

"No, thank you," I said.

"But why not?" he persisted. "It's through me you've lost this money, therefore I've a right to make that loss good."

"No," I said again.

And then, at that one word, he seemed to lose his coolness.

"By heaven, you do play up devilishly," he said breathlessly. "Look here, then, there's another proposal which has all the honor in it I can compass. Will you marry me and let me look after you in that way?"

If I had said "yes," he would have stuck to me, I believe.

I knew that and that was just why I said "no," and as I said it, he took me in his arms and really kissed me, then bolted precipitately.

He never came back, but a gorgeous diamond ring came, anonymously, which I sold for lots of money, just as I had been meant to do.

And one of the proudest moments of my life was the letter Tim wrote me, his first and last letter to me just before he went into battle last year. He wrote:

Dear Daffodil Lady:

Something tells me you are going to be very happy. I tell you I hope so, and though I didn't know it then when we met first, I know it now, I wish I were to be the lucky chap!

Good-by, my dear! Good luck.

TIM.

VI

I BECAME a star.

Partly I had luck, chiefly I had looks; and I worked hard.

For a year I did nothing but work; I worked at advertising myself; I used to go out to supper and dinner with such men as I thought would confer a certain distinctiveness upon me—I never wasted one smallest smile. I hoarded my "delightfulness" as adorers called it, as I saved my salary, rigorously: both were put by to come in at the most necessary and productive moment.

No one's sufferings touched me; I had suffered myself and no one had ever helped me. Why should I help anybody else?

An actress is nearly always made selfish by her career, her ambition, if nature has not already presented her with that useful, but undesirable quality. Introspection becomes a cult with an actress—all her thoughts, beliefs, hopes are centered on herself; that is part, the worst part, of the calculating, artistic temperament. There is no more dangerous type of woman in the world, than the woman who is beautiful and has the selfish artistic temperament. Because that egoism negatives the true qualities of the temperament, its generosity, its friendliness, its wideness of outlook, and makes for mercilessness, greed, and pity only for oneself.

I know I became like that. I did not care who went under as long as I went on; I hoarded my money because I had

been down on my luck; and I never minded seeing other girls down on theirs. Men, and their affection, I used and used.

I was very circumspect; I meant to marry well. And yet, when the great chance came I did not take it. Things often happen in life like that, I believe. Life, as it were, pays you out, by never interfering until the crucial moment, and then, with sudden wholly unexpected strength forces you to forego that for which you strove!

I was really a star when Berkeley-Rowne met me, and instantly, I knew he would "do." So I set about fascinating him as soon as possible. He was not easy game at all, he was a new type, too.

He said he was half Spanish, and he was the handsomest man I have ever seen. He stood about six-foot-two, and he had the grace of a leopard, and the strength of a Samson. He was very bronzed, and the dark color made his gray eyes seem extraordinarily brilliant, the whites of them had that bluish clearness which tells of superb health. His hair was dead black, and he had a most attractive speaking voice. And he was immensely wealthy.

I thought I should be able to fall in love with him. I wanted to, I meant to. Life paid me out. I couldn't.

I liked Berkeley; he was pleasant to be with; he was interesting, amusing, chivalrous. I knew he admired me, and I never got beyond liking.

I had stultified my emotions so long, I could not now "let them go," however much I wished to. But all the same, I meant to marry Berkeley when he should ask me.

The Berkeley-Rowne affair began in the spring of 1937. Kenneth Dumont introduced him to me at the Piccadilly, where I was lunching with

Delia Dane, the girl with whom I shared a flat.

Kenneth was in love with her, and she with him, and they were to be married when Kenneth's people consented, and even if they did not, as soon as Kenneth could earn some sort of living.

He was the only son of the newspaper king, who, being entirely self-made, had no interest in other career-makers until their object was achieved.

Ken brought Berkeley-Rowne up to our table and blithely suggested a "foursome." So we all lunched together. I can remember that morning now. The band played "In the Shadows," and all the women that year were wearing very short dresses, and it was the fashion to be as slim as possible.

"Rather different from the fashions I've seen lately!" Berkeley said to me with his quick smile. "I've just come from Spain, the northern mountains. The peasants there wear a sort of crinoline effect and a Carmen shawl over their white muslin blouses."

He talked well; he seemed so happy and vivid that day, and he took me to the theatre, and stood bareheaded in the sunshine until I had spoken to the doorkeeper in the little passage, and finally turned the corner.

That night he had a box and I saw him and smiled. He smiled back and flung down a sheaf of the most gorgeous orchids at my feet. They must have cost pounds and pounds.

Delia told me all about him in my dressing-room and while she was talking, his card was given to my dresser. There was a pencilled message on it:

Do please be gracious and come out to supper. Kenneth says Miss Dane will come too.
B. R.

I sent the answer "yes," and put on my prettiest dress.

Outside Berkeley and Ken were waiting, and beyond them a huge limousine was drawn up.

It was like a tiny sitting-room inside; there were easy chairs and the smallest table, and a writing-case in the side, and roses in tall silver vases and a little silver clock.

"It is like a magic car," I told Berkeley, who laughed and said:

"Then that's all right, for we're going on a fairy ride!"

I had been wondering what restaurant we were going to, the Carlton and Ritz had flashed past.

I asked point-blank.

"That's the secret," Berkeley said.

The car seemed to fly; we were in a field where the almond blossoms looked like snow in the moonlight, directly we had left London, it seemed to me, and yet, actually, we had reached Surrey. It was a fairy evening.

We picnicked on the thick bear-skin rugs, and had the hottest coffee, and coldest creams, and freshest salad and chicken.

Berkeley and Ken had planned every detail and it was all perfect.

We started for home about two; the moon was like a slender diamond in the sky and the whole world seemed still.

Delia had her head on Ken's shoulder, his arm was around her; once distinctly, I heard his whisper: "I love you, darling."

Berkeley and I sat side by side, at that whisper his eyes met mine, we looked long at one another. I wondered whether he felt he was going to love me, and wished with all my soul his glance had thrilled me.

I wondered, too, why it had not done so. He was so splendid in his youth and

bigness, with his whimsical charm and his "other side," which was all daring, and ruthlessness, one felt instinctively. But he never even tried to take my hand, and when he bade Delia and me goodnight, it was quite an impersonal farewell.

"There's *your* fate," Delia said sleepily, brushing out her thick, shiny hair. "Ken says he's simply *rolling*, too. D'you like him, Cecil?"

I had changed into a lace dressing-gown, and I was kneeling beside the window. The flat was on the embankment, and the river was all starry.

"Yes, I do," I said.

Delia knelt beside me and said:

"Well then?"

She slid a hand into mine.

"Being in love's the heavenliest thing in all this world," she said in a hushed voice.

I rose: perhaps already, I knew life meant to pay back.

"That's just it," I said wearily, "I feel it ought to be, and I can't make myself care like that. I wish I could."

Berkeley became an enigma to me; he took the box at the right for the season; he waited for me nightly and drove Delia and me home, or took us out to supper. On Sundays he either sent his car for us, or took us somewhere. He gave me the loveliest things, and the costliest. Our names were coupled in every newspaper; our photographs shown together in every illustrated.

And he never spoke one word of love to me.

Delia supposed him to be madly in love with me. I believed he must be and yet—the fact remained that all he ever called me was by my Christian name, and that he only held my hand when we met and parted.

I was piqued, but it did not make me fall in love. I wanted to, I longed to;

I thought that Berkeley guessed and meant to make me, and I wanted to be made to. And then so suddenly that I was utterly aghast, he came to see me one afternoon and asked me to marry him. He was rather white, and he did not smile.

"Will you, Cecil?" he said gently.

I had always meant to say "yes" when he should ask me; I said "yes" and we kissed, awkwardly, rather like children do.

Then I laughed, and he laughed too, and I could have cried.

"Let's be married soon," Berkeley said, sitting beside me on the sofa. "We've nothing on earth to wait for."

It was he who sent the announcement of our engagement to the papers, he who interviewed the reporters. He gave me the most magnificent ring, an emerald which was worth a small fortune, and he settled another fortune on me, in my own name.

He never asked me about my past life and I never told him, and neither did I question him. We were like friends who propose to go on a pleasant journey together, and make their preparations quietly and precisely.

We were to be married at the end of July, and in June, Delia and Ken "did the trick," as Ken called it at the registrars. Delia was to go on acting, and they had taken a tiny flat back of beyond in Maida Vale. She came to see me directly after the short honeymoon.

"Oh, Cecil," she said, holding my hands very tightly, "loving, belonging, is the most wonderful thing in the world. Nothing else counts."

Just that, nothing more. Delia was not very expansive. But when Berkeley came that evening to fetch me home, I felt suddenly that I could not face life with him. I choked back the

words; it would have been madness to tell him.

But a new, dreadful, ignoble jealousy flamed up in my heart instead of love. Why, *why* had he asked me to marry him when he never wanted to make love to me? I did say those words, I had to. I laid my hand on his suddenly, and said:

"Berkeley, I want you to tell me something. Why did you get engaged to me—why don't you love me?"

He went suddenly white, and he caught hold of my hand.

"For God's sake, don't throw me over—now," he said almost desperately, "I'll be more satisfactory, Cecil. I'm a clumsy brute, thoughtless. I—I do love you. Who could help it? You're gorgeous to look at—"

And so on and so forth, and he didn't love me a bit, as a man should love the woman he is going to marry, and I knew it in every fibre of my being.

You can say, why should I have expected love, needed it, felt it to be my right, when I had none to give?

I can only answer that if everyone were used after their deserts, how many of us would receive much? And the inability to give never yet deprived a selfish person of the want to take!

How beastly it all looks written down, but it was all true.

Our wedding was fixed for the nineteenth, and my wedding dress was nearly finished. Then, a week before the marriage, I went by chance to a garden dance after the theatre. It was at Lady Torrens', and her gardens are famous for their loveliness; everyone knows about them. I motored out to Richmond, and Berkeley met me in the hall.

I caught a glimpse of us together in a long mirror an instant, I tall and

very fair, he taller much and very dark.

"You are rather good to look at, d'you know, Ber?" I said to him laughingly, meeting his eyes in the mirror.

"And you are quite lovely," he said gravely.

I hated that gravity, the staid compliment. After all, he was only thirty, and I was twenty-four, and I wanted to live, and I wanted him to make me live.

He led me to Lady Torrens, who talked to both of us for a little.

The gardens lay before us, sloping down to the river. Lights had been slung from flowering bush to flowering bush, and it gave an impression of blossoms linked by jewelled chains; it was very beautiful and the night was scented, and somehow, heart-aching.

I can't describe its effect any other way, most people will know what I mean; there *are* such summer nights, and they seem to stir one's very soul.

Lady Torrens' voice broke into my dreams; she was speaking to Berkeley, and she said:

"Of course, you will have heard that Rita de Castro was married yesterday."

Berkeley said he had not heard, but was not surprised and walked away with me.

I knew Rita de Castro's name, she was the only daughter of a famous duke, and Paris had raved about her.

Berkeley and I talked of her, and then he left me with Ken and Delia.

I cannot say even now whether it was the knowledge of their perfect happiness, their need of one another and trust in one another, that really spurred me to my final action, or the song I listened to, standing by myself in the darkness.

A woman was singing, and oh! my

heavens, her voice was beautiful. The words of the song seemed to drop like falling tears into the night, each tear fell upon my heart.

I seemed to wake up at last out of my sleep of selfishness and *understand*.

And I knew utterly certainly that I could not marry Berkeley; that I could marry no man I did not love, and not only love but worship with all my heart and soul. I seemed to get back my power to love and knew that I dare not waste it.

I went straight out of that enchanted garden, sent for my car, drove home, and kept the car waiting while I wrote to Berkeley and told him quite honestly and frankly why I could not marry him. Then I sent the chauffeur to his hotel with my note, and went to bed and slept dreamlessly.

And I awoke to the news that Berkeley-Rowne had shot himself in his room, and my note had been found in his hand.

Oh, life pays back!

I was branded from that hour. I threw up my work, left town, took refuge under another name in a little village in the heart of Hampshire, and hid there.

Managers offered me double, treble salaries, and even hunted me out to importune me. I lived in a very hell of misery—the word is not too strong. I seemed to see Berkeley always, always before my eyes, so gallant and happy and gay.

And now he lay dead—and I had killed him. It came to that.

Remorse did not touch me, but sheer, utter sorrow never left my heart for the pity of it all, the blind waste, the selfishness which had been my ruin and had ruined him.

I never saw a soul I knew for weeks; I lived alone with the old

woman who did not know my real name.

Then I met Robert Carne and in the midst of all my grief and my self-condemnation I fell in love with him. It may sound heartless, but it happened. I could not help myself, I did not even know whether he loved me. I simply met, came to know him, loved him wildly.

The days when I did not see him, were utterly empty, worthless; the hours I spent with him seemed winged with fire and sunshine. I loved as I had never known women could love, and when he told me he cared for me I could not speak for joy. That was in the beech wood where the leaves were purpling, and the ground was carpeted with gold.

Robert knelt beside me suddenly and said:

"I love you, Cecil. Can you—can you give me any hope?"

I had been longing for him to kiss me for weeks!

"No hope," I whispered, "but—but the utmost certainty!"

And then our lips met.

It was the first love kiss I had ever known, and after it awakening came.

"Now I can ask you all about yourself, darling," Robert said, "I didn't dare before. But I've got to know now, I think, since we're going to be married next week. I go back to Malta then to my ship. I'll get a special license, Beautiful."

He knew nothing—*nothing*—and he asked me to tell him about my life.

I lied to him and he listened to my story of my work in an office in London, and his blue eyes grew dark with anger to think I had to "slave."

He was not clever, my Robert, he was just straight, and obstinate, and true.

I made my rotten, pitiful decision

that night, when Robert had left me to tramp over the heath to the inn where he was staying.

I would tell him nothing—until we were married. I felt I *could* not lose him, would not, dared not.

I fought over the arguments about the supreme baseness of deceiving the one being you love. I defeated that argument with the counter argument that I had never *meant* to hurt Berkeley, never dreamt I could, that all my weight of sin had fallen on me undeservedly. I had done nothing wrong, I had instead (cheap tragedy!) striven to be better by giving Berkeley back his freedom!

With the morning and the sunshine Robert came and I forgot all my misery, my doubts, my self questioning.

He loved me as I had dreamed a lover should love, passionately, reverently, *exactly*, tenderly—oh! He loved me every way that means love to a man who cares for the first time, and a woman who cares for the first time.

Those early autumn days were lit with Heaven's sunshine, I believe—we were so happy.

We picnicked all the day, and sat hand in hand before my little wood fire in my tiny sitting-room every evening, till the clock struck eleven. Punctually, then, Robert left me.

A week went past; we had just another seven days to run. It rained on Sunday; he was to leave me to get the special license on Monday. I watched behind the streaming little pane for his figure to appear. At last I saw him and all my heart leapt in greeting, then fell ridiculously; he was not alone.

Ten minutes later he had kissed me, and then he presented "Dick Burgess, no end of a pal of mine; he's in my ship," and Dick Burgess, looking at

me, smiling genially, gripping my hand warmly said: "By Jove, Miss Charde, I'll congratulate old Robert all over again. He never told me you were Miss Cecilia Maine. I saw you last as the 'Starshine Girl,' I think. No end of a good show, I thought it!"

I could no longer see him, I saw only Robert's face, Robert's eyes, and I knew what my own face told.

I had given him another name; I had lied to him, lied, lied.

Dick Burgess went off at last for a tramp and left us alone, and then I went up to Robert, and stood beside him, not even touching his hand and said tonelessly:

"I dared not tell you. I felt I could not lose you—you mean life—and—and more than that to me. All I told you about my past was lies. Ever since I was sixteen I have been fighting the world. I've kept straight because—because I was a coward, not because I was good. Once I nearly starved; always I was lonely. I was anybody's prey, really. And when I did get on at last, I stifled every decent feeling I possessed—I meant to gain a secure life. Berkeley seemed to offer it. So I became engaged to him and then—I didn't love him, you see, not one heart beat, then, that night he killed himself, I—I felt somehow I *couldn't* marry him, not loving him. I couldn't—so I wrote the letter telling him he was free, the letter found in his hand. I have told you everything now."

I looked into his eyes, and he looked back into mine.

"Robert," I whispered, and I fell on my knees before him and hid my face in my hands.

He had gone when I looked up—left me, given me up for good. Even in my anguish I was glad I had not married him, a lair. I had been saved from hurting him like that irremediably. I

forget how that day passed; I forget the night—I can only remember the day that followed. For on it, Robert came back to me, and he came and stood beside me, and watched me read a letter he had put into my hand.

It was from Berkeley-Rowne to him, and it had been written immediately before he had killed himself.

It was not very long:

Dear Bob:

You, of course, will know Rita is married. I only heard it tonight. So all my engagement plan is valueless. I did the decent thing by the girl; she does not care an atom for me and never will, any more than I have cared for her, and I have settled a sufficient sum on her to soothe her wounded vanity. I believed Rita would come back to me through jealousy. I have her final answer in her marriage, and she will have mine when she hears I have killed myself. I am all sorts of a fool I know, but that one frail woman's name spelt life for me. Don't judge me too hardly.

Yours,

BERKELEY.

I looked at Robert and shook so that I could not stand. He put his arms closely round me.

"I came here to tell you the truth," he said, "I only heard about you when I reached England, who you were and so on, and I felt it the only decent thing to do. I found you here, so afraid, so sad. I couldn't open the matter. I used to see you on purpose at first, and then I fell in love with you. I used to long for you to tell me the truth, but I couldn't drag it from you. I'd sworn never to ask you. I couldn't bear to torture you by questioning you. I never knew Burgess had seen you, naturally. When you told me all the facts yesterday, I—I simply felt I'd only one answer to make to you. Cecil, look."

He held our marriage license before my eyes, bent and kissed my lips, and we went out to our wedding in the sunshine.

Fetters of Fancy

By PHILANDER KNOX



Designing smart clothes for classmates won fame for Ray.

IT so happened that there were to be three men who should play dissimilar but important rôles in the life of little Ray; but Ray—who was seventeen, and one of those small waifs that spring up along life's byways like wild roses, to be gathered by the first passer-by—wasn't a seeress nor a crystal-gazer. Anyway, if you had told her that her destiny would hold so much, she would have looked at you very straight out of her eyes, blue as larkspur, and told you that truly, truly, there just couldn't be anyone but Jimsy. Not ever!

To Jim Woodward she offered up the secret prayers all women in love make; even if, like little Ray, they be mere fledglings in passion's nest. She gave to him honestly and deeply, and there wasn't a moment of the day when she didn't remember how he had lifted her from the dingy back room

of Madame Celeste's millinery shop, where she strained the lovely larkspur eyes, and put her into this tiny, compact but artistic apartment. Yes, poor little Ray Wiggins loved to touch the heavy hangings and the dim pictures and the quaint mirrors, but she couldn't have explained at all just what they meant to her.

Jimsy's signal sounded then upon her delighted ears — two staccato rings of the bell four floors below, before he came up. She clasped her hands ecstatically across her immature chest, then fluffed up the undulating wealth of her burnished hair before a French mirror. Next, as had become her custom, she sought a hiding place. She crouched in an alluring heap of pale gray filminess behind the fire-screen. She was waiting for the big moment of her narrow day. Jim had taught her to expect a great deal

of men and he was presently to teach her, paradoxically enough, to expect nothing.

Meanwhile, Woodward was riding up in the elevator, and anyone studying his face would have noted in it a certain hardness of glance. He had the unpleasantly repressed look of a man who has long rebelled within, with no outward demonstration. He was just thirty and, being the last of the Woodwards (the illustrious, impractical Woodwards), it had been his unpleasant task always to curb inherited tastes and live within the tag end of the Woodward fortune. You knew instinctively—noting his immaculate litheness, his aloof expression and smallish hands—that his forefathers had invariably dressed for dinner. You were sure that he believed in traditions and heirlooms and education, and you wouldn't have dreamed that there would be a little Ray waiting upstairs. Jim wondered about it himself at times. It was simply that it was one of those violent, unexplained attractions. Ray got at your heart when you'd known her a while.

Woodward let himself into the apartment, but he didn't follow his usual routine—which was to seek out the piquant hider, catch her up in his arms, rain kisses on her vivid face and set her down at last, before the absurdly small gas range in the kitchenette. Instead, tonight, he threw his hat and overcoat and evening paper across the settee and called out impatiently:

"Ray!"

A small giggle floated out from behind the screen.

"Ray, don't be silly! Come here," he said, and she knew that his nerves were on the ragged edge.

She emerged then, eyes hurt, bud of a mouth tremulous. He didn't make any move to kiss her. She came over

to him and stroked his coat sleeve musingly.

"Sick, or awfully tired, honey?" she asked.

"No. And please don't fuss around so, Ray," he said petulantly. "Dinner ready?"



"We can't get married, Ray," Jim Woodward stated boldly.

She sighed and went to the kitchenette sadly. But of course, when he saw what she'd made for dinner—

She set down the salad before him hopefully. It was his favorite; tomatoes, their jackets bursting with their filling of peas and wax beans, and topped with a heavy yellow mayonnaise. She watched him pick at it listlessly.

"You're worrying about horrid old money again," Ray insisted.

He didn't answer.

"Is the salad as good as usual?" she asked anxiously.

"The same; no better, no worse," he answered indifferently.

"Then I can save some extra money!" Ray laughed joyously, the lark-

spur eyes across the gate-legged table commanding his attention at last. "Because, you see, I mixed peanut oil with the olive oil and you never knew the difference! It's just as good for you, Jimsy, and not nearly so dear. And,"



"Not—get—married," Ray slowly sobbed.

she continued breathlessly, "I washed this gown with white soap instead of sending it to the cleaner's; and I discovered a store where they sell soups two for a quarter; and—"

But Woodward had jumped up as if he couldn't stand it, sitting there as if everything were the same. In the doorway he buried his head in his arms as he leaned against the jamb.

"Don't say those things," he said in a queer muffled voice; "it makes it—agony."

"Makes what?" Ray whispered. "Jimsy, what's happened?" She scarcely dared put it that way, make the question so clear. And now she knew that all these days the fear had been there in the back of her mind.

She went over to him. He was hers

yet. She put a consoling, faithful little arm across his shoulders; she pulled his face around to meet her vision. It looked dreadful; white and terribly narrow.

"We can't get married, Ray," he stated it baldly. He was glad now he'd gotten it out.

"Not—get—married!" she repeated very slowly. She stood so for a full minute; then she dropped down to her knees and moaned. She beat the floor with her fists in an impotent paroxysm; then fought for enough composure to frame the helpless cry:

"But why? Why? I'll do anything for you, Jimsy. We can manage; I'll save more—"

It wasn't going at all the way Woodward had thought it would. He had planned it impersonally this afternoon, and now the personal aspect of the thing rose up to make him suffer horribly. He couldn't look at the poor distorted face, the larkspur eyes all tear-blurred; but he told her—told her how Mr. Howland, who spelt Big Business, had taken such a fancy to him; how there was a greater chance for a young architect in the West, where buildings and fortunes were new and architecture was democratically diversified.

Even so, the girl clung desperately to the hope that, after all, that couldn't make such an awful difference. But the crushing face came out; he would be travelling out there with the Howlands, would become part of their *ménage*.

There was, seemingly, no place in that arrangement for little Ray Wiggins.

"You would be ashamed of me," she said with misleading calmness; underneath, the currents of fury were racing in her blood. "You don't think I should be near — Alice Howland."

(She had had a secret dread of Miss Howland every time Jimsy mentioned that the lady had visited the offices.) "You, ashamed of me!" She laughed rather wildly. It was the first sneer he had ever heard issue from that bud of a mouth. "You're just plain cad!" she went on wonderingly, as though she would have to convince herself. "Jim, do you think I should have been here all these days if you hadn't—promised? Now — I'm so ashamed, ashamed!"

She flung herself across the lounge in the living-room and he let the first flood of emotion rack her and wear itself down to an occasional deep-drawn sob. He was going to take her in his arms but she beat him away with her small fists.

"You've done what they always do," she accused him over and over. "That's the way it always ends, and each one of us has to discover it."

"Don't put it that way, Ray," he implored her. "You know it was different; we weren't like those others."

"We were, when this happens," she pointed out.

He studied her a moment, then with an almost imperceptible gesture of distaste turned away from her grief-ravaged face, so unlike the blossom it usually resembled.

It was his turning away that cut worst. Deep down in her heart she recognized that motion as the symbol of his soul-smallness. Small indeed was the heart that could sense such details when it watched another heart writhe in abysmal anguish.

They put in two terrible hours.

"It came so suddenly. Why, just last night—!" the girl concluded, twisting her hands together, her head hanging listlessly. "It's all over, Jimsy; all over. Only two months together, and

all the time you said it would be all right."

"Well, it came suddenly to me; only this afternoon, Ray. I've explained all that. Anyway, if it had to be—"

"Had to be?" she challenged.

"Oh, well!" He was clearly wearied of this. Frankly, he didn't want to feel so badly about it; he was absorbed in his own selfishness. The Howland proposition had temporarily swept him along in its golden tide of wealth-to-be. He thought he would better tell her now the final fact which would close this episode. It did take a certain kind of courage to tell it to the forlorn heap of pale gray georgette and copery hair.

"I may as well tell you, Ray, that we're leaving at midnight. It came up suddenly; Mr. Howland himself didn't know before."

There was no answer. He waited there a long time, he didn't know just why. Only her deep, irregular breathing fell upon his ears as she lay face downward on the lounge. One arm hung down, and even her hand expressed utter exhaustion and lassitude.

Doubtless she heard him in the bedroom, pulling out bureau drawers hurriedly, stuffing things into his bag haphazardly, rummaging in the closet. Still she gave no sign. Even when he at last stood beside her and whispered her name she didn't turn, though she knew this was a good-by of sorts. He should not again see her face, she resolved, since he had turned away from the piteous mask excessive weeping placed there. But when the door closed she gave a high, smothered scream.

Little Ray did not rouse to normal activities for three days. She wandered around the small rooms with

their ghostly memories, pale and tearless, munching indifferently on the store of food in the kitchen cupboard. At the end of that period, when she hadn't heard from Woodward, she began to see him more as he was. If she had had philosophies or older viewpoints, her recovery would have been swifter.

She fought down the pain of remembering him as he had seemed, and concentrated bravely on the facts as they were. It hadn't been fair at all. Knowing his inherited differences, Jimsy should never have invaded the stratum in which life had placed her. Like any invader, he had plundered and gone his way. She felt, sadly, that the blot of those two months must necessarily follow her through the dull, disillusioned years ahead. There was, in her tired pretty head, no way in which one eradicated a thing of that sort.

The lovely things in the apartment were hers to do with as she pleased; Jimsy had made that clear in a faintly grandiose manner. She put them to the best possible use, for there was a wholesome vein of shrewdness in Ray. She kept the apartment long enough to find a tenant who, much taken with the complete effect of the furnishings, bought them as they stood. Of course, she didn't get their value by any means, but she had more than enough to carry her through the difficult period of readjustment.

Ray didn't contemplate going back to Madame Celeste's or to any similar occupation. She had made up her mind that, having put forever the bright kingdom of love behind her, she would absorb herself in business achievements. The institution which had harbored her early years, had given her one year of high school before turning her adrift upon the uncertain sea of

human sympathy. She would have liked more of those pleasant, carefree days, but she put the thought away now. If there were to be school, it must be school that prepared her for the hard road ahead; so she very practically took some of her capital and invested in a course of typing and shorthand.

She succeeded in acquiring the necessary knowledge in record time. She applied herself with almost inhuman intensity, because she simply must banish spectres. She reduced the one overwhelming sorrow to a half-impersonal bitterness. The blue eyes looked up from copybooks and typewriters so earnestly that Ray Wiggins' name headed the list of promising students and she was presently told to report at the offices of Eugene Sears.

That was in April, and Ray entered the elevator of the Exchange Building in a panic. It wasn't altogether unpleasant though; here was some one or something to be conquered. She had the air of looking very business-like without in the least shedding the adorable mark of femininity. Her suit of blue serge was brand-new and the coppery hair rolled in shiny waves beneath a crisp black sailor.

She knew no more of the prosperous Mr. Sears than his startling advertisements and his door told her. The latter bore his name in gold letters, supplemented by the announcement: "*Everything in Real Estate.*" Ray smiled slightly and went in. She was passed from an office boy to an efficient girl in an inner office, and finally propelled into a luxurious room which commanded a view of the Bay and the towers of commerce that stretched ever upward.

A young man rose to meet her, and he was to play the second large rôle

in little Ray's destiny. He was young or old; one of those men whose age can't be guessed correctly. He must be young, because his jaw was fairly chiseled in its strong line, and his dark eyes laughed inwardly, and his hair rose up buoyantly on either side of the part. He was as tall as Jim Woodward, but he didn't have that narrow, aloof look. But he wasn't so young, when one considered his phenomenal success and the air of utter assurance and capability and experience he radiated. He might have answered to Wordsworth's description of a character: "*A man . . . of cheerful yesterdays and confident to-morrows.*" Physically speaking, he was twenty-six, but almost any age mentally, since he was boyishly gay or maturely serious by turns.

Ray's face looked less scared and more smiley as she said:

"Mr. Sears expects me, I think. I'm Miss Wiggins from the Business School."

"Mr. Sears does," the young man smiled with his alert dark eyes. "Won't you sit down, Miss Wiggins? Perhaps you'd like to hang your hat and coat on the rack by the window."

"But don't you think I'd have to see Mr. Sears first?" she asked bewilderedly.

"Most assuredly. I'm Mr. Sears, you see," he said, with a perfectly composed face, though you knew all the time that he was laughing inside with plain everyday fun.

"Oh!" Ray laughed, though she was afraid he'd think she was a foolish little business woman. "Why, I thought—"

"You thought I'd be some old duffer who'd be gruff and try to scare you and ask what system of shorthand you knew," he interrupted, with a tremendously engaging grin.

Ray smiled back, showing her row of small teeth, like corn kernels, and turned up the earnest larkspur eyes for directions. Eugene Sears turned her over to the other girl—Miss Clay, his secretary—who put Ray at typing in the outer office. Here Ray was content all through the tender spring months, to take refuge at her inconspicuous desk where she quickly picked up the routine system. She learned so arduously that Miss Clay came to depend upon her for anything special.

Ray learned that Sears was known as the "happiness broker," so satisfied were his clients invariably; and it was really true that he had a genius about finding anything in real estate. He was the sort of fellow whose employees called him "Gene" after they'd known him awhile, and he didn't lose any prestige thereby either; which meant that he had a personality at once lovable and commanding.

Ray didn't know him well enough for that yet, but she did know that in the gay, peaceful shelter of his large offices, she had conquered her vagrant thoughts of Jim Woodward and made up her mind that she could live fairly comfortably without him. There was still a stab of pain when she thought of those days together, and she was human enough to feel a wee bit elated when she read of the engagement of Alice Howland to another man. She didn't want him herself. She supposed it was a matter of mere pride.

When Miss Clay went on her vacation in the middle of June, little Ray Wiggins slipped noiselessly and competently into her place in Gene's private office. He, being aware of this, remarked, as he said good-by to Miss Clay:

"So you wished that pair of wistful eyes on me, eh? How the dickens is a

fellow to work when—”

“I’ve wished her perfectly good brains on you, ungrateful man!” Miss Clay retorted, “and a term in the happiness broker’s office will cure her, won’t it?”

Sears did his best. He’d come in swaggering in the morning with that delightfully busy air of his and sing out “good morning” so boisterously that Ray must perforce smile. She



Gene Sears suggested to Ray, “Enter school as Rachel Garrison.”

even suspected his scheme. But one noon, returning for a forgotten paper after he had started for lunch, he came upon her in the office, bright head buried in her arms, crossed on his very own desk, and the convulsive movements of her shoulders told him that she was crying hard. He tiptoed away.

He would never have thought of tracing it back to a conversation of the morning, when he had said casualy:

“Here’s a chap who says you have

to trample some one to get success. We won’t believe that, will we, Miss Wiggins?”

“I guess most people do,” Ray had said sadly, with that straight blue gaze he liked immensely. “I knew a man—he was young too. He thought he had to trample one soul to find his own. So, of course, he lost both . . .”

Sears was puzzled but infinitely sorry whenever he recalled that pitiful tableau he had witnessed unintentionally. He found the little blot on the letter on his desk, the little tear-blot she had left. It got an awful grip on his heart—that little blot.

Ray could have found no surer, swifter way to make a definite appeal to a young man of Gene’s impulsiveness; yet that’s just what she wouldn’t have wanted to do. As it was, he was consumed with interest in her; for Ray—though she had naturally lost faith in her ability to charm—had a subtle something about her that caught him in its web of allure and awakened all sorts of tender ideas and fancies in him.

He was thinking regretfully that he shouldn’t be able to study the entrancing and dolorous creature quite so well when Miss Clay resumed her work. In the midst of that thought he had a wire from Shadow Lake:

“May I have an extra week?”

“MILDRED CLAY.”

To which he replied delightedly,

“You bet.

“E. S.”

“Now why did I do that so quickly?” he pondered to himself. And the answer surged over him as he watched the silhouette of Ray Wiggins etched against the blue sky.

“Ray!” He spoke her name softly.

She looked up surprisedly, and then

fear came into her face. He had never called her that before.

"Yes?" she ventured, almost forbiddingly.

"Well, don't make it so infernally hard for a chap to invite you out," he grinned.

Poor Ray! If she had been just emerging into her heritage of girlhood how swiftly she must have responded to that most engaging of young men.

"Invite me out?" she repeated mournfully.

"Yes, you've got to go to a comedy with me. I've simply got to find out if you can laugh. It occurred to me the other day that perhaps you never had, you know."

She smiled weakly. She might have known this was coming, though, she supposed. Oh, if only he had let her alone—just a little longer; she was still so tired out!

Nevertheless, she did go with him and no one but a petrified man could have withstood the farcical situations the young wife in the play managed to create. There was the usual absurdly jealous husband, and the old lover who came to live across the hall, and the janitor who had a talent for telling things literally. It bore the stamp of a well-known humorist and the piquant title, "Look out, Lucy!"

They rode home in the lovely limousine Gene had purchased after a recent deal of magnitude. Ray drew an inadvertent, contented sigh.

"You can laugh! You've been holding out on us," Sears accused.

"There's no use laughing unless the opportunity arises," Ray protested.

"But there's always *something* to laugh at," he insisted. "That's what life is. Like everything else, it has its component parts. One's tragedy, the other, comedy. There's always a little

of one where you find the other. You've been looking through the wrong specs, that's all, Ray."

"I'll try," Ray promised.

Miss Clay, returning, professed to see a great difference. Gene grinned complacently and Miss Wiggins was heard to hum occasionally. Sears missed her strangely from his private office. She had become his obsession. He had discovered all her lovable traits, her loyalty and earnestness; now he was mad to get her away somewhere, where the world was beautiful and summery, and tell her all about it.

He wished Ray wouldn't have such a meek air of obedience whenever he asked her to share some diversion. She always wrung his heart terribly. There were moments when he felt that he'd barter the world away to have her in his arms, wearing the look of a woman beloved.

They went, on a perfect afternoon of his choosing, on an excursion boat which sailed down the Bay to an island where one might dance or go on a variety of "jiggers." The sail down was wonderful, for there was a stiff breeze ruffling the trees of the shoreline and scuffing up the waves in whitecaps, and sky and sea were as blue as Ray's eyes.

When they reached the island it turned out that Gene Sears had come for none of its stereotyped amusements. Instead, he searched out a charming nook, hidden from the eye of the passer-by, where one might sit on the seawall, with scrubby trees at his back and feet swinging over the mocking water beneath.

Ray sat down beside him with many misgivings. This was what she had been dreading. She had wanted so to believe that there was one man at least who was "different."

The prelude to the big, splendid

thought that was in his heart was the remark:

"Here's the world at its best all around us, Ray. Everything at the height of its glory, all resurrected from winter. People are like that—"

"Everything come to life, but dead hopes," Ray interrupted, speaking from the dramatic vein in her nature. The man looked at her surprisedly; then frowned as he ran his hand through his boisterous hair.

"You are the most determined little person—bent on being unhappy," he told her sternly. Then he took her by the shoulders. She looked at him squarely.

"I know exactly what's the matter, Ray," he said gently, almost caressingly. "Something came along and nipped your girlhood in the bud. Did you think I couldn't understand that, dear? It's just as though you were crushed down before you had a chance to see life right."

She dropped her eyes as a sweep of crimson rose in her pale cheeks. He understood, then.

"You're making the mistake of thinking that alters your whole life," he went on seriously; "but it doesn't."

It was good to hear him say that, at any rate. Ray was listening intently.

"Ray, something comes to everyone once in a lifetime, I suppose; something indefinable—" He broke off and stared out at a passing steamer. Then he went on. She had never imagined that the snappy, business-like Gene Sears could show such evidence of a deep, emotional upheaval. It was rather magic to see the subtle change that spread over his features and touched his voice.

"I used not to take much stock in the proposition," he admitted boyishly, "but you've made me all over, Ray, without even trying. There is some-

thing in you that calls to me. I can't analyze it; I'm awfully afraid I can't make you see. I used to laugh at other fellows when they raved about love; but, you see— Do you know, Ray, you're going to grow into the kind of woman who can make life everything for me? You're going to be marvelous in a few years."

His avowal had been tender and slightly embarrassed, and so very different from Woodward's sophisticated wooing. The phrases were obviously new to Gene's lips. There was a moment when Ray half wished she had been starting womanhood all over freshly and could rise to meet this lovable, attractive man in the wonderland he unveiled for her vision. But the wish was crushed down, just as she had stifled all emotion for months. She sighed and plucked idly at some loose stones in the wall.

"You aren't ready to hear it, little Ray," he said sadly. "You shrink away, or maybe I imagine it. But, you see, I don't want to take you when you are just emerging from the chrysalis. I'm older. I want—I hardly dare tell you what I want!" he ended helplessly.

Ray Wiggins' heart pounded; she was horribly afraid of what he might say. She wished he wouldn't say anything about—things.

"I'm going to tell you now," he said abruptly. "This isn't the way I planned it. I'm bungling it, and the funny part of it is that I know I am all the time. I can sell lots in Hades to a plaster saint, but I'll be darned if I can talk to you, Ray dearest! Just the way you get me . . . Do you suppose you'd ever care a whack about me?"

"I—I don't know," she mused. "I'd want to be terribly sure."

"That's it!" he agreed eagerly. "I've loads of money, you know," he con-

fided ingenuously; "I can't bear not to give and give to you, Ray. And I want you to wait until you're a woman. What do you suppose I want you to do for four years?"

"What?" asked Ray with real interest.

"Go to school."

"School!" she exclaimed in dismay. Yet, there was a responding enthusiasm in those wistful eyes now.

"Yes! I want to gamble," he stated it tersely; "I want to stake you to a fuller education—you'd get the most out of it, Ray—against the chance that you'd—you'd come to me afterward."

"Oh!" she responded faintly. Gene, then, was like the rest to some extent; less selfish, of course. Reduced to its naked truth, it came to this: he wanted to possess her.

He had forgotten to mention the actual word "marriage," so clearly was it all defixed in his mind and had been for weeks; and she—poor disillusioned, little flower!—expected nothing. No, she reasoned, it was because Gene understood about *that something*. She didn't blame him; but it seemed to make clear the fact that that was the way life would barter her about always. One paid over and over. Through the glimpse of endless pursuit, the thought of those four cloistered, unharried years in school beckoned like a beacon on a storm-bound sea.

They sat in thoughtful silence, probably the strangest two who had ever lingered there. Finally it came to Ray that she, too, would play for high stakes. She would gamble that he wouldn't want her at the end of four years. There was a certain humility in the innermost depths of Ray's soul, never to be guessed from her piquant exterior.

"I'd like to go," she said at last.

"Ray! Honestly?" He laughed happily and, snatching up her hands, he kissed them. It was like him not to ask for more.

They jumped up hurriedly to catch a returning boat, and sat by the railing, oblivious of the rest of the world while they talked endlessly of the strange project before them. Ray's thoughts unconsciously drifted back to the impatient and all-demanding ardor of Jim Woodward. And then she thought of Eugene Sears.

He *was* different, even if the ultimate end was to be the same. It must be an emotion somewhat allied to real love, that made him give her four glorious years.

Ray was human enough to entertain the fleeting vision of a future meeting with Woodward when he should see her as the finished product. She thought it rather an unworthy wish.

"Your first name is really Rachel, isn't it?" Sears was asking.

"Yes. Why?"

"There's a good deal of dignity in that name, Ray; and—you'll forgive me, won't you?—your last name doesn't come quite up to it, does it?"

Ray laughed a gay little laugh.

"I've never had any illusions about the name of Wiggins, Gene."

"Let me lend you a name that's in my family," he suggested. "Enter the school as Rachel Garrison."

"Rachel Garrison," Ray repeated. "That is *nice*, Gene." This last timidly, as she slipped her hand into his. "You are so good to me!"

ON the day she was eighteen Ray said good-by to Eugene Sears as he stood grinning at her bravely, his head bared so that one saw the jolly buoyant spring to his dark hair.

"This is the very best birthday

present anyone ever had," she told him happily, and he saw that the larkspur eyes were going to try to see life right.

He had arranged everything competently and thoughtfully for her comfort and pleasure. It had been fun, after all, those days when they



"I'm Bruce Carney of New York," he said. "Been scouting the country for fresh ideas."

browsed among school catalogues and finally selected Tetherell Academy, because it was only fifty miles from the coast city of Gene's spectacular activities.

"I can't let you get too far away," he had warned her, with one of his sunny smiles.

The danger signal rose up in the depths of the blue eyes again. Perhaps

it was not altogether veiled from the keen dark eyes above her.

"These years are going to belong solely to Rachel Garrison," he told her; "and I'm not going to mention the 'afterwards' again, dear, in all that time."

So there came to Tetherell Academy a very winsome young person—Miss Garrison, an orphan whose legacy allowances were paid through the Union Trust Company back in the city. Here was a girl who turned eyes that were a trifle sad upon the scene of her new life. There was a composite picture of gray stone buildings, calm and ivy-clad, and elms with wide-arched boughs and winding paths converging at the *portecochère* of the dean's particular edifice.

"I'm not like the rest," thought Ray, as she watched them all that first day, chatting in groups or comparing the treasures in plethoric wardrobe trunks.

Nevertheless, all the shadows fell away inevitably before the sunshine of carefree endeavors and blithe companions. It was impossible to have anything but a joyous heart as she wandered over the leaf-strewn campus with gay-sweatered groups, or carried off small triumphs in the gymnasium, or gained the first rungs in the ladder of knowledge. Perhaps she appreciated it just a bit more than any other girl at the academy.

It was one of the kind chances of life that she should room with Eunice Mills, a girl with a touch of Ray's own seriousness but an abundance of whimsical humor that lighted the dark, lonely paths of Rachel's introspections.

Ray wrote about it all in a spirit of excessive delightedness. Gene could see the new Ray emerging from every line of the letter:

"It's all heavenly, Gene. If you could only know what you've given me! I'm afraid I could never make up for it all."

He wished she wouldn't stick to that pay-up idea.

"Eunice Mills is the one girl I should have chosen for a roommate. She has one of those interesting, tragic faces—dark eyes and sad lips—and the merriest heart beneath. She's a fascinating contradiction."

Quite futile to attempt to interest Gene in anyone else.

"I've been learning so much about thoughts in the psychology class. I'm beginning to see that it's altogether possible to leave Ray Wiggins behind utterly. Who would have thought that I'd show great talent as a—pole vaulter! I shall jump off the earth one of these days and lose my head in the sunset clouds . . . I didn't care to go to the Halloween masquerade. I stayed upstairs instead and prepared a perfectly good theme on the Renaissance period . . . You surely are my happiness broker! . . ."

Gene liked the sound of that last. He carried the letter about for days in his vest pocket. Back of that masquerade business he sensed her exaggerated idea of being strictly loyal to him.

Eunice Mills had been indignant. "Look here, Rachel Garrison," she had said severely, shaking Ray by the shoulders, "you haven't looked at a boy since you came here. Every time we go past the university you act as though it contained lunatics instead of perfectly good fellows. Has some dreadful he-creature signed up your future with rash promises before you came?"

"Well, I suppose that's about it," Ray laughed, though she wondered what Eunice would ever do if she told her of Gene's supposed proposition. "But I don't care a thing about going around, Eunice. Honestly!"

"Fiddiesticks! Anyone wants to dance; anyone who can dance the way you can. It's just another evidence of the selfishness of men. The foolishness of it! You're only eighteen; how old is he?"

"Twenty-six," said Ray meekly.

"Exactly! He's ready for all that sort of thing; settling down to slippers in the evening and a hearthside slave to wait on him."

"Hardly at twenty-six!" Rachel laughed out loud.

There came a time when Miss Mills took it all back. That was at Thanksgiving time when Miss Braithwaite, the dean, chaperoned a dance at which the Tetherell young ladies were permitted to have the young men from their various home towns. Ray had written timidly to Gene suggesting that it might be nice if he came as her escort. Otherwise, she didn't think she'd attend the party.

Sears, wild with the desire to glimpse the vivid face and burnished hair of the new Ray, answered exuberantly. The old fear crept up vaguely. She needn't be afraid of Gene—yet, she reminded herself. It was absurd; one of the inexplicably dull twists of an alert brain, that it never occurred to Ray that he wanted to marry her. If he had not forbidden himself the subject it would doubtless have come out clearly in some letter or conversation. If it did occur to Rachel's subconsciousness, born of the knowledge of his goodness, it was submerged by her magnified consciousness of unworthiness. She had taught herself persistently that she had forfeited the right

to certain recognized beauties of life. Even so, the episode of Jim Woodward faded daily to the shadowy realm of nightmares.

The larkspur eyes were starry with youthful gaiety as Ray walked proudly with Sears in the colorful grand march about the flower-bedecked gymnasium. Eunice Mills, on the arm of a stoutish boy who made silly puns, stared at Sears with new comprehension. She got Ray aside at the first chance, to whisper ecstatically:

"I don't blame you, Ray! It doesn't matter if he's as selfish as a pig."

"We either do put up with their selfishness or—do without them," said Ray wisely.

"Why don't you write epigrams for the *Tetherell Foolscap*?" Eunice teased her.

There was a marked difference between Sears and the rather callow youths cavorting about so gaily. He had made his attainments, he had a sureness, a dominant force, about him. All of these things were not lost upon Ray, and she wasn't entirely unwilling to be led to a palm-screened oasis for a quiet chat.

They sat on a settee, over which an old trapeze clung to the grim walls of the gym, and Gene studied her at close range. If she had been desirable as sad little Ray Wiggins, she was infinitely more so now that the brightness of her heart lighted up her eyes and features with a swift array of fascinating smiles. She seemed more sure of herself and sure of the welcome of the world. Her hair was knotted low upon her neck girlishly, and a slender fillet of pearls went across her forehead and bound the coppery locks. She was his creation. Yes, he had made her exactly what she was at the moment; had bought the charming trappings she wore. The

ages-old sense of possession was too inherent to be stifled. He caught her in his arms and kissed her on her rosebud mouth.

It was her utter passivity that shamed Sears; a pitiful attempt to let him take payment for his generosity.

"Honestly, Ray, I didn't mean to do that!" he said, eyes averted so that he didn't see the tears that had sprung to her eyes. It had brought back so clearly so much that she wanted to forget.

BACK in town, Sears plunged assiduously into all sorts of projects, and presently Ray's letters were just as easy and chummy as before and things slipped back to normal.

Their second meeting was arranged in blissful ignorance by the capable Eunice, who more than half wanted another view of the charming young man whom Rachel took so casually. Mrs. Mills wrote a motherly letter to the orphaned Miss Garrison, asking her to spend the Christmas vacation with Eunice. The Mills were going to their lodge at Lake Chippewa and would inaugurate several old-fashioned week-ends. The letter hinted at a series of alluring mind pictures: popcorn about a crackling hearth, skating under a pale moon, charades . . .

The gist of Ray's letter to Gene, explaining it all, might have been summed up as, May I?

He responded humorously:

"Yes, my child, you can have a penny for candy; so run along. Seriously, Ray, why don't you just take your four years and do whatever you want to with them? Honestly, girl dear, you make me feel like one of those dreadful creatures—the scrub-woman in the building calls it being a 'gardeen'!"

Meanwhile Eunice, having gained Mr. Sears' address, sent him an unconventional invitation (carefully seconded by Mrs. Mills) to join them for one week-end as a delightful surprise for Rachel. Gene was doubtful as to the wisdom of seeing Ray so soon again, but he could no more have resisted the chance to be with her than a steel bar resists a high-powered magnet.

Coming down the rustic stairs of the delightful Mills lodge on Christmas Eve, Ray saw him standing by the fire in the big hall, while Eunice laughed up elfishly from the Navajo blanket on which she was sitting informally in Turkish fashion.

"We put one over on you, Rachel!" she laughed, and noticed nothing deeper than surprise in the larkspur eyes. Indeed, Ray realized suddenly that it was rather nice to see his pleasant face, touched with a glow from the bright logs. He seemed to fit in, somehow. One fancied him as no newcomer, but rather an old friend who had enjoyed many a *tête-à-tête* on the old carved chimney-seat.

"Gene, I am glad!" she repeated several times as he took her hands in his two strong ones; but he knew that the tiny shadow that flickered across the radiant face on a level with his shoulder, meant that the barrier he had raised during that brief dance night had not passed.

He wasn't sure, the first two days, whether or not it was accidental that he found himself most often in Miss Mills' company and that he and Rachel were never alone; but the third night, the last of this week-end, found them all out on the mirror-like stretch of Chippewa, their long black shadows floating over the frozen lake, always in twos. It was natural that he and

Ray should clasp hands and sway together with smooth strokes.

It was the loveliest night Eugene could remember. Somewhere beyond that line of dark pine shore, somewhere beyond this silence and silver-cold beauty, was the world. But this—this was isolation with the most adorable girl in the universe, where only the twinkle of distant icy stars was watching. The wind was at their backs as they went down the lake and with scarcely an effort they glided over the moonlit stretch. There had been no wind the day Chippewa froze, so the surface was unmarred by ice ripples. Presently the lines of various happy twos diverged sharply. Each was left alone with the one other, alone with an all-absorbing chance to ask the questions that bring sighs or shy, swift nods.

When they had left the bonfire far behind, they decided that they must turn back. Now it was battle against the frosty wind, heads down, hands tight together, stroke labored. Despite the exhilaration they found in conquest of the elements, the wind had nipped through Ray's little fur jacket and the scarf and cap she wore so rakishly. Gene found a shelter where they might catch breath, so they halted in the lee of a great pinetree on the edge of the shore. There they talked hurriedly and self-consciously.

Once again the utter charm she had for him rose in Sears. He fought it down desperately. He didn't want to tear down the confidence he had built up so cautiously; but it was so quiet and wonderful there at the end of the bleak forest—She was distractingly near.

She leaned forward then to ask him a question, put her hand on his arm. Once again he crushed her lithe form in his rough arms; once again his lips

found ecstasy against hers. Again she rested, still and unresisting, as he showered her upturned face with tender kisses and rough ones; long kisses, swift ones. She was his if he wanted payment.

Now a shame far greater than the other shame came to Gene. He fell back against the tree; stared out across desolate Chippewa.

"That will be the thing you'll remember—whenever you think of me,"



"Gene! Can I pay you back in money for everything?" Ray said breathlessly.

he said finally, in a constrained voice. "I didn't keep that promise. Oh, Ray! . . ."

"Never mind, Gene," she said sadly, for the old pain of memory had stirred to defeat the pleasant months of normal girlhood.

"Listen, Ray," he was saying eagerly. "I'll not see you alone again—do you see, dear? Not alone again—until— It's because I love you so, Ray! Don't you know that? Believe that it won't happen again, will you?"

"Yes," said Ray without much conviction.

She might have been sure, for this time the word of Sears stood staunch and unshakable. When summer came he packed her off to the Canadian Rockies with Mrs. Hanlon—safe, stodgy Mrs. Hanlon.

The next three years of Ray's school life he saw her only at odd times, always with Mrs. Hanlon at hand. He watched fascinatedly the blossoming of the bud to the flower. He had said that she would be marvelous; he had never dreamed she would be so—so— He couldn't find the word that fitted Ray; perhaps there *was* none but some lovely unknown word in his big heart. They had some really good times together, when his hope soared swiftly and Ray seemed to have lost the little shadow from her blue eyes. The summer before she graduated the three of them went camping in the woods, and that was, possibly, the best period of Sears' long waiting. Mrs. Hanlon, having been lavishly paid, trudged faithfully at their heels over the most impossible trails.

Ray was twenty-two now. Commencement was drawing near and she had a very substantial amount of knowledge stored away in her pretty head. She felt that immature little Ray Wiggins had been completely dropped out of her life. Yes, Rachel Garrison had nothing in common with that earlier phase of her existence. She had dropped it all from her soul and there was in reality no stain there—excepting the one the world would insist on stamping there, if it knew the circumstances. She rebelled at times against the manifest injustice of making Rachel Garrison pay for Ray Wiggins. At such time she rebelled against Gene as well, and her letters reflected a disturbing mood. These moods were not frequent. Usually, Eunice would come bursting in upon them with her abun-

dant capacity for joy.

Ray dared not vision what her life might be when the doors of Tetherell closed upon her for the last time. Only a week away! . . . But she had determined that Sears should not see how laggard she was in coming to him. He still wanted her; that was what she had gambled against. There was no doubt of it; he wanted her with the greater tenacity of a thirty-year-old man. She would pay gamely for four years of almost unbroken peace and splendor.

Tonight she was going to be gay, however, with a last typical school frolic. There was to be a pajama parade at midnight in the corridor; the east wing dormitory in competition with the west wing for beauty of costume. Some way or other, it had become the custom to appeal to Ray whenever anything was being planned. The west-wing girls had voiced the cries: "Rachel Garrison can design all of ours. You ought to see hers! Let Rachel do them. Where's Ray?"

Ray had entered into the spirit of the thing with the earnestness she had applied to everything all her life. The girls had ransacked the village shops for materials, ribbons, fancy papers, notions and everything else. The dormitory had been a merry confusion of color and frills and patterns and laughter. Ray, having won exemption from the dreaded "finals," worked diligently, and now the twenty-five sets of fanciful pajamas lay folded on the twin white beds, hers and Eunice's, and they were very beautiful to behold.

At midnight the west-wing girls emerged in conscious glory, each bearing a quaint candlestick with a lighted taper, and met the east-wing young ladies at the head of the stairs. Even

their opponents had crowded about Ray in a whirl of sincere praise, and there was no question of winning against such naive artistry.

"Take your candles back to your rooms and we'll stage a rhumba," commanded Eunice, as she wheeled out the victrola which was forbidden during the stricter days of the semester. The faculty had a way of not seeing and hearing these last festivities, when their seniors gathered together for the last rites of year.

It was careless, gay Mollie Harbison who set her candle down jauntily on her writing table and didn't wait to blow it out before dashing away to the scene of mirth; but it was the sweet breath of early summer that fanned the filmy curtains directly over the sturdy little flame and, contrarily enough, didn't blow it out. Then the curtains blackened and doubled up like something in anguish, and presently an untidy gilt wastebasket was crackling warningly. Then an orange tongue shot out to lick the bureau hungrily and run in a hissing path across the rug. Beyond the turn in the hall came the lilting rhythm of a popular song.

STRANGELY enough, the man who was to play the third part in Ray's life was at that moment turning out of the gate of one of the prettiest shingled houses in Tetherell village. He was Bruce Carney a swagger man of forty or so, almost foppishly dressed and certainly conscious of his young figure; but Bruce was energetic and hearty of manner and, on the whole, likable. He wrote his income in very taxable figures and had pulled more than one Broadway success out of the hackneyed rut of sameness. Some people called him lucky, others thought him a genius, and one mana-

ger of musical comedies considered him indispensable.

Beneath the veneer of sleekness and sureness there was still an unpretentious strain in Carney's makeup that drove him back to his little home town to tell his mother about any particular problem which seemed likely to defeat him. She invariably gave him advice which was absurdly futile and made him cross, but they understood each other perfectly.

This time, however, a great depression had driven away sleep and Bruce tiptoed out at this late hour—early enough for him—to walk away the jumble of ideas which refused to be formulated into any one plan. He must face the fact that the costumes for the chorus in "Betty's Boudoir" were trite, a failure. He had scouted up all the designers he knew and many he had never met, and had even consulted Ada Neville, the dainty star. That was scarcely in her province though, and the others had gone stale. That was it. The sad part of it was that Carney himself would get the blame; his name on the program would stand for it. No one knew better than he that one failure wipes the slate of success blank where the public is concerned.

He walked with his head down as he whacked out aimlessly at dusty weeds with his light walking-stick. Then, glancing up, he caught sight of a peculiar reddish glow up on the hill where Tetherell Academy stood. Even as he studied it a billow of smoke, flame-flecked, coiled its way upward.

"Good Lord, the thing's on fire!" he exclaimed and broke into a run. He forgot "Betty's Boudoir" as his heart was filled with that elation all human things feel when a blaze consumes something belonging to someone else.

The village apparatus was out in all

its glory and the fire was practically under control, the dormitory being the only building damaged. Eminent citizens in scanty attire mingled with hysterical seniors on the wide lawns. Inside that smoldering mass were vanishing cherished wardrobes, graduation gowns and all. But Bruce Carney's gaze had left the fire and was riveted bewilderedly on a group of pajama'd creatures who were clinging together dismally. Those were startling pajamas, glorious even; strange costumes for seniors to be wearing. Unconsciously, he pictured them flitting about in the first scene of "Betty's Boudoir." He narrowed his eyes for the effect. They were quite the most ingeniously conceived things he had seen in three tired months. He summed up his impressions appreciatively: "Oh, boy!"

There was one petite blonde in sea-green and white, a water-lily with mammoth petals; and a piquant brunette in a delicious affair—pajamas with a little tunic wired to stand out saucily, from which were suspended tiny bells which tinkled merrily in this scene of dismay. His eyes made swift inventory of them all, each one so individual yet blending into an entrancing whole.

"Where on earth did you young ladies get your costumes or your ideas?" he demanded as he saw a glimmer of hope.

They looked at him with pretty, tearful faces, and as there was no room for conventionality on such a terrible night, they answered in perfect unison:

"Rachel Garrison!"

He laughed. They were like a chorus.

"I'm afraid the name is not familiar. Can you tell me where I might address Miss Garrison?" he wanted

to know her business address.

But Miss Garrison, it turned out, was the wholly charming person in the center of the group, an unbelievably young somebody with eyes as blue as twin spire, of larkspur and hair almost as arresting as the conflagration. She was considerably much of a picture herself, in pale yellow, trimmed oddly with great bands of black velvet and an enormous black velvet butterfly perching between her shoulders airily.

"I am Bruce Carney of New York," he introduced himself. "My mother is one of the oldest inhabitants here if you want credentials."

"But, why should we want credentials?" Ray asked absurdly.

He laughed aloud. She was altogether refreshing. It was that which told in her designing.

He explained a great many things in a surprisingly short space of time. The seniors, crowding about excitedly, almost forgot the ruined dormitory as he concluded with the amazing proposition that Miss Garrison come to New York directly after Commencement and collaborate on the costumes for the musical comedy.

"You want—*me*?" Ray echoed, in that funny, modest way she had. "But—why, I really haven't had any experience. I'm afraid—"

"But you have genius, young lady, genius!" Bruce insisted. "I've been scouring the country for something fresh."

"Oh!" said Ray breathlessly.

"Oh, Rachel, isn't it *won-der-ful*!" the impromptu chorus sighed.

"Oh, I just love it!" Ray said, with a happy little laugh. She hugged Eunice gaily. "But I'll have to ask my guardian," she told Carney, with such adorable seriousness that his eyes twinkled in anticipation.

Ray was up in the air, occupying the most fascinating mind castles. Just down the coast a hundred and fifty miles was—independence. Yes, the fire or anything was worth while if it brought something so glorious in its wake. Then joy would come tumbling down whenever she planned the letter to Gene. She explained it anxiously, eagerly:

"It's one chance in a thousand Gene, and it does seem like Fate. (I know you'll laugh at that.) It really needn't make any difference between us, need it? I am yours, you know, Gene. The four years are up; only, I would like to show you that I can amount to something 'on my own.' But remember, I want to please you first of all. We could have week-ends . . ."

It had taken courage to write that last line. She hovered about Tetherell pale and uneasy until the answer he had framed bravely from a disappointed heart came to reassure her. You could almost see his laughing dark eyes and buoyant hair from the pleasant lines. She had a tiny moment closely akin to remorse.

RACHEL GARRISON arrived at the mammoth-pillared Pennsylvania Station on a hot, hazy morning, and was met by the assiduous Mr. Carney in one of the youthful suits he always wore. He seemed to think his rightful forty years too much of a burden, and his tailor had a way of chopping off a year here and there.

Bruce understood human nature rather well; so he told the taxi-demon to take a circuitous course. He didn't attempt to talk to her, because he saw her cunning nose flattened against the window as she drank in her fill of the city. She had seen this or that spot in

the movies, or such-and-such was just the way she had pictured it, and she professed not being the least bit disappointed.

His office was tucked away in a corner of a Broadway theatre. The walls were completely covered by an array of autographed sepia prints. Here they were to spend many absorbed hours, planning things which should awaken an overfed town. No easy task that.



"Adventure," said Richard Corran. "Life would be dull without it."

"Oh, I can work here!" she cried delightedly, much to Bruce's joy, since this untidy room was his shrine.

"I'm going to be a great friend to you, kid," he told her; "that is, if you believe any man could be friends with you. I won't promise I don't fall in love with you sooner or later," he teased her.

"I came here to work," Ray told him, so seriously that he laughed for a full minute. Ray never did know whether Bruce Carney laughed with people or at them.

Some way or other, the most remarkable hunches would come to

Rachel when she was lying dreamily in bed mornings, prior to getting up. She wrote faithfully to Gene and her letters were a complete history of her victories. It was as though she thought quantity might make up for a certain quality Gene would be searching for. He came to New York when "Betty's Boudoir" opened there for its long run. Ray, sitting with him in an inconspicuous spot of the first balcony, clung to his hand nervously. He liked that feeling that she depended on him. She wanted him to come home with her, and they sat in the lobby of her hotel awaiting the early papers.

"I should think you might have liked Carney here," Sears suggested casually.

He watched her closely and caught the little side glance from her deep eyes as she said shyly:

"No, Gene; this was *our* night. You understand more, I think."

Then he had moved a trifle closer, perhaps, and the faint shadow had flickered across her face.

The printed approbation seemed to make the success more real than the kind praise of those who were, in their several ways, fond of little Ray.

Even Hawley Trask, whom she had dreaded, said:

"The costumes by Rachel Garrison deserve more than passing comment. They reflect the delightful verve and freshness of youthful conception."

There were other clippings, all favorable.

"That puts me over, Gene! You see? I'm made!" Ray rhapsodized, oblivious to the white look about Sears' mouth.

He had given her the four years that she might become the wonder woman she was, and, in giving, he had lost out himself. He went back to

his own sure-fire cleverness and left Ray to be taken up promptly and feverishly by the city of many chances and changes. You might say that Rachel Garrison became a vogue that winter. Her name came to mean something on theatre programs and bazaar committees. Stout matrons clamored for the naive masquerade costumes Ray created, and brides were ever seeking novel trousseaux.

Gene could picture it all. More, her letters were full of a new alarm for him. The phrase dominated his thoughts: "*Bruce Carney helped me with this*"; or "*Mr. Carney is really a genius*"; or "*Bruce was telling me lately . . .*"

The name rose up before Eugene with maddening persistency. He felt at times that he would take Ray anyway, marry her the very next day. She wouldn't refuse. Her letters had borne the pitiful stamp of, "*For value received . . .*" If he had really known what Ray did expect of him he would have burned the road to get to her and tear down the sad fancies of a humble heart.

As it was, he did take the chance to be near her, to see her daily. Sears was becoming too great an influence in his own city to remain long undiscovered by still larger interests. He had been debating an offer for some time. His appearance in New York was bound to have some definite effect on Ray's attitude; but whatever caution had guided him before was abandoned now in the larger need of competing with Bruce Carney. He came brilliantly as one of the heads of the big, new Homemakers Corporation, to inaugurate a series of whirlwind public campaigns. He came to conquer the city of Ray's choice—and Ray herself.

Ray sat rather dazed over his

startling letter. Then rising, she went to her mirror and whispered to the reflection with stiff lips:

"He is coming for me this time!"

"I came because I'm a jealous old rascal," he told Ray half-seriously, as they dined together the first night of his arrival. Gene knew a great deal about practical psychology and he had chosen for this first, trying situation, the brilliant Riviera Inn, where they might dance between courses and Ray would sense the atmosphere of gay carefreeness. He would never have attempted a private dining-room after seeing the scared larkspur eyes. "I came because that Carney man—"

Ray interrupted with a laugh.

"Gene! Do you know why I've always liked Bruce? It's because he's really wild about Ada Neville, star of 'Betty's Boudoir!' He made her—got her the right play and the chance to play it; so, of course, he wants her now!"

She broke off abruptly, her cheeks red. She hadn't quite realized at the moment that she was stating Sears' own case.

They danced a bit. That was fun, and it was hard to be unhappy when one had such a partner as Gene. When at the close of the evening he had made no move to take her in his arms, her heart lifted with the old sense of freedom. Perhaps she would have a little longer time.

THE fame of Rachel Garrison spread. One read of it in the papers and some magazines, and quite naturally it came to the attention of a certain prosperous architect, who sat in his newly-opened office and reflected that there were few really interesting women in the world. There had been just one who had had the peculiar charm for him, and that was

so long ago. Not a pretty episode, that. Being a Woodward, and a devotee of all that was artistic, and not in the least connecting New York's latest brilliant personality with poor little Ray Wiggins, he set about the business of meeting Miss Garrison.

At thirty-five his face was more high-bred and narrower and peculiarly smug; yet watching the set of his lips, one knew he had missed out somewhere. That was the face Rachel turned to meet as a brand-new throng clamored for an introduction.

It was Bruce Carney who presented "Mr. James Woodward," and all unconsciously set the stage for this climax. Ray had dreamed about this moment in college days. This was her opportunity to put him down neatly in the most subtle manner. Strangely enough, she didn't care much about it now when it was happening.

He stared at her searchingly and an amused flicker in her eyes told him that his assumption was indeed correct.

"So, you are Ray Wiggins!" he said wonderingly.

"No," she returned with a cool, little smile, "I used to be!"

Then she was gone on the arm of a fresh adorer. He watched her throughout the evening and most often saw her in company with a young man with humorous dark eyes and buoyant hair.

Indeed, in the many times he sought her out in the next few weeks, half provoked with himself, he found her with the same chap; and Eugene Sears had a faintly proprietary air which maddened Woodward. Furthermore, he was unbalanced by the reflection that he had once actually possessed this most desirable of women. And yet—had he? He half suspected that underneath the icy armor of

Rachel Garrison ran the warm impulses of Ray Wiggins. If Ray had known his charm once, he could appeal to her again. He had not forgotten her utter grief when he left the tiny flat that night so long ago.

As he was riding out of the west end of Central Park one afternoon—riding behind his own chauffeur in his own elegant car, of which he was acutely aware—he saw Rachel entering on foot and alone. She had a quick, dainty step, and her feet seemed more than usually trim and well-shod as they peeped out from the wide edge of beaver which bordered the skirt of her ultra-smart suit. She did not refuse a lift from him.

Woodward seemed to have lost a bit of the finesse which had formerly characterized him.

"This seems good, Ray," he sighed; "where you belong."

"Really?" Rachel laughed. She gave him the uncomfortable sensation of continually finding him amusing.

"Yes. Call me Jimsy, Ray; I rather liked it in other days. You remember?"

"I'm afraid I have a very poor memory for personal details," said Miss Garrison indifferently; "like newspapermen, I have to have a twenty-four-hour memory. There's something new each day crowding out yesterday's trifles."

"Are you going to pose?" Woodward demanded gruffly.

"I don't believe I need to," Ray smiled. "And aren't your reminiscences in glaringly poor taste, Mr. Woodward?"

The thought of her, after she had gone up to her apartment, stung him into depression. He was finding it difficult of late to put her out of his thoughts for a minute. He was a tiny bit afraid that he had been a fool. Yes,

if he had married her in the beginning, and taken her out West with the Howlands, she would have adapted herself; would have shone in whatever niche she was placed, like a rare jewel making any setting glorious. She would have made him loom greater in the field where he had staked off his claim to success. More than that, Ray was the one woman who had the power to dominate his consciousness even to the extent of obliterating the thoughts of self at times.

He had gone on many frank quests after such a wife. He didn't seek Rachel as a wife now; that is, not yet. There was the always present hesitancy one finds in a man who has conquered the woman of his choice without vows or witnesses. He will even destroy himself with his stupidity, unless, like Woodward, he loves his peace of mind more. He had seen her a half hour ago and already he was consumed with the need of hearing her voice. He rang her up.

"You belong to me, Ray," his voice came, subdued and startling, over the wire. There was no preamble to this statement. As her voice, impersonal and cool, answered him calmly, he reflected the entire glory it would be to bring her to her knees, bring back the supplicating Ray Wiggins, bearing the outer charm and graces of Rachel Garrison. He never dreamed that he was contemptible. He had the thought of marriage in the back of his head; that excused him to his unwary conscience. Her surrender first was merely to heal his pride.

"You are only creating a mirage before your heart when you think of the Sears man, Ray," Woodward went on daringly. "You belong to me, Ray; always have. Why deny it?"

"I do?" she repeated. "I should belong to some one who has cheated in

the game, who had always taken and never given?—rather than some one who had given and given and never asked?"

His reply was cut off by the sound of her clicking receiver. The thing was not to be borne by a Woodward. He was scarlet with rage. He made a swift, futile resolve to stay away from her forever.

But to Ray the two brief encounters with the man in a single afternoon had been enlightening. She had discovered her own soul, found its inmost recess of bravery. It belonged to herself, no one else. Woodward's words had seared her, made her acutely aware of her own desire to get away from it all. Away from Gene.

She wondered why she could have believed she could do anything else; there were the four years when she had had time to think . . . Gene must suffer (and he would suffer) rather than that she should give up the liberty she had won fairly from the world. She was not enslaved to memory or duty; there was something higher than that. A repetition of that early disillusionment would strip her down utterly, be greater in exact ratio to her deeper capacities.

She went through her several bank books feverishly. The total had grown amazingly; money had poured in for months and months on the tide of popular demand. She would pay Eugene in a material way; the balance—the lost hope, the lost woman herself—must be his to sustain. She had lived through anguish; he could.

She cashed several checks and hurried to Sears, lest she lose the resolve if she waited. She found him at the office, fortunately, for she was at the height of her emotional rebellion. Barely had his secretary shown her

back disappearing out of the door than Ray began feverishly, jumping at once into the climax of it all.

"Gene!"—she was white and he, sensing something ominous, was pale too—"can I pay you back in money for—for everything?" she said breathlessly.

She had dreaded that moment when he should look at her with his eyes tortured, his lovable face distorted; but, aside from a quick tightening of his fists so that the knuckles showed white, he had perfect control of himself. After a moment he managed a smile:

"My dear little Ray, of course you can! Do you suppose I haven't seen this coming?"

"Oh!" said Ray, limp with reaction. She brought out big bills, laid them on his desk. They looked so flimsy and futile. She couldn't go, just yet. If only Gene had raved about, it would have been easier. He was so—"Gene! This doesn't pay you at all. Why do you let me do it?" she sobbed.

He put his arm gently across her shoulders.

"Ray," he began slowly, "I've never been able to reach you somehow. It just came to me lately, the reason. You were a prisoner to the idea of paying back. Now I want you to know that you've paid me back in full. Oh, my honey dear, be free to love me, won't you? Can't we start on a new basis as if I were anyone? It will seem different to you then, Ray. I can't seem to believe that that little quiet wedding I've been dreaming of, that spring day when we're married, is going to vanish!"

"Going to be married!" she cried, back, raising, larkspur eyes that were filled with the battle of an old idea against a new and lovely illumination. "Oh, Gene!—I never knew."

His surprised eyes saw her crouching at his feet then. She was kneeling there, humble before a great heart she had never recognized. She snatched his hand; kissed it.

"Ray, don't!" he said, as though it hurt him. He lifted her up. "You didn't know?" he laughed boyishly. "What on earth did you suppose—" He was studying her face queerly: "My God, Ray, you didn't think—!"

She nodded in shame. "I thought that!" she confessed.

She was stifled with the enormous wealth of love that had been growing all the time subconsciously.

"Ray, I see now. If I'd only known! Oh, what a waste! You couldn't let love come! Love could never come from—that."

She was in his arms and at last the red bud of mouth was warm and responsive beneath his own. She clung to him crushingly. He exulted in her fierceness. Then he held her off a bit.

"Ray, why, why did you think that? My dear, did I ever do anything to you except love you like mad and never tell you?" he reproached her.

"Why, because—you knew," she whispered. "You remember that day on the sea wall when you said you understood? That something had crushed my girlhood? And there's only—one thing that—does!"

He laughed, a sickly laugh. "What are you saying, dear? That's just like you; to test me out in some dramatic way. What are you expecting me to know about, Ray? I didn't know anything really about you, dear."

He was trying not to think. He wondered if this would be a nightmare from which he should awaken to refreshing morning.

"Oh, you didn't know?" she echoed. "Then, it isn't going to be beautiful! I can't get beyond it, after all . . . Oh,

Gene, why didn't I die, or something? I never would have tried, you know, if you hadn't said that—that it wouldn't matter."

He couldn't doubt now. He could only stand there and wish dully that the heart of earth would swallow them both up in oblivion forever.

"But, you see," he tried to say, while his teeth chattered with a terrible chill, "I never could have thought that—about you, Ray. I only—supposed—some little disappointment—magnified—Oh, God!"

He dropped into a chair, hid his head in his arms, crossed upon his desk, the way he had come upon little Ray Wiggins once. His shoulders heaved in anguish.

Ray's tears were hot on her cheeks, scalding.

"Gene, Gene, you are torturing me all over again for it! I suffered enough for that. I would rather die than have you pay for it too! Two mustn't pay; two mustn't!" she ended rather wildly. "No—no. Gene, I'll give you all; you needn't—marry me, now!"

"I can't talk yet," his muffled voice came in a deep groan. "I'm so sick, so sick! Go away for a little while, will you, Ray?"

IF the night Woodward left her so long ago had been a living hell, this was a thousand infernos. Why was life so hard, so final? Gene, Gene, with his tender dreams, all those four years! But she was to learn that you couldn't buy back time with tears of blood, or writhing on the floor, or the black nausea of two days' fasting. No, one only emerged still living, breathing; living to suffer. That could have been endured. It was the picture of Gene, wandering off in some lonely haunt or lost in the swirl of New York's assorted humanity and lack of

humanity, that drove her to the verge of madness. No one knew where he was, that was the worst of it.

Have you ever seen a flower that was hanging its head on a dry, dusty stem, revive to its velvety beauty with the cool contact of fresh water? Just so Ray lifted her head and reached out toward the possibility of sane living as the envelope bearing his writing came softly under the door.

Rachel snatched at it, held it close to her breast. The postmark told her that yesterday, at least, he was alive; and, having survived those first frightful days, he would live now. Never mind what fresh wound the words within would make, if only he lived! But there was no wound within that envelope; only a bit of paradise, captured from a heart that knew a love greater than life or death:

"I was so ashamed afterward, my little Ray! How much more soul it took for you to leave it all so far behind than for me to forget! Rachel Garrison — the new woman — who stands for purity in my mind; I know that now. You are wonderful; more wonderful for your own resurrection. The look in those blue eyes of yours! I should have understood. I have emerged with a new understanding of how we make our own heavens or hells . . . Poor little dear, tortured those four years by the dim spectre of what might be; and then I failed you when you had at last opened up your heart to love . . . I shall reach you almost as soon as this letter. My arms and lips will tell you more."

For a moment the room was silent; then the silence was punctuated by a sob; then a more happy sigh, as its little mistress put her arms high above her head and turned her face to the bright window.

MR. JAMES WOODWARD knocked grumpily at the door labeled "RACHEL GARRISON."

It was just two weeks since he had promised himself not to see her. It had been an unspeakable interval—and here he was. He didn't care if he had to grovel at her feet; he, a Woodward!

Her face had a new radiance about it. She was more beautiful to-day, with a beauty that defied analysis; she was divine. He blinked before the quality of her gaze. He had the strange feeling that if he didn't get her now she would soon become so desirable that no one on earth could win her.

"Well, I'm defeated," he said stiffly, his high-bred features seeming to disapprove of the admission; "you've beaten me, Ray. I'm here to offer you anything. I'm going to marry you."

"Haven't you let your imagination run away with you, Mr. Woodward? I'm not interested, really."

"Oh, yes you are, Ray! You know that I know it. Do you suppose either of us could forget—"

A shadow flicked over her eyes, dissolved.

"There are too many lovely things in life worth remembering to bother remembering the things we've thrown on the ash heap," said Ray firmly. "Furthermore, I have never contemplated committing bigamy."

"Bigamy?" he echoed clumsily.

"Yes. You see, I was married just a week ago," Ray mused, the wonder look coming back to the larkspur eyes; "married to a man so infinitely greater than you, Jim, that you could never even approach the slightest conception of what he is like."

WHAT SHALL IT PROFIT A MAID?

By Leslie Shaw Pearson

Our Marion was the kind of girl that men
 Could call a pal. She golfed, she tennised; when
 She swam you saw she had a shapely figger;
 Yet, spite her charms, this maid was no gold-digger;
 When suitors brought her gifts—who wouldn't?—
 She oft replied, "Old top, you shouldn't."

Now, Helen was a dear—a little blonde
 Who never overshot her mark, grew fond,
 Perchance; they said, "She's always just the same."
 She, when invited to amend her name,
 Was coy but cool. No gift would she eschew;
 She murmured only, "Oh, how nice of you!"

Therefore, when Helen's birthday came around
 She had a mere corsage or two, a five-pound
 Box of candy, else a bit of jade,
 Or some such dot; but Marion, our maid,
 On *hers*, received from each admiring bard
 A tasteful and expensive art post card!

"My Mistake"

By LEWIS WEST

FOSDICK was known as a cagey bachelor; that is, he gave a wide berth to the deb, with matrimony at the back of her busy little brain. He devoted himself to the unhappily married woman—who seeks consolation at dances and parties.

Fosdick was a guest at the opening dance of the season at the Country Club. It was not the first time he had been a guest of the club, and he looked forward to renewing acquaintance with some unhappy young wives. In preparation whereof, he said "how" to innumerable male members in the locker room.

The first thing that smote Fosdick's eye, as he picked his way toward the ballroom, was a man he had met on former visits. The man was escorting a perfect peach!

Fosdick blinked, to assure himself that there was one peach, not two. Then he recalled having heard that Brown had married since his last visit to the club. Brown certainly had good taste, and he deserved congratulations.

He sauntered leisurely along, timing the meeting so that it would occur at the entrance to the ballroom, when he planned to whisk Brown's wife away from her husband. No wife, he reasoned, ever came to a dance with the thought of dancing with her own husband. And it must be quite a year since he had heard of Brown's marriage; long enough for a peach like that to desire a change.

Fosdick timed his arrival perfectly. He held out his hand to Brown, while his eyes caressed Brown's lovely lady.

"Congratulations, old man!" he said. "Meant to write, but knew I'd

see you here again and preferred to say it; you're just about the luckiest fellow on earth."

"Thanks. This is——"

But Fosdick would not let him claim the peach publicly:

"I know it. And now, with your permission, old man, I'd like to give the lovely lady a whirl."

She was a peach in every particular. Just the right size for a dancing partner; her coloring pleased him in every detail: big brown eyes; brown hair that rippled close to her head; a marvelous complexion; and lips—luscious and red and pouting; and she did not seem to care for conversation with jazz. A girl after his own heart. He looked forward to the interlude between dances, in a darkened corner of the piazza.

"Shall we get a breath of air?" he murmured, as the last encore ended.

The peach nodded. Fosdick led her outside. From the tail of his eye he made sure that Brown was not lurking in the offing, ready to spirit his lovely lady away. But there was no sign of him, and the lovely lady did not seem to miss her natural protector. Fosdick found a darkened corner.

"Where have you been all my life?" he murmured. It was a good line; overworked, but still effective.

The lovely lady dropped her eyes: "Here since last——"

Determined to ignore the obvious, he would not let her finish with the date of her wedding.

"Think of the time I've wasted!" he murmured reproachfully.

Evidently, she was not used to his methods. Fosdick searched his mind, but he could not remember any de-

tails concerning Brown's wife; merely that he had married. Apparently, he had chosen an unsophisticated little person. Perhaps her line was the baby stare 'n' everything. He'd try.

That corner of the piazza was very dark. He put his arm about her, to banish fear from her mind. He felt a tremor go through her frame.

He had been right; that was her line. Now he would play up to it.

He tilted her chin so that a ray of moonlight through the trellised vine made her face stand out as if illumined. Even in that unearthly light her lips were cherry-red.

"Lovely lady, let's forget everything but that the night is young and you and I are here together."

She was no talker, but her eyes, struggling to meet his, did not forbid him. Again that slight tremor shook her frame. Fosdick bent his head and their lips met.

They spent the rest of the evening dodging Brown. His name was never mentioned. He was referred to—when it was impossible to avoid his mention—as "He."

But the "Lovely Lady"—(Fosdick had no wish to learn the name by which Brown called her, and "Lovely Lady" came readily to his lips after years of practice)—seemed no more anxious to talk about Brown than Fosdick was. She preferred to dance; and, when they were not dancing, the darkened corners were not conducive to conversation.

Fosdick's mind, confused with sampling the bottled contents of several lockers, became more hazy under the influence of the moon and the Lovely Lady. He pitied her, married to Brown; Brown with a soul bounded on one side by the stock market and on the other by golf. He pitied her to the point of wondering if it was not

his duty to rescue her from Brown. Those lips, wasted on Brown! Brown's clumsy arm about that slender, yielding form! All that charm labeled "Brown!"

As night waned and morning approached, Fosdick became conscious that Brown was on their trail. Did she know? He couldn't tell, but she lent herself readily to his whispered suggestion that his car, parked in the darkest part of the driveway, offered a deeper seclusion than any they had found so far.

If he had not been a professional bachelor, he would have found himself envying Brown.

His lips left her, sighing at the sweetness of that kiss. And then Brown's voice thundered in his ears. Brown had tracked them down, his brow twisted by a scowl, his face red, his mouth flattened in anger.

"See here, Fosdick; what do you mean by bringing my sister out here?"

Lightning flashes played before Fosdick's eyes. He wilted. Stunned to silence.

Brown went on, in his explosive way:

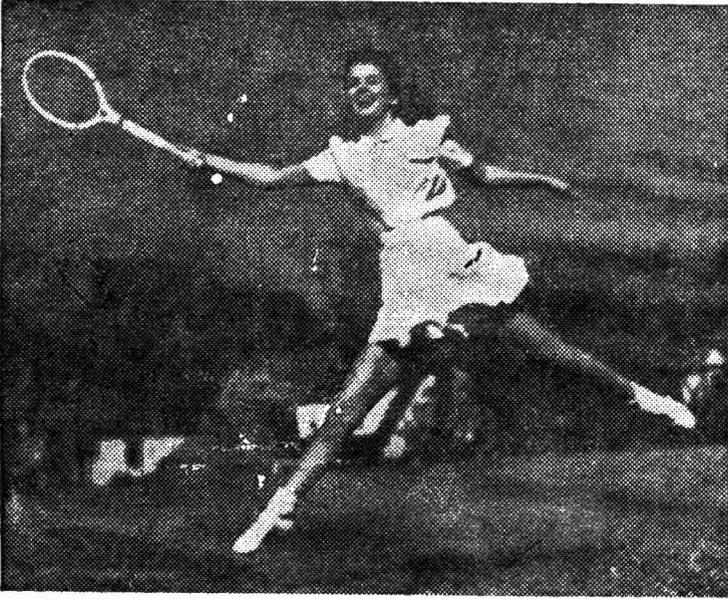
"I've been hunting all over the place for you. My wife's just had twins, you know, and, even to give Madelon a good time, I can't stay away all night."

Fosdick gibbered like an idiot. He must have been more than half-seas over to have balled things up like this; his congratulations (which Brown had accepted for the birth of the twins), his assumption that the Lovely Lady did not need to be explained.

"Your sister!" he mumbled, not knowing where to hide his shamed head; he had never been in such a predicament. "My mistake. I thought all along that she was your wife!"

The Spanish Comb

By COURTENAY SAVAGE



Muriel, the spirit of youth.

MAUDE CASLON switched on the full cluster of lights that framed the mirror of her dressing-table, and with keen, set eyes searched her own countenance, calmly, collectedly. For five minutes the scrutiny went on, and then, with a half smile, she turned off the lights and sat there in the dim room, thinking, thinking.

Mrs. Caslon was thirty-seven, and that afternoon she had seen her husband's eyes as they followed Muriel across the tennis court, seen the little light that played there, the swift-changing expression that showed how pleased he was that Muriel had come home early, how relieved he was that he would not have to spend the evening with only the company of his wife.

Of course, Maude Caslon had sus-

pected; for weeks she had seen Ernest's interest in the twenty-year-old Muriel, who was his fourth or fifth cousin, and who was spending the winter with them while she studied music; but Maude had not realized how serious it was until this evening, when Muriel had stayed downtown for dinner after a matinee. Ernest had asked for Muriel as soon as he came home, had showed that he missed her all through the dinner hour by being irritable, complaining. When she had come home, just in time for coffee and dessert, explaining that she had had a late tea, not dinner after all, Ernest's mood changed and he was as bright as a golden sunset at the end of a cloudy day. After they had retired to the living-room he brought out a box of candy, a newspaper clipping that he felt would interest Muriel, and,

seemingly quite forgetting Maude, he began to describe a piece of music he had heard a hotel orchestra play at luncheon, and how he had immediately sent to a music store and ordered a copy of the composition. It was then that Maude left them, making no stir of her going but slipping quietly away to her own room, to the brilliant glare of the lights which would tell her the truth—if she was growing old.

And the mirror had told her that she was still a handsome woman; tall, splendid as to figure; her eyes still glowing with the fires of her vivid personality; her hair, untouched by time or dye, still glossy black . . . No, it was not because she was growing old that his attention wandered; there must be another reason than that.

Maude shook her head and wondered. As if to seek a clue, she allowed her mind to go back over the years: how she had met Ernest at a fraternity dance; how he had asked to write to her; how they had seen one another occasionally; their engagement the spring that he graduated from college, and their marriage a year and a half later . . . No, she could find no clue in those years.

After that had come the busy, climbing, period of their lives; when they lived, first in a small apartment, then a small house, then one still larger, and so on until they built this place they now occupied, this show place on the Shore Drive. Ernest had worked very hard during those years—the grilling, often disheartening, labor of the man who strives and who does not visualize attainment until he is actually upon it. Maude had worked with him—a helpmate. She had helped him save for the time when he would need money to invest; had sacrificed—done the housework when other women would have demanded a

servant, kept Ernest's home happy and comfortable, so that when it was possible for him to allow the cares of the business world to slip from his mind he would find complete rest, and inspiration. Also she had brought two children into the world—sons; sturdy lads who were now away at school . . .

No, certainly not in those building years was there a trace of wandering affections. If he had shared his heart in those days it was between Maude and his work.

Of late years, since the strong tide of his finances had made it possible for them to enjoy the good things of life—really enjoy them, for they were both under forty—Ernest had been the devoted husband and lover. They had even had a second honeymoon, to Nassau. After they had finished their new home they had gone in for the society of the country club, for smart clothes, for dinners and elaborate dancing parties. Many beautiful women had crossed Ernest Caslon's path, but he had never been more than politely interested.

Then Muriel came. Muriel was a very distant relation of Ernest's, one of those almost indefinable cousins. She was twenty. Ernest's sister had hunted up her family in a middle-western State and brought Muriel to the city for a visit. Maude had helped to entertain her, and—with a sudden rush of sympathy for the girl who was sincerely interested in music, but had no proper place to study—she had invited Muriel to spend the winter with them, and so take advantage of the Conservatory. Ernest, playing the rôle of patron of the arts, was highly pleased. So was Maude until tonight, when she had seen the most dreaded light in her husband's eyes—his deep, affectionate interest in another woman.

It was only natural that Maude should ponder as to who was to blame, Ernest or Muriel. Ernest was certainly devoted to the girl; Maude could see that now. Ernest ought to realize what he was doing. Why, Muriel was only a silly, gushing girl! Some day she might become a wonderful woman, an artist; but at the moment her character was undeveloped. She was rather pretty, but in a colorless way, her chestnut hair, her soft white skin, her soft blue eyes, all proclaiming her youth. Youth—that was her charm! And—Maude wondered how far that youth and youthful beauty might attract Ernest, for attracted he was, and at any hour that attraction might blossom into love—the illicit love which has no fragrance, but gives forth to the air the poison of unhappiness.

It must have been more than an hour that Maude Caslon sat there, busy with her thoughts, while her imagination saw the future stretching ahead as a grim, black trail along which she would have to stumble. Of course, she could send the girl away, so came the thought; but she was worldly-wise enough to know that at such a time as this it would be a foolish move. That would create a scene, and give both Ernest and Muriel the opportunity of becoming martyrs, misunderstood. No, whatever happened she must never send Muriel away; neither must she let Ernest know that she saw the truth.

At eventide she switched on the lights again and studied her features, her figure. No, she had been right the first time; she was not getting old. After that she dabbed a little powder on her face and went downstairs.

And the next day she went home to mother.

Maude's mother—Mrs. Shaw, as

the people of her apartment hotel knew her—was sixty-five years young and wordly-wise. She lived in a downtown hotel because it was near things. She had an income sufficient for her needs, and offered daily thanks that she was quite independent. She did not rely upon her children—they relied upon her; and she sat by a sun-swept window, polishing her very fine old jewels (she always polished her jewels on Thursday mornings), listening intently while Maude told her of Ernest's straying affections.

"It won't amount to much," Mrs. Shaw commented when the recital was completed, "and if you could fix him now you would never have any such annoyance again." She was so casual, yet so positive, that Maude started with surprise.

"I am afraid that I don't understand," Maude confessed.

"No? Well, your Ernest is rather a safe man; he is not really interested in other woman. This girl has come right under his nose, and she stands for all the youth he realizes he is beginning to lose. She's charmingly young, Maude, and quite pretty; she makes me think of a bird, fluttering about. You couldn't flutter—you're not small and blonde—and, of course, there's a contrast."

Maude's face grew suddenly hard, drawn.

"Mother, do you think I'm getting old?"

Mrs. Shaw raised her eyes to look sharply at her daughter.

"Well, you're not girlish any longer, like Muriel. You're not old, Maude, but—but you've got what your dear father used to call a handsome maturity. It's very becoming to you. The thing to do is to make Ernest realize how handsome you are."

For a minute the two women sat in

silence.

"I don't quite know how you are going to open Ernest's eyes, but you'll have to watch for your chance. I don't think the time will ever come when he'll really cause you unhappiness; he's not that type. What you've got to guard against is the annoyance of future flirtations. And you must not worry; worry is the worst thing in the world. I told that to your sister Ethel only yesterday." Mrs. Shaw paused a moment. "Your sister is having trouble, too. Ethel's husband is a natural born philanderer, and nothing will ever change him; his life is—well, one woman and then the next. Fortunately, he's more fond of his children than anything else in life; so he'll probably never leave Ethel; he'll always come back to her between his affairs. It's too bad—for Ethel."

Maude's eyes glowed. "Ethel—having trouble?" Then, after a minute: "A wife to come back to? Why, I'd leave him! He could never touch another woman and—he could never come back—"

"Nonsense!" Mrs. Shaw cut her short. "Women talk a lot about leaving their husbands, but when they really love a man, and when there are children to be considered, and when a husband is a good material provider—well, women don't leave; they like the respectability of being Mrs. Somebody. More than half the time, when a woman leaves her husband the only reason is that there is another man waiting for them."

"Mother! You're too sophisticated for words."

"Yes, some of us get that way through our experience with life. But to get back to your own case: Some day Muriel will do or say something that will displease Ernest, and if you are acting and looking your nicest

he'll begin telling you all the things he dislikes about Muriel. Of course, it would be better if you could make him see your superiority before he gets tired of the girl. He'd never forget that—and—well, from that time on I don't think he'd ever send his thoughts in any direction but your own."

"I think I understand; though—"

"And there's just one thing more," Mrs. Shaw interrupted. "Don't start to dress as if you were twenty;—don't put rouge on your face and frizz your hair; in other words, don't enter into competition. You'll only emphasize the fact that she's twenty—and you're thirty-seven."

Maude sighed.

Mrs. Shaw looked at her out of the corners of her eyes and read the lines of unhappiness in her daughter's face. She wrinkled her brows and looked at the jewels she had spread on her dressing-table. Then she looked back at Maude.

Mrs. Shaw reached across to the table and picked up her Spanish comb, one that had come down to her from her great-great-grandmother, and represented the day when a by-gone member of the Shaw ancestry had sailed the seas as a freebooter, a pirate. Maude, unnoticing her mother's action, had walked to a window and stood staring down on the street. Mrs. Shaw studied her and then the comb. It was of silver, delicately filigreed and jeweled. There were tiny emeralds caught in the silver pattern, with five large, deep-set diamonds forming as many starlike points.

"I have been thinking, Maude, that you could wear this comb of mine. I can't wear it and it will be very becoming to your dark hair. I gave your sister the old pearls a month ago; now I'll give you the comb."

Maude turned. The Spanish comb! To be her own! The dreariness vanished from her eyes and she stepped forward. For the minute, at least, all else was forgotten but the glory of possession. She protested to her mother that she should not give up the jewel, but Mrs. Shaw laughed and told her daughter to take off her hat and try the effect of the comb in her dark hair.

In the minutes that followed Maude felt so much better mentally that when her mother suggested lunch and a matinée, she accepted immediately, telephoning home to say that she would not be there until it was time for dinner.

The chief topic of conversation that night was, of course, the Spanish comb. Maude told Ernest and Muriel about it during dinner, and immediately afterwards she went upstairs to get it. The three sat before the living-room fire, handling and admiring the jewel. For Maude there was the pride of possession; for Ernest, remembering the pirate ancestor, there was a certain glamour of romance, and the money value; and for Muriel there was a longing. Muriel held the comb and let the dancing firelight play along its silver tracery, let the flames find reflection in the hard gleam of the emeralds and the deep-set diamonds.

"It's the most gorgeous thing I ever saw," Muriel said softly, "and so very, very fashionable! Everybody's wearing their hair piled high, and a Spanish comb. Oh, I wish I had one!" There was more than envy or longing in her voice; there was almost a demand, and Maude felt that it was addressed towards Ernest.

"Perhaps some day you'll have one," Ernest told her.

"Perhaps, but I want one now while

they're fashionable," and Muriel laughed lightly as she went over to the grand piano to play soft music that she knew Ernest loved, music as enchanting as the beauty of the comb.

"That comb really is a wonderful thing," Ernest Caslon told his wife that night as she put the Spanish comb into the small jewel safe built into the wall. "I don't wonder that poor little Muriel wanted one."

"Yes, it's very beautiful."

There was a strained silence.

"You know," Ernest was hesitant, "I've been thinking. Muriel is going to have a birthday next week, and—well, the youngster hasn't had many of the nicer things of life; her family have lots of money, but no taste. Now, why shouldn't we give her a comb?"

"A comb?" Maude turned and faced him. So he had heard the demand in Muriel's voice! And the little affair between them had come to a point where he was going to give Muriel presents, where he wanted Muriel to have the same things that his wife possessed. A flaring pain bit into her heart, but she steadied her crying nerves and smiled.

"Why, a comb would be very nice, but I've already planned to give her a new evening gown. It's only two weeks to the Charity Ball, and I've ordered a new dress for Muriel; it's soft and blue, just right for her coloring—very youthful."

"Well, you give her that and I'll give her the comb." Ernest was quite triumphant over his decision.

Maude turned away and began to unfasten her hair. She felt that this was the most critical moment in her life. What should she say? What should she do? If she told him that he must not spend the money, it would only be urging him to do so; if she forbade him, he would say that she

was mean; or even worse—jealous.

"I really don't know what to say," she tried to be very casual. "I don't know if she really wants the comb, or if she'd rather have something else; furs, or—"

"Of course, she wants the comb. Didn't she even talk about piling her hair high and sticking in the comb? I think it will make a very nice present."

"Yes, it would be a very nice gift; but I was thinking of the practical side of the matter."

"Don't! Don't! At twenty the practical side of life isn't the most interesting," he laughed. Then he changed the subject, and only once, just as he put out the lights, did he mention the comb: "It'll be great to see Muriel's surprise when she gets the comb."

Maude made no comment.

The next morning, however, after hours of wakefulness, Maude had arrived at a very definite decision—one that helped to banish the heavy ache of her heart and to make her tired eyes glisten. Ernest usually breakfasted early, and neither Muriel or Maude appeared regularly; but this morning Maude shared the meal with her husband.

"I've been thinking, Ernest, that as I have to go down to the shops this morning, if you like I can meet you and help you pick up Muriel's comb."

Ernest looked up sharply. "That would be very nice," he told her. He had not suspected such an offer, but he appreciated that Maude had good taste. Also, that she should offer to go with him eased his conscience, though he felt that Maude's being with him would mean a quarrel, for he had made up his mind to buy a handsome, expensive jewel. Would Maude object to him spending a considerable amount of money on Muriel?

"All right. Then suppose I meet you—where?"

"Why, at Callo's. I think their jewels have a distinction."

"Oh, yes; but I was just thinking about lunch. Shall we lunch first, or afterwards? Maude was being her very nicest self. "Suppose," she went on without waiting for him to answer, "suppose we meet at Henri's at twelve-thirty and pick out the comb later? I know that you always feel better after lunch."

"Fine! Fine!" he told her. Over his being a decided sense of relief was settling.

Ernest was still further relieved when he found that Maude did not attempt to dictate to him in regard to the gift. She sat beside him at the long, velvet-covered counter and made minute examination of the combs that were shown to them. She did not even object when he chose one that was very expensive—foolishly so; a beautiful jewel, large, brilliant, made of finely wrought shell inlaid with gold and set with many small diamonds—many of them only chips, but the effect being one of great luster. It was a gorgeous bauble and Ernest's eyes feasted on it with delight. When the jewel was paid for and had been carefully placed in a velvet case, Ernest put it into his pocket. He was ready to leave.

"There's—there's nothing in the jewel line that you want, is there?" His question was almost an after-thought.

"Oh, no," Maude assured him. "That's a lovely gift, and, Ernest, I want you to do something for me; I want you not to give the comb to Muriel on her birthday. I've got the dress; there will be other presents; so save the comb and give it to her the night of the Charity Ball. It will

add so much to her pleasure if the comb is a complete surprise."

"Not give it to her on her birthday?"

"No, save it; it will only be for a few days, and when she is just ready to dress for the ball—can't you imagine her excitement, with the new dress, and then, as an added attraction, as they say, the comb?"

Ernest did not quite understand, but Maude seemed so set on the idea and she had been such a brick about his spending the money on Muriel, that he consented without further conversation.

The days passed, rather feverishly. At evening, when they were in their own room, Ernest would take out Muriel's comb and let the light play over its jewels. He gloated over it, almost with an unholy glee. The incident of the comb seemed to make him bolder, for he paid Muriel a hundred little attentions and before Maude's eyes. He even told Maude that Muriel was a wonderful girl. Maude smiled, and was silent.

Even though she stilled the words that would have rushed to her lips, Maude could not silence the questionings of her heart, the vivid thoughts that flashed across her pain-racked mind. She would sit in the big living-room, with a smile on her lips as if nothing unusual was happening when Ernest's fingers would play lustfully over the girl's hair, or travel up her arm; but while she smiled she sighed. More than once she wondered if she really cared enough to go on with the battle that lay before her; but each time the answer came strong and clear. She loved Ernest, she wanted him for herself.

One night he telephoned her that he would be late in leaving the office, that she need not wait for dinner. It

was not ten minutes later that Muriel telephoned to say that she was going to stay downtown and have dinner with two girl friends from the Conservatory.

As Maude hung up the receiver the world went black. Could it be? Had it? She managed to stagger to her room, and she paced the floor in agony of doubt. She did not touch the meal that a servant brought on her tray, but paced—thinking, thinking. There were moments when her heart was filled with hate, with bitter scorn—with murder.

At nine o'clock she heard Ernest come home. She went downstairs to face him, accusingly. As she did so she supposed that Muriel would come in at any minute. Did they think her a child?

But Muriel did not come in, and Ernest was very tired. He wanted to go to bed at once. She had hardly spoken to him, but she followed him to their room. Tired, was he?

"I've been fussing over that Curtiss deal all day," he told her as he dropped his head back on the pillows of a huge chair before the fireplace. "I haven't been so worn out in years. Come and run your fingers through my hair, the way you used to when—when we were young, and not so rich." He laughed lightly; like a boy, Maude thought.

She dropped to the floor beside his chair.

"Ernest—" she started.

He smiled at her, and circled her with his arm.

"I guess I'm getting old—to be so tired; but I don't mind working for you, dear," and he leaned forward to kiss her, to clasp her close to him, to whisper in her ear. Maude's heart beat a startled tattoo. Had she been wrong? Why, Ernest—! No, he had not been with Muriel; she knew he

had told her the truth. He had been working. It was like the old days, when he would come home and tell her of his love for her.

A great engulfing wave of happiness passed over her; it was not too late. And immediately afterwards shame flooded her soul; she had suspected Ernest and Muriel. She had done them both a great wrong.

But the following evening, when she saw the way Ernest smiled at the girl, the old worry, the old wonder, came stealing back to her.

Then came the night of the Charity Ball. Ernest came home in the middle of the afternoon. He had always been fond of parties, but he had a strange boyish zest for this affair.

Before dinner—they did not dress until after dinner—he gave Muriel the comb. Maude, sitting apart, a fixed smile on her lips, watched them both and could not decide which was the more pleased. Ernest or the girl. Muriel fairly danced in her joy; Ernest was less physically moved, but he was very happy. Maude thought, with a little pang, that he had never seemed so interested in any gift that he had given her—not even her engagement ring. Still, she was her usually calm self—outwardly, at least—and she hurried through the dinner hour without much attempt at conversation.

Then they went to dress.

No woman of the theater preparing for a gala night ever clothed herself with more care than did Maude Caslon the night of the Charity Ball. There was no haste in her actions, nothing to show that her heart beat so madly in her breast that there were moments when she felt faint, when the world grew black. She had banished Ernest to a guest room and shut the door. She needed to be alone as she dressed.

Carefully, she piled her luminous dark hair high, in Spanish fashion, on the top of her head, and carefully she placed the Spanish comb that her mother had given her. Then she did something she had never done before—touched her lips with carmine and her cheeks with rouge. She powdered carefully, and the result was brilliance. She was not overpainted; her skill was such that only another woman might have guessed that she had called on the art of the cosmetic.

Her gown was the dream of an artist. Maude had gone downtown many days during the two weeks that had just passed, and she had taken her Spanish comb with her. The comb and the gown matched to a perfection that was harmony. The dress was of green-and-silver, shimmering, alive, following the lines of her handsome figure and trailing in little wisps of chiffon to the floor.

When the maid she summoned had helped her dress, Maude turned on every light in the room, even took the soft shades from the lamps, so that she might see herself in a hard brilliance of light. And she was quite satisfied; her appearance was striking, beautiful. She picked up the large feathered fan of green that completed the costume, asked the maid to carry her evening coat, and went downstairs to join her husband. As she neared the living-room she heard Muriel's voice.

For a moment her heart wavered; then she went slowly into the room, head high, eyes sparkling. It was as if the ancient pirate ancestor was asserting himself; as if the Spanish comb carried with it a spell of beauty and romance, and that spell had come over Maude.

"Maude, how wonderful you look!"

It was Muriel who exclaimed, and

there was a quick note of surprise and envy in her words. Ernest—his back was to the door as she entered—turned and looked at her, and there was a song of satisfaction in Maude Caslon's heart as she read in his eyes the slow dawn of the light of his pleasure.

"Maude—yes, you are very beautiful!" He almost whispered the words; as if he had come suddenly upon a vision that surprised and delighted him.

"Thank you. Thank you, both!" Maude smiled, and she turned to look at Muriel.

It was as she had expected. The blue dress, charming by itself, youthful, richly simple—it had been wonderfully bright and pretty when Muriel had first tried it on. Now it seemed to have faded, to have become insignificant. And the pale, small features, the ash-blonde hair that was so prettily curled, it was—well, just hair and a face. In her hair the gold and diamond comb glistened, hard, brilliant—too brilliant; so hard, so brilliant, so beautiful, that the girl's beauty and her charmingly youthful clothes faded into nothingness.

"Isn't my comb just too wonderful for anything?" Muriel demanded, and Maude's smile deepened. At least, the girl was spared the realization that by comparison the comb made her look faded, almost tawdry. She watched as Muriel danced about the room, pausing to smile at her reflection in the long mirror. Muriel's youth might be wonderful, but far more wonderful was the way in which Ernest's eyes watched only his wife.

"Yes, it's a beautiful comb," Maude said softly, and then, "but it's ten o'clock; the car is waiting for us."

She almost laughed at the manner

in which Ernest hurried to hold her evening coat.

It was a night of triumph. Men told Maude Caslon that she was wonderful; the women forgot their envy and enthused as women do, demanding the name of her dressmaker; and Ernest danced with her continuously. When she asked him if he had danced with Muriel he said that Muriel had found two boys home from college for the week-end, and was thoroughly enjoying herself.

It was towards morning when Ernest followed his wife to their room—tired, but somehow strangely happy. Maude dropped to a chair before her dressing table. Her evening coat dropped from her shoulders.

"Don't you think it was a great success?" she asked.

"Yes, great!" He chose a chair so that he might watch her. "And Maude, I never saw you look as charming as you do tonight."

She smiled. For a minute they were silent. She saw that Ernest was looking at her intently, and she felt that she read his thoughts. He was wondering how he had ever thought Muriel was so charming; how she had even seemed slightly attractive, when his wife was so splendid. In that moment Maude thought of her mother and her mother's wisdom.

"I've been thinking," Ernest said presently; "it's almost spring, and I'm tired. The Curtiss deal will be finished in about ten days, and then how would you like to run down to Florida for a couple of weeks?"

"That would be wonderful," she turned to him eagerly; then, after a second's pause: "Shall we take Muriel?" A fear gripped her as she asked the question, but she felt that on its answer depended her future happiness.

"Oh, no!" He did not hesitate before he answered. "Just we two. Muriel has her studies, and the house will be here just the same." Then: "I suppose she'll be going home in a short time," he reflected.

Maude could not suppress her smile, but so that it might not be too noticeable she turned towards the mirror and, as a preparation for the night, she took the Spanish comb from her hair.

As she did so, something caught her eye; something that startled her. She looked closer. Yes, there it was! A gray hair! She was growing old after all. But there was no sting of bitterness, no tragedy, in the discovery.

Ernest had risen, and was standing

back of her chair, his fingers on her bare shoulders, lightly caressing her neck and arms.

"And, Maude, I've been thinking," her husband said softly, "I don't suppose that the comb was the best gift for Muriel. I should have followed your advice and got something more practical."

"Oh, no!" Maude assured him. "Why, in a woman's life it's often the impactical things that count the most. You can't appreciate what this Spanish comb means to me! Why!" and though Ernest could not know why, she was so very happy, he joined her when she laughed—a mirthful laugh that filled the room with the joy of living.

THE CALL OF THE WILD

By J. Perley Robinson

A man there was and he made his speech

(Even as you and I.)

To a beautiful bird way beyond his reach—

For a fellow might as well try.

Now the lady, of course, could not understand,

When he tried to teach her to eat from his hand;

But she giggled "Te he!" She laughed "He haw!"

When he fitted the diamond onto her paw.

Now the man at first thought he'd picked a peach

(E'en as we often think.)

But she turned out to be just a beautiful screech,

And drove him 'most to drink.

But at last he was able to understand,

That a bird in the bush is worth two in the hand;

So he left the jade half his worldly goods,

And like all the rest of us—took to the woods.

For the song of the wild birds, saith the sage,

Is a greater lure than the birds in the cage—

Though the wild girls' wiles and the wild girls' chants

Leaves us empty pockets in our pants!

But ever since Adam and the Fall,

It's been human to answer the Wild Bird's Call.

Three Day Pass

By LUCILLE O. HAYUM



"How long are you good for?" she asked. "Three days," Jim answered.

RAINING in Hollywood! Bucketsful. Just Jim Carver's luck! And to hit the beach dead broke. Or almost. About three pieces of folding money, a few chicken-feed coins and—three days to kill.

Hell, you couldn't grab a girl—or could you?

Luck usually put a half dozen veils over her face when she saw Jim coming. Been that way all his life. But tonight—

He was heading far out the Boulevard where some kind civilian soul had told him—free eats—free bed and girls. Sure—girls. But really decent girls. Girls who didn't talk Jim Carver's lingo. Why, Jim had crossed a half dozen ponds. Jim had gone native. Sure he had. He'd been a sailor in the United States Navy ever since—Gone straight from college and now three red stripes below the

eagle. First class petty officer.

Hitch hiking on. Sunset Boulevard to save a dime. Yeah?

"Want a lift, Sailor?" Lady Luck out on a rainy night with a lantern looking for him.

Jim stepped off the curb and over towards the long, de-luxe convertible. A woman's voice. Don't kid yourself. Here was the answer.

But Jim was due for a spill.

"Want a lift, Sailor?" She repeated the inquiry when he reached the open car door. And just then, Jim's world stood still. Stopped revolving around its axis. Or something like that.

She had gray hair. Nice gray hair. Older than his mother if his mother were still alive. She had died when Jim was born. Maybe he missed having her. Sure thing. Maybe mothers are swell. But not when a fellow gets

a three-day pass from a P.O.E. and knew that any day he'll be confined for the big dash into the South Pacific.

"Thank you, ma'am." Think fast, Sailor.

"I always pick up servicemen. You see that's what I'd want somebody to do to my boy." She talked fast, still holding the car door open. The rain had called in a reserve force and was coming down more plentiful than ever. Filling Jim's little white cap, rolling in rivulets down his pea jacket. "Get in, Sailor, you're getting wet. Get in and I'll take you home. A big wood fire—a good dinner." Then just a bit of facetiousness. Poor dame. "Maybe some wine to thaw out the cold. Hurry, Sailor. You can have a good night's rest, too. In my boy's room. Listen to his radio—"

And while she talked, Jim's eyes were trying to pierce the gray foggy rain—his brain was trying to conjure up something to say before he was trapped. Hi-yah—think fast, Jimmie.

And just then his eyes caught a sign shimmering through the rain. A sign across the Boulevard, which said Joe's Place. And the light was just defiant enough to let him see two girls open the door and walk in. That's what he wanted. A girl. Not comfort. He was twenty-one. Guys, when they're twenty-one don't go looking for fireplaces and burning logs and radio programs on a rainy night. Not sailors headed for the Big Show.

"Please come. I'm lonely. My husband sits there reading law briefs and I want to talk—"

Don't be a sucker, Jimmie. That's what he was telling himself and he usually listened to himself. All his life. That's why his father and he used to have those Class A rows during summer vacation. Jimmie had read too

many times about wild oats and he always believed what he read.

"Thank you, ma'am but—" Lights over at Joe's Place seemed to use the navy code. "Come in, Sailor. Juke box and girls and cheap beer."

"You won't be any trouble. You can sleep as late as you want in the morning." Then, even in the dim light, Jimmie saw tears in her eyes. "I'll bring your breakfast to bed like I used to bring Ted's when he had shore leave."

Men got the electric chair for being less cruel than Jim.

"Thank you, ma'am but I was just heading for a place in this block. Sorry ma'am. I'd sure liked to have taken you up on that invitation. Sounds swell, all right."

Her lips quivered.

"You look so much like Ted. He—" Then she straightened up. Brave as an Admiral. "My name is Gibson. Mrs. Theodore Gibson. If you get lonely, call me up. I'll keep that bed for you, Sailor—Goodbye."

"So long, ma'am. And thanks." But she didn't hear the thanks. She was speeding down the boulevard and Jim was standing in the rain.

Joe's place wasn't much. A half gray light. A misty damp smell from the wet uniforms gathered around the bar. Joe himself was well cast. He belonged behind that bar. Fat, a bit greasy, a soiled apron and a toothy grin for servicemen. They were good gyp bait.

Jim stalked in. Where were those skirts he'd glimpsed from the middle of the Boulevard. The light, feeble as it was blinded him a little at first. Then it cleared and he saw them.

Bunny was little and dark and had on a glaring red raincoat. Not worth splitting a beer with her. Jeanne—No, he wasn't seeing right. Jeanne was beautiful! Blonde hair loose as corn

silk, cheeks pink as the camelia stuck in her hair. A wet camelia, perhaps but suggestively elusive to a girl-hungry sailor. Her raincoat was, seemingly some soldier's trench coat. Too big for her but somehow adding something intangible to her beauty. And on a night like this, when he'd been heading for a respectable free eats—free bed affair.

Some corporal was buying drinks for the girls, when Jim crowded in. He could always do that. Jim's black hair, his black eyes, that crooked little smile of his had made girls forget to be good, too many times. So why shy off this time. Even though he was short on folding money. He could afford a couple of rounds at a cheap joint like Joe's place. Then—

"Room for one more?" Jim's entrée into the contest. Pushing aside a little sailor boy with nary a stripe on his arm and only two white ones on his cuff. The little sailor boy wasn't interested in girls anyway. Just stopped off to keep out of the rain and linger thirty minutes over one glass of beer. Much to Joe's chagrin.

Jeanne liked that voice. Had class to it. Not some garbage man turned sailor. Then she faced him. Jeanne was just as tough and hard boiled as Jim. Jeanne had shifted for herself since she was ten. Ever since her father took a short cut to freedom and her mother became a movie extra. Her mother had seldom remembered right from wrong so couldn't help Jeanne distinguish the difference.

"Sure, there's room for one more, when a good looking sailor moves in. Hi-yah—"

"What will it be?"

"Rye."

No time wasted. Minutes were scarce and Jim believed in squeezing all he could out of them.

"First time in Hollywood, Sailor?" Drinking, not like a lady but like a skid-row drunk. Gulping it down too fast. According to that, Jim's folding money, wasn't going to last long enough to make the grade.

"Yeah!" Why tell her that as a civilian, he'd flown out there in his father's private plane and hit the high spots. Get down to her level and have a three-day pass to remember when he was out on the high seas, surrounded by nobody but a lot of homesick blue jackets. Why not?

"How long are you good for?" she asked.

"Three days."

Another round of drinks.

"O, boy. And payday just over. Say, you can have a swell time, Sailor." She looked straight at him. Her eyes bluer than ever. Her soft hair fluttering around her face like filmy lace. Jim caught hold of her hand. That was what she wanted. What he wanted too. He'd better slow down on the beer. Had to save a few cents for—well, maybe a room in a third-class hotel.

Bunny broke in just then. Bunny, the little dark-haired girl who was Jeanne's partner.

"Can you beat that? Listen here, Jeanne. Know what that dope next to me ran out on me for? Going to put in a long distance call to New Jersey. Wants to talk to his mom. Just wants to tell her goodnight. Spending all that dough when he could have seen how I needed a few more drinks. Okay—here I go for that sergeant over yonder. Wish me luck, kids."

Jim lit a cigarette. Almost automatically. Something deep down inside of him began to make him take notice. By golly it must be sort of nice to want to say goodnight to somebody off in New Jersey. To want to say it hard enough, bad enough to split your

month's pay in half to do it. His father wouldn't even be home. And ten to one if he was he'd turn the conversation into a free lecture.

"Say, you ain't even hearing a word I said, Sailor." Jeanne was fingering an empty glass.

"Sure I was—Say, you never told me your name."

"You're trying to change the subject, Sailor. What the devil do you care what my name is. I just told you, I'd fallen for you like nickels into a slot machine. Then you get moony-eyed and look far off into space. Speak up, Sailor. Do I click or don't I? I ain't got no time to lose."

Sure she clicked. Her fingers were pushing back his black hair—her red lips were on his. Joe allowed such things until somebody warned the gang that the S.P.'s or M.P.'s were about to push open the door. Then all arms, all lips went back into place. Joe didn't want to be put out of bounds.

"You're sweet—I like you. What say we get out of this place."

"Okay." She answered without hesitating.

Jim didn't have much left after he paid his bill. A taxi just wasn't in the cards.

The rain seemed to have called for reinforcements and received them, when Jeanne and Jim stepped out to the sidewalk.

"Hell, what a night. Where we going, Sailor?"

"Where do you want to go?"

"Out of the rain, that's for sure. Where you staying?"

"No place. Yet."

"Well rent a room at a hotel. There ain't no hotels out here on Sunset. We got to get a cab and get down town. Hey, taxi—"

Jim felt like a dummy. Hell, but this

was cheap. She was hanging on to his arm. Just a little woozy after she stood up. Too much beer. She had out-ordered him, two to one. But—she was pretty.

Luck took time out and gave Jim a break. No empty taxi cruised along the Boulevard. They waited. Rain soaked.

"Listen, Honey—" And suddenly, when he said Honey, he felt like the romantic lead in a trashy movie. "We'd better just hoof it."

"You kidding? It's a mile. Say, the lieutenant that showed me the hot spots last night had a car. You bet. And did we have a good time?"

"What's a mile more or less. And we're just as wet as we'll ever be. Come on, Honey."

Jim caught her to him there in the night and held her close. Jim's kisses worked wonders. They didn't fall short even now with hard-boiled Jeanne.

"Okay, you win."

There wasn't much to say as they splashed along. Dark empty streets—few pedestrians. Arm in arm—

"I don't usually go for enlisted men—" she told him after a block of absolute silence. "But on a rainy night like this you can't hold out." Then—her arm tightened. "But want me to tell you something? When it comes to looks and a nice way of talking and looking at a girl, well—Sailor you got the whole U. S. navy beat a mile."

Jim didn't answer. Somehow he was agreeing with his father, just then. He—well, he just wasn't any good. Cheap. That's what he was. Haunting a beer joint and then quitting the place with a blonde floozy hanging on his arm and heading for a third-class hotel to register as Mr. and Mrs. Somebody. Jim halted himself so much that he bit a cigarette in half.

"Say, Sailor, didn't you just hear that build-up I gave you. You're solid with me. Maybe for keeps. Maybe. How you fixed for dough?"

That was the climax. Like a spark on a can of gasoline. Jim forgot that he was classed as a gentleman. Had been brought up along those lines anyway.

"Why you cheap little gold digger."

"Gold digger. Don't make me laugh, Sailor. You can't do much digging and find gold in a sailor's wallet. His I.D. card and a few stray coins. I was just asking because—I know you're about broke. I saw your wallet back there at Joe's. Still I come with you, didn't I?"

Stumped, he was. The girl had something there. He wished that she would play another record. He didn't know what to say. Was she on the level? About liking him?

"There wasn't much to choose from. Was there?"

"Why, damn you—that was a nasty crack. There were fellows in there throwing money away like peanuts."

"Maybe they were decent chaps. Not on the make."

"Say, are you trying to make me hate you, Sailor?" She stopped short. "I've half a notion to go back to Joe's."

Jim stood still watching her. The rain had flattened the blonde hair. Had splashed some of the rouge to places where it wasn't meant to be. Her lips were not smiling now. Set in a thin straight line. And hard. God, was this what he'd been planning on a three-day pass—

"Well, Sailor, what's the answer? Going to let me go back?"

"Do you want to go back?"

Jeanne thought fast. She was halfway to town. Halfway and the rain was faster than ever.

"No, Sailor!" Her arm tightened over his. Like a vise. On, they walked.

Lights flickering ahead like Joe's place. This was Gobo's. The name was the only difference. The same raucous music flaring out and inviting them in.

"Let's take time out for another drink, Sailor, huh?"

Jim thought fast. Sort of confusedly. But down deep he got his answer. What in hell did he expect. Shouldn't have been a terrible disappointment to him. Any of it. Hadn't he been planning drinks and girls and all the et ceteras every night aboard ship after he hit the sack. Sure thing. But—somehow—

"Okay, Honey." That Honey came out without invitation.

They had to wait at a stop signal. Lights turned red, just as they halted at the curb. He was still clinging to her arm or vice versa. At least they were headed in the same direction—Jim and his cheaper than cheap blonde.

Then—

Jim could always remember things he'd seen once. Little out of the ordinary memories made photographs on his mind. Even now when that brain of his was beer filled and topsyturvy with disgust for himself. Even now, as they stood there waiting, his eyes took in the big car just in front of him. O, sure it was a de-luxe convertible, all right. But—there were stickers on the windshield that he recognized. One, especially. Navy. And set off in a corner. Yeah—that was Mrs. Gibson's car. The gray-haired lady who had tried to ruin his three-day pass by wanting to mother him. The lady, who had let tears fill her eyes when he had said thumbs down.

One hour ago!

Jim thought fast. The rain made a curtain around the windows of the car. But Jim knew that a woman was at the wheel. By the shape of her head silhouetted against the mist.

"Wait here a minute, Honey."

"What do you mean—Wait here Think I was going to leap in front of them cars. What's up, Sailor? Dog-gone it, but that signal is slow."

Jim jerked away.

"Wait here because I see somebody I know in that car. I'll be back—"

He knocked on the closed window. Knocked just as the signal changed. There went his luck again. Always missing fire by a half second. But the car ignored the signal. Just drew in towards the curb and switched off the ignition. Might have guessed that Mrs. Gibson would do a trick like that. A nice motherly trick. She had caught sight of him through the glass.

The car door opened. So what?

Jim asked himself the question and couldn't find the answer. What was he planning to say—to do. Why in heck—

The door was still open and he heard a voice—

"Want a lift, Sailor?"

A low throaty voice. A voice full of laughs and tears and love and youth. Jim looked up.

"Say, I'm sorry. Darn sorry. I thought you were the lady who had offered me a lift earlier. I thought I recognized the car. Say, I'm sorry—"

She looked like his girl back home. The kid he'd taken to junior proms and things like that. Betsy Hall. Once he had almost thought he loved red-headed Betsy. But she'd met some South American over in Washington and that was that. Jim stood and stared. And as in a trance, through one far-off corner of his eye, a slim girl was still standing there on the corner in the rain. His girl. His girl for the night!

"Maybe I'm guessing wrong, Sailor. Anyway no harm in trying. I am Cynthia Gibson. Mother told me she tried to pick up a sailor tonight who looked

just like Ted. My brother. Okay am I right? Because you do look like Ted. Am I right?"

"Yeah—yeah, you are right."

Pause. With the rain still working overtime. Neither seemed to know whose turn it was to speak next. Cynthia took it up from there.

"I'm on my way to the postoffice now with a V-mail for Ted. He's in the South Pacific and Mother went right home to write him. After seeing you. I'll be going back home then. Changed your mind, Sailor about coming out to the house?"

The street lamp shone on her. Made her seem terribly young—Or, not too young. But that light succeeded in imbuing her with a sort of halo. Jim hadn't gone in much for halos. Except on saints in a cathedral. But suddenly with Gobo's lights inviting him in and Gobo's music adding to the invitation, halos seemed a little on the right side. Halos over a red-headed girl—a real girl with all the things he'd been used to, sparkling from her eyes.

"Hey there, you big jerk. Want me to drown?" Jeanne had waited a few minutes too long. Couldn't blame the girl. He was rude and thoughtless. Now she called out from the corner.

Jim stuck a wet cigarette between his teeth and forgot to light it. He had a date with Jeanne.

"Just a minute—" He started to say Honey. Then drew the word back where it belonged. Unsaid.

"Okay, Sailor. I'm sorry. I didn't know you—you had a—a girl friend." Down on the starter. Cynthia's lips set. Maybe Jim only imagined it, but he thought he saw a bit of irritation shining out at him. God, but she was pretty. In the right way. Cute too. Little. He liked little girls with a lot of fire showing through. What did she

say her name was—Cynthia. Perfect for her.

“Say, turn off that engine, will you—please.” One of his hands holding the door open. Jim Carver was talking now. Not a lonely sailor on a lonely boulevard begging a hitch-hike. Cynthia snapped off the ignition, as she had been commanded to do. And she liked to get orders. That was why she had broken off with Lieutenant Louis Gregg. He treated her too much like his C.O. She couldn’t go for that. “I am going to take you up on that bid for the night. Will you wait just a minute?”

“Don’t be long, Sailor. This letter has to catch the air-mail pick-up. I promised Mother.”

Jim started back to the curb. He should have felt like a heel. Somehow he felt anything but that.

“Honey—”

“Don’t you honey me. What’s the big idea. Giving me the brush-off. That the trick. You didn’t know anybody in that car. I heard that dame ask you if you wanted a lift? Okay, why don’t you spill the truth. I hate liars. And getting me out here in the rain and dropping me and—”

“Pipe down a minute. I do know that girl’s mother.”

“Don’t make me laugh. And—don’t you dare ditch me. See!” The girl had something. Yellow, that’s what he was. Or was he? She looked smaller than ever, Jeanne did. Little and thin and wet as a drowning rat. Poor kid. Bad as the worst. But he had made her walk through a California down-pour, promising her the warmth of a hotel room. And now—Jim straightened up. He had been home hungry, when he stopped that car. He’d visited his roommate one summer. But

Jim hadn’t felt the want of home then so much as tonight. Maybe thinking of things he’d seen across the pond under enemy attack—his carrier in flames, radios buzzing hotter than firecrackers, men dying—yeah, men dying—and those orders still ringing louder than juke-box music in his ears—those orders—Close all bulkheads—Dog down all hatches—Put on flash-proof clothing—Maybe thinking back, had made a date with a floozy seem a little out of place.

“Say, you don’t even know a thing about me. I’m just one sailor or the next. I hadn’t planned to ditch you. But—” His hand dug for his wallet. Out it came. Jeanne watched.

He took out his folding money.

“Take this. I want you to. Go in to Gobo’s and buy yourself some drinks. Then take a cab home—”

“Where do you get that stuff? Me have to use my own dough. Sailor, I ain’t lost my sex appeal yet. Have I?”

One of her hands covering his. Her lips quivering. Her eyes blinking just once because a damn tear got caught in her lashes.

“You’re a darn good looking girl but—I thought maybe—”

“Maybe you’d give me a handout same as you’d give it to some bum. I ain’t that old, Sailor—”

She turned and walked away. Then Jim shoved the money back in his wallet as he entered the car.

“I’m glad I found you—What’s your name?”

“Jim,” he answered.

“Home James? You bet!”

Jeanne had turned up a dark side street. She was going to hoof it back to her furnished room. She didn’t have money for carfare. And somehow tonight she—she didn’t want any.

An Indiscreet Woman

By ROSE KURLAND

RESTLESS—alone—lonesome! Feeling isolated and stagnant, Babe Vanoring looked at the photograph of the elderly man on the Louis XIV carved table. The years of Paris, operas, yachts—then his death and now—alone—with a fortune of cold, glittering, little round iron discs. Yes, iron discs! Money was iron! That's all it was!

She walked to the window, looked out, unseeingly, walked back again to the photograph. Thoughts slid into her consciousness like sluggish water, swamplike in their years of decay. The thought of years ago in that smelly little flat in the Bronx with Bud—a shoe clerk's moist hands! She must get out of here—or thrust the walls apart to liberate her. She'd call Grace Merwyn. Grace, always smiling, with autumnal youthfulness, who somehow managed to enjoy life. Grace would help her!

"Hello—hello, Grace. I had to call you up. I'm just lost tonight."

"I have just the thing for you, dear. We're all going to the opening of a new night club—why not join us?"

"But I have no one to take me."

"Well, would you be willing to be a little—a little indiscreet?"

"Indiscreet? I'm willing to do anything. I'll go any place—with anyone."

Indiscreet! The word held intrigue, adventure—perhaps romance! Quickly, she darted into her boudoir. Let's see, what gown? . . . She'd wear the black velvet; that made her look interesting. Pearls or diamonds? Diamonds—to reflect the newly found sparkle in her black eyes.

The stranger should be here any moment. What would he look like? What did Grace mean by indiscreet? It sounded so mysteriously alluring.

Well, why wasn't he here? Why was she so nervous—so keyed up? There, the doorbell and the maid's inquiring voice—a soft, low, resonant reply, strangely familiar. Quickly, she faced the mirror, her hands fingering her jewels excitedly. Soft footfalls on the Saruk rug. A most pleasant reflection—smart clothes, suave, a little moustache, dark, admiring eyes. Those eyes—how strange! They were somehow familiar. Strange those eyes—where had she seen them before? The eyes of— Good heavens!

"Bud—what—what are you doing here?"

A different Bud—a miraculous change.

"I do this for my living. How are you, Babe?"

"For your *living*?"

"You didn't want me to be a shoe clerk all my life, did you?"

"Why—why, you're nothing now but a—a—"

"A what? Well, why don't you say it? And what makes you think you're any better?"

"Better? Why, I have money, position, everything! What have you?"

He turned on her savagely:

"Still, you seem to *need* me—my kind! Well, you left me for money, so money ought to keep you company here tonight!"

She recoiled. "You cheap—"

"Cheap! Who's cheaper, you or I? I, at least, give them their money's worth. What did you give him—that

rich old fool? That's what you made people call him. An with all your money—here is your shoe clerk, come to take you out! In the end, you had to send for *me!* Is Madame ready?"

She whirled into her boudoir. She stood there in front of her mirror, panting with anger. She'd show him! She wouldn't go! She had more self-respect than he did. She'd prove it to him. His triumph—no—she wouldn't go! She'd do something else. Lord, what else was there to do! Oh, she hated him and she hated herself. She could see him, buttoning his glove now. He was right. She *was* no good. Iron discs—money—that's all she had! Not even stamina to be alone—alone with her thoughts. He had told her that years ago. She had called him a stupid underdog every Saturday night as he gave her his meager shoe-clerk's pay. Well, she could be alone.

She'd show him. She'd build up a new life for herself. She'd read; she'd take up philanthropy—she'd help people! She'd build a life for herself inside of herself!

Was that the phone? Yes. She had better answer it—it seemed so insistent.

"Hello, Pabe. What are you doing up there all this time? We're waiting downstairs. And what do you think, we've got ringside seats—it's going to be some party!"

She hung up the receiver. Her shoulders drooped as she picked up her wrap. She stood at the door. He bowed very low. The wrap was dragging on the floor. He sprang forward and picked it up.

"Allow me, Madame." He bowed low again. "Is Madame ready?"

And they went out.

LITTLE BROTHER'S OPINION

By Marion Hamilton Wood

Grandpa's chasing chickens, not the feathered kind;
 Grandma's with her "Cake-Eater," so she doesn't mind;
 Mother's dancing nightly, trying to reduce;
 Father's playing races and mumbling: "What's the use?"
 Sister's trying mighty hard to sit upon the lid;
 Brother is in college—a cunnin' "Rah! Rah!" kid.
 The cook has learned to rhumba, and does it at her work;
 The maid thinks she's an actress, and you should see her smirk.
 The butler is a poet, because he told me so;
 The chauffeur's trying manfully to be my sister's beau.
 The cat has had some kittens—as common as can be—
 And Thomas-cat, her husband, sniffs: "They don't belong to *me.*"
 The dog and I, together, are doing pretty well,
 But the balance of the family has surely gone to Hell.

Checkmated

By JUDITH OLDHAM

THAT indefinable stillness, which heralds the approach of death, hung heavily over the Stenson bungalow. Within the roomy hall, bowls of daffodils and the small, bright fire of logs, proclaimed the season early spring. A tall antique clock, which had witnessed the joys and sorrows of many, beat with measured solemnity, and, in chiming the hour, seemed to ring up the curtain for a finale.

A door opened at the end of the hall, and two men entered, in consultation. Approaching the fireplace, the older man laid his hand kindly on the shoulder of the woman seated there; so cold and quiet, she had seemed merged into the furniture, like a statue engraved in dull blue and silver.

"Mrs. Stenson," said the surgeon, "you are a brave woman, and I must tell you the truth. Harry cannot possibly live. A sudden effort or exertion on his part will prove fatal—in any case, his hours are few."

Except for a slight tremor, which seemed to pass over her beautifully gowned figure, she did not move, but in a singularly clear voice she asked:

"Does he want me? Does he know?"

"I think he realizes it, yes; he has sent for his lawyer."

Like a flash the woman seemed to come to life, and instinctively putting out her hand as if to ward off something, inquired in a low voice:

"What lawyer?"

"Why, George Barton, of course."

With a slithery noise of high-heeled shoes scraping the parquet, Mona Stenson fainted.

The man on the bed was breathing with difficulty. His features were

drawn and haggard. With an effort he beckoned to the nurse.

"Nurse, hand me—those papers—and leather case from the bureau drawer—and when—Mr. Barton—comes, leave us alone for ten minutes."

The nurse, crossing the room to obey his request, hesitated at the bedside.

"It will exhaust you to talk, Mr. Stenson," she said. "Can't I tell Mr. Barton what you want?"

"What I—have—to say to—George Barton is private," said the injured man, testily. "I know I'm dying—I always thought that—mare would throw me badly—some day—please do—as I request—you!"

Through the silent house a bell rang sharply. A few seconds later a firm step crossed the threshold. Silently the nurse left the room.

"Stenson, old man, I don't know what to say; this is hard lines. You're pretty badly hurt, they tell me—but something—"

"Nothing," Stenson's voice cut in like a thin, sharp knife. "Sorry to disappoint—you—my friend. You're a good actor; Mona's—a clever woman—but—I've known your—secret for—three months!"

He was wheezing badly, and beads of perspiration bedewed his forehead. Slowly he raised himself, his right hand fumbling amongst his pillows.

"Mona—won't be—any more—faithful—to you—than she has—been—to me. You and I will—go together."

With a superhuman effort he raised his arm—the shot rang through the silent house.

The Lipstick

By DOROTHY DOW

BECAUSE her mouth was the most alluring feature of an altogether lovely face, Lola Rowe always rouged it, ever so lightly, so that its beauty might be the more evident, and because Hugh, her husband, delighted in all her little whims, he had the lipstick especially made for her—a dainty jeweled affair, delicately carved and fashioned, quite distinctive. There was none other exactly like it in the world, the jeweler assured him when he purchased it. And Lola exclaimed with joy, when he gave it to her.

Hugh Rowe moved a little uneasily in his chair, in the big bay window of the club. He could hear quite plainly what the two next men were talking about, and the conversation did not please him at all. They were discussing his best friend, Charles Stanton.

"Quite rotten, the whole affair," said the first.

"They say she goes there every day, very openly. And yet her poor fool of a husband hasn't found it out. If he ever does, and doesn't shoot Stanton on the spot, then he's a yellow cur, and deserves what he's getting."

"Yes, yes. Can't blame Stanton so much, though. She's a deuced pretty woman, you know."

"Yes—but her husband is Stanton's friend, man!"

Hugh got up, and walked away. He felt that he ought to warn Stanton of all the talk. And yet it was a nasty thing to do, interfering in a man's private affairs. Still, he was Stanton's best friend.

All the Avenue was agleam with

women in fall clothes—expensive, luxurious looking women, all rose and cream, and heavy furs. Birds of Paradise—moths—joy hunters! Now and then some one bowed to Hugh from the depths of a limousine. Absently, he nodded back. He was absorbed in what he was about to say to Stanton. He didn't wonder, even once, who the woman in the case was. That was not his affair. All that concerned him, was to help his friend out of an unsavory mess.

In Stanton's apartment the valet admitted him. Mr. Stanton was not at home, but was expected any minute. Very well, Mr. Rowe would wait.

He was quite at home there, and so, as he waited, it was not strange that he wandered about, instead of sitting still. At the door of the bedroom, he smiled a little grimly, for a brilliant rose robe lay across one chair, and from its folds a tiny slipper peeped. Hugh frowned and shrugged—then walked back to the big divan before the fireplace.

Sitting there, wishing that Stanton would come, his hand began unconsciously to play with a small hard article that was hidden in the mass of pillows. Half absently, he pulled it out and looked at it.

It was a lipstick. Worse than that—it was *the* lipstick.

"None other like it, in the world, sir," he heard that jeweler saying.

The lipstick he had bought for Lola! There was no doubt about it—that queer setting of the diamonds and that odd carving. Lola's lipstick—in Stanton's apartment! It seemed as if he was numb—somehow he could

not think plainly. From a long way off, he seemed to hear echoes of those men at the club. What were the phrases they had used? "Her husband's friend" . . . "He doesn't know it" . . . "A deuced pretty woman" . . . "And she goes there every day" . . . and last of all they had said he would be, what was it, "a yellow cur" if he didn't kill him. A yellow cur! Damn those old he-gossips. Damn Stanton! Damn Lola!

He'd show them—he'd show them. Lucky that he knew where Stanton kept his gun!

Stanton let himself into the apartment whistling gaily,

*"Do you hear me calling
When the dew is falling—"*

and on to the end of the measure. Rowe walked out of the bedroom, gun level.

"You dog!" he said—and fired.

Very slowly, Hugh ascended the steps to Lola's bedroom. It seemed a long time since he had left Stanton lying quite still, and had rushed out of the building. He dimly recalled that Stanton had moved a little—groaned.

Lola lay on a *chaise longue*, blue draperies making a mist about her. Her face was very lovely, as she turned it at her husband's step.

"Dear, what is the matter?"

He didn't answer—only went up close to her, and extended his hand.

Lola—I found this in Stanton's apartment."

His voice broke.

She looked at it, with a curious, sad little smile. He wondered that she did not seem alarmed, or afraid.

"Yes," she said at last. "It's Molly's lipstick! But of course you suspected before this."

"Molly's lipstick," he repeated, dumbly.

"Why, of course, she copied the one you gave me, dear. It's got her name inside—see! But I'm sorry you found it. I hoped they'd come to their senses, before you learned about it. I knew how you'd feel if you found out your best friend was the lover of—your brother's wife! Of course I knew. But I wanted to keep it from you."

She touched him, tenderly.

Molly! So it was Molly! And he had thought all the time it was Lola. He hadn't trusted her. Molly—lovely, silly, Molly, who had eloped with Dick Rowe when she was only sixteen. Thank heaven—it wasn't—it wasn't—his Lola! With a half sob, he buried his head in her lap.

Quite slowly, he realized what he had done. He had killed Stanton. There would be — death, for that. At least, no one would ever know why he had done it. They might think it was to protect his brother's honor. Let them think what they pleased. At least Lola was still Lola — not the thing he had thought her for so short a time in Stanton's apartment. Only—he wouldn't have her long. He was going to die—because he'd been a fool—

There was a servant in the doorway, with a message.

"From the St. John Hospital, sir, Mr. Stanton has been hurt, a flesh wound. He discharged his gun accidentally, but the bullet was deflected by a notebook he had in his breast pocket. He wants you to come and see him."

"Oh, poor Stan," cried Lola,

"He'll get well." Hugh put his arms about her. "I know he'll get well! And I'm going to him now. I have to tell him I was mistaken—about something."

Sailors' Sweetheart

By H. O. STER



IF her intellect could have encompassed the flight, Connie Cronin would have told you that poverty fosters the predatory habit. All of her eighteen years had been lived in the slums. When a girl sweats all day at a factory bench to wrench from drab existence her need of food and shelter and covering for her body, she snatches what pleasure she can in the hours between, and isn't meticulous about it—my word, not Connie's.

At the fag end of a hot June day Connie tottered home to the dark, ill-smelling flat in Gold Street. Her mother met her at the door; her eyes were blackened, her head was swathed

in bandages. She bore the convinced air of one in whom the inevitability of marital infelicity had once more been vindicated. Connie cast a casual glance at the battered countenance of her parent.

"Ag'in, mom?" she asked. "Old man in jail?"

"Thot he is, th' dirty bum! An' fer six months. But what's the good it do me? I dunno; fer it's the aisy toime he had there, wid me wurrkin' hard an' him livin' on the fat o' th' land. It was afther he'd beat me up th' day he ses, ses he, 'Sind me to jail, thin. Begorry the grub I do be gittin' there is better'n any ye have in this j'int; an'

'tis a bit exthry I'll be havin' loike th' las' toime whin they made me a thrushty fer me good behavvour.' Fer his good behavvour, do ye moind?"

As susceptible to fleeting impressions as a cinema film, and with as much soul, Connie surveyed her mother wearily. A softened look came into her eyes.

"It's a darn shame, I'll say," she commented. "Never mind, mom, mebbe I'll git a raise at the fact'ry some time, an' we kin duck out and leave the old man hussel fer hisself. . . . Watcha gotta eat?"

It was that night that Connie outrageously jilted Jimmy Dolan. A month previously, when Jim came ashore from the torpedo boat flotilla—in Brooklyn Navy Yard for repairs—Connie had captured him twenty feet outside the yard gate. Blond Jimmy fell hard. At once the Adonis and the Hercules of his ship, he boasted a broken heart and the same average of broken heads at every port the flotilla entered on the South Atlantic station, but he had never before met anyone just like Connie. In the month that followed she had him acting like a navy marine on a practice cruise. He was as assiduous as that. At the end of the first week they had their pictures taken in a Coney Island gallery. The next night Jim hung around Connie's neck a cheap heart-shaped locket. In the center of a lot of curley-cues it bore the inscription, "I love you." Inside their photographs faced each other affectionately. Jim laid great stress on that locket—his picture and hers so close together. It was something tangible. He had never gone that far before. It stood him back five dollars.

"I want yuh should wear it alla time fer me, willya, Connie?" he

asked.

"Sure I'll wear it," she answered. "It's swell."

Jim spent an afternoon gazing at wedding-rings in Fulton Street shop windows; and speculated on the chances of getting a job after the war ended. He was a sad sea dog. Then, in an evil hour the tramp ship *Indus*, from Straits Settlements ports, warped into Pier 52. Rajpoota Singh, purser of the *Indus*, hadn't the bulk of Jim, nor his free and open American ways. He was slender and wiry; there was a blend of Javanese in his Lascar blood, and he had a furtive manner and a mean look; but he had, also, a melancholy cast of countenance, and a soft, ingratiating voice. He was something entirely new and romantic to Connie; and he had six months' pay in his pockets. At the height of a dance in Diana Hall, while all the world of the dock section looked on, Connie turned her back on Jim, and walked off on the arm of Rajpoota Singh.

But the romance was short-lived. Something happened — something which was reflected in the philosophical observations of Connie Cronin when, washing up at quitting time in the factory the next afternoon, she declared herself on the eternal masculine.

"The kinda feller I like," she said vigorously applying a soapy cloth to her face, "is one 'at ain't always wantin' yuh to go the limit after he ain't made yer acquaintance but fer on'y a couple hours. Youse girls knows what I mean."

Connie elaborated the point.

"Fellers is all right when yuh knows how to handle 'em; an' they ain't so many yuh kin afford to be hauty-like. What's the dif about kias-

in' an' pettin'? Gee, gi'm a thrill! But girls has gotta know how to take care of theirsels when a guy gits too fresh."

As she paused to locate a clean spot on the towel, Aggie Reilly interposed.

"Goin' t' th' dance tonight, Con?"

"I ain't made up me mind yet," replied Connie, sharply compressing her lips.

"I thought mebbe you'd gi's a knock down to yuh'r new feller."

Connie glared.

"I seen yuh chucked Jimmy las' ni'," persisted Aggie.

Then Connie bristled, and flashed steely eyes at her shop mate.

"Say, lissen, Ag," she said crushingly, "it ain't my practice never to discuss public my private relations with my boy friends. Yuh jist lay off Jimmy Dolan an' me, git me?"

"Well, yuh needn't git spotty," Aggie retorted. "Gee, we was all a-thinkin' mebbe yuh was goin' to git married to Jimmy."

"Me?" Connie struck a satirical note. "Me git married? Say, when I pull that trick I'll let you Janes know."

In this frame of mind she turned homeward. She and Jimmy get married? She had never thought of that before; but after last night? Ha! Ha! But gee, she mused, girls like something different, now and then. All of which was beside the point, however. The thought which had burdened her mind all afternoon was of the dance at Diana Hall tonight. She had chucked Jimmy; and after what had happened Rajpoota—the fresh thing—was impossible. It was half-past five and Connie had no one to escort her to the dance.

"I shou'd worry," she said. "I'll take a chanst."

She donned her red polka-dot gown, sleeveless and cut low at the neck; and

at the other extremity so high that it neatly cleared the point where a dimpled knee peeped out above her leg makeup. Before a bit of broken mirror she applied lipstick and rouge to her piquant Irish-American face, with its slightly up-tilted nose, big blue eyes and sizable mouth—capable on provocation of either billingsgate or blarney. Tossing back a wisp of brown hair she jammed a red hat over her left ear; as an afterthought, she gave her suede pumps a few dabs of ink to hide the cracks. Then, kicking her shop clothes under the bed, she hung a leather bag over her arm and was ready.

Twilight was deepening into night as she rounded the corner into Sands Street, where, between Manhattan Bridge Arch and the Navy Yard, is reflected all the bizarre glory of an international port of call. The Yard had already disgorged its quota of shore-leave gobs into the cosmopolitan aggregation. From the East River docks a galaxy of deepsea going buckos, from all points east and west of Suez, were in eager pursuit of the diversions of the quarter. Chinese and Lascars, French and Italian hard-boils, nattily attired marines, white-jacketed Filipinos from the mess rooms of the warships, longshoremen, and the nondescript hordes which the scores of nearby tenements nightly empty into the district, breast-ed their way along. Greek, Hungarian and Chinese restaurants emitted raucous sounds of clattering dishes and rancid odors of dubious cuisine.

A jargon of tongues, a pandemonium of sounds, swelled above the throng—canned music from juke boxes, the notes of a hymn floating through the windows of the Navy Y.M.C.A., jive from Diana Hall, a plaintive love-song which some home-

sick Spanish lover was picking from the strings of a guitar. Men of all colors and climes in linked-arms with women of all sorts and conditions—surged back and forth with the restlessness of the sea which had borne them in and would shortly claim them again. On the fringe of it all, Connie Cronin, lurking in the shadow of the Bridge Arch. There was mingled uncertainty and resentment in her face. What's the fun at a dance without a boy friend? It was bum luck that the fresh thing from Callamacutta had tried a funny crack. Her eyes blazed. Trying stunts with her, and he a mere acquaintance! Connie Cronin wasn't a prude. By the tenets of her own code of philosophy, she knew where to draw a sharp line, and was able to take care of herself. Why can't a guy play the game square, she thought, as she stood there, with the strains of dance music from Diana Hall ringing in her ears. Aggie Reilly swept by on the arm of a bo'sun's mate. Connie bit her lip and shrank back. She hoped she had not been observed. Sailormen ambled by without noticing the trim maid back in the shadows. She was weighing her bravado against her pride—on the point of boldly entering the dance hall unattended, and stealing Ag Reilly's boy friend away from her when, as she peered wistfully into the depths of the quarter, she sighted Jimmy Dolan swaggering down Sands Street in her direction, and alone.

A while back, a confident smile would have lighted up Connie's face, and she would have sallied out to meet him. Tonight, Jim's appearance only increased the burden of her woe. She had an acute sense of her bad strategy in tossing the sailor away for the Lascar. She didn't feel ashamed. She felt sore. Jim was bearing straight down upon her, but Connie wasn't the

sort to run away.

"I shou'd worry," she repeated defiantly.

Abreast of her Jim stopped short, surprised and hesitant.

"'Lo, Jim," she said nonchalantly.

"'Lo, Connie," haltingly, uncertain.

He gazed down upon her—Connie at her conquering best—and his heart quickened. But his face clouded as he recalled the Rajpoota incident of the night before. She caught the first ardent glow of his eyes, and quickly seized her advantage. Tilting her nose at a fascinating angle, she flashed a smiling challenge at him, then drooped her lashes and waited.

"Goin' anywheres tonight, Connie?" he asked.

"Nowheres in perticaler."

Then, timidly: "Come to the dance with me?"

Would she! But her reply was non-committal enough.

"If yuh want me."

Three minutes later, they were whirling across the dance floor, but Jim was not at his ease. He had her in his arms, but a sore spot burned in his breast.

"Yuh threw me down, Connie," he stammered, as they swung around the room. She remained silent; but pressed her arm against his. "I didn' think yuh'd do 'at."

"As if yuh cared," she whispered softly, with a renewed pressure of his arm.

"Sure I care! What'm I here fer Connie? I ask yuh that. I'm here because I think yuh're the best skirt I ever met. 'At's why I'm here."

His voice rang with hearty earnestness, and Connie darted a look of triumph about the hall.

"Yuh cou'dn't a-liked me much when yuh let him take me without a scrap," she murmured, tightening her

arm about him.

"Where's 'at guy now?" he flared.

"Cut it out, Jim," and then, with a subtle concession. "I ain't carin' where he is. Him? He's nix to me!"

"Honest, Connie! Yuh ain't gonna see him ag'in!" He felt a sudden concern for her. "It's hot in here," he said. "Le's git sumpin' to eat."

At the Greek's, while a crowd of revellers ate with ravenous clamor, he faced her.

"Tell me about 'at guy."

"Oh, what's a-use? He's sailed already."

"Oh, zat so! Mebbe th's why yuh're with me tonight."

She protested hurriedly.

"Yuh'n't no right to say 'at, Jim. It's just—" and then, her eyes flashing, she leaned over the table and told him.

"It was awful, Jim! It was fierce. My new dress, which it ain't paid for yet—in rags; an' a big bruise on my breast, here!"

"The dirty rat!"

"Yeh. An' my leg scratched—"

His eyes blazed. He bent close to her, his fists clenched.

"Tell me, Connie, did he—did he—?"

"Yuh betcher life, he didn't!" she flashed. "Watcher think I am? If a girl's gonna fall fer any guy 'at makes a play fer her, I ain't gonna work in a fact'ry fer eighteen per, am I?"

"Well, I didn' know, Connie. I see 'em Hindoos in Bombay do magic better'n anythin' you'ver seen in the theayter. I thought mebbe— Wha'ju do, Con?"

"I mus-a kick a hole in his shin, an' I scratch 'is face plenty, an' wreck a tea-pot over 'is conk!"

"Serve 'im right, the—"

"Yeh. I give 'im what he ain't lookin' fer."

Jim struggled with his impotent rage. Then, "Yuh gotta gimme credit, Connie, I ain't never tried nothin' like 'at with yuh."

"I shou'd say not!"

"Well, gimme credit, I always treat yuh like a lady."

"An' I allus be'n a lady with yuh, Jim, 'ceptin' that one break."

"Didn' I fall fer yuh first?" Jim demanded. "I allus had what yuh calls respeck fer yuh, Connie, yuh gotta gimme credit."

"Yeh, I gi'yuh credit, Jim. What I allus likes about yuh is yuh don't make no wise cracks."

"Course I wou'n' make no wise cracks, Connie," Jim said hesitatingly, dropping his hand on hers. "'Cause, mebbe, they was sumpin else with me."

"Watcha mean, Jim?"

"Well, sumpin which if a guy feels like 'at fer a lady he won't make no funny cracks at her."

"What, Jim?"

"D'ja ever think uh gettin' married, Connie?"

He plumped it out with an ardent jerk, and she simpered.

"Aw, watcha' tryin' to do, kid me, Jim? Gee, who'd marry me?"

"Well, mebbe somebody. If I didn' hafta be aboard ship tonight."

"Aw, applesauce!"

"If we wasn't sailin' tomorrer!"

"Oh, gee!"

"No kiddin', Connie."

"Gee," she repeated, "this here ain't no place to talk them kinda things where the whole mob kin hear. Le's take a walk, Jim."

They made their way to the park east of the Navy Yard. It is a grim, grassless pleasure spot. Its shadows had indulgently enveloped a thousand romances, glad, sad and mad. From its hard benches in the lee of the band pavilion men have gone forth to war

with burning kisses on their lips, vows have been pledged and sealed, hopes embarked, and dreams have faded as dreadnaught and tramp ship crept through the Narrows on the way out to sea. Jim and Connie found a secluded bench; and she abandoned herself to his powerful arms, reveling in the stifling pain of his embraces.

"Do yuh love me, Jim?" she whispered.

"I sure do, Connie."

"Yuh ain't sore no more?"

"Nothin' like 'at. Ain't I tellin' yuh? If I on'y didn' hafta be aboard ship at twelve."

"I'm allus outa luck," she murmured gloomily.

"I'm comin' back all right."

"How soon, Jim?"

"Oh, mebbe I git a transfer or sumpin. Yuh'll wait fer me, Con?"

"Sure I wait. Gee! Think uh me git-
tin' married. Th' old man 'ud hafta go to work."

His arm was about her neck, which he was softly stroking, when his hand stiffened.

"Where's 'at locket?" he cried.

She suddenly remembered.

"It's gone."

"Where?"

"He took it."

"At guy?"

"Yeh. Las' night. After I cracks 'im on the head, he jerks it off. Ses he wants it fer a soovineer."

Jim ripped out an oath. She felt his body grow taut. He was opening and closing his fists and breathing hard.

"What's 'at guy's ship?" he demanded.

She told him.

"Yuh ain't sore on me ag'in, Jim?"

"Lissen, Con," he muttered. "This is a bum deal. I give yuh 'at locket,

don' I? It's got yuh're pitcher in it. 'At guy ain't no right to yuh're pitcher. 'At guy didn' take 'at locket from yuh; he took 'at locket from me, see? It's a li'l ole world, an' I'm gonna git 'at guy. I on'y want one crack at the bum."

"Kiss me, then, an' tell me yuh ain't sore."

"I ain't sore on yuh, Connie; but the guy—"

And then a prowling city policeman intervened.

"Come on now, sailor," he said, breaking in upon their rapture, "there's a priest around the corner and Raymond Street jail in the next block."

Even then there might have been a Sands Street wedding. But the bells of half a dozen ships in the yard sounded the quarter hour. Jim had fifteen minutes to get aboard. Connie accompanied him to the gate.

"Sure yuh love me?" she asked.

"Cinch," he replied, but with a somewhat detached air. His last word was: "I'm gonna git the guy!"

"Gee," said Connie, back home, as she folded up the polka-dot dress, and put it away in a cardboard box under the bed. "Some scrap if them guys meets!"

Mrs. Cronin, asleep at the other side of a curtain stretched across the room, groaned aloud. Connie drew the curtain aside and gazed meditatively at the bandaged face of her parent.

"Gee," she murmured. "I wonder what it'd be like to git married?"

Jim Dolan sailed at flood tide, nursing a steadily burning passion. Amid the glow of the fire which burned in his brain the fair features of Connie Cronin were framed in the flames of his rage against Rajpoota Singh. Not alone had Jim's affections been

wounded. His pride had been seared. He was in love now as never before. And here was a man who had trifled with the girl Jim loved. She had tempted him, of course; but like any other man, Jim could forgive the girl; but, forgiving, feel an ever deepening fury against the offending male. Moreover, Rajpoota Singh had made off with the bauble which was the symbol of Jim's and Connie's love, and which Jim had paid for with his good money. He fumed over the luck which had sent him to sea without a chance for one poke at the Lascar.

"She's a good kid," Jim mumbled, plying his oil-can in the engine room of the destroyer. And, completing the circuit of his thought: "I'm gonna git that guy! I'm gonna git 'im, sometime!"

The grievance became an obsession with him. By the time the flotilla dropped anchor in Subig Bay two months later it had assumed importance in his mind above every other consideration. It was an offense touching not only his heart's affection, but his personal honor, even the influence and prestige of the United States Navy. Through the Canal, across the Pacific, down to Australia, his dominant thought had attuned itself to the rhythmic pulsations of the engines. As the pistons drove into the cylinders, and the shafts, the rods, every part of the mechanism responded to the call upon them, they sung Jim's hymn of hate: Clack, clackety-clack, clack, clack. "I'm gonna git that guy."

His resolution wasn't shaken any when, a few nights after the ships made port, he met an Australian maiden at a party at Sydney. And on the sublime tropical night when he sat beneath the tropical moon, and played "Always" for her on a wheezy mouth organ, the thought of Connie

and Rajpoota was never absent from his mind.

"I'm gonna git that guy," Jim would mumble at the moon; and if the petite Mary mistook the remark for a pledge of undying affection, Jim had a good alibi. The matter of "getting" Rajpoota was something to be done—a sort of "*Swat the Jap*" or "*Remember Pearl Harbor*"—a stain on Oiler Jim Dolan's 'scutcheon which had to be removed.

Then came the summons to Manila. Fires were still burning in the city which a thousand bombs and shells had reduced, when Jim's ship dashed in with relief supplies. Three days later he got the coveted shore leave.

"Cripes!" he exclaimed, as he surveyed the Bund. Here on previous cruises he had tasted to satiation the sweets of oriental adventure. It now lay covered with twenty feet of wreckage along the curving sweep of the bay front. Ruin and devastation stretched out as far as his vision carried. A swaying of paper lanterns, like huge fireflies, half a mile across the waste, drew his attention. He pushed his way to a clearing, where a big tent had been set up, across its front a sign, *Red Cross*. Inside half a dozen tables stood ready for the service of what food was procurable; behind a curtain half a dozen army cots completed the only hotel accommodations to be found in Manila.

Jim was depressed by the desolation about him. He was pining for human associates.

"Cripes!" he thought. "It's a hell of a country. I'm glad Connie don't live in a dump like this."

His thoughts reverted to Rajpoota, and through his single track mind ran the old refrain, "I'm gonna git 'at guy!" Sounds of women's voices drew him outside. Across the clearing, in

the shell of a burned temple, half a dozen girls were sheltered under the care of an old native woman. He strolled over, and a chatter of girls' voices welcomed the American sailor.

"Merry Christmas," cried Jim, with a broad grin, as the group of girls bowed low before him. "Say, lissen, kids, stand up! We on'y done our duty."

Within two minutes, they had him squatting, native fashion, an honored guest, jabbering at him in the abominable pigeon English of Far East ports of call. One of the girls nestled up to him. She was petite, graceful, shy; clad in a torn, mud-splattered kimono of contrasting greens, reds and yellows. Connie Cronin had played house with something like her not many years before, when she got a doll at the Settlement house at the Christmas entertainment.

"Poor kid!" he said. "It's certainly great Connie wasn't here fer the big show."

The spirit of hospitality seized him.

"Say, lissen," he exclaimed. "Le's all have a drink. Youse kids wait here. Is it all right, mom? I'm gonna see if they got any soft stuff over in that joint."

He darted across the clearing, and was about to enter the canteen, when he stopped short. A group of sailormen had occupied a table close to the entrance. As Jim came to a halt—his face screwed into a hard knot—he gazed down upon the figure of Rajpoota Singh. The passion which had smouldered across seven thousand miles of water suddenly burst into flame. Jim's eyes blazed with fury. The girls across the way were quickly forgotten. He dodged behind a group of natives, waiting, watching catlike. There were five men in the

group, a Greek, a Filipino, two Eurasians and Rajpoota. Jim caught fragmentary talk about their voyage through the Straits, up through the Inland sea; of conquests they had made on the voyage around. The Lascar bent forward, his eyes glistening.

"Your women!" he drooled. "In United States I have American girl—be-aut-ee-ful! I tak her from American sailor."

That was it! The thing that had rankled in the soul of Jim ever since that night in the Greek's. His heart pounded, a lump filled his throat.

"Look—see!" Rajpoota maundered on. "She geeve me these picture locket that man-of-war feller geeve her. Ah, verry fine! I have her fer myself—"

Jim seized a bit of broken tent pole which lay at his feet and leaped in.

"You're a dirty liar!" he cried.

All five were on their feet at once. Jim missed a blow which he aimed at the jaw of Rajpoota, dodging at the same time the fist of the Greek. They closed in on him, but he kept them at a distance with vigorous swings of his club until a party of English tars from a collier, at another table, swung into the fray with a "Cheery O, lads!" Then the fight became general, with Jim dodging about to keep an eye on Rajpoota who was edging toward the exit. One of the flying missiles crashed against the swinging lamp. It went down, plunging the interior of the tent in darkness, just as the Lascar, wiggling his way out of the fighting mass, darted through the tent opening. In the last flicker of the lamp, Jim saw the movement and leaped after him. The moon emerged from behind a cloud affording sufficient light for Jim to locate the fleeing Indian twenty yards ahead,

picking his way over the ruins of the Custom House.

As Jim closed in on him, Rajpoota turned swiftly and a long knife flashed in the moonlight. Jim halted, and as the fellow lunged forward, swung his club. The blow struck Rajpoota's wrist, and the knife dropped from his hand. He stooped quickly to recover it, but with a flying leap Jim was upon him from behind, and dragged him back. Then they grappled. Rajpoota tried a jiu-jitsu trick, but tripped on a bit of wreckage, as he lost his balance, Jim's hand closed about his throat. It now became a death struggle between them. Bracing himself against a slanting girder, his hands clutching his foe's throat, Jim thrust him out of the shadow of the wall under which they stood, and a renewed flood of moonlight revealed, directly behind them at Rajpoota's feet, and wedged between a jagged mass of bricks and mortar where it had fallen from his hand, the long, gleaming knife, the blade tip pointing upward.

Held firm in Jim's grip, Rajpoota clutched wildly at the air—gasping, grunting, clawing at the face of the American, leaving great red streaks across his cheeks. While they struggled, the dull rumble of an explosion jarred the earth; billowylike, followed by a series of sharp vertical jerks. The air was ominous of fresh disaster. Off toward the bay a swaying section of wreckage fell with a crash. Bricks and mortar, loosened by the renewed disturbance, clattered about them. The grim struggle went on amid the almost audible creaking and straining of their muscles.

Jim had now forced Rajpoota to his knees, the Lascar, his eyes bulging, resisting every fraction of an inch. Their faces almost touched. Rajpoota

snarled and sought to sink his teeth into Jim's face. When the latter wrenched the Lascar's head to one side, Rajpoota spat at him. Then suddenly he slipped, Jim's knee shot forward against the wriggling body. Under the impact, Rajpoota went down backward, dragging Jim with him. The American's one hundred and ninety pounds flattened out his opponent with pile-driver force. A thin, choking scream escaped from the lips of the Indian. Jim pressed hard. Once more Singh made a convulsive effort to rise—Jim steadily pressed him back. There followed a thin, hissing sound, a shudder and Rajpoota fell back limp. He had landed full on the protruding knife blade, wedged in the ruins, and under the pressing weight of Dolan's body the point had pierced his heart.

Jim held him there—spent, panting, the gleam of triumph in his eyes. When, after several minutes, Rajpoota didn't stir, had even ceased to breathe, Jim relaxed his grip, eyeing the prostrate figure narrowly. Then, diving into the pocket of Rajpoota's blouse, Jim drew forth the locket and dangled it in the moonlight before the staring, sightless eyes.

"I got 'im!" he muttered. And laughed.

He opened the bauble and gazed happily at the smiling face of Connie Cronin. The treasured picture which had cost—this.

"The kid'll be glad," whispered Jim. "I guess I send her a postal tellin' her I got 'im an' it."

Picking his way way over the ruins to the landing dock, Jim indulged in visions of a job in a garage, a flat in Gold Street and "me wife."

Two months later, Connie Cronin sat in the shadows of Navy Park, wrapped in the smothering embraces

of a stoker from the liberty ship *Winnabago*, two days in from Buenos Aires with a cargo of quebracho wood.

"Yuh love me, Danny, doncha?" she punned.

But Danny's affirmative protestations were interrupted by the intervention of a prowling city policeman.

"Come on now, sailor," said the policeman, "there's a priest around the corner and Raymond Street jail in the next block."

"Gee, 'at reminds me," exclaimed Connie, as they moved off. "I got a

swell postal from a boy frien', which is in the U. S. N. He meets a fresh thing in Manila which stole a watch, call it, from me with my pitcher in, an' copped it from 'im. Emagin'! 'Way off there in 'at dump."

"Zat so!" growled the stoker beligerently. "Wotta hell's he gotta right to yuhr pitcher fer? I ain't standin' fer ho guys havin' yuhr pitcher if yuhr an' me is gonna git married when I git back from the next v'age."

"Aw, gee!" said Connie, squeezing his arm affectionately. "What's a pitcher? Can't I git some more took?"

WHAT PRICE LOVE?

By Carol Warren

Her dainty curves, her regal air,
 Her lips—just fashioned for a kiss—
 Entranced him. "You were made for love!"
 He whispered; visioning rapturous bliss.

The dinner came, her eyes grew warm,
 Her tiny teeth like pearly seed
 Made inroads. Then she murmured low:
 "Gosh, kid! This sure is some swell feed!"

He rallied—led her forth to dance;
 Like summer clouds they seemed to float
 Into a fairyland of dreams,
 Borne on a haunting, minor note.

She begged of him a moment's rest,
 Took slipper off, then said: "Oh, Bo!
 I cannot dance another step!
 This damned old corn of mine hurts so!"

He lingered when he said goodnight;
 Her eyes like purpling skies above
 Played havoc with his bursting heart.
 He breathed his passion—sought her love!

With queenly grace she silenced him:
 "That stuff don't penetrate my bean.
 If you're hipped on winning my young heart,
 Say it—with a limousine!"

Saturday Afternoon

By GERTRUDE BROOKE HAMILTON



BEATRIX LOOMIS

IT was Saturday afternoon in the dead of summer, just before the last stretch of hot weather. Young Joseph Upton pulled down the top of his desk with a movement of vehement impatience; it was summertime, and he was in love and unsure of the girl he loved, and generally in a cussed mood! He stretched his arms and shoulders, looking about him. His office was in a downtown street famous for financial transactions of fabulous proportions, typical working quarters for a young executive of initiative, keen intelligence, and a mind fully versed in finance. On this slack afternoon, with his assistant and

stenographer gone for the day, he folded his arms on his desk and laid his head on them.

His thoughts were of Beatrix—
Trix Loomis.

She was the daughter of a man higher in "the Street" than Upton, a financier whose name commanded immediate respect. Her mother had been a famous Virginia beauty. One of her sisters had married an English lord; another had lately walked to the altar of St. Thomas's with a steel magnate's son. Trix had been out two seasons. She was different from her sisters; more of a daredevil, less ordinary in type. She had a way

with her that provoked men and women—women to gossip, men to love. People wondered why she didn't marry, catch up a millionaire between her slim thumb and forefinger and laugh to see him squirm. Perhaps she was waiting for a multi-millionaire!

She had been nice to young Upton, very. There had been times in the six months he had dined, danced, flirted and fussed with her, that he had felt singularly sure of her; but most of the time he doubted dismally if she cared a jot for him.

This afternoon was one of the times when his caring for her made him miserable.

He lifted his head to look at himself in a mirror over his stenographer's desk. He was a clean-cut, presentable chap, well-tailored, firm-skinned; if the lines about his eyes were pronounced, the fineness of the eyes was undeniable; if the mouth was commercial, a dimple in the chin relieved it. His face was not a happy one. It seemed to him, in the hot, uneasy moment, that Trixie's face laughed at him from the mirror: dark, oblong eyes of changing lights; arrogant brows; a mouth wilfully red, wistfully aloof; hair neither blond nor *brune*, but shimmering off into a molten shade; creamy skin; spirited nostrils. . . . He frowned, and smiled, at the fancy that the lake of quicksilver held her face.

Without volition, his hand went out for his telephone.

Trix Loomis happened to be in town, having remained in the city to keep her father company while the rest of the family went to their summer home on Lake Placid; at least, this was the reason she had given young Upton for staying in the sweltering city. There had been a certain reticence in her filial avowal, a gleam

of fleet aggression which had made him instantly wonder *why* she was staying in town this summer.

Her voice was soon on his wire, cultured, lilting:

"Oh, how do you do, Mr. Upton? Isn't this a hot week-end?"

He sighed, lustily—her voice was so deliciously *her*!

"How do you do?" he said, in a way that made the stereotyped question more like, "How are you, love?" His words never mattered very much, when talking to Trix. "Are you weakening about remaining in town these dog days, Miss Loomis?"

Her laughter was silvery. "I'm enjoying it."

"Who taught you to fib so easily? Will you take pity on a toiling man, and give me the afternoon?"

"Why, surely; delighted. But what shall we do?"

"I've a launch at the boat-club; we might sail. Or there are some cool spots in town and some diversions."

"Let's be diverted, at any cost. Come for me in about an hour's time."

"Thank you!"

"It is nothing. Good-bye." The click of the receiver was just a trifle hasty.

He sat for a few moments looking at the telephone, as if her voice were still drifting out of it—slight, crystalline, threaded with its hint of withdrawal and flick of gay pathos—the voice of Beatrix, of the girl he loved! Finally, he rose to cross the office for his hat and walking-stick.

Joseph Upton took a subway express to the conservative part of town where he had chambers. A tubbing and shower and a change of habiliments followed. Then he went to Beatrix Loomis, who lived in a tasteful house just off Riverside Drive.

In the Loomis drawing-room, done

up in tape and linen and summer nettings, Trix gave him her hand. She was diaphonous in filmy attire, floppy hat and light open toe footgear. The oblong eyes, in lifting, changed from hazel to dancing brown.

"Shall we choose the river-ride?" she queried.

"My choice," he approved—because it was her choice.

They left the linen-shrouded residence, and walked leisurely over to an entrance of Riverside Park. Its wide green spaces and easy tiers of steps going down to the river were wondrous to traverse with the tall, slim naiad of one's desire. A rustic foot-bridge led them to the boat-club, where awnings were blowing in the breeze and where verandahs had great wicker chairs and tea-tables.

Upton and Trix Loomis were soon launched on the blue river.

The weather sparkled, the breeze brimmed with effervescent suggestions, the river was dimpled as the back of a naughty danseuse.

"Shall you be in town all summer?" he asked, as his craft took the waves.

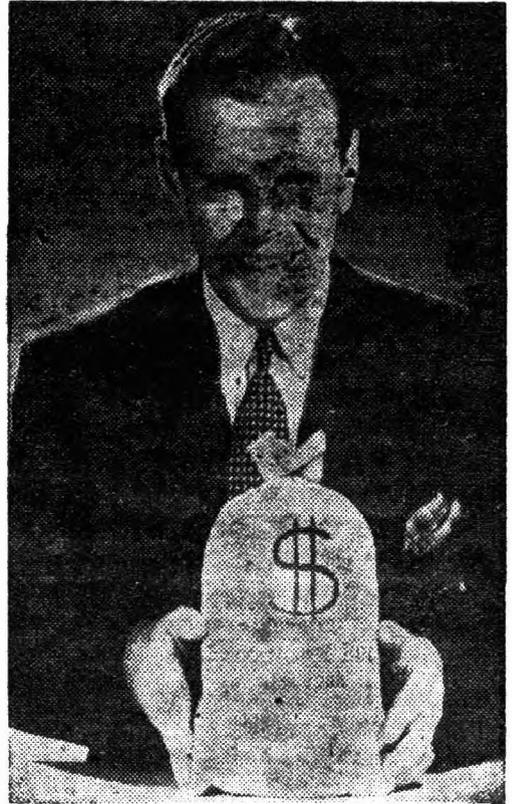
"I hope to be," she replied, from her cushioned end of the launch.

He caught her glance, held it. He looked at her without speaking, turning the wheel so rapidly that they rode between ridges of foam. His motor-boat left in its wake a fleeting path of white foam, while beyond it, the waters were yet to be cut by a sun-burnished prow. On and on flowed the uncut river ahead of them. Trix took off her hat. Her hair turned gold in the sunlight. Particles of water moistened her cheeks and mouth. Her eyes were amber under their well defined brows. Once, when the craft danced over a billow, she laughed.

He echoed the laugh, in as young cadence.

"What would you do if I lost control of the wheel and let the boat go free?" he asked with a trace of recklessness.

She shrugged, against the breeze and the spray.



Joe held the Money Bags.

"Drown, probably," with her surface gaiety.

His hands tightened on the wheel. "Shall we race the sun?"

She nodded, face quickening through increasing foam and wind.

"Yes; I like any sort of a race!"

"So do I," he said, "when the stakes are worth it." He watched the dews from the ridges of spray drench her. Higher and higher they rose, the snowy, sun-topped ridges. His boat seemed speed-crazy, it whizzed through the waters like an arrow shot

from a tipsy hand. Showers of water-drops rained on both of them.

"So do I," he repeated, long afterwards, in a way that made the words seem "I love you!"

The boat reached the more solitary lengths of the river. The shores on either side widened. They were far enough up the sun-bathed river to seem nearly alone.

He slackened speed, and they drifted over prismatic wavelets.

They talked of water sports and watering places, of social events of the past season, politics, fashions and shows. The afternoon sailed on. The sun made a path of gold on the river. They talked of everything but love, because he was full of it and he wasn't sure of her. She was a practised flirt, and no matter how nice she was to him there was always present in her manner a shade of mockery.

On their return to the water-club, they had dinner on a verandah. The sun dipped lower. The river rippled and broke against the pier at the picturesque club. Over the teacups, their eyes met rather often.

Upton watched her hands with sugar tongs and cream-jug.

"Your father should be congratulated," he ventured; "most business men go home to empty houses at this time of the year." He went further: "I wonder if you'd treat a husband as well—"

She parried the issue. "How can I tell? I've never had a husband."

He plunged: "Are you averse to taking one on?"

Her eyes fled to the river. "Are you proposing?"

"Yes, if you're accepting. No, if you're not." He made a vain attempt to camouflage his eagerness, to convey that his life might not be blasted

if she refused him—and his face was lovelorn as a loon's!

Trix was silent, looking out over the river, drifting with the moment.

The pause was broken in upon by a chance mention of her name at an adjoining table, where two women were drinking some opaque stuff from tall glasses and gossiping indiscreetly. Their chatter ran:

"No, I've never met Miss Loomis—Trixie Loomis, my dear. But I know Tom Runkle quite well."

"Tommy is why she doesn't marry."

"Is that really so? What a pity!"

"And she has her people fooled to the point where she can remain free in town."

"She and Tom are going about together?"

"Yes, under the rose. His wife—"

The scandal ran on, injudiciously audible. . . .

Young Upton kept his glance on Beatrix, saw the swift shade on her face, part pique, part nonchalance; felt his happiness of the afternoon collapse about his ears. He hadn't happened to have heard her name linked with Tom Runkle's; but the chance hearing, coming at a psychological moment, seemed to clear up the mists of her state of single-blessedness.

Tom Runkle . . . high in the street as her father . . . with a wife a bit oldish! . . . In his quick surmisings, he was cynical over the credulity which had led him to even half-conjure up a daughter devoted enough to endure the town heat for her father; a modern maid simple enough to have no under-strings to her bow; a little daredevil whose coqueteries were entirely innocent.

The look she brought back from the river seemed to feel everything in his mind, for she did not pursue

the subject of marriage or dally with amorous converse. She began to talk, quite too brilliantly, of nothings.

He took the cue, bitterly. Tom Runkle! What a mess!

They soon left the club verandah and strolled up through the dark, across the drive, to her home.

"Thank you for the afternoon," he said, head bared, eyes tragic in spite of himself.

Her answer was disconcerting, low-voiced:

"Why didn't you let me drown? Go free? In the sun-race."

His hands went out to her, fell back. He gave her a look that dealt with but one fact—his love for her; and another look, hot as the weather, that dealt with Tom Runkle and herself.

She paled, opened her mouth to speak, turned away with a cool good-bye.

His farewell was terse, pent-up, contemptuous. He left her, feeling that he would not see her again, and that her ability to carry off the situation, her refinement, gloss, poise, made her none the less common. For Tom Runkle was coarse-grained.

It was incredible!

Young Upton walked back to the Drive.

He halted at the stone wall above the river and used his stick to dislodge some pebbles; likening them to hardened little humans poked about by the devil's walking-stick; wondering if in all the long, hot town there might be anyone who wasn't sizzling to the tune of the devil's stick, anyone immune to inordinate and sinful affections, anyone impervious to the other sex, anyone fibrous enough to believe in virtue and hang to it. It was funny, he cogitated, how often the bars were let down and people came to understand other people, of a Saturday af-

ternoon in summer. Every other day in the week had its guard up. . . . He savagely dislodged more pebbles. . . . Well, Trix had been shown up by a couple of incautious voices. Good luck to her little under-the-rose affair with Tom Runkle!

But this good sportsmanship left him with a sense of loneliness, a need for companionship, for some sort of solace. He was tired, suddenly, of this very select part of town where the women were good to look at and not so good to know. He thought of the east side of the city and a girl there, whom he had known for a number of years—Madge Cuff, daughter of "one-eyed Sam" who ran a mission over on Avenue A. Upton had first come upon Sam's East River Mission when reporting on a local paper, and at varying points in the career which had soon carried him up from newspaperdom he'd remembered Madge and crossed town to see her. Madge thought a good deal of him. In one of those odd criss-crosses, he was, it might be, the reason why little Madge Cluff didn't marry any of the boys who hung around Sam's mission. His humor freshened, thinking of Madge, who drew her sustenance from the existence of God and was boisterously, youthfully virtuous.

Loveless thoughts revolving around Madge, the young executive turned from the graveled promenade and went east through the heat-haze that was closing over the city.

He struck away from the blocks of boarded-up houses and clean sweeps of concrete, to a section where the pavements swarmed with partially-clad human tadpoles, where women leaned from decadent windows for air, and doorways had coatless youths with the inevitable cigarette sagging from lip.

Sam's East River Mission was in a building dilapidated as any. The first floor was given over to a sewer-pipe company; the second floor had cheap dental parlors. Upton took the stairs to the mission under the roof; a couple of rooms, the larger with a piano and a battered ice-cooler, whose spigot dripped into a tin basin with a handy soap-box attached.

Upton went to the cooler for a drink of water.

"A n y b o d y home?" he called through the mission rooms.

"Praise the mount!" a girl's voice answered, and Madge Cluff came to him from the rear room.

She was just the sort of young woman to shout glory at the derelicts of the East River section; long-armed, wide-shouldered, flat-bosomed, fresh-skinned, blue-eyed, with flaxen hair parted at one side and twisted into a knot the size of a butter-plate, and a mouth curved for loud prayer. She was not more than twenty, and full of animal spirits.

As she came, Upton chastised her with a splatter of ice-water.

"How are the transgressors coming along?" he laughed.

"You should know," replied the Cluff girl, cupping her large hand under the spigot and flinging a return salutation in his face. She was quick to wipe the water from his cheeks with a corner of her red-checked apron.

"Where have you been, stranger?" she asked, sighing. "Pap was saying the other day that the winds of temptation must have got you, making you forget us."

"No; I've just been working hard, Madge," said Upton, putting his stick and hat on the piano.

She stood his stick in a corner and hung his hat on it. "The boys don't

like swell things lying around," in explanation.

Eyeing him with blue eyes frankly worshipful:

"Have you had your dinner? I'm cooking tripe and string beans today; there'll be iced coffee, too. Pap's out, scavenging."

"Then we'll have the tripe to ourselves, eh?" said Upton, thinking of Trixie's changeable eyes. He followed Madge to the living-room-kitchen behind the mission hall.

The room was hot, but the kind of heat atoned for by its very ferocity, crudely torrid. Joseph Upton, aggressive young executive whom financiers were beginning to notice, sat at a cloth-covered table, while friend Madge added a plate and some flat pewter to the table service.

Meeting his eyes, Madge said, with a gust of affection:

"How's the boy?"

"Tired," he said.

"Sad and desponding?" she laughed, testing the beans bubbling on the gas stove by putting one in her mouth.

Upton watched her white teeth demolish the bean:

"Ever get tired yourself, Madge?"

She put two water tumblers on the table: "Yes. I'm tired this afternoon, boy."

"Why?"

She waved a water tumbler vaguely: "Oh, the heat, I reckon; or maybe it's the end of the week—Sunday still to come, you know."

He was quizzical:

"You work hard saving souls of a Sunday?"

She laughed, shaking her head.

Then she turned from the stove, with a dish in each hand, red-cheeked, flaxen hair curling in the heat.

"This tripe will melt in your mouth," she predicted, placing the

dishes without order on the table and going to an icebox for a pitcher of cold black coffee and a glass plate of butter substitute.

Upton served two portions of tripe and string beans.

"It's good," he said of the honeycomb meat.

While eating, Madge made no conversation. Once or twice she pushed the bread plate to him or asked for the tripe dish. River air and the breath of the streets stirred the limp curtains at the windows of the little room that would soon need a light. The drip from the water-cooler in the mission hall was audible.

Madge pushed back her plate and put her elbows on the table. Her eyes were on the window.

"By and by, some gale will blow you off for good," she said to him. "You'll quit dropping in here."

"There are always plenty of sinners about," he comforted, stretching out his well-shaped hand across the table.

Madge impulsively put her cheek on his hand. Her words were:

"I wish you were just ordinary, like us!"

"I'm not extraordinary, Madge."

Her reply rose from the hour, her youth, the fact that she saw him so seldom and then across a social gulf, and a fancy for him—which he, perhaps, was more cognizant of than she:

"I'd like to guide and hold you, boy," full-voiced.

Because Trix hadn't evinced any desire to either hold or guide him, the murmured impulse touched him, moved him to put out his other hand and finger the hemp knot of Madge's hair.

"You'd love me, girl?" curiously.

"Yes," admitted the little mission-

ary of the East Side. She was quiescent for the second, cheek burning.

Then she straightened, and began to jumble the dishes together, ashamed of her spasm of feelings. She arose and lighted a gas jet. The cutlery and plates clattered into a pan and were soused with hot water. She spoke, to cover her embarrassment, of Pap and the boys; told of one bum who'd "made a hole in the river" the week before, and another who'd gone to glory straight. . . . The steam from the pan of water arose in her face, curling her lashes and hair; she was tumultuously goodlooking, hands plying dishcloth and towel with youth's grace, eyes now avoiding, now seeking his.

At length, she said, of her impromptu love-confession.

"Forget it, boy."

Upton laughed. "Forget it, yourself, Madge," easily.

"I'd better," she said, bluntly yet cheerily, as she went into the other room and looked into the water-cooler to see if it needed more ice. Replacing the top of the cooler, her uneven touch clattered it to the floor.

Upton went to pick up the cooler top for her. Fitting battered tin edge to tin edge, his eyes met hers. Involuntarily, each bent forward. A sigh, a laugh; they had kissed, over the top of the frosty water-can.

His loneliness, the rankling gap which Trixie's frailty had left, tempted him to prolong a foolish moment. But he was, in the main, a decent chap, hardly given to after-dinner spooning with a young thing emboldened by her Pap's absence and a tweak of nature.

He took Madge's thin arms from about his neck, folded her hands together in the half-dark hall through whose windows were pouring the

sounds of a summer dusk on the east side.

She held to his hands: "You're the only boy I know who hasn't been a bum or a 'testifier.' I wouldn't let any of them kiss me, not for a crown in heaven!"

"Which shows you worthy of a crown in heaven, Madge," soberly.

She stammered. "I've sung so much of heaven, this is my first taste of it!"

"More praise to you, Madge."

Tendrils of hair fell away from her face, and suddenly she buried her flaxen head on his shoulder.

But young Upton's mood was quixotic this afternoon. He was lonely, yet prone to survey rather than share the havoc which mortal flesh seemed heir to. His eye was caught by an open singing-book on the piano rest, the number of the song, and the first measure.

"I will sing you a song of that beautiful land,
The far-away home of the soul. . . ."

He looked down at Madge Cluff, who, with her God to shout to, seemed just like the rest, ready to be dislodged at the slack end of the week! Tomorrow she might petition not to be led into temptation; tonight, moved from her orbit by summertime and chance.

Ironically, as if he were better than himself, he lifted her head by reading aloud to her, from the singing-book:

"That home of the soul in my visions and dreams,
Its bright jasper walls I can see. . . ."

He laughed down at her, teasing her back to her normal (and virtuous) self.

Madge, putting a hand on the piano, managed to laugh, too. She reached

out her free hand to take his hat and stick from the corner.

"Good-by, boy," she said unsteadily. "Next time you come, come Sunday."

He accepted his traps from her:

"I'll remember, Madge. Good-by." A rapid step carried him to the door and out of the rooms. In going, he paused long enough to put a generous donation in the fund-box outside Sam's East River Mission.

Young Upton left the section of town given over to unbridled summer and a Saturday holiday.

His humor was grim, as he walked along with no definite aim. His thoughts were idly cynical. West or east, it was the same old foolery, conscious or unconscious, the same restive insurrection and folly. Beatrix Loomis had disappointed him. Madge Cluff hadn't moved him to any feeling of gratitude for a passing reflection of spirituality. He'd looked for possible love and found chicanery, for refreshment and found monotony!

Upton hailed a taxicab, giving the driver the address of a fashionable hotel.

He was going (and he didn't care who knew it) to call on the cleverest, most stimulating and most dangerous woman he knew, Viola Ray.

Viola lived in town all the year 'round. She had a mentality which had evinced itself rather electrically at Wall Street. She was neither young nor old. She drew men about her as a magnet draws iron filings. When everything else palled, when the world went stale and the one woman funkled, there was nothing like a few moments near Viola. He thought of her face, as the needle of the cab-meter swung around, gray eyes under a swirl of moose-colored hair, a nose too long and

pointed for perfection, a mouth too wide for anything but charm, clear, vibrant skin, and eddies of lights and shadows holding beauty and ugliness.

His cab stopped before her hotel, one of those modern odes to luxury which abound in the vicinity of Park Avenue.

Within, he sent up his name to Viola, and was told he might wait for her in the lounge. He sauntered through an electrically cooled place, taking a seat on a duplex divan and watching the flow of life through the lounge, where the wall-candles between windows of leaded glass shed a blinkless glow on the old and young, the giddy and grave, furtive and bold, rouged and pallid—

He came to his feet as Viola Ray entered the lounge.

A woman of unusual grace, quietly gowned, she appeared oblivious to anyone outside her radius; and she might have been walking alone in some effulgent lane, as she approached her caller.

"My dear Upton!" she exclaimed, in a voice magnetic, yet metallic.

Shaking hands with her, he was conscious of the vitality in her fingers. He felt his youth, his perceptions that however acute had yet to be made gilt-edged by time, as he surveyed her.

"I've come to chat with you; I hope you can spare me a half-hour," he said.

"Any other day I couldn't have spared you a moment," she replied, suggesting a busy week, as she seated herself in a current of artificially cooled air.

He took the place apportioned him on the other side of the divan's curve, so that they sat face to face in upholstery of satin and on cushions which curved to the human form and

afforded a fleet impression of sympathetic springs.

"I'm out of sorts," he told her, without guise.

Viola took stock of him: "I can't credit that."

His color rose. He laughed.

"At the end of my thirty minutes, I'll be soaring," he predicted.

Her smile condoned the youthful implication while it curbed his tongue.

"Have you had a dull week, downtown?"

"Fairly steady," he answered buoyantly. "My grouch isn't a money grouch, for a wonder. It—it hits a different spot."

Her brows contracted, concentrating a good deal of expression in her eyes and leaving the rest of her face blank.

He confided, boyishly:

"Since closing time I've had my last illusion smashed by one young woman, and I barely escaped smashing the illusions of another."

Her interest in his peccadilloes was short:

"And before closing time, Upton, my dear?"

"There were big doings," he answered briskly.

"And you're out of sorts this Saturday afternoon?" Her laugh was speculative.

"I shouldn't be," he admitted, rallying. He looked the length of the hotel lounge, his attractive face intent as his thoughts switched to his office and "the Street."

She spoke, rather slowly: "It seems to me, Upton, that the prevailing pessimism in financial quarters isn't justified." She launched into a few radiantly energetic questions concerning current quotations.

He turned to her, caught out of any-

thing less vital than the manipulation and government of money. An active conversation opened between them. High money, falling exchanges and inflated levels were discussed. He talked with no surplus words yet with a driving force which carried him along. She, too, conserved her utterances while conveying an intense enthusiasm for the subject. Their half-hour was soon ticked off. An hour passed.

A full tilt in his and the city's affairs, Joseph Upton remembered that Viola had the markets at her finger's end and she numbered among her acquaintances names big in the city's business. He was tipping her off rather more than he should!

"I've overstayed my time," he said, catching himself up in the tide of commercial discussion. "Why didn't you cut me short?"

Viola arose. "I was enjoying you."

He grimaced: "Naturally."

She gave him her hand.

"Thank you for a delightful gabble," she smiled, vivid in her conserved maturity.

Viola Ray walked through the lounge with him, the cynosure of many eyes as she bade him adieu at one of the exits of the hostelry which housed her charming, graceless head of moose-colored hair — which thatched one of the cleverest brains in Manhattan.

Young Upton left the vicinity of her hotel with a rapid gait.

The elixir of Viola's presence bore him along the blocks between her domicile and his. He had the unpleasant feeling of having talked too much, the knowledge that she would put to use every word he had uttered. In discomfiture, he wished he'd kept away from her. He had first met Viola Ray at a public banquet where the diners

were financiers of both sexes. He should have known better than to prattle money to her! He walked, using his stick irately, through the smart middle section of the town where the lights shone yellow in the heat.

Disgruntled, vexed and overfatigued, he reached his own dwelling-place and let himself into his apartment.

His commodious rooms had a strong breeze through them. His man had laid out his slippers and a snack of something cold to eat. The modified light of the reading-lamp was the the only illumination. The whole place seemed a haven, at the end of the afternoon. Upton dropped into his favorite chair, reaching for pipe and tobacco jar. His skin felt water-burned and prickly. His tongue was dry from talking. He'd drunk tea with Beatrix—and coffee with Madge—and gone on a word-jag with Viola Ray. Avoiding the thought of Beatrix that, after a while, would be uppermost and beating off all other thoughts, he generalized her sex, in a soliloquy hardly gallant.

Women (so ran his thoughts), serene, deceptive, selfish; disarming, simple, damning; clever, avid, cruel! Women seemed to hold in their tender palms, in the curve of their elbows and breasts, in their eyes, in their hair, in the fragrance of their breath and the softness of their bodies, an eternal promise of balm and abundance. But the aroma they exhaled was no more beneficent than the scent of any flower doomed to early decay. His reflections were: when a man has life strong in him and his nerves are level—why, let him have women to jig with; but, when he is tired of money-making and the rest, when he wants solace, and a bit of

God, and real stimulus, let him spend his half-holiday alone.

Joseph Upton, young executive, smoked his pipe in solitude.

A ring of his doorbell was followed by the tread of his man servant through the hall. Then a light step sounded in his essentially masculine quarters.

Upton rose from his chair to see Beatrix Loomis on the threshold of his smoking-room.

Hot tobacco tumbled from the bowl of his pipe as it slipped through his fingers and showered in red sparks to the floor.

Trix stood looking at him, across the wide, windy room. Her hair blew up as it had done on the river. But her eyes were almost black now, shadowed, very large. She was the first to speak:

"May I come in for a moment?"

"Of course!" He stepped forward, his astonishment at her presence only half concealed.

She entered the room with her fleet, contained step.

"May I sit down?" half laughing.

He wheeled a wide chair to her, hardly knowing what he did. She was cloaked but hatless; his reading light made her hair seem more brown than gold, yet shot with all sorts of glints. Below her hair, her face was pale, a bit luminous.

Trix took a chair, motioning him to another.

"Pray, don't look as though I were Mother Hubbard and you were the only bone in my cupboard! I haven't come to eat you."

He flushed, laughed jerkily:

"I beg your pardon! I didn't mean to look like an edible." He leaned against the back of his chair, waiting for her next words; thinking of

Tom Runkle and wondering if this was the way she dropped in on Tom, whenever she pleased and where!

Beatrix took her time about speaking. She sat looking at him, long, slim hands on the arms of the chair, near-gold head inclined to rest for the second against the high carved back, mouth drooping from habitual gaiety to unwonted sweetness. At length, she said:

"Confess that you've been thinking scandalous things about me for the last three hours."

He shook his head: "I don't waste my brain matter on scandal."

She lifted her hands, and let them fall again:

"Let's be serious for about five minutes."

"Well?" He was conscious of a consuming seriousness, which took form of a fear that she was going to confess all about Tom to him and he was going to suffer; yet he made no effort to check whatever she might say, because if she talked he would hear her voice in his rooms and have something to remember till his love for her died its hard death.

Trixie's first attempt at being serious was a laugh.

"I'm going to scandalize you, in spite of the conservation of your brain!" she declared. "I've come to see you, because I love you . . ." She made the statement with delicate daring.

He whitened. "Have your fun, if you wish it."

"Is love fun?" she was suddenly mischievous, yet with pain somewhere in her eyes. "I haven't found it so—waiting for you to speak, doubting if you cared a flip of your thumb, believing you mad about me, then beginning to doubt all over again. Is that fun?"

He fairly shot a retort at her:

"Ask Tom Runkle. He may be better versed in such matters."

She shook her head:

"No. I've come to answer more than ask; I've come to answer what you said this afternoon. It's 'yes.'" She looked at him with eyes unruly as the waves the motor-boat had ploughed in the radiant sunlight.

He folded his arms on the back of his chair, leaning on them. His look was haggard.

"What about Runkle? Is it true that you have been seen about town with him?"

She nodded. "It's true."

He was stern. "You admit it? Then, what can there be between us?"

"Love," she answered readily, "and marriage."

"With Runkle somewhat in the background? Too modern. Thanks." His face belied the curbed words.

She stood up, holding his glance: "If you love me I wouldn't be 'too anything' for you. You'd want me so you wouldn't care how many Toms you had to contend with."

"If that's your idea of a perfect bride, it isn't mine." He kept his arms on the chair.

"I'm not perfect; that's why I want you to love me, thinking me faulty. I'm full of faults; but I love you. I always have, ever since my first dance with you." She came to him, holding out her hands: "Don't you want me, despite the gossip?" She actually touched his breast with her exquisite fingers.

Upton took the girl he loved in his arms, caught in one big embrace all her slimness and culture and deviltry and foibles.

"I want you any way, Trix! I love you—love you—love you!"

"This," she said, with a ring of faint laughter, "is what I came to find

out. No man really loves a woman unless he loves her in spite of something."

"I love you!"

"Spite of the afternoon's talk?"

"Yes!"

"And that it may be true?"

He winced. "Yes! I'd love you if you were the devil's own daughter!"

She sighed, content. "I'm only my father's daughter," so, the sweetness was flooding her voice and face, "I'll tell you now why I came to your apartment, why I couldn't let the week-end go by without—" Tone warning, "I'm going to tell you about Tom Runkle and myself."

"Don't! I do not care to hear it!"

"I do not care to tell it, so we're quits." She laughed, with a breath of relief.

He took her by the shoulders, inclined to shake her.

"Did you honor me with a visit just to back out of any explanation that my caring for you might merit?" He was suffering already.

"Your caring for me?" softly.

"You know *how* I care!"

She nodded, eyes pure gold for the moment.

"I believe you do." Slowly: "I've been seen several times with Tom Runkle this summer, because of my father. And, please, consider this confidential. Father, you know, has been one of the keenest men in the money game. What you don't know is that within the last few months his mind has snapped. He looks well as ever he did; none of his friends know that his nerves have gone back on him so badly that he cries easily as a child, gets confused, loses his tongue, can't remember. He and Tom Runkle had some deals on this summer which demanded father's best. I happened in at one of their conferences. Father

snapped; Runkle, aware of it— I'm not up in the matters of 'the Street.' So, because I didn't want father to lose, I sought the advice of someone who was more sagacious than I—a woman in town named Viola Ray. Such a woman! She knew just where to hit Tom Runkle under the belt, should he take advantage of dad's neurasthenia, and she knew just how I could best Tom Runkle—by flirting some requisite facts out of him. So I dined with him once, danced with him once, motored with him once. That was the extent of my affair "under the rose." Owing to Miss Ray, some fervent prayers on my part, and some pretty lively flirting, I saved dad's neck in the deals." Laughter threading the dulcet voice.

"The idea of your believing two tattlers chatting in an idle hour! Tell me you're ashamed; and tell me, once again, you'd love me if I had cause to be ashamed."

She lifted a face brimming with volatile truth, weighed by the inevitable yearning which a rich man's daughter feels when confronted by her love problem.

Upton proceeded to completely satisfy any doubts she might have of him, not telling her how he'd doubted her in the good old-fashioned way of young love the world over.

He could have knelt and kissed the hem of her very modern skirt.

Finally, Trix said:

"I came in my car; come back with me and tell father. If he cries, dear, don't notice. He's been tired for so many years on Saturday afternoon!"

She put her hand through his arm, leading him while she leaned on him, light as thistledown, lovely as a perfect Sabbath dawn.

Young Upton went with her, chastened, full of a sudden liking for faulty, defamed humanity.

BUNGALOW BLISS

By Lucia Trent

Give me a bungalow
Big enough for two
With wide windows looking
On a lovely view.

Give me a fireside
And a dancing flame,
A low voice speaking
Only my name;
Two hearts playing
At an old, old game.

Give me a bungalow
Big enough for two;
Give me a man's heart
That always beats true.
Yes, give me a bungalow
With no rent due!

Caesar's Wife

By CLARA MANDERSCHIED

"**W**HAT a beautiful shawl! See, on that girl at the next table!" Mrs. Donald Marshall indicated the direction by a slight nod, accompanied by another long, wistful gaze at the gorgeous wrap.

"Yes, isn't it nifty?" replied Mrs. Churchill, with merely a passing glance at the shawl as she resumed her conversation with Dr. Marshall. She and her husband had at last persuaded the reserved doctor and his wife to come into town with them for the evening, and she was highly elated over the fact that Mrs. Marshall had already proffered the long-sought invitation to attend the next meeting of her exclusive bridge club.

Under cover of the Churchills' ingratiating, "Indeed, Dr. Marshall?" and "How very interesting, Doctor!" Mrs. Marshall's eyes continued to dwell on the shawl—dreaming, dreaming. The daringly exotic red and yellow flowers on their black background helped her create an atmosphere for which she longed, but could never actually experience as the wife of Glendow's faultless physician:—a gay house-party in the country; a porch dimly lit by paper lanterns; a secluded corner; a sleek blonde head bent over her hand.

"Don't you agree with me, Mrs. Marshall?" Mr. Churchill turned toward her. She gave a start. How far away her dream had carried her.

When they were finally alone in the taxi, after leaving the Churchills at their door, she said to her husband:

"Don, I'd love to have a Spanish shawl."

"A Spanish shawl? But, my dear, there's nothing dignified about them, they always remind me of a cabaret dancer. That gray brocade is much

handsomer. Think of your position!"

She might have known it would be useless. . . . Her thoughts took another turn. She wondered what their daughter, away at Vassar, was doing. Burning the midnight oil probably. Did Virginia ever think of her mother after she had finished her dutiful weekly letter home? She was so like her father—a scholar, serious and able. But her mother could not suppress a smile as she thought of her own girlhood; the undisputed belle of her set, vivacious and frivolous, with all the men at her feet until the doctor, ten years her senior, returning home from the University, had won her after a brief but masterful courtship.

The next morning, after reading the paper all through breakfast, Dr. Marshall kissed his wife absent-mindedly and said:

"Well, good-bye, Midge; I may not be in till late. Will, probably, be out on the links sometime during the afternoon. If there are any emergency calls, telephone the club-house."

"Dear Don," she mused as the door shut after him; "he's a man's man and it's only natural he should want to spend what time he can snatch from his trying cases playing golf or cards, but the days are so long with only the radio for company. If I could drive the car I believe I'd run out to Aunt Emma's for a day or so. The new puppies she wrote about must be cunning now. I could walk under the blossom-covered appletrees and go down to the brook for watercress."

Her thoughts ran on: Perhaps Vincent might drop in; Vincent, the son of their good neighbors, now graduated a year but still unable to find a niche for himself.

After scanning the ads in the morn-

ing paper, she went upstairs to their bedroom and began straightening up the dresser. She caught a glimpse of her face in the mirror—so like a girl's despite her years; the wonderful mass of coquettishly curly hair, unbobbed because of the doctor's prejudice; the hint of mischief in her eyes; her lithe form. All these bespoke a keen appreciation of the lighter joys of life; dancing, flirting, possibly the playing

with fire.

As she turned from the mirror to the window, where she could see Vincent's mother cutting her first roses, the doorbell rang and she hastened down to answer it.

"Good morning, Vincent; how are you today?"

"Very well, thank you, Mrs. Marshall. Is the doctor in?"

He always went through this for-

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mality, but both she and he knew, although nothing had been said, that the time had long since passed when he came to see the doctor.

"No, he's gone; so sorry."

"Oh, never mind; just stopped in to return this book. How well you're looking this morning!"

"Thanks, Vince." She knew him for an impractical dreamer, but his unqualified admiration was most gratifying. She at once became animated.

"We went into town with the Churchills last night, to dinner and the theater. At dinner I saw such a perfectly ravishing Spanish shawl on a girl at the next table. I'd adore having one. Do you know, Vince, I can just see myself on a moonlit night in an open roadster with some gay Lothario at the wheel, wrapped in that enchanting shawl, bound for the beach and—"

"Don't, please, Mrs. Marshall," interrupted Vincent, as he put his hand on her shoulder.

"At last!" she thought, although she moved discreetly away.

"Come down to the shore with me tonight," he continued excitedly. "I'll make all the arrangements and you can meet me at the Maple Avenue Station. No one would know; it's much too early in the season for any of the bunch to be about. Oh, Mrs. Marshall, my life is hell—hell, I tell you! Father and I just had another scene. He doesn't understand; he simply thinks I'm lazy. If I didn't have you to talk to I'd go crazy," and he sank into the nearest chair.

Now that the anticipated moment had arrived, she was somewhat frightened, and endeavored to relieve the tension by striking a lighter vein.

"But I couldn't, Vince; I haven't any shawl, you know," she replied laughingly, as she moved toward the window. "Better run along home and water the lawn for your mother. I

can see her doing it from here."

He made no reply, and she continued to stand at the window, with her back to him. Presently, she heard him get up, go to the door and close it slowly behind him. A minute later she caught a glimpse of him crossing the little path their two families had worn as a short cut between the houses.

Well, that was finished. She breathed a sigh of relief. Just a boy's foolish fancy that she had dispelled by her levity. She congratulated herself on her clever handling of the situation with that facetious remark about the shawl. Undoubtedly, his vanity would be wounded and she would miss his little attentions and the suggestion of intrigue his presence always brought, but it was better so. She was Dr. Marshall's wife, with her husband's exalted position to consider, and Vincent was only an idle boy, consumed by the dissatisfaction of inaction. Still, how she would have enjoyed going with him! He had been so much in earnest and his eyes had followed her every move for months. Such an attractive personality, and the best father and mother in the world; but, for all that, how little he appeared to be getting out of life. Perhaps, it was his fault; perhaps not. After spoiling him for years, his father was now thoroughly disgusted with him. Since leaving college he had made several attempts to get started in his chosen profession, but invariably he found some trifling reason for dropping out; either he wasn't appreciated or his associates proved to be the wrong kind.

But, much as she sympathized with him, it was scarcely her problem . . . What! Was that the clock striking ten? She must get on with the work, and she quickly crossed the front hall on her way to the kitchen. She was an excellent housekeeper—so particular, in fact, she never could find a maid

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to suit her, and, then, the household duties kept her mind occupied to some extent.

While she was eating her solitary luncheon she tried to make some plans for the evening. The time dragged so! She would call up Mrs. James and suggest, if the doctor got home in time, that they might drop in for a game of bridge, but on second thought she abandoned the idea; Mrs. James was such a poor player. Also, she knew that if she did succeed in getting Don off, the men would shortly turn from the game to the more interesting topic of golf, while Mrs. James prepared some of the most atrociously bad coffee it had ever been her misfortune to drink. No, it was scarcely worth the martyred expression Don would wear all evening.

Here her thoughts were interrupted by the door-bell. In answer to her response, a boy from Craig's thrust a large box toward her, saying as he did so, "Mrs. Marshall?"

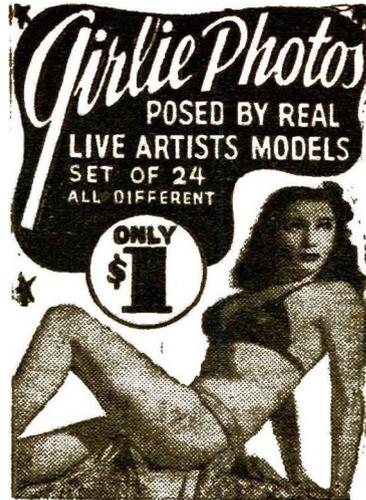
"Yes," she answered, eying the package dubiously. She had ordered nothing from Craig's. However, she took it into her room and opened it.

Could it be possible? Yes, it was—a Spanish shawl, lying there in all its sensuous beauty of heavily embroidered flowers and long, thick fringe. Had Don relented and ordered it for her? No; that solution was out of the question. Suddenly, her fascinated gaze caught sight of a small white card among the folds. As she picked it up she looked first for a signature. There was none. It simply read:

"Will be at the Maple Avenue Station 8:30 tonight."

Vince! He had taken her at her word! How quickly her heart beat!

She lifted the shawl out carefully and wrapped it lovingly about her. Of course, she must send it back at once,



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with a note explaining that there had been some mistake. After a guilty glance in the mirror, she took it off, folded it, and put it back in the box.

Later, as she was preparing dinner, the phone rang:

"Hello, is that you Midge? . . . Any calls? . . . All right; don't expect me till late. Good-bye."

Exactly as she had expected—that little Mrs. Graves! Why Don took such cases she couldn't understand. She knew he was considered hard and unsympathetic by some; yet, here he was, more than busy with a practice comprising the wealthiest people in Glendow, spending long, tedious hours in that poor little cottage. Why do such people marry anyway? Merely a common boy and girl, both of whom worked in a nearby factory until she was forced to give up.

It seemed to Mrs. Marshall that her whole life was spent in waiting for the doctor. And when he arrived—what then? He would probably either read all evening, or go out for a game of cards with the men. She rarely interfered with his plans, and he was the last person in the world to consider her neglected. What! *His* wife neglected? Didn't she enjoy a coveted position in Glendow society as the wife of its most famous physician, a man who never looked at another woman? Wasn't she the mother of a brilliant daughter, the bearer of a proud old name, envied the county over? She knew so well his line of reasoning.

If his ideas regarding women were not so old-fashioned she might interest herself in politics, go in for writing, or something of the sort; but he was the type of man who believes a woman's personality should be absorbed in that of her husband.

Well, she wouldn't eat dinner alone, she decided, as she returned to the kitchen and turned the gas out under her cooking. This done, she mounted

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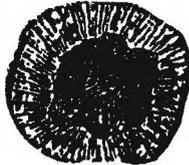


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wearily to her room. As she entered the door she caught sight of the box containing the shawl. She would take it out once more. Why not put on her new black lace evening gown and her slippers with the steel buckles? Her clothes were always conventionally elegant, but even her worst enemy could not say they were too young for her years. The doctor saw to that. If the dress were only shorter, like the audacious girls she saw on the street! In an instant she had it off, slip and all, sewed a tuck in it, and again pulled it over her head. Next she draped the shawl gracefully around her and, standing sidewise, tried to strike the pose as Carmen. Then she thought of her tortoise-shell comb. Hurriedly opening a drawer, she extracted it from its box, unwrapped the tissue paper covering and placed it in her thick hair, while her eyes became brighter and brighter. She could almost hear the castanets! Now for some rouge! Of course, she never used it, but in a daring moment had bought a box just to try the effect, and had kept it carefully hidden in a drawer with some expensively useless Christmas presents. How deliciously wicked she felt, as bright splashes of color appeared on either cheek! She could almost picture a cigarette between her lips!

"The only thing lacking is a mantilla for my hair," she thought, as she began nervously opening and shutting drawers, searching for a long-discarded black scarf. Presently she straightened up, closed all the drawers and switched off the lights. Why this desperate hurry? Was she losing her mind?

Deliberately crossing the room, she sat down by the window, striving for composure. The street lights were on and she could see indications of the evening's festivities. A dapper young man in a low car, accompanied by a



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girl in a close-fitting felt hat, swung quickly 'round the corner, out of the quiet street in which she lived, on to the broad avenue that would take them into town, or, if they turned in the other direction, out to the country club. What a lovely drive on a night like this! The maples along the avenue had taken on the tender green of spring . . . Tender, yes; that was what she wanted—a little tenderness . . . Where was Vince? What was he doing? The clock downstairs struck the quarter-hour. Eight-fifteen! Could it be possible? She must decide at once; there was still time if she hurried. She must call a taxi.

"Central? . . . Er, give—give me Main 6400. . . ." "Yes, that's right; Main 6400." Then, after only a second's wait, impatiently: "Central, I don't get Main 6400. Central—"

Listen! Was that someone coming up the stairs? Quickly, she hung up the receiver.

"Why, Don, how you startled me! I thought you wouldn't be in till late."

"Midge, what are you doing in that outlandish get-up?"

"Oh, this? I—I—was just rehearsing for that fancy dress ball our D. A. R. Chapter is going to give."

"But surely you were not thinking of going like that? Where did you get the shawl?"

"I—I—borrowed it from little Miss Wheeler across the way."

"Well, is it a boy or a girl, Don?" she questioned, anxious to change the subject.

"A girl," came her husband's short answer.

"And the mother?" she continued.

"The poor little mother is no more," breathed the self-contained doctor, as he buried his face in his strong hands.

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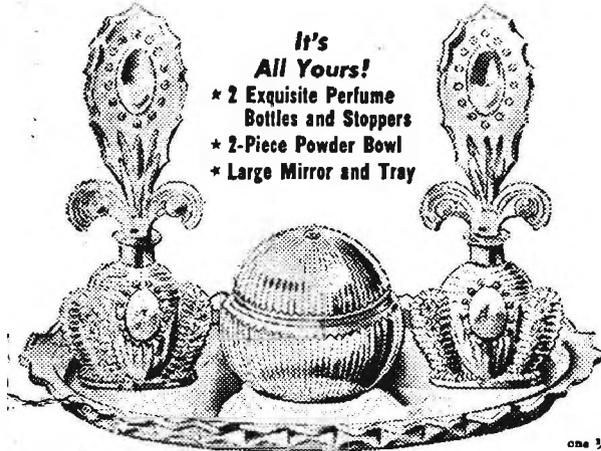
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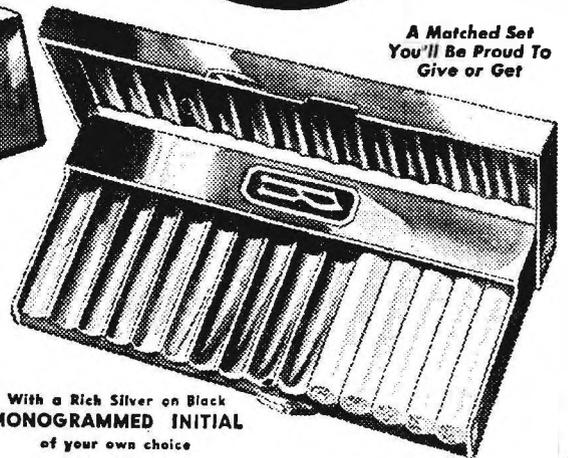
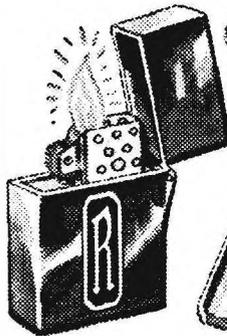
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