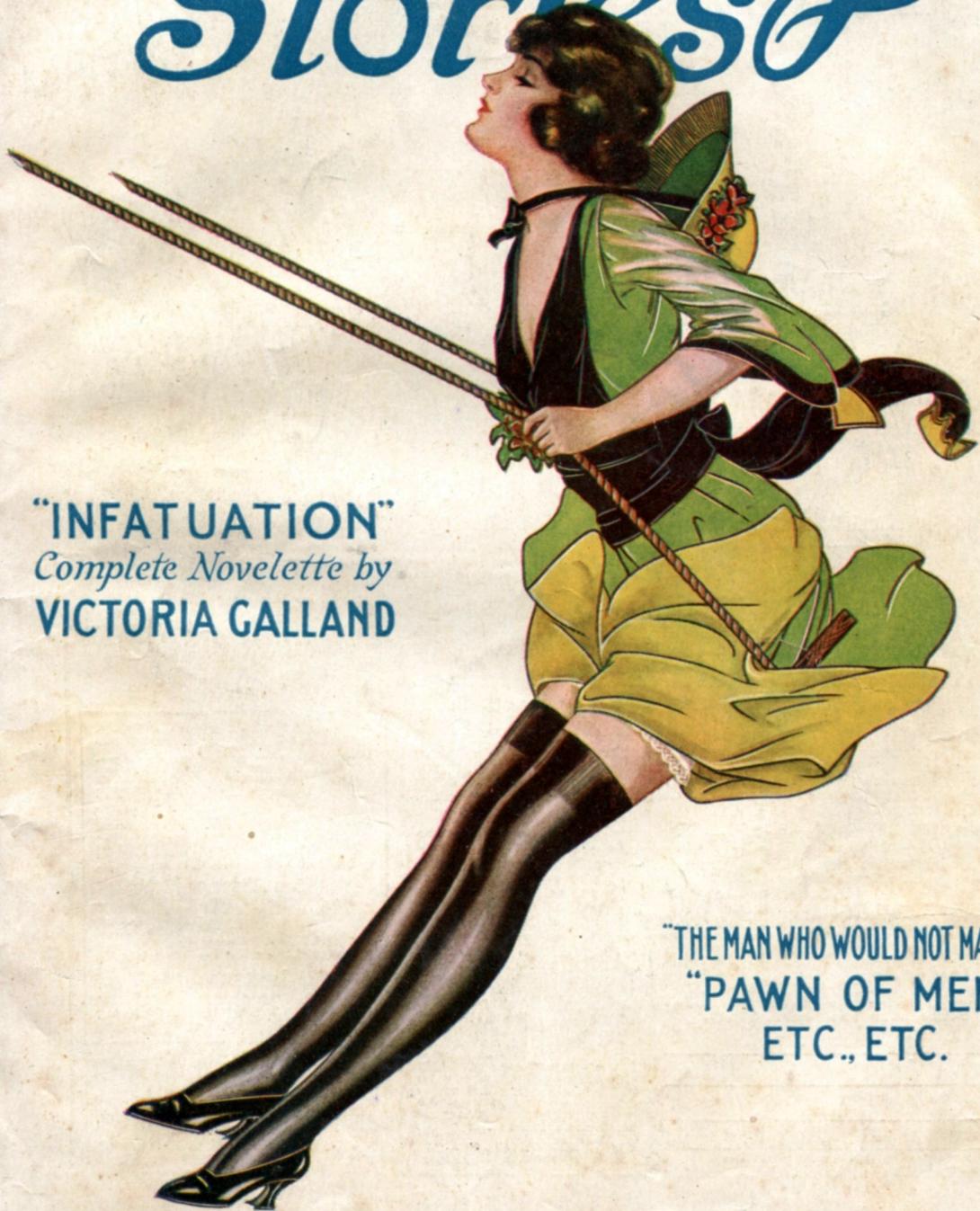


JULY, 1922

20 CENTS

# Breezy Stories

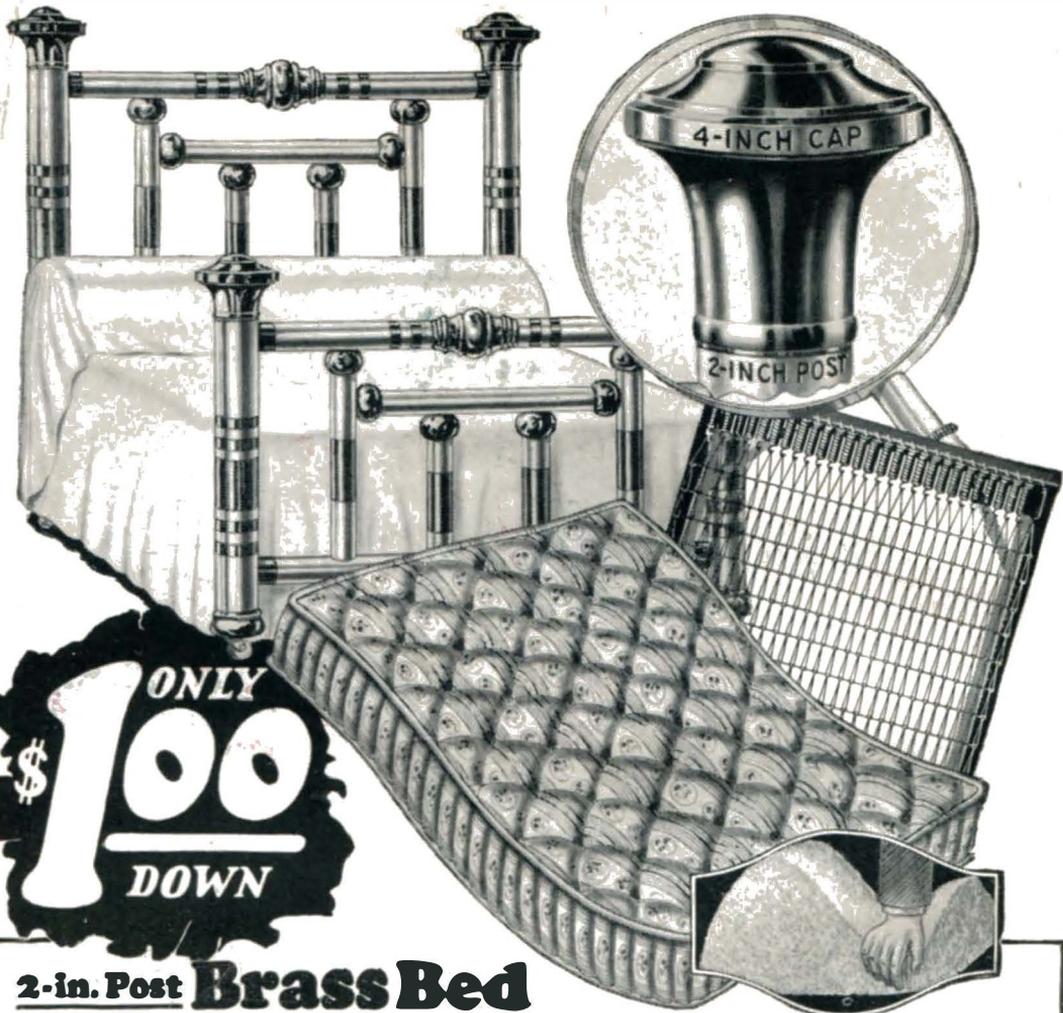


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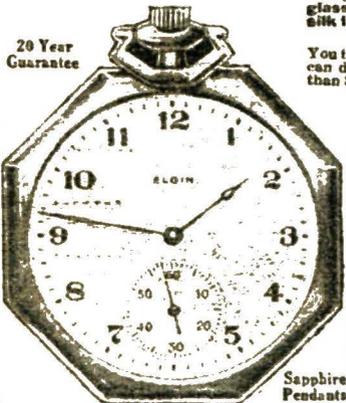
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Entered as second-class matter August 10, 1915, at the post office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879.

Published monthly by

C. H. YOUNG PUB. CO., INC.,  
377 FOURTH AVE., NEW YORK CITY.

(Printed in U. S. A.)

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NOTE—The Editor will be pleased to consider stories of from 1,500 to 5,000 words and novelettes of from 25,000 to 40,000 words. Where stamps are enclosed, every effort will be made to secure their safe return in case of rejection, but no responsibility for them is assumed. ALL MSS. should be typewritten.

## INFATUATION

By Victoria Galland

"FOR the love of Pete, who is that man?" Rita Parmelee asked Janice Hyatt, not five minutes after she had entered the room. "Look at him, Janice! Who is he?"

"You mean Mr. de Lorzac—the man standing in the doorway talking to Dorothy Potter?"

"Is that his name—de Lorzac? Nice name that."

"Georges de Lorzac," Janice, pretty in a dark, Madonna-ish way, glanced about to see who could overhear her, and then dropped her voice a little. "Georges de Lorzac is an extremely dangerous person, my dear. But surely you've heard of him!"

"He's dangerous you say? Tell me about him!" The very fact that he was alleged to be dangerous added to his fascination. "And why haven't I met him before?"

"I'm sure I don't know, dear. He's been here several times—and I've seen him loads of places both here in New York and in Washington."

Rita drew Janice from the big ballroom to a little anteroom that was unoccupied. She opened her cigarette case and offered it to Janice, but Janice shook her head.

"Not now—I'm supposed to be with mamma—greeting guests," she said with a little *moue* of dislike.

"Well, you can go, dear," Rita said sweetly, "after you've told me about this Georges person and after you've introduced him to me!"

She took a cigarette, lighted it, and sank into a comfortable chair. "Don't

you think he's the most wonderful looking person you've ever seen?"

"Oh, I don't know," Janice returned. "I don't like men—with reputations! And then he's not particularly young."

"I hate young men," Rita put in. "How old do you suppose he is?"

"He's thirty-five, if he's a day!"

Rita laughed. "My dear baby child! Any man under thirty-five ought to be locked up on a charge of youth and ignorance and unsophistication, and kept locked up until he's presentably versed in a smattering of all the world's vices!"

"That, I suppose," Janice retorted, "was intended to be extremely clever, Rita! And perhaps it was. Personally, I like clean-cut, just-out-of-college, not-over-twenty-six men!"

"Well, don't let's quarrel over them, dear. Just tell me about this de Lorzac individual, and then you can go and greet more of your guests. By the way, I think this is going to be a marvelous party. I just feel it! Now—what about him? Why is he so dreadful?"

"Well, to begin with," and Janice ticked her points off on her fingers, "he's French!"

"That means he's charming and polished and—"

"—and wicked!" Janice finished for her. "Then he makes love to every pretty woman he meets."

"Which means that he appreciates beauty! Go on—what else?"

"Thirdly—he was known to be the cause of the Lorrilards' divorce in Washington. You heard about it, of course—a filthy scandal. And finally, no one knows quite why he is over here

and not in his own frog-eating country!"

"And is that all?" Rita asked with an air of disappointment. "I thought you said he was dreadful—and wicked. As far as I can see, he's just adorably human and extraordinarily fascinating! Now take me along and introduce him to me!" With which conclusive remark, Rita extinguished her cigarette, got up, and led the way to the door.

The two girls made their way through the ballroom. The music had just ceased, and couples were leaving the floor. At the sight of Rita, two or three men darted up to her and begged her for a dance, but she put them off. Rita was a one-purpose girl, and her purpose at the moment was Georges de Lorzac.

"Ah, Miss Parmelee!" he murmured in his precise English, after Janice had introduced them. "I saw you when you first came in, and I was wondering how long it would take a kind fate to send you to me—or me to you?"

"Do you wait for fate to send things—I mean girls—to you?" she asked impertinently, taking in at a glance his intensely black eyes, his black, pomaded hair, the sharp, almost gaunt lines of his face, which was clean-shaven except for a small moustache, and the full, sensuous mouth that quirked upward at the corners and gave to his countenance a sardonic expression.

"We must all wait on fate to send us our heart's desire," he said, with the facile grace of a man who is never cornered conversationally. He looked at her for a moment, that wonderful smile of his hovering about his mouth. The music struck up again. "I know you dance beautifully," he said; "but then so many girls dance beautifully, and so few know how to talk. Will you sit this one out with me?"

He could not have flattered her more. But then he wanted to flatter her. Flattery, he knew, was the most poisonous

of all the darts that a certain little naked person carries in his sheath, and this also he knew; that no matter how pretty a girl may be, she loved to be told she had brains! The chances were, he decided, that she was entirely brainless, while his eyes told him what, perforce, she must know—how radiantly lovely she was.

She was the rare perfection of a not unusual type. Thousands of girls approached her fairness. Thousands of girls had violet eyes and golden hair, but Georges de Lorzac had never seen eyes quite that shade of violet, quite so wondrously set in quite such an exquisitely oval face. Then her skin—*Dieu!* It reminded him of a rose in the soft light of dawn. It was delicately tinted; it was of the softness of almond blossoms. Most girls of her coloring were cold, but Rita could not be cold! Not with a mouth that was so intensely red and soft and moist! It was like a living flower, alive for love, like a fragrant rose filled with honey. Then, too, she was a little thing! Georges could have picked her up in his arms as easily as he could pick up a child. Yes, there was much about her that reminded him of a child—the air of her—a certain naïve innocence. And, as strength is instinctively drawn to weakness, so is sophistication attracted to the antithesis of sophistication—and Georges de Lorzac was the epitome of worldliness.

"Tell me about yourself," he said. "You are married—naturally?"

"Married!" she laughed deliciously. "Why do you say—'naturally'?"

"You are not married? You have looked like this for—well, since you have been sixteen! Oh, it is not possible you are not married!"

She was only twenty. She told him so. And girls in America did not marry so very young. In France, perhaps, it was different!

"Yes," he said, "your country is very strange!"

During the evening he devoted himself to her. They danced; they sat out; he took her in to supper; and in his clever way he found out all he wanted to find out about her.

He found out that she lived by herself in a little apartment on Murray Hill. She was not a rich girl. She was not the typical society girl. Her parents were quite simple people, who lived somewhere in the Middle West. They allowed Rita a moderate income, and she was there, in New York, because the Middle West had bored her, and because she was interested in art—especially in dancing. She was studying dancing. And while she was not "in society," she was on the fringe of society. She had an uncle and aunt, very smart and very rich, whose one purpose in life seemed to be society. But they did not altogether approve of Rita, and so she saw very little of them.

"And why do they not approve of you?" Georges wanted to know.

"Oh," she told him lightly, "they think I'm too unconventional. And they don't like me living alone. And they don't like me studying dancing. And they don't like my attitude towards their smart friends. Unfortunately, they don't impress me. Most of them strike me as being exceptionally dull and stupid—and I like people who do things—artists, sculptors, theatrical people."

Georges laughed. She was such a little thing, so doll-like and naïve! And now he learned that she was rebellious! She liked people who did things! Society bored her! It was the stirring of life within her. She was in love with life!

"You are very, very adorable," he said to her with quasi-seriousness. "You and I will be friends—yes? You will come and have dinner with me the first night you are free? And that is—when?"

His deliberateness challenged her. "I will not come and have dinner with

you," she said decisively. "If you want to, you can call me up sometime—and I may see you!"

Now Rita's knowledge of men was slight enough. She had had no serious affairs. She knew that she was capable of great love: her imagination had pictured for her—situations. Often she had dreamed marvelous dreams of romance and passion, but she had never thought it possible that some man might come along and entirely sweep her off her feet—especially a Frenchman.

But when it happened—when she woke up in her apartment the morning following the night of the Hyatt dance to discover that she was madly in love with a man whom she might never see again, it did not seem at all extraordinary to her. All that concerned her was whether he would attempt to see her.

And, of course, he did. He phoned that same day and begged her to dine with him. She thought it would be best to put him off, but she couldn't. She just must see him; she just must hear his voice.

They dined together; afterwards, he said:

"Would you like to go to the theatre, or shall we go back to your place—and talk?"

She would prefer, she said, to talk.

Arrived at her apartment, she led the way through the tiny hall to the charmingly furnished living-room. He looked about him. He was profuse in his praise of the room.

"You did it yourself," he said. "You made it as a setting for your beauty! It is charming! It has atmosphere and comfort! It is unlike the apartments of girls who live by themselves in France!" He looked at her fixedly, but evidently the inference of his last remark was wasted upon her.

She came, of her own accord, and sat down beside him on the divan. It stood before an open fireplace, but now

no fire burned in it, because it was spring. She remarked upon it:

"But in winter it makes it very cozy and warm."

"I should think it would," he said conversationally, "and it is so nice to make love in the firelight. Darkness all around, and just the glow of the fire flickering on very white skin! How wonderful it would make your hair! Ah. *Dieu*—I can imagine it!"

His voice fascinated her: the fact that he had begun, at once, to make love to her amused her.

"Do you always make love to every woman you see?" she smiled at him.

"Er—no," he retorted contemplatively, as though he had been replying to some weighty question, "when one makes a study of love, it becomes very precious, and so few women are really beautiful! When I saw you, I knew at once that I had found—well, what I have been seeking always, it seems—a perfect person. Everything about you is perfect, your voice, your hands—" he broke off abruptly, and took one of her hands in his and for a long minute gazed at it appreciatively. He regarded her fingers, and then, stooping, he kissed the soft, delicately perfumed palm.

There was a quality to his kisses that made them unlike the kisses of any other man. They thrilled her. They made her wish that he would go on kissing her, and kiss not only her hands, but her arms and her throat and her mouth.

But he was content for the moment to kiss her palms. Now and then he would glance at her quickly, noting the expression of her face, the heightening color that crept into her cheeks. Then, suddenly, his arms were about her, and he was telling her in his wonderful voice, with its inimitable accent:

"I love you. I am in love with you. You are so white and so wonderful! The scent of you is like all the perfumes of Arabia!"

She yielded, for the moment, to his

passion. She let him kiss her soft mouth because she wanted to be kissed. She let him crush her in his arms, because his strength intoxicated her deliciously. But when his kisses grew too fierce she put him from her, and got up, her eyes alive with love, her cheeks flaming. She said no word, but reaching for a little cedar box, she opened it and held it out to him.

"Let's smoke," she suggested evenly. "These cigarettes aren't at all bad!"

He looked at her with genuine admiration. "You are marvelous!" he said. "Marvelous!" He refused the cigarette, and moved towards her. As she stood, lighting her cigarette, he put his arms about her again. "I want to make love to you," he said. "You—who are made to love!"

She shook her head as she released herself from him. Then she laughed. She made it quite clear to him that he was not to make love to her. And when he became persistent, she grew a little angry.

Georges did not understand it at all. He gestured his surprise. "How extraordinary you American girls are!" he exclaimed. "In France, girls—women—are of two kinds: those who have many lovers first, and marry only when they are *passé*; and those who know nothing of love until they marry, and then—"

"—and then have lovers afterwards!" Rita supplied. "Well, girls in America are different. We are free; we have earned our freedom. We know how to take care of ourselves."

"Ah," he said, "that is because you are cold—you do not have to be afraid of letting yourself go! Love is not the beautiful thing it is to me: it is like the cigarette you smoke; you enjoy it, but it is not a necessity!"

"No?" she smiled quietly. "Perhaps not—love may not be a necessity—but marriage is!"

"Ah, that is it! Still, if you were really alive; if you had but tasted of

love, you would not think of—marriage!"

So they fenced. Now and then he tried again to break down her barrier of protection with his kisses, but Rita was quite adamant. He was too fascinating! His kisses were far too intoxicating! She would not even let him touch her hands.

De Lorzac kept saying he could not understand it. He hinted that he would go; that he would not come again. "Other men, perhaps, can come and sit with you and talk—politics, but not de Lorzac! Not to make love to you would be ungallant: it, in itself, would be to insult you! Ah, yes, for you are so beautiful, so *ravissante!*"

As a matter of fact, she fascinated him because she seemed to know so little; while he fascinated her because he seemed to know so much!

But presently he went, a little crestfallen, a little sorrowfully. "And I will not see you again, Rita, although I shall remember you always!"

Her impulse, then, was to fling herself in his arms, but because she was 'Anglo-Saxon and not a child of the south, she restrained herself. But for two days afterwards, she was actively unhappy. She wanted him. She stayed in all day in the hope that he would phone, and in the evenings she went only to those places where she was likely to meet him.

Then he phoned to her. He must see her; she must dine with him. Why must he see her? Why must she dine with him?

"Because I am wild about you," he said over the phone, "because I cannot get you out of my mind, because you are the most perfect person in the world—that's why!"

Of course she dined with him, but when he suggested that they go to her place—and talk, she refused. Instead they went to the theatre. He was moody and silent all evening; he behaved as

though Rita were being unnecessarily unkind to him.

The following night they dined together again, and on the night following that—again. Then he left her alone for two days, but on the next night, after they had dined together, he insisted that they return to her place. There was something of the most vital importance that he must say to her.

"I am thirty-seven years old," he confessed, "but never have I felt for any woman what I feel for you. It is madness; it is the madness of hell or the madness of heaven, I do not know—but you have captivated me; you have captured the heart of de Lorzac. It lies bleeding in the palms of your little hands. Now—" and here he stopped before her and held her with his eyes, "now it is the same with you, Rita! You love me. Do not say 'no.' You love me!"

She did not reply at once; when she spoke her words came slowly: "I can only love—my husband!"

"And if I were your husband," he said, "you would love me?"

"I would adore you," she answered, a wondrous glow shining from her eyes, her mouth remaining a trifle opened in her ecstasy.

"Then," he said a little sadly, "there is nothing for it—but marriage! I do not like it! I do not like it! But you American girls are so strange. You cannot love without marriage; and then you can adore!"

"You love me enough to marry me, when you don't want to be married!" she gasped, one hand resting on his arm.

"I love you enough to—to die for you," he told her with all the fervor of his passionate nature. "I tell you you have made me mad, and I do not know what I am doing! I am insane with love for you! Rita, Rita, my beautiful, wonderful woman!" He held his arms open to her, and she came to him eager for his strong embrace.

"Oh, Georges! My Georges!"

## II

HE did not leave until quite late that evening. Rita was deliriously happy. She was going to marry this man among men, who was so handsome—and dangerous, and who knew so much about love. She had wanted to know then, when they were to be married, and Georges had said: "Soon—soon! Right away!"

But he gave Rita no definite idea of time. "Right away" might mean anything—weeks—months. Still, that did not matter so much, and she fell to sleep that night with a happy little sigh, thinking how long the hours would be until the following evening, when he was to call for her for dinner.

But he was there, at her apartment, at the absurd hour of nine in the morning. Her maid came and woke her up to tell her that Mr. de Lorzac was in the sitting-room.

A sudden fear came to grip Rita's heart. What on earth could he want at that hour? Without waiting to dress, she flung a *négligé* over her rose-silk pyjamas, and hurried to him.

"Georges! What on earth—"

De Lorzac, as usual exquisitely dressed, was smoking a cigarette; his manner was the acme of all calm.

"Ah, Rita! Rita! How exquisite you look! You adorable—"

"Is that what you came to tell me at this absurd time!" Now she was the least bit angry with him.

"No, Rita," and now his face was serious. "I want to know if you love me as much as you said you did last night?"

"Why—why, of course I do, Georges. But what is it? Tell me!"

"Rita, you and I must be married—right away! I am leaving to-day, at twelve, for France. It is important that I am there! I do not know when I can return."

Rita gasped. "But Georges—"

He came close to her; his hands rested

on her shoulders. "Rita, if you love me, you will come!"

She hesitated only a fraction of a minute. Then, succinctly: "Georges, I will come!"

They wasted just thirty seconds—the half-minute that immediately followed, during which she clung to him, and he tasted of that luscious fruit that was her mouth.

Then haste and hurry and excitement. Georges was in the way; so he was told to get out and return in one hour. And by ten-thirty, when he returned, he found Rita ready, her bags packed, her cheeks flushed with happiness.

By ten minutes to eleven they were on that floor of the Municipal Building where marriage licenses are issued, and by ten minutes after eleven a justice of the peace had declared them "man and wife."

"And now," Rita said, as they came out on the street again. "we still have three-quarters of an hour—to shop!"

The little shops of lower Manhattan yielded up their best. It was a poor best, but what mattered it? Soon they would be in Paris!

It was not until they were on board, with the horn of departure deafening them, that Rita thought of any one else. Then, everybody seemed to come to her mind at once: her parents, her aunt and uncle, her friends. The boat was moving out into the river, but there was still time. She could write to them all, and give her letters to the pilot to mail upon his return to shore.

She hurried from Georges, and it was not for an hour that he found her.

"Where in the name of heaven have you been?" he asked her. "I've been looking for you everywhere!" He was frowning; his anxiety over her was so apparent.

She loved him for it. "You poor darling! I was writing—to everybody, telling them everything. But I'm finished now. What do I do with them?"

She gathered up the little stack of letters and gave them to him.

He took them, the frown going from his face. He slipped his arm through hers, and led her to the *de luxe* stateroom which he had managed to obtain through the purser in exchange for a generous bribe.

He left her there, exclaiming over the cabin's luxurious appointments, and went on deck to give her letters to the pilot. Rita stood looking after him for a moment. She glanced at the ring upon her finger. She thought of the kisses that now could be hers; and the very thought sent the blood coursing deliciously through her. Georges, who knew so much of love! Then, industriously, she began to unpack and make the cabin into a love-nest of pretty intimacies.

The days that followed dawned too soon and passed too soon. It was spring; the weather was perfect, and the great steamer ploughed through the Atlantic with the steadiness of a giant ferry-boat. There were crowds of people on board, but neither Rita nor Georges found any one whom they knew. Nor did they make many friends. Georges, who had traveled a great deal, warned her against "steamer acquaintances;" but his warning was quite unnecessary. Rita was perfectly content to be with her Georges. She had eyes and ears only for him; her voice was for him; she dressed for him; she lived alone for him to admire her.

"You are very, very happy, Rita?" he asked her, as one night they sat close together on the wide deck.

"I am—too happy," she murmured ecstatically, "and you, my Georges?"

"Like you, Rita, I am—too happy!"

Six days and six nights—hours that far too swiftly died—and they were at Havre.

"And now Paris!" Rita said, as they made their way from the dock.

"Must it be Paris—so soon?" he asked her.

She did not understand him. "But I

thought you had to be there right away?"

"I did," he replied, "but I telegraphed, and this—this is our honeymoon, *adorée!*"

She pressed his arm. "Where then, Georges?"

He smiled down at her, and kept her in suspense as though she were a little child for whom he had a wonderful surprise.

And he had. They drove in an old *fiacre* to a hotel, where they had *déjeuner*. He left her there, promising to return in half an hour, and when she saw him again from the dining-balcony, he was at the wheel of a smart roadster.

"That is our chariot—a chariot of love, *ma belle Rita*, and in it we will drift lazily through Arcady!"

The idea enchanted her. By Arcady he meant Normandie, but Normandie in the spring indeed is Arcady. They started that same afternoon, and for two weeks more they continued to live their days and nights of love, driving aimlessly from one peaceful little French village to another. And each one seemed as links in a chain that bound Rita closer to her Georges.

"Why can't life always be like this, Georges?" she asked him once.

He shook his head, a little sadly. "I don't know, but it—" and he broke off abruptly.

They were staying at a little hotel in a tiny seaside village not far from Calais. They had arrived the day previous, and so enchanted was Rita, that she refused to move on. They got up late, and spent the afternoon on the beach. They went back to the hotel to dine, for there was no other restaurant in the village, and afterwards, because the moon was full, they motored. Georges was silent, but Rita did not notice his silence; she was perfectly happy, her senses lulled to peace beneath the silver of the moon, the beauty of the night and the consciousness of Georges beside her. Presently he would say

wonderful things to her; his kisses, like a storm of fire, would sweep over her, winging her to the Elysium of all earthly delight.

And it was, even as she thought, except that his love seemed fiercer, his kisses charged with a tragic savageness, his extravagant protestations of love more vehement.

"I love you! I tell you, I do love you, Rita!" The words seemed to be torn from him, and he held her so tightly that it hurt, bruising her soft lips beneath the intensity of his kisses. "Ah, Rita, Rita—always I love you!"

Presently, her flower-soft soul, lulled by love to rest, she fell asleep, one little arm about Georges' neck. A shaft of moonlight shone upon her face, changing the gold of her hair to silver. Georges looked at her. Gently he removed her arm from about his neck. Ah, *Dieu de Ciel*, but she was beautiful! Tears came to his eyes, and his heart was black with misery. But he brushed the tears away, and quietly crept from beside her, through the door and into the adjoining sitting-room. He sat down at a desk, lighted a candle, and drawing paper towards him, he began to write:

*"Adorée, toujours m'adorée:*

*"I write this in agony with my very heart's blood. Each word is like a tiny barb of fire that sears my soul, just as it will sear your soul. But it must be done; there is nothing else for it. . . ."*

*"Rita, my Rita, I have done you a great wrong, so great a wrong that I do not think it can ever be righted. And you will hate me for it. That, indeed, is my hope. When you read this, you will hate me, but that is better than loving me. When you read this, I shall be gone. I was married already, Rita. I go back now to Paris, to my work, and to the wife I no longer love.*

*"Always will my conscience ache me, always will my heart feel like lead in my breast, because of the wrong I have*

*done you, but even though I live to a hundred and suffer each day and night as I am suffering now, I will count myself well paid. Your beauty, your love, your ineffable sweetness has been beyond words. I have felt for no woman what I have felt for you; you have stirred me to greater emotion than I have known. I have known perfect happiness; I have tasted of perfect love!*

*"And now it is over. It must be. I am still insane, still mad, still infatuated with you—for it is infatuation that we feel for each other, Rita. You are infatuated with me. When you begin to hate me, that will pass.*

*I leave you a sum of money sufficient to take you back to your America. Nor need anyone know. The letters you gave me to give the pilot, I tore up and threw overboard.*

*Good-by, adorée! Perhaps one day you will be able to look back upon this time, and upon me, without hating too much.*

GEORGES."

He read the letter over, tears blurring his eyes. Then he got up, dressed quickly and quietly, and without returning to Rita, lest his infatuation should weaken him, he crept from the hotel, and started through the night for Paris in his car.

When Rita awoke in the morning and found Georges not there, she was frightened. When she saw his letter, with the money beside it, she all but fainted, and it was minutes before she had the courage to read it. But at last she read it. Her fears became realities. The world turned black for her, and it was as though she had been hurled from some dizzy pinnacle to an abyss of Stygian darkness. She experienced myriad emotions; she passed through all the agonies of hell. At first she was too dazed to think; she was numb with misery. Then she was frantic with grief and despair.

For two days and two nights she remained in the little village. She neither ate nor drank nor slept. She lived in a world of torment. Again and again she read the inconceivably cruel letter, while again and yet again her tear-stained eyes fell upon the little heap of bank notes, amounting to twenty thousand francs, which he had left her. She felt shame; she felt humiliation; she felt love and hate and fury; there was scarcely an emotion she did not experience. When she read what he had written about infatuation, a wild, uncontrollable anger seized her, and she wanted to kill. Infatuation! God, was that all he had felt for her!

She thought, in intermittent moments of calm, of returning to America. But she put the thought from her. Her pride urged her to throw the money in the sea; that, she reflected, was what most girls would do. But why—why should she? No, she would keep his money. And she would not return to America! She would keep his money, and use it! She would go to Paris—where he was. He was hers—she loved him. He was more to her than life itself. Deep in her heart she knew that. But he had done her a great wrong. Well—he would pay for that great wrong! Even though she loved him, Rita would see to it that Georges de Lorzac paid. . . .

### III

Six months later. November. Paris—the *café* Coq D'Or in Montmartre. Outside it was cold and rainy, but who in the Coq D'Or thought of cold or of rain? Inside it was warm—warm with music and lights and the gay laughter of the *boulevardier*, of the Apache, of the *demi-mondaines* who came there to coquet with stray Americans, who were there to see what was to be seen!

During the early hours of the evening, business was slack. Many of the

little tables were unoccupied. Those who were paid to sing sang; and those who were paid to dance danced. They sang and danced without much *verve* for the *bourgeoisie*, who were there then, drinking their absinthe, paying their checks, and going home, like good citizens, at a respectable hour. But presently, the *café* took on a gayer aspect. The *bourgeoisie* gave place to men and women in exquisite evening clothes, men who were the real thing in Paris, and women who were either their mistresses or who expected soon to be their mistresses. By eleven o'clock the *café* was crowded; it was always crowded of late—for between that hour and two the following morning, there danced at the Coq D'Or a little American, known as "Rita, l'Américaine."

She had been quite unknown when she had first come to dance there, but now she was getting a reputation. Paris was beginning to talk about her. People from both sides of the river came to the Coq D'Or to see the little dancer who, it was said, "had a way with her that captures the heart!"

And indeed she did—capture the heart! To begin with, she was extraordinarily beautiful. In the sheer, pastel-shaded chiffons, in which she danced, and which revealed more to the imagination than they concealed from the eye, she was a vision to remember! Her figure was as exquisitely perfect as was her face. And not only did she dance, but she sang. She sang naughty little French songs, in the most adorable and imperfect French; but she sang them, even as she danced, with American pep that made her positively irresistible.

Now among those who were there that night was the Comte Jules Marvonne. He was there alone. He had been there before—several times—with a woman who was quite beautiful. And the reason he was there alone to-night had been Rita. Jules had been too lavish in his praise of the little American. It had

led to a quarrel, which Jules determined should not be patched up. In the first place he was tired of her; and in the second place—well, there was Rita, *l'Américaine!*

So he sat there by himself, sipping his liqueur, and watching Rita. Several times he chanced to catch her eye, and once she smiled at him. *Mais, nom de ciel, she was charmante! Adorable! Ravissante! Quelle figure! Quelle peau! Quelle yeux!*

When she had finished her dance and had gone, Marvonne beckoned a garçon and bade him fetch the proprietor, Monsieur Giraud.

He came hurrying, his rotund figure shaking with fat and with excitement, for Marvonne was a personage in Paris, as well as being an extremely wealthy man. What could he want with Giraud?

"I want to know about that girl," Marvonne said in a low voice. "Who is she? Who is her lover? Who comes for her and takes her home?"

Giraud frowned. "*Je ne sais pas, m'sieur!* She comes alone, and she goes home by herself!"

Marvonne smiled his surprise. Was it so, indeed? Well, Marvonne would meet her. Let Giraud arrange it.

"*Mais, m'sieur,*" and the frown deepened on Giraud's brow, "then you will take her from me? You will not permit her to dance—!"

"Well, what of it! Besides, don't I always pay?"

"*Oui, m'sieur—oui!*"

"*Alors!* Here is my card. Take it to her!"

Rita received the Comte Jules Marvonne in her dressing-room. She recognized him as the man whom she had seen at the café several times, and as the man at whom she had smiled. And the card told her his name, which meant nothing to her. Still, he was very good-looking, and despite the graying hair at the temples, he was comparatively young.

She knew why he was there; she knew what he would say—so many men had said it to her since she had been there. But Marvonne was different from the others; he was young and better looking. There was much about him that attracted her.

He began in much the same way that the others had begun. He raised her hand to his lips and kissed it. He told her that she was the most beautiful person he had ever seen. Then he asked her if she knew who he was. She glanced at the card.

"The Comte Jules Marvonne," she said.

"Yes—and does that name mean nothing to you?"

She shook her head. She smiled. She had not been in Paris long.

He sat down beside her and took her hand. "Rita, the name of Marvonne means two things—wealth and honor! When I want something I go straight for it. Life is too precious to waste! I want you—more than anything else. I am rich enough to satisfy almost any desire you can have. Tell me that desire and I will satisfy it!"

His directness made her gasp. He had not tried to woo her with fatuous words, with extravagant phrases of love; he had merely stated something. He had made himself quite clear, and for his very bluntness she rather admired him.

But she shook her head. She drew her hand away and got up.

"Is there nothing, then, that you want?" he asked her.

"No—nothing that you could give me!"

"Are you quite, quite happy, then, Rita—dancing and singing here at this café?"

She hesitated. Suddenly her eyes were blurred with tears, but she brushed them away—and laughed.

"I am quite, quite happy—thank you!" Marvonne got up. He bowed. It had been very good of Ma'mselle to

see him! He picked up his coat and hat and moved toward the door. There he turned and bowed again. "*Bon soir, Ma'mselle!*"

"*Monsieur!*" she called to him on sudden impulse. "There is—something I want."

He came back. He closed the door behind him. He came swiftly towards her, and without a word he took her in his arms and kissed her mouth. "Ah, Rita! How sweet you are! Tell me what is it you want?"

His swiftness—his kiss—bewildered her. He was unlike any other man she had ever met—with the exception of Georges de Lorzac. For some reason, they were alike. And for that reason, perhaps, she changed her mind.

"No," she said, "no, there is nothing—I want!"

He smiled at her. From his pocket he drew forth a card. "Whatever it is you want, I will give it you—when you send for me." He placed the card on her dressing table, and without another word he was gone.

But that did not prevent him from coming nightly to the café. Rita saw him; and now he was always alone. Sometimes she flirted with him; at other times she chose to ignore him. Once, as she danced, she paused by his table, and for an instant their eyes met.

"Rita! *Ali, Dieu—Rita!*" she heard him murmur.

And that night she sent his card to him. He came to her at once, his dark eyes alight with anticipation. And he would have kissed her as he had kissed her before, but she stayed him.

"Wait!" she said. "First let me tell you what I want! It is a great, great deal!"

"It must be a great, great deal—for me to refuse it," he answered her.

She gestured him to a little sofa; she sat down at her dressing table and turned towards him.

"There are many things I want," she

began slowly, "and I want all of them—or none. And in exchange, I can offer you so—so very little."

"You," he said, "that's all I ask!"

She smiled a trifle whimsically. "But if I was yours to-day—and—and not yours to-morrow, then—then you would say I had not played fair!"

He looked at her, a self-complacent smile playing about his well-cut mouth. He knew his power over women. It was always he who tired first! "When you send me away—I will go," he said evenly.

"But suppose it were very, very soon?"

He bent forward and took both her hands. "*Petite*, the sporting blood of France runs in the veins of all the Marvonnnes! But tell me what you want. Perhaps it is not in my power to give it to you!"

"I want many things," she said, drawing her hands away. "To begin with, I want to be the rage of Paris. I want to dance at the most famous cafés. Can you give me that—with your money?"

"I think so! Yes, I am sure I can! Go on—what else?"

"Then I want clothes, the most wonderful clothes in Paris. I want jewels—jewels, that when people see them, they will talk about them. I want a house marvelously furnished and perfectly appointed. And beyond all that I want to be free to have my own friends—anyone I choose!"

"And if you had all that, would you be quite happy?"

She hesitated. "I do not know. I would be—grateful!"

He laughed at her seriousness. He got up and stood above her. He tilted her head up, and stooping, he sought the ecstasy of her perfumed mouth.

"I will give you everything you want," he said, "and more—I will make you love me as you have never loved before! I will make you care so that you will never want to leave me. Rita, Rita!"

## IV

JULES MARVONNE kept his promises—so far as they lay in his power. Within a month, Rita, *l'Américaine* had leaped into the limelight of all Paris. She no longer danced at the little café in Montmartre. Now she held sway in a far more exclusive place in the Bois, where she danced to the jazz strains of the "Rita Orchestra," and many were the expensive delicacies on the menu labeled "*à la Rita*." But her fame did not stop there, for all Paris knew that she was *l'amie* of Comte Marvonne. Paris saw her, marvelously gowned, driving with him in the afternoons. And he was always there at the restaurant where she danced. Then there was the place where she lived—a *chic* little house in the Rue Raspail, where parties were given—very, very wonderful parties, to which many would have flocked, but to which few were invited.

So did he keep his word to her, and Rita more than kept her word with him. For in a way he fascinated her, and were it not for Georges, she felt quite sure that she would really have loved him with all her heart. He was so charming, so self-assured, so tremendously good-looking. But there was Georges, who Rita never forgot.

"Who is Georges de Lorzac?" she asked Jules one evening as they dined together. "Do you know him?"

"Oh, I used to know him quite well," Jules returned. "But he married some years ago, and his wife does not approve of—well, she does not approve of me or my friends. I'm sure she would not approve of you, Rita!"

"And he loves her, this dreadful woman?"

Marvonne smiled covertly. "*Pauvre* de Lorzac! He must love her whether he wants to or not, because she holds the key to the door through which de Lorzac must pass! Her father is a big power. He could break de Lorzac politically."

"Oh, he's in politics?"

"Yes—his goal is the Chamber. It's the ambition of his life. That's why he married her, I believe!"

"He is not very rich, then?"

Marvonne shrugged. "He is not very poor! But then his wife has a large fortune. But tell me, Rita, why are you interested in this de Lorzac?"

"I am curious about him! I should like to meet him!"

Marvonne looked at her. His eyes told him more than they told her. "I will see that he comes to one of your little parties," he said; while what he really meant was, "I shall see that he does not come to any of your little parties!"

"That will be very nice of you, Jules!"

Naturally, Rita expected that Jules would keep his word. He always had in regard to everything else. And she was disappointed when she did not find Georges among the guests who came to her next party. But she said nothing to Jules. She waited until the next party, and then the next. She let Jules see that he had displeased her, but Marvonne chose to ignore it. He knew the cause of her displeasure, however, and sought to placate her with an exquisite necklace of diamonds and sapphires that matched her eyes.

She took it and kissed him. "Jules, you are very, very good to me!"

And it was the very next night that she saw Georges at the restaurant. Rita was dancing. When she saw him her heart almost stopped beating, but she forced herself to go on. She knew that he was looking at her, but she pretended not to have seen him.

But he came to her in her dressing-room. He brushed past the maid, and entered.

"Rita! Rita!"

Her impulse was to run to him. Everything within her cried out at the sound of his voice. But with a tremendous effort she controlled herself.

"Ah, Georges—but why are you here?"

She looked at him a little imperiously. "Were you in the restaurant dining? I did not see you!"

He glanced at the maid. "Send her away," he said tersely. "I must speak to you!"

She laughed. She saw the look of extremity in his eyes; and his face had changed: it was older, there were lines in it; it was a little gaunt.

"I'm afraid she must stay, Georges," Rita said sweetly. "In a minute I must dance again, and there's my costume to change."

He came towards her and grasped one of her arms. "When can I see you?"

She looked up laughingly at him. "After the way you treated me, I don't know that I want to see you ever!"

"Rita, for God's sake, can't you see," he whispered hoarsely. "Please!"

"Well, then—come to my next party—to-morrow night late!"

"At his house?" He released her arm, but his eyes flashed with passionate hatred.

"At my house," she corrected him.

He deliberated. "If I come, will you see me alone for a minute?"

"Perhaps—" she mocked him with her voice, "if I can!"

When he had gone, Rita jumped up and flung her arms about the little maid. Tears ran down her cheeks, and sobs convulsed her. "Oh, Marie—Marie, I'm so—so happy!"

Rita saw to it that more than the usual number were invited to her party. And festive as those parties were, this one was even more festive. It was amazing! There were two Malay girls who danced to the intoxicating syncopation of Borneo drums. There was a Chinese boy from Limehouse who performed his strange "Dance of Desire" with a little golden-haired girl. And then, Rita herself danced; and at the end, she whirled round and round, across the floor into the arms of Marvonne, who lifted her on high and toasted her in champagne.

Georges came comparatively early. Rita greeted him, but then escaped. He was there, though, watching her. There were many people he knew, but he had eyes only for Rita. He saw her dance. She watched his face grow set; she saw the hatred in his eyes, as she flung herself in Marvonne's arms.

Later, much later, she sought him out. "You wanted to speak to me?"

"Yes."

She led the way downstairs, to a small drawing-room. He followed, closing the door so that what he had to say might not be overheard. But Rita was the first to speak:

"So you are still infatuated, Georges?"

"I do not know what I am," he burst out with savage fury. "You do not know what you have made me suffer to-night, Rita!"

She laughed mirthlessly. "You have never made me suffer, Georges," she said ironically.

"I could not help it," he defended himself. "I was mad then; I am still mad; I have been like this ever since I met you. *Dieu!* I had to have you, but I thought you had returned to America. Then I learned you were here in Paris. I saw your pictures! They are everywhere! And your name—Rita; it is on the tip of everyone's tongue! Your name and his! Ah, *Dieu*, when I saw you throw yourself in his arms to-night, I thought I would kill him!" He stopped abruptly, and came with rapid strides to her side. "Listen to me," he said, his voice hoarse with passion, "I love you! I am insane about you, and you—" again he broke off, and catching her in his arms he held her for an instant with his magnetic eyes, and then kissed her—not once, but many times, and in between his kisses he spoke: "And you love me. . . . Yes, yes, Rita, you love me—me—*me!* I am certain of it!"

She grew faint beneath the fury of his kisses, beneath the storm that swept over her. But finally she tore herself from

his embrace, and laughed that silvery, mocking laugh.

"And what if I do—care a little for you, Georges? What good does that do now? I have so much more than cheap infatuation! I have—this,"—her gesture took in the beautiful room, it implied so much more—the house, her clothes, her jewels. "I have—Jules. I have everything I desire! What can you give me?"

"Rita, *m'adorée*," and now his voice was pleading, "I cannot live without you. I have been in hell for months and months. Come back to me. Come back to me. I will give you all that you have now—clothes, jewels—motors. Only come back to me!"

"You can afford to give me all that I have now?"

"Yes," he said, "I am not rich, Rita—but I have enough!"

"Georges," she told him with a curious little smile, half-tender, half-ironical, "I am not—like I was. I warn you. I am quite, quite different. I do not think you would like me—as I am now." She paused. "No," she decided. "It would be better not!"

"Rita, for God's sake!" For an instant he covered his face with his hands, and then stretched them out to her imploringly. But she paid no heed to them. She moved to the fireplace, and stood there gazing into the glowing embers, the while his words, his little snatches of sentences, came to her. "You must come back—Rita! Ah, *Dieu*, you are mine—not his. I love you, and for him, you are just a pretty toy, Rita!"

"Georges," she said, turning to him suddenly, "I think I will come back to you—"

"Ah, God, Rita! Rita!" He sank upon his knees before her, kissing and kissing her hands.

"There was a time when I believed myself your wife—now I come back to you, Georges," she repeated slowly, "as your mistress."

## V

MARVONNE behaved extremely well in the matter.

"I have failed, then, Rita?" he asked rather unemotionally, keeping all sense of defeat from his tone.

"You have not failed, Jules," she replied enigmatically. "It is only that I—am succeeding."

He only half understood her. "You know, of course, that de Lorzac is not a rich man?"

"I do not care if he is rich."

"You—love him?"

She did not reply at once. "Either I love him or I hate him, I don't quite know."

He smiled whimsically at her. "They are the same, Rita. I only wish that you hated me—that way. I have been very, very happy with you. It will be very difficult for me to find such happiness again."

His frankness touched her. "You do not regret my extravagances then? Jules, I must have cost you a fortune!"

"Money!" he shrugged his shoulders. "Money is so cheap! Women like you, Rita, are so rare!"

She wanted to give him back the jewels he had given her, but when she suggested it, Marvonne frowned.

"And what would I do with them?" he asked. "Rita, that is unworthy of you! Our affair has been beautiful, has it not? At least to me it has been beautiful. Let it remain so! What I gave you, I gave because I—I love you." For a moment he regarded her a little sadly. Then he took her hand and raised it to his lips. "Good-by!"

She took with her, then, Marvonne's jewels, the capriciousness which she had acquired, and Cleo, the little maid who had served her so faithfully, and she went from the super-luxury of that little house to a smaller apartment, not quite so luxurious, but exquisite enough.

But then she had Georges, and as a

matter of solid fact, Rita would have been content with Georges in a one-room studio in the Latin Quarter! He had behaved to her outrageously; he had made her suffer torment indescribable. Never would she forget those first few days in that little village in Normandie, nor that dreadful letter he had written her in which he had said "it is infatuation that we feel for each other." Those words were always with her, and before she got through Georges was going to take back those words—on his knees. But for the moment, Rita set aside her designs, and yielded herself up to the happiness that was hers—with Georges.

And for a little while it was as it had been before, when she had believed she was his wife. His kisses winged her to those dizzy heights which she had known before, suffusing her being with adoration and love that was—extremely dangerous to her plans. She felt the bitterness of her heart vanishing, and the fact that she was his mistress and not his wife seemed of little importance.

Georges, who knew so much about love, was amazed. Was it true, then, that love thrived beneath the lash of cruelty? He had treated her so despicably, and yet she had come back to him as loving, as sweet, as wonderful as she had been before. *Dieu*, but she was marvelous! Her kisses, her warm whiteness! Her tenderness!

"Rita," he asked her once, "why is it that you do not hate me?"

She laughed softly. "Perhaps I do, Georges, only I am not yet over my infatuation!"

"You will never get over it, Rita! If you love me now, you will always love me!"

"Yes? Well, maybe, Georges—maybe!" And she closed her eyes dreamily, while a strange little smile caressed her lips.

And the very next day he found her capricious. Her mind seemed full of

a wonderful jewel she had seen in a little shop off the Rue de la Paix. She simply must have it! Georges must bring it to her!

He asked her the price of it; and she told him.

"But, *chérie!* Ninety thousand francs! I told you I was not a rich man!"

"But, Georges," she pouted prettily, "what is ninety thousand francs? And it is so beautiful!"

"I will find something else that is beautiful, and not quite so expensive," he said, coming towards her with outstretched arms.

"I do not want anything but that," she returned a little coldly, turning from him and moving imperiously to the window. And when he followed her and placed his hands on the satin smoothness of her arms, she pulled away from him. "I do not feel—like that, to-night, Georges!"

He was a little taken back; she had never acted so before. "What is it, Rita!" he exclaimed. "Surely, you are not angry because I am not so rich!"

"Oh, Georges, you are rich enough!" she laughed unkindly. "And when I ask for something, I do not expect you to act as though I were—well—married to you! I am not accustomed to being refused!"

He knew exactly what she meant, and to whom she referred. It made him a little angry, but he dared not show it.

"I—I will give you the jewel," he said.

And at once she was all smiles. "I knew you would, Georges! You will bring it to me to-morrow? Then Rita will be all happiness—and she will be so nice to her Georges!"

He was there the following night, at the restaurant, where she still danced. He had wanted her to give it up. He did not like to see her dance—half naked, as he put it—before all those people!

"But they love to see me dance,

Georges," she had objected. "And I love to dance for them. I would not dream of stopping. Besides, I have worked hard to become what I am—the rage of Paris!"

Between dances she sat at his table—and then it became her table. She refused to devote herself to him there. She had her friends, her admirers—and if Georges wanted to sulk and not be amiable to her guests, then, well—she would not sit at his table.

Georges was furious, but what could he do? There were men there far richer than him, who would give their souls for the favors of the exquisite Rita, even though she were ten times as capricious. He wished that he did not care so much! He wished that she were not quite so beautiful!

On the way from the restaurant, she criticized the limousine he had given her. She did not quite like it! She had seen a car that afternoon that was a dream! But they would talk of it some other time! Now she was too tired to think of anything—but—oh, did Georges remember the jewel?

"Rita," he said reproachfully, "you are different! I don't think you love me as you did!"

"Oh, Georges, how can you say that—when I love you so much!" And as evidence of it, she leaned her pretty gold head against his shoulder, and raised half-parted lips to be kissed.

Arrived at the apartment, Rita told Cleo to serve supper in the little room adjoining her boudoir, and leaving Georges, she went into her bedroom where she changed into a *négligé*. It was an exquisite creation of rose-colored chiffon embroidered with hundreds of tiny butterflies.

"Ah, *adorée*, it is perfection!" he exclaimed when she joined him. "but spoiled by the black stockings! It is as though the butterflies were dancing in the shadows!" He picked her up in his arms and carried her to a small divan,

and there he insisted upon removing the offending stockings, reveling in the vision of her pretty feet, which, kneeling, he bathed in his kisses.

Then Cleo came in with the supper. "We will serve ourselves, Cleo," Rita said. "You may go!"

"*Merci, Ma'mselle—et bonsoir!*" She went out through the drawing-room, switching out the lights behind her.

Georges moved to the little table and poured out two glasses of champagne. Then from his pocket he drew forth a jeweler's case. He opened it and brought it to her.

"Oh, Georges!" she gasped in delight. "Oh, Georges! How beautiful it is!"

He took the ruby pendant and placed it about her white throat, the great jewel gleaming crimson against her ivory breast.

"There!" he said, holding her face between his hands and kissing her moist mouth. "Now is my Rita quite happy!"

She put her arms about his neck; she drew him down to her. She kissed his rough face and his dark hair, murmuring little words of love and thanks. He was so good to her! And the jewel was so wonderful!

"I never cared so much for jewels before," she said rapturously. "but now they mean so much to me! Georges, you must give me loads and loads of beautiful jewels! I can never have enough!"

His face clouded. She noted it, and she laughed softly, while her white arms went out to him, luring him with the eternal lure of love. He came to her. Peace entered his soul. He took her in his arms, and kissed her soft white neck, while his fingers picked the pins from her hair, so that it fell a mass of scented gold about her shoulders. He buried his face in its perfumed splendor, whispering his extravagant words in her shell-pink ears, fondling and caressing her, forgetful of all else save love—and that she was his. Ah, *Dieu*—how wonderful she was!

And Rita? Rita lay there in his arms a little faint with love, all but drowned deliciously in the ecstasy of the hour.

But suddenly she started.

"Georges! What was that? I hear some one!"

He released her. They listened, and in a moment they heard footsteps, beyond the drawing-room, in the hall.

Rita sprang up. She drew her *négligé* about her, and moved toward the door. Georges followed her quickly. He caught her arm and drew her back.

"I'll go!" he said. "You stay here!"

Swiftly he moved to the electric switch and snapped on the lights, flooding the room in brilliance. In the doorway stood a woman, tall and not unbeautiful, exquisitely gowned, an ermine cloak about her shoulders.

"Agnes!" The name broke from his lips in astonishment. But before he could say more, Rita, in her gossamer *négligé* and with her wonderful hair about her, entered the door, crossed the room, and faced the woman. And Rita was angry.

"Who are you?" she demanded. "And what do you want here?"

The woman mocked her with her laughter. "I am Madame de Lorzac. I have come for my husband!"

Rita glanced at de Lorzac. "Georges! Oh, Georges!" she half sobbed. Then, covering her face with her hands, she sank into a chair weeping.

Georges seemed bewildered. He looked from Rita to his wife, while Agnes, her fury unleashed, stormed and raged:

"So this is why I must practice economy, *hein!* For her—for her I must do without—and not be 'so extravagant!' For her—that courtesan! Well; we shall see!"

He tried then to quiet her, and presently she permitted him to take her down and put her in her car. When he returned, he found Rita quite composed, but more than a little cold. He did not notice that, however. He was concerned

with himself. His brow was furrowed, and there was an expression of deep anxiety in his eyes. He seemed to have forgotten love, now. Nor did he speak. Merely he paced nervously up and down the room.

"I did not know you loved your wife!" she said ironically, her voice like ice.

"Love her!" He looked at her and snorted. "I do not love her—but you do not know what this means to me—just at this time. She will divorce me—and then—" he gestured despairingly, "I will be ruined politically. All my efforts of years will have been wasted. I shall be done for—ruined!"

Then Rita's manner seemed to change, and she was all sympathy and tenderness. Poor Georges! Rita understood!

"But it is not too late, Georges," she said consolingly. "She will forgive you. You must return to her. You must devote yourself to her—and forget me. I shall be all right. Don't worry about me, *cher Georges!* There is Jules!"

"Rita!" he cried despairingly. "You—you would go back to him?"

She shrugged her shoulders. What else was there?

"No, no, no!" He came to her and held her arms in a grip of steel. "Whatever happens that must not be!" he said vehemently. "I love you. I will not give you up!"

"Are you still so infatuated, Georges?" she asked tenderly.

He did not answer her. Merely he held her tight, tight in his arms in an agony of love—and fear of losing her.

And Rita kept consoling him, telling him how sorry she was, urging him to reconsider his course. Surely if he went back to her, she would forgive him! Then there would be no divorce!

But in the morning, when Cleo brought her breakfast to her in bed, Rita was all smiles.

"And did everything occur just at the right moment, Ma'mselle?" Cleo wanted to know.

"It was wonderful, Cleo! You arranged it perfectly! Now bring me my jewel case."

The little maid obeyed. She brought it, and Rita opened it. She took from it the jewel which Georges had given her and placed it about her neck. Then she held the box open to Cleo.

"Now take your choice, Cleo," she said. "Which do you like best—for your reward?"

## VI

INSANE though he was with love, be it set down neither to his credit nor to his shame that Georges, in a moment of sanity, did go to Agnes and ask to be forgiven. She agreed to forgive him—on condition that he would never see Rita again. And she was quite adamant about it. As for Georges, he was between the devil and the deep sea. So, in the end, Agnes did not forgive him. Instead she brought suit for divorce, which, with the swiftness with which such little matters are always attended to in Paris, was granted her within a month.

In the interim, Rita was more than ever adorable to Georges. Her demands on him ceased, and she was just her loving, tender little self, always eager for his kisses and his caresses. He objected to her gay, erotic parties—so there were fewer parties. He wished that she would give up her dancing, and she said: "Perhaps—soon!"

When the divorce was granted, and he came and told her about it, in despair as to his political future, she was sympathetic. Still, could he not go on just the same?

He shook his head. It was no use! He would not even try. Agnes' father would see to it that he was defeated.

"Poor Georges!" Rita said tenderly. "And it is all because of me! I would think by now that you would be cured of your infatuation."

At that he laughed mirthlessly. "Are you cured?" he asked her.

"I do not know, Georges," she replied slowly. "I think, perhaps, soon I will be—no longer infatuated!"

He looked at her sharply, a curious expression of fear creeping into his eyes.

"You mean," he said in a tense, staccato tone, catching her wrists, and holding her so that she could not evade his gaze, "you mean—Rita!" He stopped. He thought for a long moment. Then: "I am glad about the divorce. Now I can marry you!"

"Marry me!" Her tenderness had gone; her voice was the acme of all mockery. "That is so kind of you, Georges! But I have already been married to you, or I thought I was, and this way is so much nicer. We are both free! When we no longer care—well, that will be an end of it!"

"But I will always care," he protested.

"But I may not, Georges," she retorted calmly. "Besides, as your mistress, I do not have to do as you say. Being your mistress makes me my own mistress, while if I were married to you, then I would not be my own mistress!"

And from that moment, Rita seemed to change. If before she was capricious, now her caprice knew no limits. Neither did her extravagances. There must always be new clothes—new and wonderful creations! And jewels! She had a passion for them. Then there were parties, gayer than any she had given before. Nothing seemed to satiate her, and at the slightest word or look, she would become "displeased" with Georges. Then there would be no kisses; or there would be a succession of parties, so that she never had a minute for him alone.

Sometimes, for no apparent reason, she was cold. But then, too, there were hours when she would lull the ragged nerves of Georges to blissful peace, and he would count himself well-paid for all those other days of torment.

But, as so often he told her, things could not go on that way.

"You are ruining me, Rita! Soon—there will be no more—and then what?"

"I do not know, Georges. It is not my fault that I am—like I am. I must have things. I warned you that I was not like I was."

"When I am ruined—utterly, then you will leave? Is that it—then?"

She did not reply. Merely she shrugged her pretty shoulders. "You are not so poor, Georges. And then you must make more!"

That did seem to be the solution of it, and indeed Georges tried to make more and yet more money. But money is not so easily made as it is spent, and Rita had a sublime genius for spending money. And the day came, not long afterwards, when Georges was cornered.

It was late in the afternoon when Cleo admitted him to the apartment. Rita was not in. She was out, Cleo told him,—shopping.

But she came in soon afterwards.

"Ah, Georges," she greeted him sweetly, "I did not expect you!" She rang for Cleo to take her hat and wrap. The little maid entered, and in her hand she carried an expensive-looking, diminutive package.

"That came for Ma'mselle," she said.

Rita opened it. Inside she found a jeweler's case, and inside the case an exquisite bracelet of sapphires. With it was a card, which she read cursorily.

"Oh, look, Georges!" she exclaimed delightedly. "Isn't it lovely!" She held it dangling before him.

"Who's it from?" he asked, his black eyes narrowing.

"It's from Jules," she told him. "He doesn't want me to forget him!"

Georges said nothing, but he held out his hand for the bracelet. When she demurred, he said: "Give it to me!" with suppressed anger. And when she hesitated, he snatched it from her hand. "Damn Marvonne!" he half shouted.

"Damn him!" And dropping the bracelet on the polished floor, he ground it into the hard wood with the heel of his shoe. "Damn him! Damn him!"

She waited until he was through. Then she picked up the mangled piece of platinum and laid it in the hollow of her palm. "Now, Georges," she said quietly, "you can give me one—just like it!"

"I can give you nothing!" he turned on her in savage fury. "You have had all I can ever give you. That's why I came here now—to tell you. You have ruined me. You ruined me—politically; and now you've ruined me financially. I have only one more chance to recoup—and that chance is not worth considering. It's the end—the end, I tell you!" His words and his tone reproached her bitterly.

"And did you never make me suffer, Georges?" she retorted.

"You did it then, deliberately! You meant to ruin me? You did not really love me then? It has all been—false, just a pretense."

"I have been nice to you, Georges? Did I not come back to you when you asked me? Is it my fault that you did not get over your infatuation?"

He laughed a wild, mirthless laugh. "No—it was not your fault. But it doesn't matter now. It is the end. Now I shall get over it."

He waited for her to speak, but she remained silent.

"This is the end," he said again. "It is—good-by!"

"Just as you like, Georges," she returned with infuriating calm, and turning, she moved across the room and entered her boudoir. There she listened, and presently she heard him go into the hall and out, slamming the front door behind him.

That night Georges did not appear at the café. Rita was not particularly surprised, but when he did not communicate with her all the following day, she

became a little anxious. When she arrived at the café in the evening, she looked about for him. But he was not there. Marvonne was there, though. He had not been there for months. He sat at a little table by himself, and as she danced, Rita saw that his eyes were forever upon her. And once, as their eyes met, he smiled beckoningly.

But she did not go to him then. She was sure that Georges would come—and she waited. When, however, midnight came—and then one, and then two—and he did not appear, and Marvonne remained sitting there, ignoring those who came up to him and begged him to join their tables—Rita sensed that he was there because of something he knew about Georges.

So she went to him flirtingly. She remembered the bracelet; so did Marvonne.

"You are not wearing it, I see," he said.

"No," she answered hesitatingly. "no, I'm not."

There was a moment's silence. Then Marvonne said: "I have something rather interesting to tell you!"

"Tell me," she said, with an effort to conceal her eagerness.

He smiled—very sure of himself. "Not here," he said firmly.

She pretended then that she was not curious. Still, if Jules were very good, he might drive home with her; she would drop him at his house.

He bowed his thanks, but he was not quite sure that he could. But for all that, he was waiting outside her dressing-room when she came out.

He helped her into her limousine, and got in beside her—and for a little, he kept her in suspense. He waited for her to say: "You had something to tell me?" But she didn't say it. Deliberately she chatted about nothing, and Marvonne admired her cleverness.

"What I had to tell you," he said presently, in a quite conversational tone

of voice, "has to do with Georges de Lorzac."

"Oh, yes?"

"Yes, the poor chap staked everything he had on an insane speculation on the Bourse to-day—and lost! A friend of mine saw him, just afterwards, and said he was positively desperate. But of course he will get over it, although politically, well, his divorce was rather unfortunate!"

Rita said nothing. Her heart beat fast with anxiety, and all of a sudden, it seemed, she was seized with an icy terror.

"But what I really wanted to say," Marvonne went on, and now he turned to her and possessed himself of one of her hands, "is—well, it's rather a confession, I'm afraid."

"A confession?" she managed.

"Even so," he laughed softly. "Rita—since you, there has been no one!" He stated it as though it were the most extraordinary thing that ever happened. "Don't you want to come back?"

She did not answer, chiefly because her brain was on fire about Georges. A million fears obsessed her.

"Don't you want to come back to me, Rita?"

"No, no, no," she said quickly. "No, Jules! You must not ask me that!"

"But Rita, I—I love you!"

She shook her head. She noted with relief that the car was drawing up outside Marvonne's house.

"Tell him," she said with nervous fear, "tell him to drive quickly to my place!"

It was only then that he noted how his news of Georges had affected her. But he understood. He got out of the car. He gave the driver her directions, and as it drove off, he stood for a long time gazing after it.

The distance from his house to Rita's apartment was not great, but it seemed as if the journey would never end. She sat there, tense and frightened.

When the car pulled up at the house, she jumped out and ran inside. There she saw Cleo, weeping.

"What is it?" she asked sharply. "Tell me—quick!"

She drew the girl into the elevator, and the car ascended to her floor. The door was open—and her fears increased.

"Tell me—tell me!" she ordered.

"He—he was here," Cleo sobbed. "He told me to get out. He was beside himself! He told me not to go back!"

"Where is he now?"

Cleo shook her head.

"Where did he go?"

"I don't know."

Together they entered the apartment. Rita pressed the light switch, but no light came. She did not understand it.

"Get a candle," she ordered.

Cleo moved through the hall, but she stumbled and fell. Rita ran to her side and helped her up; she saw that it was an over-turned table over which she had fallen.

Presently they managed to find candles in the dining-room. As the spluttering wick flared into flame, Rita saw that the room had been wrecked. Crystal and silver and broken furniture were strewn everywhere. Pictures had been torn from the wall; light fixtures had been smashed—and nothing remained except ruin and débris.

They went from room to room, but it was the same in all of them. In her bedroom the worst damage had been done. There she found her clothes torn in ribbons and scattered on the floor. Her delicate toilet articles had been trampled under heavy feet. Perfume bottles had been smashed in the fireplace, their contents still trickling from the hearth and permeating the atmosphere with their mingled, heavy odors. The pretty, painted furniture had been broken to pieces. Everything had been utterly and completely destroyed.

The worth of the things mattered nothing to Rita. The story the destruc-

tion told froze her heart with terror. She could sense the fury with which Georges had been obsessed. She knew his passionate, uncontrollable nature so well.

"Stay here," she ordered Cleo. And hurrying from the apartment, she went down in the elevator, and reentered her car.

She had no idea where Georges had gone, but at all hazards she must find him before it was too late. She knew he would not have gone to his own house. Then—where? The first person she thought of was Marvonne. His friend had seen Georges. He might know where he was—and anyway, Marvonne would help her.

She gave the chauffeur the address. "And drive like hell!" she added.

The car leaped forth through the night, and Rita sat terrified, wondering, her mind a seething chaos of half-born fears.

Hurrying up the steps of Marvonne's house, she rang the bell. She waited. A moment passed. She rang again. Then the door was opened by a man in livery.

"I want to speak to Monsieur Marvonne—quickly," she began.

"Monsieur is not in," the servant informed her.

"Not in!" she all but screamed. "He must be in!"

"Mad'm'selle is mistaken! He has not been in all evening!"

"But—" She had brought him back herself! Then he had not come in! She thought rapidly. "I—I will wait for him, then," she said, brushing past the footman and moving towards the door of a small drawing-room. The door was partly open. Now it opened wide, and in the doorway stood Georges.

Rita gasped. "Georges!"

His face was haggard and gray; his eyes seemed to burn in his head. Obviously he was controlling himself with a tremendous effort. He motioned to

her to enter the room. He closed the door behind them.

"Georges," she began at once. "I—I have been so frightened. So dreadfully frightened. Jules told me—"

"Jules!" he thundered at her. "I know all about what he told you. I saw him at the café to-night—and I saw you!"

"You were there. Georges?"

"I saw you with him. That is why I am here now, I knew it! I knew you would come here—to him."

"I am not here—for him," she put in quickly.

"You lie!" Slowly he advanced towards her, and as slowly she retreated. "But no—no, by God! He will never have you, although doubtless you would do to him what you did to me! But then he would have your sweetness, too. No—you have done for me, but you have done for yourself. I am going, but you are going, too!" From his pocket he drew forth a revolver.

Rita saw it, and she stifled a scream. She retreated another step, and then she stopped. She glanced from the gun to Georges' face, and then, ripping open her gown, she bared her white breast to him.

"Very well," she said. "kill me! I'm not afraid, Georges!"

Slowly he raised the revolver, leveling it at her heart; slowly he raised his eyes till they met hers. Then a curious,

stifling sound came from his throat, and the gun fell from his hand. His legs seemed to give way beneath and he fell on his knees at her feet.

"So you couldn't kill me, Georges?" she taunted him.

But her mockery was wasted on him. He was sobbing. "No—no, I—I couldn't—!" He buried his head in his hands. "I—I love you—ah. Rita—Rita!"

She stretched out her hands and touched his bowed head. Poor Georges! If he loved her, ah, dear God, how she loved him! Tears fell from her eyes on his dark hair. He reached for her hands, and sobbingly, tenderly, he kissed them.

It was a moment before she could speak. Then, very simply: "Georges, do you still want to marry me?"

*Dieu*, did he want to marry her! Then she still loved him? "Rita!" Now he was on his feet, holding her in his arms, close, close. "You love me, Rita?"

The tenderest of smiles quirked the corners of her mouth. "Perhaps it is just—infatuation, Georges," she said. "Love—infatuation—what is the difference?"

"Infatuation," he told her, "is love that lasts but a little time—"

"And love," she added, "is infatuation—that lasts?"

"Forever, Rita, forever!"



## THE LURE EXTRAORDINARY

*By Marion Lyon Fairbanks*

MARNA scurried along the short block from the delicatessen to the Vera Apartments, her head down against the icy wind. The chill breath of January eddied about her cloak of royal blue velvet, turning to view its worn lining. The cloak had indeed seen happier days and was now neither very royal nor very blue.

The Vera Apartments were in much the same state of gentle decay. The façade of imitation marble was chipping sadly, the brass rails and letter boxes were tarnished and blackened. In some prehistoric day the elevator had been an asset, but it had long since been in a chronic state of waiting patiently at the third floor.

The Vera housed odd, transient folk, fleeing there from more exorbitant rents; business people who house-cleaned on Sunday; gipsyish people who liked the air of "no questions asked."

Even as she contemplated the climb to the fourth floor, Marna smiled. Donald would be waiting.

In the vestibule she hesitated a moment as she caught sight of some new woman fitting her card into the letter box of the apartment vacated yesterday. As it was the apartment across the hall from hers and Don's, Marna's scrutiny was complete though brief; that purely feminine knack of appraisal so puzzling to a man. One could never be sure in the Vera.

The woman glanced up at that moment. She might have been twenty-five or thirty-five, one of the type that remains brilliant and unchanged for a span of years. There was an impression of sleekness, slimness, length. Her dark hair was

drawn back in smooth undulations, leaving in its wake a question mark of dark hair on her forehead. And if her head was not decorative enough in itself, she had further enhanced it by a vicious comb—a little dagger set in red stones. Her gown was odd, exotic too, falling in an unbroken line of shameless sparseness from her shoulders to her slippers. The slippers were a bit shabby, as befitted things in the Vera, but they were bronze and beaded and altogether passable.

These impressions registered on Marna's consciousness in a second and she hurried in on catching a faintly hostile gleam in the almond-shaped dark eyes. The stranger was the sort of woman who felt as elemental a dislike for her own sex as any wild thing of the forest might. The mental picture Marna carried was disagreeable, disturbing. But she forgot it when she crossed her own threshold.

Although Donald was twenty-seven and Marna was twenty-two, she always felt a bit mothering to him. Perhaps it was because he had yellow hair invariably touseled, or because, like most musical geniuses, he was charmingly impractical, or because of the way he had of calling her every other moment to look at something or listen to something.

Marna dropped a kiss on the boyish, mussed head. After all, they had taken their nook in the Vera because it was well heated and a piano went with the apartment. And it had fulfilled these two things. Anyway, such brave young love would have found its heaven in any corner.

"How is it coming?" she asked eagerly, bending over the score of his Intermezzo.

It looked rather uncertain, having borne many erasures.

"No," the young man shook his head. "It won't come, dear, and that's all there is to it— But it will!" he added instantly.

"Of course," said Marna smiling, her hazey eyes with their tawny lashes dancing as they always did so hopefully.

She pulled off her bizarre little tam o' shanter, disclosing brown hair touched with unexpected flashes of tawny.

"My sun is shining now," said Donald softly, as was his custom when Marna took off her hat.

With a last kiss she darted out to the kitchenette to fix up a "minute and a half" supper. The kitchenette looked out on a court which had been whitewashed back in some era of the Vera's prime. When she stood in the centre of the box-like room, Marna could touch the gas-stove, the cupboards, the sink or the ice box. Even so, she sang a snatch from "Manon" as she worked.

She and Don Varney had married on the proverbial "nothing." But it had been a glorious adventure. And at the end of two years the honeymoon had not waned. Their only wedding gift had been a trunk full of old theatrical goods and costumes, coming pathetically to Marna from an aged aunt in Elmira who had once starred in stock in the West. From the trunk had come the velvet cloak and other things, remodeled cleverly and patiently at night by Marna. Daytimes she sat in a back room of the Coal City Electrical Company, painting parchment lamp shades with considerable talent and speed. Don taught music three days a week at the Coal City Conservatory, where he was shamefully exploited. But it was in hope and rosy future-dreaming that they found the never-diminishing springs of courage.

Donald had genius; and Don had something big under way at last. Even Mannerstein, the great man from New York, whom Don had contrived with

great ingenuity to meet in Chicago, had said so. Don's operetta was a thing of beauty—better, a thing of permanent beauty. And Mannerstein's hobby was American-made music of the higher type.

"When you can work up that intermezzo to meet the rest—come to New York," Mannerstein said. He had talked with Donald and listened to his impassioned playing until three in the morning. That surely meant something.

The operetta concerned the Boy who turned his back on Peaceful Valley and the Girl and followed the call to the great city beyond the mountains. A pretty pastoral, the first part. He paused on the bridge which spanned the River of Chance, with the city seen dimly on the far bank. The voice of pleasure and folly and adventure came up to him from the depths of the river. That was one of the finest hits of Donald's composition; powerful, alluring, with a hint of modern hectic rhythm. And later, when he was beaten and ashamed to go back to Peaceful Valley he stood again on the bridge, and now there came to him the voices of all those who had sought solace from disgrace and failure in its murky waters. That was to be the high, artistic moment, the Intermezzo of Lost Souls. That was the thing Donald worked for, snatching his hours eagerly from the routine of his conservatory work. And the longer he strove for it the more elusive seemed the theme he wanted. It was there, in some dim recess of his mind—until he tried to transcribe it. Sometimes he declared he would put the thing away for good, and with it, their hope. But, of course, he never did.

Marna had a great knack for giving prepared foods a homey flavor. She now took a can of spaghetti *a l'italienne*, put the contents in a casserole, sprinkled it with grated cheese, crumbs and butter, and put it in the oven to brown. She put the salad she had bought at the delicatessen on crisp lettuce leaves and topped

it with some of her own mayonnaise, mixed up providently the Sunday before. She cut a bakery sponge cake into squares and took five minutes to stir up an uncooked mocha frosting, which she laid on in a fluted design. It wasn't likely that Donald Varney would ever again find such a one for him as Marna.

"We have a new neighbor across the hall," said Marna across their gay little supper table.

"So the janitor warned me," Don grinned. "It bears the improbable name of Valentine Clarke."

"Well, I don't believe she's much of a valentine," Marna said with a grimace.

"Why?"

"Oh, because I don't think she has much of a heart," Marna laughed.

A week later Marna Varney came in rosy from the unabated cold wave. As she mounted the musty stairs of the Vera she was thinking of the little surprise she had for Don. The influential Mrs. Bixby of Bixby Avenue, having admired a parchment shade of Marna's making, had sought her out in the rear of the Electrical Company's shop and had given her a private order for place cards to be painted in leisure moments. That meant a new pair of shoes for one of them. Marna thought they could toss up to see.

But even as she put her key into the door, Valentine Clarke's door across the hall opened and Donald of all people was grinning from the aperture, his yellow hair tousled temperamentally.

"I'd left my key in my other suit. I'd have frozen to death if Miss Clarke hadn't been so kind," young Varney explained.

The two women acknowledged each other with bright smiles that meant nothing. Marna was acutely conscious of Valentine's sleek grooming, her clear, arresting pallor and her mouth so warmly red (with the aid of a lipstick), like a startling poppy blooming in a field of

snow. Her lips drew one's gaze unswervingly, and since they were of the full, kiss-inviting sort, it was a dangerous type of mouth. And Marna was never more aware of her own shabby velvet cloak and the wind-whipped tendrils of brown-tawny hair.

Valentine Clarke had wonderful manners, easy, graceful, compelling, yet she managed to convey to Marna how little the latter counted in Val's scheme of things. And Donald said good-by enthusiastically and Marna's cheeks were redder than the wind had made them.

"Why wouldn't you step in a moment?" Donald wanted to know.

"Miss Clarke's flat doesn't interest me," said Marna coldly.

But Don wasn't noticing. "Oh, Honey, listen to this!" He suddenly dived into his pocket for the familiar score of the *Intermezzo*. He dashed to the piano, playing a bar or two with his wonderful touch. Marna listened, eyes half closed.

"That's what you've been searching for," she said, quick to catch his mood.

"Marna, are you sure, Honey? It came to me so strangely this afternoon, there in Miss Clarke's—Marna, you *do* like it?"

"So you worked there, then?" she asked hopefully, ignoring the other issue for one which was, after all, so much more elemental.

"Miss Clarke's great. Doesn't bother a fellow. Nice of her to let me in, don't you think? When do we eat, dearest girl? I'm anxious to get at this again. Then it's New York for us and the little old fame and furbelows!" he cried, snatching her up in his arms for a rapturous kiss.

"New York," Marna repeated, but the hazel eyes did not dance to-night. And somehow, there wasn't any fun left in telling Donald about the place cards. She shut herself out into the kitchenette noiselessly.

"What's the matter with me?" she

wondered. "Here's the first thing Don's ever done that I didn't like—and it wasn't anything anyway—and I'm ready to tear his hair out—or mine!"

She laughed at herself, and because she was warm-hearted, true-hearted, and a believer in love as the dominant force, she put it out of her mind. But one thing remained a disturbing fact; Donald had not been able to go on with the theme started so bravely in Valentine's flat. It was weird that his great, throbbing harmony should have been born only to die. . . .

So, perhaps, Marna wasn't surprised to find Donald having tea there with Miss Clarke four days afterward. She felt as though she had known this would happen. The thought had loitered in some unhappy inner consciousness. She heard their voices and stopped without scruple outside the door.

"You've accomplished so much this afternoon, Don—" How the sound of his name on those absurdly red lips shocked Marna! But not half so much as the sound of Val's name on his.

"You've been so—so decent, Valentine. Frankly, I like to be let absolutely alone when I'm working." Donald was adopting an awfully sophisticated tone of voice. Or perhaps Marna imagined it.

"That's because I believe sex is an element that can be eliminated, when one chooses," Valentine answered slowly. Marna could imagine the languorous lids lowered over those exotic, almond-shaped eyes. And Don would flush up to the roots of his touseled yellow hair. Or maybe he wouldn't, now. Things had changed so much for Marna with such breath-taking rapidity that she suddenly realized how little she could count on with certainty.

"I'm like another man—in my companionship; don't you think so, Don?" Miss Clarke was insisting.

"Absolutely," Varney agreed seriously. Marna choked back a hateful little

laugh. "She's no more feminine than—Helen of Troy," she thought furiously.

"You're the kind that gets there, Donald." Val was speaking again. "You see, you haven't let marriage stultify you—"

Marna walked across to her own door blindly, tears hot in the mutinous hazel eyes, tears misty on the tawny lashes. After all, how little worth while had been the hard pull to keep their heads above water! She had given service, service—a service of love; and it all came to this!

"What propaganda she throws at him!" she raged, once inside her own sanctuary. "If Donald can't see through it and her, why then, I—" But she didn't finish. You see, she loved Don. . . .

And when he came grinning in a moment later so ingenuously, her heart met him as it always had. But life, if not spoiled, was certainly marred for Marna. There was an underlying fear, contempt, hatred; all sorts of elemental emotions and dormant passions that rose up to drive her mad at her routine of lampshade painting. Yet she went to tea with Valentine on Saturday when her half holiday occurred. She simply had to size up this atmosphere that brought Donald his inspiration. He couldn't work successfully in his own home these days—which was rather a terrible thought for poor little Marna Varney.

Valentine's flat, like the girl herself, was well-groomed, colorful, odd. She had acquired a number of effective pieces, valuable and otherwise. But the piano had no better tone than theirs, Marna decided jealously. And that was the main item in Don's work. Of course, the place was restful, yet stimulating, and Val herself, sitting in a turquoise gown in a carved, monastic chair, was no ordinary rival.

Val had traveled here there and everywhere, a sort of wanderer, picking up work easily and dropping it with the

whim. She had been a social secretary in Shanghai in the brilliant English concession; she had sold flowers with two other art students at Nice in a week of mad, merry masquerade; she had been a waitress in a lurid little restaurant in Cushing, Oklahoma, in the first days of the oil boom. And she knew how to tell these things. Furthermore, Val called Marna "my dear girl," until young Mrs. Varney felt like some crude schoolgirl. That's wherein a great deal of Miss Clarke's power lay; she could make you feel exactly what she wanted you to appear, and all the time you knew you weren't at all her conception. It gave Marna an oppressive sense of imprisonment, until stifled in the heady air of burning incense and burning insult, she escaped with an excuse about the place cards.

"How clever of you to be able to do then," Valentine's voice followed her out patronizingly.

She had longed to challenge back with, "Yes, I wonder if you would slave away for any man!" But that would hurt Donald. . . .

Well, Donald had stayed behind, already picking out elusive bits of harmony on the piano, as though Marna's presence had been his only hindrance. Of course, he wouldn't mean that; goodness knew she had always been a shadowy background when it came time for his periodical snatches of feverish work. But men were so careless of the impressions they gave, never realizing in the least that every point was an issue between two women.

But Marna did not do the place cards that time. Too heart-heavy, head-heavy for that. She felt exhausted and depressed, as though she had wept for hours. A sort of spiritual weeping, perhaps. She was struck with the futility of all things in general, and of sacrificing for love of a man in particular.

It was only six, but the winter night had closed in with finality and the stars

were pale high above the arc lights of the street. She wanted to get out of doors, out into the invigorating sharpness of January, having found that her panacea in other days of less absorbing problems.

She thought suddenly of the roof. It would be pleasant there, no passers-by to stare at her; only a multitudinous silence. She wanted the clear coldness to think in. As she went up to the roof, arrayed in the faithful velvet cloak, with a rose scarf from out the plethoric theatrical trunk thrown softly over her tawny hair, a certain thought she had been stifling was born with utter clarity. It was Val herself that was Donald's "atmosphere." You couldn't stay neutral with Val's sort. She either overwhelmed you or left you cold. Oh, it was all so heartbreakingly clear! Indeed, Marna had asked him tremulously on several occasions about some of the artistic things in Miss Clarke's flat.

"That carved chair?" he had laughed. "Looks like the throne room scene in a Viennese opera. The brass samovar? Oh, yes . . . fountain service in the rear! What's the matter with my darling little crazy girl?" he had finished with a laugh. And then he would kiss her, and Marna had tried to rest content in his arms and put aside ugly doubts until she met them face to face. She had been afraid of that day, and here it was!

Up there on the roof that seemed so much higher than it was on this ice-clear night, she sat down on an old bench left there from the warmer nights of June, and dreamily watched a weird dance executed by a suit of red flannels some one had carelessly left on the clothesline. She could see the dull blue glow of the hydro plant down the hill and the twinkling lights of trolleys racing in the distance like elfin chariots. But Marna could not conquer her rebellious heart. She had given Donald all the love she could ever give, and now—there would be nothing. She

might not even salvage from the wreck a real respect for anyone who succumbed to the obvious artificiality of Valentine. This sadness was succeeded by a surge of real anger and hot pride. Her tears were cold on her cheeks in the wind.

"Oh—I'll do something desperate, I'm afraid," she cried out to the Big Dipper which glowed brightly like the enormous symbol of a dry country.

"What little rebel is this?" a voice inquired amusedly, a voice which came from directly behind her.

Marna started to her feet and made out the tip of a lighted cigarette and the form of some man. Probably he had been easily within view the whole time.

"Oh, I didn't know—I thought—" Marna stammered, looking for the moment quite beautiful with her startled eyes and blown tendrils of hair and tragic little face, all framed in the misty rose of the old scarf.

"It has always been one of my ridiculous day dreams that some one would discover my favorite place and come up to me," he laughed, and stepping forward Marna recognized him as Harry Carleton, the bachelor who lived on the top floor of the Vera. He was quite the plutocrat of the place by virtue of owning a flivver coupé with white wire wheels, which, parked daily before the chipping entrance of the Vera, lent a certain mild air of affluence to the dingy street.

Some one in a rash moment had once told Harry that he resembled John Barrymore, and he had been making the most of it ever since. But there was something about him one liked; a buoyancy of spirit, a blatant good humor and gaiety of heart that was as good as a tonic.

"Why, this is little Marna Varney," he smiled, saying her name with a rhythmic lilt that was quite charming. "Little Marna Varney, who sings up the

court to me while I put to death my eggs, bacon and coffee on my inconstant gas stove."

Marna laughed unwillingly. "I had no idea my efforts were so appreciated."

"Just a variation of the great law of cause and effect, Marna Varney. There's always some one to appreciate something! Not always the logical one, of course—"

Marna interrupted hastily.

"I'm not really a rebel, as you might justly think."

"Every married woman is a rebel," Harry went on pleasantly. "Life can't go on without rebellion. That would be stagnation."

Marna drew the velvet cloak high about her throat. "It's better to stagnate than—raise the roof of the world," she answered. "And I'm not going to stop up here to listen to a young bachelor's sophistries, either!"

She laughed as she said it, though, and turned to go.

"I'll be good—talk about the weather or anything, if you'll stay," he promised, flopping down lazily on the bench and indicating the place at his side for Marna.

She continued to stand there hesitantly.

"To continue my point," Harry went on, ignoring his promise. "there's always some one to tell troubles to, if you have them, and who doesn't? You must admit, Marna Varney, that you didn't come up here to make a father confessor of that—Bolshevik union suit!"

"Or of anyone," Marna said, piqued.

"Waiving that point, for the sake of argument," Harry continued imperturbably, "I want, for some reason, to make you happy—or happier."

Marna considered. His dark, romantic eyes under a plaid golfing cap looked out at her with a flash of seriousness.

"What is the reason?" she asked, with a purely feminine instinct.

"Because you came to the roof, perhaps," he shrugged.

"That would be a lot more inexpensive than making some nice girl your wife and providing for *her* happiness," Marna retorted bitterly.

Carleton only laughed his infectious laugh which revealed a flash of large white teeth, showing dimly in the starlight. "The fellow has a wonderful disposition," he mused innocently. "He simply refuses to quarrel with little Marna Varney."

Again Marna laughed unwillingly.

"You might give a party—a—a snappy one," she suggested with sudden inspiration, "for the inmates of the Vera."

"'Inmates?' Your choice of words, my dear Marna Varney, is nothing short of genius. Your idea is better than that. In fact—sit down, won't you?"

"If you are going to give the party I shall have to be a conspirator," she rallied.

"In fact, as I was saying, I have intended giving a housewarning ever since I joined the ranks in November. My acquaintance is limited. I might sum it up as follows: Opening the door with a butter knife that time you and your temperamental husband were locked out; taking Mrs. Billy's cream from the dumb-waiter by mistake (she thought I was a horse thief); afterwards taking two dollars from Mr. Billy in penny ante (now she's sure I'm dishonest); nearly running over the Jameson girl twice (that kid has the most maddening habit of going into reverse at the wrong moment); and smoking my pipe into Mrs. Cartwright's washing. You might say that I was the most popular man in the outfit. As yet I'm not an speaking terms with the amateur vamp on your floor."

"Prepare to be wholly charmed," Marna said lightly, and yet her words told him a great deal.

"I wouldn't go so far as to say that," he returned meaningly.

Marna turned the subject to the details of Harry's party, and the night was set for Saturday, Marna with an eye to the recuperative sleep of Sunday morning. And when at last she thought of going downstairs she discovered that she was chilled through, and that it was ten o'clock.

Carleton helped Marna down the steep, dark stairs, each acutely aware of the other, an atmosphere Harry was wont to create. Yet in Marna's heart there was only the sad wish that Don were her cavalier. Harry took both her hands, kissed one then the other.

"Don't!" Marna said sharply, pulling away.

"Merely a little Continental accomplishment I picked up in Chicago," Harry said good-naturedly.

Marna smiled the tired little smile that came to her lips these days. "You've cheered me up, anyway," she admitted grudgingly.

Now she was afraid that Don had beaten her home, but when she got to the ominously quiet door she was afraid he hadn't. Just then Donald began playing over in Valentine's flat. It held Marna, that theme, so majestic, so suggestive of anguish and despair, and when he broke off abruptly the tears were on her lashes again.

"Oh, I don't know what to do!" she thought helplessly. "I want to help him so, so, so! And yet. . . . Oh, I'll let him do it his way. I won't complain the least little bit," she resolved bravely, which was Marna's way of laying a very tangible sacrifice at the feet of love.

She sought forgetfulness in searching through the battered old theatrical trunk for something to fix up for the party. She did not care to shine for Harry. Val was her real incentive.

She found some white *crêpe de Chine* draperies on which silver stars had been pasted. These could be picked off patiently, however, after which the thing could be ripped up and laundered in

white soap suds. She had five full yards to work with, and wonders might be performed after the day's routine. Don found her humming when he came in.

"Marna, we'll be going soon," he enthused. "A few more sessions like tonight and it'll be done!"

"Shan't you hate to leave—the Vera?" Marna asked, lowering the hazel eyes.

"Why should I?" he counter-questioned quickly.

"Don! You forgot me all this evening, didn't you?" she flamed out when the thought could no longer be repressed.

"Forgot you?" He shook his adorable, touseled hair and his blue eyes held hers. "No, Honey. You are just a lovely, comfortable thought in the back of my head all the time. I know you'll always be here when I come. I depend on you!"

"Oh, but I don't want to be a horrid old comfortable thought!" Marna rebelled. "Just a background. . . . Don"—(suddenly)—"don't you know that people are forever tiring of the comfy things and hunting out a little brilliance?"

"When they're fools," said Varney gruffly.

"There's a little of the fool in all of us," Marna said with surprising cynicism. "If you turned out to be one—I'm afraid I'd be one too!"

She struggled out of his arms as he went to take her and ran into the bedroom, slamming the door. He followed.

"Marna, dear—what is it?" he pleaded.

In the days before the party Donald seemed quite oblivious to the peculiar mental torment Marna endured. And she was too proud for a showdown. She did not want to hold her husband by the mere legal right she had. Love and marriage and life meant something deeper, unforced, wonderful to Marna. It was evident that Val supplied some stimulus lacking in herself. Also, there were times when Marna wondered if

anybody or anything in the world were worth so much worrying.

In such a mood of recklessness she prepared for Carleton's party. The event was the talk of the Vera Apartments. She was determined to shine, and shine she did. The white crêpe de Chine had been fashioned into an artistic gown, draped in modish folds, Grecian in simplicity, but very effective. She had resurrected a foliage wreath from an old hat and had gilded the leaves. Then she braided her hair and wound it about her head in coronet style, the gold leaves crowning her with a final note of splendor which contrived to bring out the tawny flashes in her brown hair and hazel eyes.

Harry Carleton put his hand to his brow and pretended to faint as Marna came in.

"Well, well, well, here's little Marna Varney as the resplendent goddess of something or other. Fickleness, perhaps, Marna?"

"Leave that for the men," Marna retorted.

Harry himself was resplendent, the only man in the Vera possessing a Tuxedo. He nodded to Varney indifferently, with the slight contempt a young man who called his business the "real estate game" might feel for a mere pianist. Valentine Clarke came in directly afterwards, dominating the scene of action in Burgundy charmeuse with a Turkish effect about the ankles, wearing a corsage of artificial orchids. She greeted Marna effusively, and Harry, watching the two girls, began to understand certain things.

He devoted himself utterly to Marna, whose downcast heart responded sadly. Her eyes were sweetly wistful whenever they rested on Don. He was sitting in a corner dreaming his dreams, his blond head in his hands, and he looked adorable to her.

Val was singing then, an imitation of Nora Bayes that wasn't half bad and

which won wild applause from the oddly assorted tenants of the Vera, each to impress the others that he had had the price to hear the incomparable Nora. But Marna had her inning next.

There was a "hat making" contest for the ladies, with the men of the company as judges. Each lady was given two great squares of fancy paper, one green and one white, a pair of scissors, a paper of pins, from which she was to fashion a hat in ten minutes. Here Marna's cleverness, the outcome of necessity, won her acclaim. Her paper hat, a draped turban of the green with two improvised quills of the white pinned on at a rakish angle, won a unanimous vote from the men, and Valentine yawned prettily.

It was the prize which reduced the losers to a state of sheer envy. It was a little wrist-watch on a black ribbon, a decided luxury for most of the ladies of the Vera. The watch was plain, but represented to that assemblage of "nearly-brokes" an expenditure most surprising. Marna was acutely embarrassed as Harry snapped it onto her slim wrist and the Barrymorish eyes looked into hers with a swift expression she could not fathom.

"It—seems like robbery, really," Marna laughed consciously.

"Let genius be rewarded," said Harry, waving away the mere trifle with a gesture he had perfected before his chifonier no later than this afternoon.

Marna felt like a little queen and Donald smiled at her reassuringly, and told her she was the cleverest little wife a fellow ever had, and she began to think that perhaps the world wasn't going to turn out such a hateful old place after all.

Just as she decided that, the blow fell. Val, seeing that Donald was inexpressibly bored by a noisy group about the piano, gave him her latchkey. She leaned to him with that absorbingly personal smile of hers. It marked her

as the one person in the mad throng who really appreciated his mood. Marna took it all in with the old sense of sickening futility.

"Just run along to my flat and work out that theme while it's still fresh in its glory," she advised him.

"If you'll excuse me, Carleton—" Don apologized.

"The pleasure is all ours," the irrepressible Harry grinned. "What I mean to say is—"

But young Varney had disappeared out the door and Harry crossed to Marna with a look of elation on his face.

Of course, after refreshments had been served, Marna wasn't at all surprised to find that Miss Clarke had mysteriously disappeared. They would be alone down there now! Well, she wouldn't follow; not if it killed her to stay behind. So she turned flashing hazel eyes to Harry. Harry, with a swift glance that took in the charming details of her white, shimmering gown, the gold wreath in her hair, the betrayingly high color, saw in her a desirable goddess delivered into his hands at a psychological moment.

At last the Jamesons, professional party breakers, made a dash for home, and the others followed suit.

"Don't go yet." Harry put his hand on Marna's sleeve. "Help me clean up the kitchen, will you, Marna Varney?" He said her name softly, with that odd, sing-song rhythm.

"Yes, I will!" said Marna, her head high. None of the departing guests so much as raised an inquiring brow. A comfortable old place, was the Vera.

Marna went into the kitchenette, a duplicate of her own, and Harry tied a funny, mannish apron about her waist. He seemed to enjoy the transaction, as though the tightening of the strings was the next best thing to putting his own compelling young arms about this enchanting girl. Marna pulled away with a laugh.

When she was putting away the desert plates she discovered a pound box of chocolates in the cupboard.

"Oh, you modern Silas Marner," she chided him over her shoulder. "I suppose you get these out in the dark o' night, lick a little of the chocolate off and put them back again!"

"Wait, young woman," he commanded. "I'm about to heap the well-known coals of fire on your braids." He smiled his Barrymore smile. "As a matter of fact, Marna Varney, this was the hat prize to any other winner but yourself."

"Oh!" she exclaimed uncertainly. "Then—don't you see?—that makes it a gift." She was already unfastening the watch regretfully. "I can't keep it, Mr. Carleton. I love it, but you really shouldn't—"

He imprisoned her hands. "Marna Varney is going to keep that watch," he said roughly. "Who is going to care?" he demanded.

She flushed. Oh, the hatefulness of Val and Val's flat! The whole thing was forever putting Marna in a false position. She was consumed with fresh anger.

"Well, I will keep it," she announced. "And every time I look at it I'll feel like a dreadful outlaw—and I don't care!"

"Now we're on the road to common sense," Harry approved. "Listen, little Marna Varney, don't you know that you are beautiful and unusual and everything else desirable, and that there are a certain number of damn fools in the world? Husbands, as a class—"

Marna interrupted angrily. "The tenth commandment was made for—for lazy young men who won't take the trouble to find wives of their own—"

Harry bowed. "When all the loveliest ones are always taken!"

Marna laughed in spite of herself. "If you'd only let me be mad at you for half a minute," she protested.

"Do you know why you 'treat me rough,' Marna Varney?" He stepped

nearer her. She was a little afraid of something strange in his voice, some new timbre. But she wanted to go on down this mad road. She didn't know why except that somewhere Don and Val were together and had forgotten her.

"Why?" she answered him. Her heart fluttered a tiny bit.

"You're afraid of me. You're afraid to give in to it."

"To—to what?" Marna asked breathlessly.

"This—" He put his arms about her. She buried her face against the roughness of his coat. Somehow it was good to feel his arms tightening, holding her prisoner. Some one wanted her, some one cared! She was drifting.

And then she had lifted her face, and his lips were warm against hers in an intense kiss.

But with the caress came clearness to her very tired, worried little head. Hot shame enveloped her in a seething flame. She backed away from him, sat down limply on the one chair in the kitchenette. There was no solace for her in taking from another that which she wanted from Don. She began to cry softly, hopelessly.

Harry stared at her perplexedly. He had thought it a joyous moment, highly worthy of repetition, and he could not guess that Marna was overcome with the sense of irreparably having destroyed something beautiful which could never be restored. She had surrendered lips pledged until death to Donald. She, as well as he, had put a blot on the bright scroll of their marriage. She stood up weakly, went to the door, a drooping pathetic, yet beautiful figure in her goddess-like gown.

"I wanted you to be happy, Marna Varney," Carleton said miserably. "I guess I've made a mess of it."

"Oh, I'm not blaming you," she sighed. "There was nothing to hold you back. Only, I'm so ashamed! Could you for-

get this?" she cried wistfully, tears standing in the hazel eyes.

"No, my dear. I couldn't," Harry smiled with something of real seriousness.

"Good-by, Harry," she said firmly.

Marna tiptoed past Val's shut door, her pretty mouth very grim. Behind that door. . . . No, she didn't think that she'd dare look beyond that oak barrier even if she were suddenly granted some X-ray power. She wanted so to clutch onto the shreds of romance and faith as they went slipping, slipping away.

"This is going to be the end of this," Marna told herself. She was afraid, not so much of Harry as of her own mental chaos.

When Donald came in with ecstatic news of his operetta on his lips, he was arrested by the look on Marna's face. She had been waiting in an interval of high anger he could not have guessed. She had thought she would have to go and pound on Val's door hysterically if he didn't come in another instant. She had formulated mad, fleeting plans for ending that hideous suspense; such as setting fire to the Vera or throwing herself down the stairs; anything—anything— And in such a state he found her.

"Donald, do you know where we are heading?" she demanded, her cheeks and eyes brilliant, her voice maintaining a semblance of control only with the greatest difficulty.

"But Marna dear—"

"Oh, I'm not dear to you any more, Don!" she flung out with a sob, the prelude to a greater storm of tears.

"If I've done anything—" Don began helplessly, a little impatiently, for he had come home full of his theme.

"That's just it! Do you suppose it's nothing to me for you to live practically at Valentine Clarke's? Oh, Don—we'll just end up on the rocks! Or else, I'll lose my mind—"

He had never seen Marna, gay, little

Marna, of the dancing, hazel eyes, like this. It was horrifying.

"I had no idea you cared—" he began again.

"You've hardly had time for other—ideas," said Marna bitterly. "It's Valentine this and Valentine that!"

"It's my Intermezzo, Marna. Please be reasonable, dear. I've always been that way when composing. You knew that. And you've helped wonderfully— You've been so good!"

"—by letting Val sit on the sidelines and vamp," she finished his sentence. Well, she was glad *that* was out.

Don frowned.

"That's where you're wrong. Val—Miss Clarke—has let me use her flat because for some reason or other I could write this thing there. I don't know why myself. Marna, listen, Honey—"

"I don't suppose Val knows why you like to compose there!"

"She thinks it's because it's so restful; no disturbing—"

"The inference being, that I—!" Marna was too furious to finish.

"You don't try to understand Valentine," said Donald, keeping his voice down, always an aggravation to the wildly angry party of a quarrel.

"And of course she tries to understand me," Marna said sarcastically.

"Yes, she does," Don agreed eagerly. "Why, we often speak of you."

"I can imagine that!" Marna laughed unpleasantly. "When it comes to propaganda, my dear stupid Don, Val could make you give a hundred cents on a Mexican dollar."

Don reddened. He was, in his way, almost as angry as Marna.

"If you want to imprison me in a sort of watchfulness, how am I ever going to expand, rise above the conventional smallness of the usual marriage?" he asked.

"Ah, did I hear an echo?" Marna retorted.

"Marna, you are spoiling something

for both of us. We've always been so different."

But she flung herself away from his arms.

"I—spoiling it? Oh, Don, you're just like—Adam! Can't you see, it's you—you? It's come to this, Don." She looked at him stormily, very beautiful in the white gown and gold wreath. Harry's watch ticking on her wrist, challenged her to see it through. "You've got to choose between Val Clarke and me. You give up going there, or I give up staying here!"

Now that that much was over she felt a blessed relief. She had been afraid to dare him before. And now she was afraid of nothing so much as the miserable uncertainty of this last month.

"I'm not choosing between you and—anybody," Don conceded stiffly. "The fact that you don't trust me closes one chapter in the book as far as I'm concerned. I was not aware that I was marrying a—guardian."

"Perhaps it would have been better if you hadn't married anyone," Marna suggested.

"Perhaps it would," Don agreed.

And so they both said a great many things they didn't believe at all, and Marna learned how futile victory can sometimes be.

They were very polite to each other in the next few days. Hatefully polite. Donald spent his evenings at home in moody silence, secluded behind a book or paper. Valentine smiled pityingly on Marna in the hallways. Then the atmosphere cleared a tiny bit and Don tried to work on his *Intermezzo of Lost Souls*. But he couldn't go on. Whatever web of illusion or enchantment Val spun in her cosy lair, was missing now. He simply couldn't finish the theme. Three-fourths of it was done, a weird, stupendous symphony of sorrow, great, crashing chords, dim minors. The score lay on the end of the piano gathering

dust, a barrier between the young Varneys and their harmonious yesterdays. Marna discovered that there are roads along which one does not retrace his steps.

She met Harry Carleton on the dark stairs one snowy evening as she came in with the usual supply of groceries. Harry had not forgotten one detail of the kiss that night, nor had he any intention of allowing the delightful memory to escape him. There was something infinitely appealing about little Marna Varney struggling through the cold in a worn velvet cloak, with groceries for an unappreciative person whom he mentally catalogued as "the tow-headed piano fancier."

"Sorry the world is dark for Marna Varney," he said, with a smile and a flash of the Barrymorish eyes that dared her to forget the kiss. Again her name had the odd, pleasant lilt as he said it.

"Oh, the world isn't any darker than it is," she answered, but somehow she scarcely felt the energy for spirited banter.

"You no longer sing up the air shaft to lull my thoughts from the evening zephyr arising from Mrs. Jameson's ham and cabbage," he accused her.

Marna trudged up the stairs in weary silence, and Harry was sorely tempted to pick her up in his arms.

"I have a joyous little plan for you, Marna Varney," he began in his cheerful, buoyant manner.

"Not me," she shook her head.

"Yes, you! Sunday there's going to be a jollification out at one of my friends' house—married couple. Live out at the Orchard Manor allotment on the river."

Marna threw up her head proudly. "Sunday is the one day on which Donald and I are never separated," she told him. And that was true. Even Val had never intruded on their one day of the week.

"Just the same, cross marks spot where

Harry's chicken coop on wheels will be parked Sunday at four," he went on with a grin. "Around the corner on Maple Street, where no one can see a certain charming young lady tripping thitherward. You know, 'The night has a thousand eyes, the Vera but forty,'" he paraphrased, "but believe me, those two score optics can see *some*. But this is safe—and sane. The only sane thing to do. I'll get you back early with roses in your cheeks and Pollyanna in your heart. Are you on?"

"Decidedly off! But thank you, Harry; only, you don't understand—"

"Wait and see. Remember I'll be waiting there," he interrupted, and as suddenly dashed up to his own landing above.

Sunday dawned frigidly. That is to say, there was plenty of good steam up in the Vera, but there was forbidding ice in the hearts of the young Varneys. They simply weren't getting on. Don was hurt, Marna was hurt, and the Intermezzo wasn't even mentioned, nor any of their rosy future-dreams.

Donald was staring moodily out of the windows, though there was nothing to see in the drab street, until Marna felt at last as if she would scream.

"Don!" Something in her voice made him wheel about sharply. "We're not making out very well, are we? I'm sorry—if—I've hindered you!" (It was hard to say that.) "And so, I want you to go to Val's the same as before, if you think it will help your work."

She waited for him to deny it, and yet his eyes were lighted by a flash of energy, hope. She turned her own away lest she read an utter defeat in his.

"But you must know, Marna, that it isn't because of Val— There isn't anyone for me but you! It's just something intangible. I'm going to try to analyze it."

"It will be a dangerous process," Marna smiled mirthlessly. "Don, it's the

fact that you can't see—" She shrugged hopelessly. It all came to this, she didn't want Don unless he wanted to stay above all things. That was Marna's way.

"Then I'll go right over. Here's a long Sunday to work in. Won't you come too, Marna? You're sure you don't mind?"

Marna nodded mutely. Her voice refused to come for a second. So Donald had broken their precedent himself! He was throwing away their Sunday, their one day of the week.

"Why should I care, after all?" she said, with an attempt at lightness.

He was gone, the light closing of the door booming dizzily on her consciousness. She had no idea of following. She couldn't endure Valentine's condescension, and she had never essayed the awkward rôle of third party. In fact, she doubted if there were anything in the world she really wished to do. And then she remembered Harry. . . .

She denied the insistence of a heavy heart. It was three; she had an hour then. She got out the wrist watch, hidden away guiltily all week, and put it on. It was hers. No one cared. She had a navy blue serge dress that wasn't half bad. It had a tricky little bolero and an accordion-plaited skirt, short and clinging. The sash of Roman stripes added a dash of color. Marna brushed the brown-tawny hair out until it glistened, and dressed it prettily.

She tiptoed furtively past Val's door. She could hear the wonderful touch of Don's hands on the keys, and had to wink back the tears.

Harry's flivver coupé was waiting, and his smile intimated that he had never doubted that she would come.

"You know that inverted question mark of hair on Val's noble brow?" he asked, once they were out on the pike.

Marna nodded. She didn't want to talk about Valentine.

"Well, no wonder. It means that little Val knows all of life's answers

backward. Can't you think who she is, Marna?"

"No," she replied listlessly.

"She's the girl who figured in that big breach of promise suit with the Chicago builder; remember?"

Marna was all attention now. The thing had been page one stuff in the Coal City papers for a week last year. "Oh, the girl who wrote the famous 'yum yum' letters?"

"The very one. Pretty cheap stuff, eh?"

Marna closed her lips hard over her even, white teeth. It *was* cheap stuff; and perhaps after all, Donald was cheap too. At any rate, that was the thought Harry had wished to put into her head. He saw by her face that the fact of Don's neglect was a thousand times more potent now.

Orchard Manor was a typical down-at-the-heels subdivision, started gaily with tulip beds and high hopes in the days of its prime, sold out to careless commuters. No less typical were their host and hostess, the Briggs, and their strident assortment of guests. They were loud people who liked to talk about home brew and the family life of film favorites. They greeted Harry and "Miss Varney" uproariously.

As they laid off their wraps upstairs, Harry's chief interest in the party divulged. He would have been content to stay there alone with Marna all afternoon. She had no sooner laid aside her hat than she felt his arms about her.

"Are you going to be my little pal, Marna Varney?" he whispered.

"Yes," said Marna faintly, not in the least knowing what she was saying. She was afraid of Harry, now they were so far from the Vera. But this was poor little Marna's reckless day, and her bruised heart took what balm it could from Harry's devotion.

He kissed her then, again and again, and it was only on her insistence that they joined the group downstairs. It

was a hideous afternoon as Marna afterwards recalled it. The men made frequent pilgrimages to the cellar and the party grew more flamboyant. She tried to crowd out of her mind certain Sunday afternoons she and Don had had together. Harry was always trying to draw her off to some nook, there to bestow his hot caresses as his manner became more and more daring. She wanted to escape, but discovered with dismay that they were doomed for supper too.

"I'll drive you home right afterward," Harry promised. "Who'll miss you anyway, Marna dear?"

And it was nine-thirty before she could get Carleton started homeward. After all, she had always been home before Don—to welcome him in. Or would he still be at Val's? . . .

But the moment Harry opened the front door of the Briggs' house he drew back sharply as the wind swept devastatingly through the hall.

"Wow, what a wind! The temperature must have dropped about twenty degrees," he exclaimed.

"We can run out to the car," said Marna pluckily, pulling the velvet cloak high about her ears.

A moment later Briggs stuck his head out the door jocosely. "Don'tcha know we don't allow loitering on these here premises, young feller?"

"Lizzie's frozen," Harry explained. "Wonder if I could thaw her out before I'd freeze to death?"

"Forget it. Stupid, and I can bunk you up for the night," Briggs insisted heartily.

"Yes, come on," Harry said roughly, running back to the house and pulling despairing Marna with him.

"But Harry! I can't be away all night. Don't you understand? You promised—"

"This is something we can't help. Be a sport, Marna. What do you care, if you stand ace-high with me? Listen,

Marna Varney—why don't you give that ingrown pianist the go-by and tie up with me?" He performed his very best Barrymore smile.

But his words struck to her heart cruelly. Poor Don! Wasn't she being the worst now? But it was no use to plead with Harry, as Briggs was already dragging him again to the cellar stairs.

They left Marna there in the hall, and she knew in that instant that two wrongs never make a right and that she was going to get back to Donald to-night.

On the landing she saw a telephone, and feverishly called up the Traction Company, only to find that the last inter-urban for Coal City had left twenty minutes earlier. She looked out of the window on the lonely allotment. She could never explain to Don. . . .

Then she was hearing Mrs. Briggs' dominant voice complaining: "If it hadn't turned so doggone cold we could have gone skating. You can hire skates at the clubhouse at the foot of the next block."

Marna knew clearly that she was going to attempt to skate back to Coal City, eight torturing miles. It was a mad, dangerous plan, but this was her test, and she rose to it superbly. She got out the front door noiselessly and was instantly engulfed in the chill swirls of air. She had no trouble in locating the little clubhouse, and she startled the funny old man who was reading by the stove in the centre of the one big room.

"I want to hire some skates," she gasped.

The old man removed his pipe. "Reckon you don't know how cold it is, young lady. All the skaters are back, and glad to get in, too." He indicated the shelves of returned skates.

"Well, I'll try it a moment, anyway," she laughed bravely, and no one would have guessed how afraid she was.

She offered the wrist-watch for security. It seemed like poetic justice that

Harry's gift should be the means of her getting back to Donald.

"Good luck! We'll see you back before long," the old man called as she went out with her coat collar pinned high. Marna couldn't answer because of the sob in her throat.

The wind proved to be at her back, and with scarcely any effort she drifted like a leaf along the shadowy course of the river. All the time she was chanting a bit hysterically to herself, "Oh, Donny, Donny, I could never belong to anyone else!"

The real test lay just beyond, for the river made a sharp bend and the wind cut across her body now, an intangible sword. Several times she stumbled across frozen-in twigs or cracks left by boys' hockey games. And each time it was harder to get up again. Her feet and limbs seemed like nothing so much as two leaded weights, propelling her by sheer dint of her will. She had no idea whether she was making headway or not. The gale was a dull roar in her ears, and the weird shore was of a sameness. Then she found herself lying on the ice—funny, she couldn't remember having gone down. She was just sinking, sinking. It wasn't so bad, after all. . . . The cold was kind now.

And that came very near being the end of Marna's little story; but coincidence was rounding the bend of the river. The annual sleigh ride of the Pastime Club was hurrying back to the shelter of Coal City, and some one saw the dark shadow on the ice. Brawny young arms lifted a stiff, half-frozen little person to the warmth of the straw-filled pung, and the joys of spooning were temporarily forgotten. Scared young people deposited the tawny-haired, hazel-eyed bundle in the Emergency Hospital. Search of the pockets in the worn velvet cloak yielded up the clue of "Varney," and the city directory did the rest.

Marna opened her eyes. She had al-

ways been afraid of these places that were spotless white, a trifle bare, hushed, smelling drug-storish. But a certain beloved, tousled head came into view, dispelling her fears, and some one stooped and kissed her ever so tenderly.

"Why, Donny, Donny dear," she murmured, running her fingers through his hair. But she remembered certain things, and shut her eyes tight so that he couldn't see their depths.

"Marna," young Varney began hesitatingly.

She started. He might at least wait until she was stronger before telling her the bad news about himself and Val. Because, of course, there *would* be bad news.

"I've been thinking of—everything all this long night, Honey. It isn't really a mark of greatness to wrap yourself up in anything and exclude even those you love best. That's only selfish. It might have cost us both so much. You went out alone to skate because I left you. But dearest—"

Marna was always going to let it stand at that—a lonely skating trip. After all, the other details were hers, and she had risen high above them for Donald.

"The Intermezzo is done, sweetheart. It's right—you'll know when you hear it. Then we're off to a new start and New York."

But she couldn't talk of that—yet. "Don, what was the lure?"

It was out at last, and she sighed.

"You'd never guess, Marna. It's a scream! I analyzed it this afternoon like a regular old Sherlock. It wasn't a thing but—a defective steam radiator valve!"

"What!" She stared at him uncertainly. Don was either a—plumber—or a madman!

"Absolutely, Honey. Whenever the steam came up high, as it has all this cold wave, the radiator in Val's living-room started up. It was the strangest thing imaginable. It sang the weirdest wail—a little far-away, tuneless Intermezzo of Lost Souls. Wonderful effect. There was something sublime about that darned old radiator valve! It got into my music—a *soil* of base for the real thing. I told Val as soon as I'd fathomed it. You should have seen her; eighty miles up in the air! That was the funniest thing." He broke off to laugh.

Of course it was funny! Only, life had been so hard all those days, that Marna turned her head away. Her shoulders twitched a little, for she had thrown away something so blessed—given those hideous kisses to Harry Carleton. She turned back to Don, smiled for him.

"Why, you've laughed until you've cried," said Don joyfully. "Guess I know how to cure my very own little wife!"

And Marna, being wise in the way of women, let it go at that.



## THE SETTING OF THE EMERALD

By Thomas Edgelow

THE theatre, on Broadway, was devoted to the highest form of vaudeville. On the stage a man was being funny. I hate to admit it, but I, who write this story for your amusement, am lowbrowed enough to chortle vehemently every time I see a fat man with a red nose—breaking plates. The comedian, on this particular evening, was breaking plates by the dozen, and the audience rocked with mirth. He made his exit to a roar of applause, when the orchestra started a new melody, to cease the tune, when a roll of kettledrums impressively announced the coming of Vivian Wycombe.

Now Vivian Wycombe was a darling and a pet, and beloved by audiences not only in New York, but in Chicago, Pittsburgh, Washington, San Francisco, London, Edinburgh, Liverpool and Paris. Heaven knows what the woman did, but whatever it was, she got them. She would walk insolently upon the stage, showing quite a lot of her beautiful self, smile, talk to her audience as though they were her bosom pals, break into a rather naughty little song, talk a little more, sing another song and go off, leaving them to shriek and yell and bellow for more. If they shrieked enough, Vivian would return, make a little *monie* at them, laugh, kiss her hand and make a second exit. Never would she give an encore. Using an ungrammatical truism: she didn't have to!

She was beautiful enough to get away with blue murder. She looked about twenty, being really eight years more than that. She was tall, not too tall, and

white of skin and the possessor of a figure that would make every woman in the audience green with envy, and every man amorous with the intoxication of her beauty. A satin skin! Big eyes of vivid green—like two huge emeralds! Curves and exquisite outlines! A throat, to see which, was to think of kisses. A pretty, piquant face, with an impertinent tip-tilted nose, and a red, rather large mouth—made for passion. Then her hair was a sheen of golden silk, and altogether, Vivian was made to tantalize, to content, to torture—to raise to Heaven—just men!

Two boxes were of interest that night, or rather the occupants, for in each box sat only one figure. In the first, behind a curtain, sat an Englishman, —quite a prominent Englishman. Egbert Walter St. John Townsend Phyllipse, Ninth Duke of Wainysland, K. G., and all the rest of it, had followed Vivian Wycombe across the Atlantic, as until recently, Vivian had been playing to London audiences.

Rumor had it, and in this case rumor did not lie, that the Duke, who was enormously wealthy, had been responsible for Miss Wycombe's expenses during her stay in London, and when it came to a question of expenses, well, Vivian was an artist. She could spend more money with less results than any woman since the time of Eve. Expensive! Vivian's middle name was "Expensive," and although her salaries were generous, Vivian would spend a little sum like that in half an hour's shopping.

In the other box sat Oswald M. Gideon, whose activities on Wall Street

were not small. Not a bad-looking man, Oswald Gideon, and a great contrast to his rival, the Duke of Wainysland. While Wainysland was the same age as Gideon—forty—the Duke was inclined to be plump, more than inclined to baldness—a red-faced, moustached man, rather like a grocer. Gideon was tall, dark, with a hard expression and brown eyes—eyes that changed when they looked upon Vivian's lithe beauty.

Having finished her turn, Miss Wycombe went to the star dressing-room, where Ellen Williams, her maid, dresser and confidant, calmly awaited her. Ellen was one of the ugliest women ever seen, short, very bony, fifty, with beady black eyes and a dour, severe manner. All the same, despite her severity, Ellen loved Vivian's little finger more than she loved her God, and Vivian knew it and took advantage of it.

"What's all this?" asked Vivian, in her musical voice, as she pointed towards the masses of flowers.

"The big one is from the Duke," Ellen answered, in her curiously familiar manner. "Thorley's, and he didn't get out under two hundred dollars. Send them, as usual, I suppose, to the Children's Hospital? And how can I unhook you if you don't stand still?"

Now that exquisite body was all but nude, so that a sculptor would have raved at such white perfection. "And the other?" Vivian asked.

"Them orchids? Very expensive—more than the Duke spent. From that Gideon. They go to the Hospital, too?"

Vivian sat down, while Ellen, kneeling, drew off the long silk stockings, revealing a limb rapturous in beauty. "You know, Ellen, I'm broke."

"And you always will be until you cease your fool extravagances," grumbled Ellen, as she stripped off the other stocking—exposing an adorable dimple. "Well, I suppose you will go back to the Duke."

"I'm sorry for that woman," Vivian

returned, as she helped herself to a cigarette. "Give me a match, Ellen."

"You are sorry for what woman?" demanded the other as she struck a light for her employer.

"Don't be such a fool, Ellen! For the Duchess, of course. She looks like a dead parrot—like a parrot that's been dead for ever so long, and she adores her husband; although how any woman can be really pash over Eggy's manly charms, beats me! I think I shall send Eggy back to his Duchess—poor devil. It would be very decent of me, and I like being decent, Ellen—really I do."

Ellen laughed. "Funny, that! A vaudeville star taking pity on a Duchess! Some one at the door." She walked across the small room, and parleyed with some one without. "The Duke," she whispered. "Will you see him?"

"One second," and Vivian covered her delicious whiteness with a creamy *négligé*. "Come in, Eggy," she called musically.

His Grace of Wainysland entered eagerly. He kissed the white hand extended to him, and glanced at Ellen.

"Leave us alone for a minute, Ellen," Vivian ordered, and as the door closed upon her dour maid, she began at once on her subject.

"Now, Eggy, listen to me."

He laughed and pulled at his moustache. "It took your mind, Enchanting One, to turn 'Egbert' into 'Eggy.' And I'm not the least hard-boiled, as you Americans have it."

"No, darling! Soft-boiled!" she smiled at him. "But, Eggy, I want to tell you that you sail on the *Aquitania* on Saturday. No—I mean it! Don't argue with me—you have certain duties to fulfil in life, and I would think much more of you if you were serious about them, instead of running after a good-for-nothing little actress like me. You have been very sweet to me and everything, but this is definite. Good-by!"

Plead as he would, Wainysland could

not alter her decision, and while he was talking to her, Oswald Gideon knocked and was admitted. The two men bowed stiffly to each other. But Vivian was all smiles for Oswald.

"I may wait outside for you?" Wainysland asked formally, and withdrew from the dressing-room.

Now Oswald Gideon had long desired the beauty that was Vivian Wycombe's. Life had taught him that you could have most things provided you had enough money to pay for them; and of money, Oswald Gideon had gobs. So his eyes glittered as he observed the curve of Vivian's white throat, the entrancing line that ran from hip to knee.

"And you can go and wait outside for me, Oswald," Beauty announced insolently. "I might perhaps allow you to take me to supper."

So presently Vivian found both men waiting for her, but as she smiled at them, she heard the hacking cough of Joppy, the old stage doorkeeper.

"Stop it, Joppy!" she ordered prettily. "Did Mrs. Joppy rub your chest with that stuff I told you about?"

"No, Miss," he coughed in reply.

"Eggy," Vivian commanded imperiously, "run to the drug store and bring me back a tube of Balm Hartsthorn. Be quick. And Joppy—you go to my dressing-room."

Therefore an English duke hurried to the drug store, to return with the specified ungent, and Joppy, seated in the dressing-room, had his old chest rubbed by perhaps the prettiest hands in New York, while a Wall Street financier stood by to help.

"Now, Oswald, you can give him fifty dollars," Vivian said generously. "And Joppy, not one dime is to be spent on bad rye whiskey, but get yourself a coat for the thing you are wearing has no warmth in it."

A week later, after the Duke had grumblingly sailed from New York,

Vivian sat at supper in an expensive restaurant just off of Fifth Avenue. Across the table, Oswald Gideon was gazing at her sensuously.

"You know how extravagant you are," Oswald was saying intently, "and you spend more money foolishly than most people. If you were to consider my proposal, you could be as extravagant as you like."

"And what exactly do you offer?" asked Vivian coldly, narrowing her emerald-green eyes.

The offer was princely in its munificence, for the man, shrewd from his Wall Street training, realized that he would have to bid high. There would be a house—a small house in the Murray Hill district. This would be deeded to Vivian in her own name. And practically she could spend as much as she wanted to within reasonable, even unreasonable limits.

"I like the house," she agreed avariciously, "but I like bonds and things as well. In my own name—yes?"

He consented smilingly to—bonds and things!

Early in April, then, Vivian, whose engagement on Broadway had ceased, was living in much luxury within the smart little house on Murray Hill. And everything in that house seemed to form a suitable setting for such loveliness. Perhaps it was the color of her eyes that caused Oswald to whisper:

"A beautiful emerald should be beautifully set."

Vivian entertained a great deal, nor did Oswald offer any objection to the gay hospitality which Vivian dispensed to others of her own kind. Pretty little ladies in pretty clothes drove in pretty broughams to Vivian's pretty dinner parties. The men, whose bank accounts were responsible for so much prettiness, often attended these parties, at which Oswald pretended that he was only a guest. All the same, after the others had driven away, Oswald Gideon would

remain. He looked upon Vivian somewhat as he would regard a beautiful picture or a fine horse. She was essentially his property.

There was such an evening in April, when champagne had been liberally served. Vivian was lovely in a daringly-cut gown of black, which enhanced her exquisite coloring.

When the last guest had driven away, Oswald came to her. His arms slipped about her supple waist, and he thrilled at the touch of her. He stooped, and now he was kissing her hair, the perfume of which arose and intoxicated him. Mad with desire, his lips sought and found her red, wet mouth. He kissed her ravenously, and then she pushed him away from her.

"I'm not in the mood—for kisses," she complained. She moved slowly towards the door. "Good night, Oswald!"

He did not reply, but followed to the hall, where he stood by the staircase to watch her ascend languidly, ever gracefully.

A few moments later, Oswald ran upstairs. He knocked on Vivian's door, and she opened to him.

"What's the matter?" she asked crossly.

"You are the matter," he answered, and then he was kissing her bare, warm shoulder.

With a little sigh of resignation, followed by a tiny yawn of boredom, she permitted his caresses. There was nothing else to do.

But the next morning, Vivian awakened to experience discontent. She did not really know what she wanted, but she snapped at Ellen, when that devoted woman brought the breakfast to Vivian's bedside.

"Oh, what lovely pearls!" enthused Ellen.

Vivian's white hand played with a string of pearls that nestled against her lovely breast. "Yes—not bad. He gave them to me last night. But I don't

care for pearls, outside their value, Ellen."

Vivian sat up in bed, and sipped her coffee. She rose late, dawdling over her bath and the intimate secrets of that process which every pretty woman experiences on rising, provided she has the time and the money.

"I don't want the car, Ellen," Vivian said dully. "If it comes to that, I don't know what I do want. Anyway, a walk will do me good."

Half an hour later, the pretty girl discovered what she wanted. She saw it—an enormous emerald—in the window of a famous firm of jewelers. She entered the shop to inquire the price.

"Seventy-five thousand dollars, Madam."

"I want to telephone," Vivian announced, so that they showed her into a private room, where she called Oswald Gideon at his office.

"And it's too perfectly perfect for words," Vivian was saying a few moments later. "And absurdly cheap! Nothing—only seventy-five thousand. And I want it, please, and I want it now." Her voice was that of a spoiled child.

Now that morning the bears had been causing Oswald a great deal of uneasiness—something to do with Daybreak Copper. He was not broke, for that was almost impossible, but he was a little scared, and therefore in his worst mood.

"I'm afraid that's quite out of the question, Vivian," Oswald answered severely and coldly. "There has to be an end to your extravagances."

Vivian slammed up the receiver, dashed temperamentally from the shop, entered a taxi, and was driven home to weep hysterically, foolishly, unreasonably upon Ellen's sympathetic bosom.

"I'm sick of it all—all, all, all!" wept Vivian. "And I'm tired of that brute who thinks of nothing but the market and money."

She dabbed furiously at her eyes, and

then went into the bathroom to bathe them in cold water.

"Ellen, I know what I want!" Vivian exclaimed, coming into the bedroom. She was smiling happily like a child. "Yes, I do!" She nodded her pretty head. "I have lots of money—quite enough for a simple person's tastes. With this house, which is mine, and all those bond things, to say nothing of my jewelry, I have a perfectly adequate income, and Oswald and everybody like him can go plump to Hell! You know what I want, Ellen? I want a small town—all Main Streety and everything. I want the little corner drug store and nice, simple, friendly people. Get me out of this."

Protesting, grumbling, arguing—all to no purpose—the adoring Ellen removed the chic little suit which Vivian was wearing, to assist her to don a simple little frock—simple with the simplicity of Paris and costing Heaven knows what!

"Pack some things for me and for yourself, Ellen, and don't go mouthing about it. You and I are off to Main Street. To Main Street!" She made a little song about it as she danced about the room: "To Main Street, to Main Street!"

Protest as she did, Ellen was soon driving in a taxi beside her capricious and beautiful employer to the Grand Central Station. A second taxi, loaded with baggage, followed the first.

"And where are we going, and what will Mr. Gideon say?" whined Ellen.

"We are going to Main Street, Silly, and I don't care a damn what Oswald says."

Leaving the baggage in the charge of two grinning redcaps, Vivian approached the Information Booth and helped herself to a time-table.

"Give me a hatpin, Ellen."

Closing her eyes, Vivian jabbed with the pin at the open page before her. Then she looked: "Oh, how nice that

sounds! We will go to Evanston, New York. Please," she smiled at the clerk, "when is there a train for Evanston, New York?"

"Can't you see there in the time-table?"

"I can see the place, you foolish man, but I'm not a mathematician or an astrologer."

"This," ejaculated Ellen, as she cast her eyes up at the decorated ceiling of the Grand Concourse, "is madness!"

Madness or no, they arrived that night in Albany, and early the next morning motored to the little town of Evanston.

"And don't forget," Vivian warned Ellen, "that I am Mrs. Snyder, a widow. Little did I think that I would ever use the name of my husband before last."

"As if they won't spot you from your photographs!" sniffed pessimistic Ellen.

"In clothes like these?" queried Vivian, glancing down complacently at her expensive simplicity.

Mr. Thornton, a local real estate agent, smelled not only Vivian's imported Parisian perfume, but also—money. Therefore, very kindly, Mr. Thornton rented Mrs. Snyder a furnished cottage, which chanced to be vacant, for not more than double what he would have asked anybody else. But as the cottage was charming, set back from an actual Main Street in a delightful garden, and as the April sunshine was happy, Vivian was well content with her bargain. Adding to her staff of one, a village maiden of a light chocolate color, one, Victoria Louise, Vivian settled down to enjoy to the full her caprice of a small-town life.

Within forty-eight hours, neighbors began to call. There was fat Mrs. Finch, who lived just across the way.

"And I am sure you will enjoy our services," Mrs. Finch managed with difficulty because of her adenoids. "Reverend Blithers is a powerful man

in the pulpit. Last Sunday he gave us an address on adultery."

"Oh, how shocking!" exclaimed pretty Mrs. Snyder. "I mean, what a wholesale kind of subject! But won't you have some tea, Mrs. Finch?"

Then there was thin Miss Perch, whose angular frame was only equaled by her angular character. "You will find everybody most homeish," Miss Perch confided, as she breathed heavily over her teacup to cool its contents. "Of course, same as other places," and here Miss Perch sucked her teeth noisily, "we have our scandals! Oh, yes, indeed. There's that creature, Lena White, born and raised in this very town. Went away to Chicago, and they do say a cigar drummer was mixed up in it. Anyway, back she comes, not a month ago, and with nothing to say of the years that have passed since she up and out. And covered with paint—like a gatepost! The men are all crazy about her. Men are so low. And no one knows how she lives, this Lena White woman, but between you and me. Mrs. Snyder, not a word outside these four walls, Daniel Doolittle, who works to the bank, tells me—and not a word—that Lena cashed a check for a large sum of money, over a hundred dollars, signed by that old hypocrite, Joseph P. Rogers! And now, what do you know about that?" Miss Perch concluded with more noisy sucking of her teeth.

But Vivian was amused. These people were so different. She was amused for fully two weeks! Then boredom.

"I told you so!" sniffed Ellen, when she brought the morning mail to Vivian's bedside. Among the letters were two from Oswald Gideon, forwarded on from New York by a trusty manservant, who could be relied upon not to divulge Vivian's present address.

"Come back to me," Oswald had written. "You beautiful white, capricious thing, come back, for New York is gray without you."

"I think I will telegraph for him," Vivian announced to Ellen. "I will walk to the post office, as all the town listens in when I phone. I think—yes, I think New York, but I will make Oswald come dashing here to get me."

But the telegram was not sent. As Vivian, trimly dressed in a sport suit was walking to the post office, a boy on a motor bicycle, rounding a corner, skidded badly, and was pitched head first to lie unconscious for a moment at Vivian's feet.

The girl knelt, to pillow the boy's head on her delicious lap. He opened his eyes and Vivian perceived that he was good-looking in a dark, Italian, romantic kind of way.

"That was a nasty spill," he remarked in a musical voice, as he recovered consciousness and sat up, regarding Vivian with obvious admiration.

And that's how that started, and that's why that telegram was not sent.

Kenneth Wrenn, twenty-three, intensely good-looking, athletically built and all the rest of it, lived with his widowed mother in a small cottage half a mile outside the little town. Mrs. Wrenn was the possessor of a tiny income, just enough to support herself and her adored son. That Kenneth did not work at any serious employment was caused by the fact that the boy was blessed, or cursed, with a tenor voice far above the average. Yet there had not been sufficient money for expensive vocal training. Therefore Kenneth was drifting, somewhat unhappily. He had not met Vivian before, as he had returned the previous evening from a visit to Albany.

Vivian heard all this as she motored him in a hired car from the scene of the accident to his mother's cottage, after a doctor had decided that there was nothing more serious than a bad cut and a sprained ankle.

Mrs. Wrenn, a white-haired, plump woman, in the late fifties, was full of

gratitude to Vivian for playing the part of the Good Samaritan. Intensely did both women enjoy fussing over the good-looking youth as he lay on a couch in the sitting-room. It was Vivian's soft hand that removed the soiled shirt, slightly blood-stained, while the mother held out a clean one. It was Vivian who sat by the handsome boy, while his mother was busy in the kitchen. And Kenneth, who was of the artistic, temperamental nature, was precisely one hour and twenty-two minutes before he realized that he had fallen desperately, passionately in love with the beautiful stranger.

"I have never seen anyone before like you," he said naively. "You—well, I can't tell you what you do to me!" Somewhat clumsily, he stole one of Vivian's gloves, to hide it under a cushion. Vivian, pretending not to see the theft, was secretly amused and a good deal thrilled. She pictured her sensations on being kissed by this boy. How good-looking he was! Something of his purity appealed to her æsthetically. Perhaps he had never kissed a girl before! It would be delicious to—to train him!

"Did you send your telegram?" asked Ellen on Vivian's return.

"Certainly not," laughed Vivian. "I have found a toy! Such a pretty toy, Ellen, with dark, passionate eyes, and a beautiful olive skin," and she went on to tell Ellen about Kenneth.

"A boy of twenty-three!" grumbled Ellen. "And nothing but a good-looking face and a voice between him and the poorhouse. And you say that his dead father was a parson! A nice fuss there will be with the old woman, his mother, if she finds out that you are the celebrated Vivian Wycombe! She will accuse you of ruining her boy's morals! I know these women! And you, with your extravagant tastes!"

Vivian giggled naughtily. "Mrs. Wrenn approved of me, Ellen. I told

her I made this suit myself! Cut it out and everything!"

"May Heaven and Lucille's forgive you!" Ellen smiled grimly. "Why, you couldn't sew a button on a shirt—to save your life!"

Kenneth recovered quickly, and as soon as he was able to mount his motor bicycle, that noisy horror was frequently to be seen outside Vivian's cottage. One day he came to lunch.

When Ellen had sniffed her disapproving exit, carrying the used plates and dishes, quite suddenly the boy's shyness broke before the torrent of passion which Vivian's beauty had caused. He was holding her in his arms, while words failed him. She relaxed and thrilled to his kisses, while every trick and feminine wile that was hers, led the boy on to greater and greater rhapsodies of passion.

"You dear!" he whispered fiercely, as his lips knew the satin Heaven of her milk-white throat, while his hands caressed her. "I—I love you!"

She broke away from him, and went to stand by the window. But she was intensely thrilled. His kisses, so suggestive of youth and of youthful vigor, had caused delicious little shivers that enchanted her; but a certain prudence whispered to her caution. So she sent him away from her.

"Go, now, Boy!" she said imperiously, to smile as she added: "But come back this evening—at nine."

"Cradle snatching!" Ellen grumbled. "Well, I don't expect you to listen to me, you and that foolish boy."

"Shut up, Ellen. I am almost determined to marry that foolish boy. I am not so very much older, and I want to settle down. I want children! With my influence and money, I can give the boy his career, for his voice is really marvelous."

"Well!" Ellen's hands were raised helplessly. "And will you tell them—

his mother and everybody—who you really are before you marry him?"

"Tell him! Certainly not—not until we are married! People only do that kind of thing in pictures."

"And can you imagine the row that will follow?"

But Vivian would not listen. She spent the afternoon dreaming of her future. She was so tired of drifting, although she drifted with such beautiful and expensive simplicity. And she loved this boy. He was like a mountain breeze after the close atmosphere of men such as Oswald Gideon or the Duke of Wainysland. She, who had so long forsaken purity, desired the purity of this boy's love. She built castles in the air where she and Kenneth dwelt in happy love. And she could be of such worldly assistance to him! She would make his name, and all would be rosy happiness.

Vivian could hardly eat her evening meal. She dressed especially for Kenneth's ravishment. She had selected a tightly-fitting gown of white velvet, in which she looked adorable, while about her neck were the pearls that Oswald had given her on that last night that she had seen him. Nor did she see anything incongruous in this—being a woman!

Kenneth could hardly speak for rapture. All the same, he did manage to stumble over a proposal of marriage.

"I know I have nothing to give you," he mumbled. "And you—you are so wonderful."

She took his face between her soft hands and looked down into his young eyes. "Nothing to give me, my poor Kenneth? You have your youth and your purity and your love. Have you ever kissed a girl before me? Be honest, now!"

He flushed. "There was a girl staying here two summers ago, and one night, one night I took her home, and at the gate—well, I took her in my arms and kissed her."

Once he had kissed a girl, and at the memory of it, he had blushed! She adored such youthful purity.

"And that was all, wicked one? You are sure that you have kissed no one else?"

"No one," he told her, and then his lips were feasting on her white beauty.

It was late when she sent him away; and still later before she could calm herself sufficiently to sleep. But before she slept, she had told Ellen definitely that she would marry the boy.

"And you will regret it all your life," snapped Ellen. "It is suicide for you. I love you, and I know you, and I would do anything to save you."

When Vivian awoke in the morning, it was past ten. Ellen, as usual, brought in her breakfast.

"A lovely day," announced Ellen. "I went out for a little walk, as I knew you wouldn't wake until now."

It was as Vivian finished dressing that a small boy arrived with a note from Mrs. Wrenn. The old lady was not feeling well, and would Vivian come to see her that afternoon? Vivian sent back a note to say that some people were coming to tea, and that if it were convenient for Mrs. Wrenn, she would call that evening after dinner.

Just before lunch Kenneth came in, and Vivian told him that she could not see him that evening in her own cottage as she would be calling on his mother.

"Then I shan't be there," Kenneth announced. "Unless I can tell mother of our engagement. I can't sit near you—and not kiss you!"

So that evening, Vivian walked to the little cottage outside the town. She found Mrs. Wrenn greatly agitated.

"And to think you can have deceived me like this!" Mrs. Wrenn began at once. "You, Vivian Wycombe, an actress! Oh, but I should not talk to you like this," and she broke into hysterical sobbing. "I shall only make

you angry, when my happiness is in your hands! You—you who can have any man—you will not steal my only son away from me! You will have pity on my white hairs! You cannot, a woman of your reputation, marry my pure boy."

Vivian experienced nearly every emotion during that long interview. At first she was angry, and then bitter. Then a great pity and a certain understanding arose within her for this narrow-minded old woman, who so worshiped her son. Narrow-minded—and yet none the less capable of suffering for all that.

"Of course, my maid and companion, Ellen, told you all this?" demanded Vivian.

"Oh, she made me swear I wouldn't tell you when she came to me this morning," Mrs. Wrenn answered helplessly. "But tell me—tell me—don't keep me in suspense—you will leave me my son?"

There was silence for awhile, and Vivian fought with herself. She loved Kenneth, or at least she thought that she loved him. Why should she give him up? Then the agonized expression on that old woman's face awakened within Vivian such a wealth of tender compassion, that she determined on self-sacrifice. After all, what was this boy to her but a new sensation? And yet it made her bitter. Why should she be treated as an outcast? Was her beauty naught to set against a boy's purity and youth? Nevertheless, she forced herself to smile.

"There, there, Mrs. Wrenn! Don't cry any more! Your son is safe from me, and I will see him to-morrow and tell him that it is all over. By the way—does he know who I am?"

"You mean it? You mean that you will give him up?" The other's voice was jubilant.

"I promise. But does he know?"

"Not yet," responded Mrs. Wrenn. "You can tell him if you wish, and I can never be grateful enough to you for listening to a mother's prayer."

"Send him to me early in the morning," Vivian said curtly, for, after all, the position was not a pleasant one. "I shall return to New York after I have seen him."

Vivian was in bitter mood as she walked from the cottage. So, in the eyes of people like Mrs. Wrenn, she was an outcast—a scarlet woman! When a whimsical mood descended upon her. She was an outcast, and there, at the side of the road, was the cottage of the village outcast, this Lena White, over whom all the tongues wagged so scandalously. This inartistic, over-painted creature, was in the same boat as her exquisite self! She was in the mood to call upon her, and with Vivian, a caprice was something instantly to be satisfied.

The bell on Lena White's door did not ring, so that Vivian, confident of her welcome, opened softly and entered the hallway.

A parlor, vulgar in plush furniture, was separated only by some portières, and through these Vivian perceived Lena White. The woman, common, over-painted, horrible, was sitting on a low couch, and by her, with his arms about her and his lips kissing her whitened shoulder, was that pure youth, Kenneth Wrenn. . . .

Money will do most things. Even late at night in a small town, it will procure results. By midnight, Ellen, now completely forgiven for talking to Mrs. Wrenn, had packed the last trunk. Money had brought from Albany two automobiles so that with all her baggage and belongings, together with Ellen, Vivian set out for Albany, from where, early the next morning, she caught the express to New York.

The wires had been busy, so that Oswald Gideon met the train.

On the drive in his brougham from the Grand Central, he was alone with Vivian, and his starving lips were tast-

ing the flaming elixir of love offered by Vivian's red mouth. Then, from his pocket, Oswald produced a jeweler's case, within which, upon white satin, reposed the emerald, which the capricious Vivian had coveted.

"Oh, how sweet of you," she smiled.

"I bought it soon after you left, as I knew you would come back to me," the man answered. "Foolish little girl! Do you see this platinum setting, and the white satin case? Fitting surroundings

for this perfect emerald. So a parable for your pretty ears to hear. You, with your emerald eyes, are the perfect stone. But you need the perfect setting—which, fortunately, I have the money to supply. Kiss me!"

And as she suffered his embrace, Vivian, remembering Kenneth, smiled and laughed a little happily.

"What are you laughing about? Because I kissed you like that?"

But Vivian would not tell him.



## EVERYMAN'S IDEAL

*By Ella Bentley Arthur*

Beautiful and simple,  
 Daring and discreet,  
 Ultra and old-fashioned,  
 Spirited and sweet,  
 Dignified and peppy,  
 Negligent and neat,  
 Classice in the headworks,  
 Jazzy in the feet;

Cold and yet alluring,  
 Childish and mature,  
 Brainy and domestic,  
 Dashing and demure,  
 Logical and yielding,  
 Thrifty and well-dressed,  
 Tempting and disdainful,  
 Brilliant and repressed;

Girlish and maternal,  
 Artful and yet real;—  
 Thus a maid must measure  
 To a man's ideal.  
 Here's the combination—  
 Simple, 'twill be seen—  
 Sinner, saint and siren,  
 Cook, coquette and queen.

## THE TARGET

*By Howard R. Marsh*

SOME strain of hot, riotous blood flowed down through the decades from the famous Madame Paul of the passionate court of Louis XV to run rampant in the present generation of Pauls. But where the emotional impulses of the French beauty had been on a grandiose scale, resulting in the making and ruining of men and nations, the wilful passions of the migrated Pauls created sensation only in Parma, Illinois.

There was John Paul, the only boy, who was intrigued into marrying a girl of doubtful reputation after indiscreet association with her during his college vacation period, and who was shackled mind and body for all time as a result. There were the three older girls; Janet, who ran away with a smartly-dressed tobacco salesman without securing the marriage license considered so necessary in Parma; Janice, who left for "New York and the stage," but who was reported by Sidney Huntley, owner and buyer of the Parma Emporium, as being "some terrible wild" in the metropolis; Joan, who married a stock promoter and was facing the world with the handicap of a sad baby and a sadder tale of desertion by the bigamist.

Finally there was Jaquith Paul just budding into womanhood.—Jaquith, the relish of Parma's conversational epics.

"How will the wild blood crop out in her?" Mrs. Sadie Huntley asked Mrs. President Ida Fisk, of the Parma Town Improvement Society, when the two ladies met in Carruthers' General Store.

"Who knows? But I'm sure as my name's Fisk that Jaquith Paul will be a

bad one!" Mrs. President answered decidedly.

"She will, and that's so," agreed Mrs. Huntley. "You can tell by her eyes. They're changeable and wild. Sidney says that when she looks at him he just has to hang on, to keep from saying something quite too outspoken for a married man to say. And you know how I can trust my Sidney. He saw Janice Paul, Jaquith's very own sister, in New York last fall when he was buying ladies' garments and went into a swell restaurant to see what ladies were wearing. Janice was cutting up something awful with a whole party of young rounders. And the shameless girl kissed her fingers to Sidney and—" (Mrs. Fisk had heard the story twenty times before, but she waited until it came to its dramatic conclusion.) "And she's bad, that Janice is, and Jaquith is another out of the same mould!"

"What you girls talking about?" Sam Carruthers, village storekeeper and postmaster, shoved in to ask. "The Pauls? Say now, I knew it. There's a terrible family if there ever was one. A disgrace to Parma, that's what they are. Lucky Mr. Paul didn't live to watch them go to the bad. Mrs. Paul, now, I don't know as she cares if the girls are wild. Anyway, they're beyond her. Even Jaquith. Already she's being talked about, isn't she? And she's just turning seventeen!"

Mrs. Fisk and Mrs. Huntley perked inquisitive ears. "What are people saying?" they demanded eagerly, their appetites whetted. "My, isn't it awful?"

"Well, they ain't saying much definite about Jaquith yet," Sam Carruthers re-

flected. "except like you and me was saying here—that she's sure to go to the bad like her sisters. And that there ain't a man but what goes crazy over her eyes and tempting beauty. Poor girl! If only some of you good women could show her the beauties of the path of rectitude that Preacher Snodgrass talks about!" Sam, sanctimonious Sam Carruthers, looked sadly into the smug faces of the two ladies. "But it's too late now, isn't it?" he inquired hopefully.

"Too late!" mourned the human ravens.

Sam Carruthers passed out the mail for the next week with the under-the-breath gossip, "Sadie Fisk and Ida Huntley declare it's too late to do anything for Jaquith Paul. Guess they must have found out something pretty bad about her, huh?" He leered, then looked very sorrowful. "Poor girl! Such a pretty thing, and to think she's going like her sisters and brother!"

Poor girl! Indeed it was "poor girl!" But to look at her one would never have thought so. If she were blackened by the smutty smoke of small-town gossip, she was redeemed by amazing, breath-taking beauty, the beauty of a French queen. Tall, delicately moulded, imperious in carriage, she rightfully belonged to the time of her famous ancestor, when feminine beauty was more to be gained than hope of Heaven. Her ebon hair, piquant nose, moulded chin, delicate, long-fingered hands and slender ankles, most of all her eyes,—the bewitching, purple-blue, ocean-deep eyes,—would have found in any place but Parma the homage due them. But Parma, although it wouldn't admit it in so many words, considered each and every perfection of Jaquith Paul as an added temptation of the devil.

"Mother," Jaquith said, as she doffed her apron to depart for the very store in which Mrs. Fisk and Mrs. Huntley were deriving so much pleasure dis-

cussing her, "if we were rich would people talk about us so?"

"I don't know, Jaky." Plainly Mrs. Paul was beaten in the battle against small tongues and wild blood, resigned to acceptance of defeat as her due. "Maybe not, Jaky." Then she roused herself, her dull eyes flashing momentarily. "But they aren't talking about you, are they, child?"

Jaquith hesitated. Then with the reluctance of one confessing an irremediable fault, "Yes, Mother." She noted the spasm of pain on her mother's sorrow-battered face, and hurried on. "Not much, I guess, though. And as long as I give them no reason for talking it'll come out all right, won't it?" She was appealing pitifully for help.

"Of course." But Mrs. Paul was lying, and knew she was lying. Jaquith knew it too. As long as human nature endured in Parma, the Jaquiths and Johns were doomed to be crucified on the words of the Sanctimonious Sams and Insinuating Idas.

"Just hold your head high, your heart higher, and lying tongues will never hurt you," Mrs. Paul declared after the moment of silence. "Now run along, Jaky. I must finish this sheeting for Mrs. Fisk."

But Jaquith lingered. "Was John so awfully bad, Mother? He seems so nice when he's not discouraged. And Janice and Joan?"

For ten years Mrs. Paul had delayed discussion of the waywardness of her older children with Jaquith. But now the time had come to face it.

"Bad? No, Jaky girl, my children weren't bad. They made mistakes, awful mistakes, but they weren't out-and-out bad. Was it bad for Joan to believe that the man she loved really loved her? Was it bad for Janet to give up everything for the man she loved? Janice—" the mother hesitated, "Janice found the world hard, too hard for her, and cruel, maybe. But at heart she is the same

little girl who searched all night in the snow for her little lost kitten. And John—" quick, unshed tears filled the life-weary eyes, "My John, who was to have been a great doctor, is giving his life on an eighty-acre patch of weeds and stumps atoning for one mistake, a mistake most of the Parma boys have made, but because John was honorable—" The mother heart could stand no more. Like a brave warrior concealing defeat from his troops, she turned from the room, her head held high until she could hide her overflowing eyes in the always-consoling pillow.

Jaquith clenched her little fists; set her teeth. "I'll show them!" she vowed, "I'll show them! Either they'll stop talking about us that way, or I'll give them something to talk about!"

A high-pitched voice greeted Jaquith Paul as she entered Carruthers' General Store, the light of battle in her eyes. Back in the meat department where the proprietor was slicing bacon, Mrs. Simmons was holding a loud argument with herself, mistakingly believing Sam Carruthers was doing part of the talking.

"Would I?" Mrs. Simmons asked herself, her fat chin trembling with emotion. "Would I let my Lowell take her to the dance? He asked me last night. Would I let him? Well, I guess not. I said to him, 'If you ever let me see you speaking with that girl I'll tan you!' That's what I said. 'She ain't the kind of a girl for any decent fellow to be with. No decent boy ever invites her. She'd just lead him astray.' That's what I said. Just look at her sisters, every one of them bad, and her brother John—"

Two slender hands whirled Mrs. Simmons' dumpy figure around; two blazing eyes stared into her quivering face. "Are you talking of me?" a knife-edged voice asked. "Mrs. Simmons, are you talking of *me*?"

The astonished, outraged matron could only gasp for breath.

"You were, weren't you?" Jaquith's eyes were wilder than they had ever been before. Behind the plank counter Sam Carruthers dropped his knife to the floor and gazed open-mouthed.

"Take back what you said!" Jaquith ordered, her fingers tightening on Mrs. Simmons' fat shoulders. "Take it back!"

"I—I—" gasped Lowell's mother.

The hurricane broke. With unbelievable strength Jaquith shook the heavier woman, shook her until hairpins flew into the meat and gaps appeared between the matron's waist and skirt; shook her until her eyes bulged and her body groaned.

Once only did Jaquith stop the adding process. "Mrs. Simmons, I wouldn't go with your pig-eyed Lowell to join the angel choir," she said, and resumed the shaking with redoubled vigor. That blasphemy was repeated many times in Parma during the next few days.

Sam Carruthers managed at last to collect his wits. "Here, here!" he called, waddling around the end of the counter, "Stop that, Jaky!"

Jaquith stopped from sheer exhaustion, but she turned her blazing eyes on the sanctimonious storekeeper. "And you're a real man, aren't you, to listen to the slander that woman was speaking?" she said. "Yes, a real man!"

"Now, now, Jaky, I wasn't more'n half listening!" he said conciliatingly. "And Mrs. Simmons didn't mean what she said, did you, ma'am?"

The luckless Mrs. Simmons grunted something into her double chin about calling the sheriff, and strutted out of the store, a ludicrous figure of a beruffled magpie.

"All right now, Sam Carruthers, you listen! You heard what she said. Well, I'm going to have every boy in this town crazy to come and see me! And they'll come, gossips or no gossips! You just see! They'll come crowding up to

my house, and they'll never want to go home! Every last eligible man in this town except Lowell Simmons! I'll take them away from their sweethearts and their mothers. You watch!"

Forewarned is supposedly forearmed, but in spite of the news of the impending calamity spread by Sam Carruthers, the mothers of Parma one by one found their sons disappearing evenings; eventually traced them to the Pauls' humble residence, and vowed vengeance. The girls of the town, deserted by their suitors, doubly vowed vengeance. Meanwhile Jaquith held court in the Paul parlor, where wits and half-wits, boys in their teens, and bachelors of fifty, strove for a smile from Jaquith. For Jaquith was luring them on, and none could withstand the lure. Jaquith aroused was Jaquith irresistible.

The good women of Parma realized something must be done at once to empty the Lorelie's net of its catch. They talked over ways and means, then Ida Huntley had a long talk with Sam Carruthers.

"—and there I was, caught good and proper!" Ed Guilfoil, the fat, sleek, perfumed meat salesman, paused to allow Sam Carruthers, Lowell Simmons, and the usual rotten core of the small-town store to laugh uproariously at his suggestive story.

"Say, Ed, I want to ask something of you," Sam Carruthers said as soon as the ribald mirth had ceased. "We've got a girl in our town who's a peach! Trouble is, she's cutting out all the other girls, and what's more she ain't popular with the boys' mothers. You see, her sisters—"

There followed the tale of the wickedness of the whole Paul family, a tale poisonously embellished. "So I thought maybe you'd be interested in calling on this girl. Say, she's a looker! And if you cut out the local boys all the town will give you a vote of thanks,—particu-

larly the mothers and regular sweethearts!"

"Lead me to it!" Ed Guilfoil boasted pompously. "I'll beat their pace, believe you me! That is, if she appeals to my taste. I'm particular, I am."

"Just you wait and see her!" Sam Carruthers announced like an auctioneer. "She'll be in to market in a little while, and I'll see that you meet her. Then you arrange a date and make the Parma boys look sick!"

A moment later Jaquith entered, and Sam said ceremoniously, "Miss Jaquith Paul, allow me to present my very good friend, Mr. Edward Guilfoil, salesman for the Greaseless Brand Company."

Guilfoil appraised the girl with a quick stare, whistled between his teeth, and grasped Jaquith's hand. "Mighty glad to meet you, sister," he said ingratiatingly. "It's a real pleasure." He manœvered her aside. "Honestly, Miss Paul, a decent business man like me on the road gets so lonely for real people that you're a godsend. Say, you're so far ahead of all the rest of this town that you'll rescue me from the dumps. I'll come up to your house to-night and make a little call. Thank you! You're a sport!"

Jaquith hadn't given him the permission to call; neither had she refused it. His type was new to her, and left her speechless. So Ed Guilfoil, of unsavory reputation, joined the admiring chorus at the Paul house that night. He managed to outstay the others by a few minutes, then sauntered slowly back to the hotel, not arriving there until almost midnight, a most unseemly hour in Parma.

"Well, Ed, did you have a good time?" Sam Carruthers stopped the salesman as he hurried for the train next morning. "How'd you like Jaquith?"

Guilfoil smiled his self-satisfied smile. "She's there!" he declared. "I'm coming back to this town again pronto! Greatest treat I've had in a long time!"

"Wasn't the place crowded with other fellows?" Sam Carruthers inquired.

"Well, it was for awhile," Guilfoil conceded. "But along towards midnight I had her to myself. And it was worth waiting for, I'll say. . . . There's the train. S'long, Sam. Coming back soon, I'll say!"

Sam Carruthers was grinning from ear to ear when Ida Huntley and Sadie Fisk stopped in to verify the rumors of the new suitor at the Paul home. "That Ed Guilfoil is some fast worker," Sam declared. "He's cut out the local boys already, I guess. Stayed up there with Jaquith last night until after midnight and—"

"Isn't it awful!" breathed Mrs. Fisk and Mrs. Huntley in unison. "Now I guess our boys will know what kind of girl she is, picking up with a fast drummer!" Mrs. Huntley added.

"Oh, I wouldn't say but what she was just friendly," Sam soothed his conscience. "But that Guilfoil is a fast one with the ladies," he felt forced to add.

"Well, that sure ought to make our boys less crazy about the girl!" Mrs. Huntley repeated. "And if she likes drummers there's no reason why you shouldn't introduce others to her, is there, Sam?"

Sam remembered Mrs. Huntley's suggestion a week later when Jaquith came into the store while he was talking to young Alfred Daines.

"Miss Jaquith, meet Mr. Daines, son of the President," he said unctuously, then added with a fat chuckle, "President of the Daines Wholesale Company."

Jaquith, remembering with disgust the sleek, insinuating Guilfoil, attempted to ignore the introduction, but her eyes were caught and held by those of the young man. Something inside of her startled to life, some realization came to her that here, at last, was a real man, a clean man, a man who would seek her

and bring her happiness. Some message flashed from him to her, and from her inner being back to him again.

For a moment the two young people stood, their attitude expressing mutual admiration, attraction, trust. Then Alfred Daines took the girl's cool hand in his. "I'm not in the habit, Miss Jaquith, of being very sociable when I'm on the road, and honestly, I've never asked before for permission to call on a young lady as soon as I was introduced to her. But maybe you'll pardon the suddenness and let me see you to-night. Will you? I'm going into the office after this trip, and this is my last day on the road. I'd like to celebrate,—with you."

"Oh, I want you to come," she telegraphed with a pressure of her fingers. "You may call if you like," her lips said demurely. She was conscious that her face was flushed and that her eyes, her telltale eyes, were softly shining. But Alfred Daines, smitten youth, was too occupied with the beating of his own heart to notice the girl's perturbation.

"I'll come early," he said, as Jaquith turned away.

The hours dragged or flew for Jaquith; dragged as she waited for evening and Alfred Daines, flew as her mind became occupied with speculation. "Oh, I know that he's different. I can feel it. He's a big man inside. And he's handsome, and he likes me already, and I—" she choked her avowal and amended, "anyway, I *could*—I know I could love him."

Alfred Daines, too, was impatient for evening. Never before had he felt that odd contraction of his heart and throat, never until he fell worshipingly before Jaquith's beauty; never had there been so clearly revealed to him the possibility of love.

Evening came at last. Jaquith donned her simplest white dress, which startlingly set off her rich color. Then she waited on the vine-covered porch, tingling with anticipation. She waited a

long time. Then steps sounded on the walk.

She sprang to her feet, hands extended, and found herself facing—Ed Guilfoil!

"Well, well, little beauty!" that flabby-bodied, flabby-minded individual greeted her. "Prettier'n a picture! And all dressed up for me!" He seized her nerveless hands and pressed them. "Aren't you glad to see me? Haven't you got a real greeting for—"

"You must go away!" she gasped. "Go away! I don't want you here!"

Instead, he advanced close to her. "Oh, ho! Expecting company, aren't you?" he said. "Well, I came 'way back from Springfield just to see you. What about that?"

"Go away! Go away!" she repeated.

He chuckled and pinched her cheek. "Oh, I'm on to you, you little minx," he said. "You were expecting that handsome young Daines, weren't you now?"

"Where is he?" she asked, in spite of her will.

"He's not coming."

She turned on him, her face white, her luminous eyes flashing. "Why isn't he coming?" she demanded.

"Well, if you must know, he dropped into Carruthers' store this afternoon just after I got in. I—" he hesitated, "I happened to mention that I was coming up here to-night."

Jaquith towered above him, an outraged majesty. "What else did you say?" she cried. "What else? Tell me everything!" Something imperious in her tone forced him to answer.

"Well, Mr. Carruthers and I joked a little about—about your family, you know. No harm meant, you know. But this Daines took it up. Then Sam Carruthers told him about your sisters."

"What else?" She was at white heat, but her voice was calm.

"Well, I guess Sam did say that I stayed up here last week with you until

rather late, and that you and I were pretty thick. That's all."

"Didn't you deny it?"

"Well, in a way I did. I said, 'A fellow has to stay late to get very far with that girl, she's so damned—beg your pardon—wild and full of the devil.'"

"Merciful God!" The exclamation seemed to come from her soul. It shattered the man's smug complacency.

"There, there, little girl," he protested. "Just one man more or less in your life won't count for much. You've so many—"

"Many?" she echoed. "Many?" Suddenly she grasped his arm frantically. "Where is he? Has he gone?"

"Daines? He took the night train. Said he's leaving the road for good."

"Yes. He told me he was." The banality of her response made her realize that her glorious dream had fled. There came to her a clear picture of that scene in Carruthers' General Store, of Sanctimonious Sam and the earthy salesman defiling her character, aided and abetted by Lowell Simmons, probably, and every other low-mouthed loafer in the store; of the leering mouths and insinuating lips; of Alfred Daines' astonishment, disgust, utter revulsion; of his disillusionment and departure.

"It is all over!" she said wearily, and turned into the house.

"Wait! Wait!" sputtered Ed Guilfoil. "See here girlie—"

But the door shut in his face.

In her room Jaquith stood for hours, her face as white as the walls she leaned against. Just before dawn she fumbled in the closet for a suitcase, the same one Joan had used in her flight. Heedlessly she packed it.

Even the dawn couldn't soften the paper-strewn, gaudy-painted ugliness of Parma. Mud holes, broken harness, screaming signs, cigarette stubs in front of the Carruthers store, and Sam Car-

ruthers himself unlocking the door so Mrs. Huntley could make a necessary before-breakfast purchase.

Sam saw the figure of Jaquith stumbling towards the station. "Where are you going Jaquith?" he called. Curiosity filled him.

"To New York and Janice!" Jaquith forced her answer.

Ida Huntley turned to Sam Car-ruthers, a satisfied light in her eyes. "There!" she said. "There! We all knew all the time that she was that kind of girl!"

"Poor girl!" Sam muttered sorrowfully. "Poor girl! But she was just naturally wild in spite of everything we did for her!"



## ASPIRATIONS.

*By Arthur Briggs*

I'm sick of behaving  
In ways that are nice,  
I find I've a craving  
For vice.

I've had an upheaval,  
My soul has gone wrong;  
For ways that are evil  
I long.

I'm late in beginning  
And, ere I am through,  
I've got some tall sinning  
To do!

I've been very quiet,  
But now I declare  
I'll make life a riot  
For fair.

For youth may be sporty  
There isn't a doubt,  
But when a man's forty  
Look out!

When *he* leaps the traces,  
You cannot deny  
He hits the high places  
On high.

So when the walls rattle  
With sounds of great glee,  
I prophesy that'll  
Be me!

## YOU NEVER CAN TELL

Elmer Brown Mason

**W**ELL, you gotta hand it to stenographers, they sure got the best chance to grab off a rich husband." Marilynne Smith—christened Mary Ellen—took another bite of egg sandwich and looked impressively at her audience. "I guess it's because they get closer like to their bosses. Wished I'd learned to steno. Fat chance I've got, stuck in the files all day! 'It ain't what I want,' as the pup said about the dog biscuit."

A babel of voices rose, filling the rest-room of the Windham Trust Company's building with shrill clamor.

"Who'da thought it?"

"An' her that quiet-lookin'!"

"Well, she wasn't nobody's goat, I'll tell the cash register!"

Mrs Palisi, matron of the rest room, advanced into the centre of the excited group. "Who done it?" she asked breathlessly.

A tall girl, with severely-marcelled brown hair and a black satin frock, turned to the matron.

"It's Amy Wallace," she said impressively, "that little, blonde steno, down in the Windham Trust. She married the 'sistant cashier this morning. What do you think of that, Police?"

"You don't say so!" Mrs. Palisi's black eyes snapped excitement. "Well, you never can tell. Ain't that the truth? I was sayin' only this mornin' to Miss Higgins here, I says, Miss Higgins, I says, you never can tell about blondes. Didn't I, Higgie?"

"You sure did," gloomily replied the girl known as "Higgie," "guess it's me for the good old p'roxide bottle."

"P'roxide nothin'," Marilynne Smith

said scornfully, "'twasn't p'roxide done it for her, 'twas p'roximity. That's what it done it, pe-rox-i-mity! Leave a girl the chance to dust a man's desk an' fix up his spellin' an' phone that he's in conference when he's off playin' golf, an' she can do anythin' with him, just about anythin'."

There was a sigh from the filing experts, accountants and statisticians' helpers. One of the stenographers looked doubtful.

"Maybe," she said, "then, again, maybe you have tough luck findin' the right job. Me, I generally strike an office where the big guy's married, or else he's too old or deaf or somethin'."

The girl with severely-marcelled hair sniffed incredulously. "They ain't *never* too old," she said severely, "not 'less they're so old they're dotty, an' the family can come in an' swear they didn't know what they was doin' when they married you. That 'sistant cashier's mighty near sixty."

"Pity he ain't nearer seventy," said a bobbed-haired girl in a pink blouse, "then she'd be a rich young widda. If you marry them round fifty or sixty they're liable to live 'til you're too old to do nothin' but crochet."

"How do you suppose Amy Wallace done it?" the stenographer asked dreamily.

"He kept her once late to do some rush work," the Windham Trust filing clerk replied tartly, "an' then took her out for a bite to eat—that's how it started."

"Yes," agreed the marcelled one, "if you can get a man started eatin' with you, the worst is over. Ain't that so,

Marj?" she turned to a slender girl in blue serge who had just come in.

"Ain't what so?" asked the girl addressed as Marj. "I don't know that anythin's so this mornin'. You wouldn't either if you'd been takin' dictation for three mortal hours, the way I have. Old Windham's all broke out with business this mornin', just like a rash." She sighed drearily, slumped down in a chair that had just been vacated and began to unwrap a package of sandwiches.

"We was talkin' 'bout Amy Wallace marryin' your 'sistant cashier," explained Marilynne Smith, then she looked at Marjorie Blake speculatively. "Say, Marj, it's a wonder you wouldn't take a tip from Amy."

"Whatdya mean, take a tip from Amy?" Marjorie chased an elusive olive into one corner of the lunch box, captured it and turned back to Marilynne. "I s'pose because she married Mr. Wrightson." she added scornfully. "Huh! Anybody who pries any money out of Wrightson will have to work harder than takin' letters all day. Why, he quit havin' his shoes shined in the buildin' because the bootblack went up a nickel in his charges. Wrightson's wife will have to practice blackmail an' extortion before she gets the price of a new hat out of him."

"Well," Marilynne persisted stubbornly, "old man Windham ain't like that. For a bank president with loads of money, he's almost human. Didn't he pay Jimmie Rogers' mother's hospital bills when she was sick? An' Jimmie only an office boy?"

"Oh, yes, he's liberal enough," Marjorie conceded without interest. She finished her lunch, yawned. "I guess I'll go out an' get a lungful of fresh air before I have to go back an' transcribe all that stuff. Hello, who's the new one?" she asked, as a girl looked at the clock, rose quickly and left the room.

"Name's Mrs. Williams," volunteered

a fat girl who occupied the only couch. "Married a nice young fella in our office. She come to work for us this week."

"There!" exclaimed Marilynne Smith triumphantly, "that bears out what I'm sayin'. Marry a young fella an' where do you land? In two rooms in the Bronx! Or else come back to the little, old job. 'Not any for me,' as the cat said about the crust."

"Yes, I s'pose that's so," Marjorie agreed thoughtfully. "Marryin' a poor fella is like throwin' away limousines for laundry work. Oh, well—let's can the calamity. I'm goin' out for a few minutes. Anybody want a walk?"

"Not me," said the fat one languidly, "walkin' don't agree with me."

"It's one o'clock, girls." Mrs. Palisi spoke warningly.

"I bet there won't be much work done in this office buildin' this afternoon," giggled the bobbed-haired girl, "it always upsets everybody when one of the girls grabs a winner."

"Well, I guess there ain't much chance that you'll startle the world that way," retorted the girl in black satin.

"Oh, I don't know. I'm quittin' next week. Goin' on in the Follies' chorus. There ain't no use wastin' legs like mine under a desk," the bobbed-haired girl answered coolly.

Marjorie Blake took a "down" elevator and came out on Fifth Avenue. She was very tired. There was a traffic jam, and she decided it would be easier to go down to Forty-first Street and cross the Avenue there. From curb to curb extended a seemingly solid mass of cars but the girl managed to slip between two of them and reach the middle of the Avenue. At that moment the white light flashed on. Cars began moving all about her. In dismay she glanced to the right, to the left, took a step forward, retreated, then—so quickly that she scarcely realized it had hap-

pened—an arm was about her waist and she was whisked into the front seat of a big touring car. Her rescuer slipped back into his own seat, banged the door shut, threw in his gears. It was not until they had left the Avenue at Forty-eighth Street that he turned toward her with a grin.

"How does it feel to be carried off by an auto bandit?"

"I was certainly scared," she admitted, and began a minute inspection of her rescuer.

He was a big, dark-haired young man, dressed in rough, well-cut clothes. A clean-shaven, pleasant face grinned back at her.

"Well, do I look all right, cutie? You suit *me*, I'll say. Wish I could pick something as good out of the traffic jam every day."

"I'm certainly indebted to you," Marjorie said coldly, "I suppose you *do* pick up a lot of girls that way."

The man colored.

"I'm sorry I offended you," he said. "I was just being smart, I guess. You'll put me down for a roughneck now, I suppose."

"I'll put you down for what you act like with me," she answered, then relented. "It was mighty nice of you to pick me up that way, I don't mind saying. I certainly was scared! Will you take me back now? I'm late for work."

"Oh, you're one of the little busy bees," he said, turning the car into Madison Avenue. "I thought we'd go for a spin."

"Not so's you could notice it," Marjorie retorted, smothering a sigh, "I gotta beat out 'bout a million letters between now an' five o'clock."

"Oh, five o'clock."

He stopped before the Windham Trust Building as she said: "Here's where I get out," sprang from the car and helped her alight.

"Now," he spoke meditatively, "if this car would happen to be here about

five o'clock, how about a spin—and some dinner afterwards?"

"I go home for dinner," Marjorie answered promptly, "and I take the Forty-second Street ferry to Jersey. I wouldn't think of troubling you to take me there."

The big young man grinned again.

"No trouble," he said airily, "we aim to please."

"Of course," Marjorie smiled sweetly, "if you were a chauffeur you wouldn't be able to tell if you could have the car at five o'clock, would you?"

"Probably not." The grin was undisturbed. "Five o'clock it is, then." He turned back to the car.

"I didn't say—" Marjorie began weakly, but her voice was drowned in the roar of traffic.

Marjorie's fingers flew madly. There was more to do than she had thought. Suppose—a glance at the clock gave fresh speed to the flying fingers—she couldn't get through by five? Well, if he wasn't interested enough to wait. . . .

At five minutes after four Mr. Windham left his office. Thank goodness, he wouldn't have anything more for her to do! He stopped beside her desk and Marjorie's heart sank. Mr. Windham was a little man with pale blue eyes. His tremulous white whiskers looked as if their purpose was to stand between their owner and undue familiarity. He was stroking their stubby ends, "Just as if they were the office cat," she thought. A sudden memory of the conversation in the rest room that day made her blush furiously. Think of marrying Mr. Windham!

"H'm! h'm! Miss Blake," she heard Mr. Windham saying, "did I understand you to say, when you came here, that your parents are living?"

"No, sir," Marjorie's eyes were round with wonder, "no, sir, only my mother. We live together."

She thought: "Now, what on earth. . . ."

"H'm! Does your mother, h'm! work?"

"No, sir." She hoped that her voice didn't sound surprised. "My mother's lame," she explained, "not much, but she couldn't do anything but a sittin' down job—an' they're kind of scarce."

"I see." Mr. Windham, still stroking his whiskers, left the office.

Now, what on earth. . . . Another hurried look at the clock warned her there was no time for wondering. It was two minutes to five when she laid the last letter on Mr. Windham's desk, closed her own desk and hid her best pencils where the other stenographers would be least likely to find them. It was five when she joined the steady stream of men and girls pouring out of the Windham Trust building.

He was there!

"Good girl," the man said approvingly as he helped her into the car, "we'll go down the Avenue a couple of blocks," he explained, "and so dodge the jam."

Marjorie sat back serenely, watching the tide of cars swirling in the opposite direction. It was lovely to watch them, this way. Different from dodging them, when you had to walk. She ventured another scrutiny of the man beside her. He was good-looking. And his clothes were good. He had turned west now out of the traffic. In a few moments the car drew up near the entrance of the Forty-second Street ferry. The man made no move to open the door. Instead, he turned to her suddenly and spoke:

"I hate to lose you like this, girlie. I don't mind saying you've made a hit with me. When can I see you again?"

She was silent.

"You're going to let me see you again, aren't you?" he persisted.

Marjorie faced him. "Are you married?" she asked.

A snatch of rest room philosophy had come back to her: "Wastin' time on

them Brigham Young kind is what don't get you nothin' but worry."

"Do I look like it?" he asked reproachfully. "No, I'm single, of age, steady, raised a Presbyterian." He saw her eyes travel over the car, and grinned again as they came back to meet his. "No, I don't own this car, either," he added. "You can see I haven't any bad habits. My name's Tom King and I'm chauffeur for the man who owns this boat and he'll be back to-night on the 11:10 from Washington. Now, do I see you again?"

"Yes—I guess so," she said hesitatingly.

He *was* a chauffeur, after all! And she had thought. . . . Well, he was nice, anyway.

"Yes, I 'guess so' is right," the man laughed. "I'll be waiting for you at five—if I have to lock up the chief to do it."

On an afternoon two weeks later Mr. Windham was dictating to his stenographer.

"Suggest a retiring of ten per cent of the, h'm, mortgage, h'm, from the h'm of this second mortgage—got that, Miss Blake?"

"Yes, Mr. Windham." Marjorie wondered if the second h'm meant bonds or notes. It was four thirty. Oh, why did men start dictating at four o'clock?

"All right," Mr. Windham acknowledged and went on with his letter:

"Under these—h'm—terms the—h'm—Trust Company will arrange second mortgage—h'm—two hundred thousand—h'm—at six per cent for one year. That's all."

Marjorie gathered up notebook and pencils and started from the room. As she neared the door Mr. Windham called her back.

"Got something to talk to you about," he said, "might as well now. Sit down."

She sat down. The telephone on Mr. Windham's desk buzzed loudly.

"Windham," he said shortly, then lis-

tened, "all right . . . I suppose I can. Very well, send him in."

He turned to Marjorie.

"Got to see a man. Talk to you to-morrow morning. Proposition to make. Think you'll like it."

Marjorie left the president's office, her head whirling. What could Mr. Windham want to talk to her about? A proposition! It couldn't be. . . . She went downstairs to the rest room. Marilynne Smith was powdering her nose before the mirror. She laid the puff down and stared at Marjorie.

"Hello, kid," she said, "what's the idea? You look as if you'd just fell out of a balloon, as the frying pan said to the sausage."

"It's worse'n that," Marjorie gasped. "Mr. Windham said—" Rapidly she sketched what Mr. Windham had just said.

Marilynne stared. "Holy cow!" she said in tones that were almost reverent, "Holy cow! Mr. Windham! Why, he's the richest man in New York. He's got so much money he could buy a staff of bootleggers. Say, didn't I tell you? Didn't I say it could be done if you went at it right? Guess I got somethin' under my hat besides henna. Oh, boy! Mr. Windham!"

She stopped suddenly. Marjorie was crying.

"Of course, I don't wonder it's knocked you out," she comforted, "but why the weeps? Now, me! I got cause, but you an' salt tears oughta be strangers from now on."

"I don't want to marry him," Marjorie sobbed.

Miss Smith sat down weakly on the radiator, then rose hastily and sought the window sill.

"I guess it's been too much for you," she pondered, "never mind, get a grip on yourself, girlie! By this time to-morrow you'll be wonderin' whether you'd oughta get new platinum dinner plates or worry along with the gold

ones. Run along home now an' give mother a shock."

Marjorie found herself outside the Windham Trust building. The big touring car was waiting around the corner on Forty-first Street.

"Oh, Tom," she greeted the occupant breathlessly. "oh, Tom!"

She got in, dropped down in the seat and searched frantically for her handkerchief.

"Mr. Windham said this afternoon he had something he wanted to talk to me about," she sobbed, "a proposition. I think—"

"Oh, he did, did he?" the man said grimly. "Well, what did you say?"

"Nothing. Some one came in. He said he would talk with me to-morrow."

"What do you intend to say when he talks to you to-morrow?"

"I don't know."

The man did not speak. Marjorie, glancing at him, saw his face set in hard lines. She reached forward and put a hand over his on the steering wheel.

"Tom!" she said softly.

"Well?" he did not turn toward her.

"Tom," she tried to steady her voice.

"You know I'm thinking of what you said last night, and I'd—I'd like to, but—well, I can't do it. I just can't let you take care of mother. It's dear of you to want to do it, but—I can't. I wouldn't care how little you and I, had, we could get along, but I can't ask you to take care of mother, too."

"I told you last night I want to take care of her."

"Yes, I know. You think you do now. But I can't let you do it. As it is I can take care of her and get along, somehow, on my salary. I—I guess I'll have to keep on like I am now."

"And then marry Mr. Windham," his voice was bitter.

She did not reply.

They were silent until the entrance to the Forty-second Street ferry showed

blackly before them. Then the man spoke:

"Look here," he said savagely. "Are you going to marry Mr. Windham?"

"I didn't say I was."

"No, and you didn't say you weren't."

No answer.

"I suppose," he said, after a moment's pause, "that you'd rather have Mr. Windham take care of your mother than to have me do it?"

"Oh, Tom, no!" The girl's words were a wail. "I've—I've got to go home now." She spoke breathlessly. "I can't talk about it any more—to-night."

She felt his steady eyes on her, turned her face away.

"All right," he said briefly. "I'll be waiting for you at five to-morrow night. You can tell me then what you've decided to do."

"Margie, dear, you look tired." Her mother looked anxiously across the small supper table. "You're sure you ain't workin' too hard?"

"Oh, no, mother. I'm all right."

"Maybe you'd like toast better'n biscuits? 'Twouldn't take a minute to make you a slice."

"No. The biscuits are lovely. I guess I just got a headache."

"You ain't—" her mother's voice hesitated, then went on, "you ain't had no—no difference with Mr. King, have you?"

"No, Mumsie. If you don't mind I'll go to bed now. I'll be all right to-morrow."

She lay staring at the ceiling, listening to the tramp of feet in the apartment above, to the subdued sounds of the supper dishes that her mother washed and put away, to the gentle creaking of the rocking-chair that followed. Dear, old Mumsie! Mumsie mustn't ever know. It would just about kill her. The phonograph across the hall started "Sweet Hortense." If it would only

stop, just this one evening! Mrs. Blake came into the bedroom.

"I feel kinda sleepy," she said, "I guess I'll come to bed, too. It'll save gas."

Marjorie slipped out of bed, prepared the hot water bottle, brought it to her mother and tucked her in. The phonograph ceased for a moment, then began "Ain't We Got Fun?" She crept back into bed and lay wide-eyed, turning her problem over and over. If Mr. Windham did mean to ask her to marry him! What else could he want to talk about to her? It would mean comfort for mumsie—no more dishes to wash or dresses to make over—just rest and comfort. For herself—a beautiful home, jewels, furs, motors. Tom's face rose before her, Tom with the grim line around his mouth as he had looked when he said: "What are you going to say, when he talks to you to-morrow?"

What *was* she going to say?

Mr. Windham could give her everything in the world, everything—except Tom. She must never see Tom again if— Could she go on living without seeing Tom?

Marjorie was up earlier than usual the next morning, hastily drank her coffee and ran for the car. The keen wind whipped the color back to her cheeks as she stood at the front of the ferry and watched the New York shore line draw nearer. She must tell Tom what she had decided to do, tell him right away! She couldn't possibly wait until five o'clock. When a cross town car brought her to Fifth Avenue she sped into the nearest drug store and entered a telephone booth. Tom had given her the telephone number of his employer's house, he had said to call him there.

"Rhineland 33478," she said eagerly.

It seemed hours until the number answered, more hours until some one had called him to the telephone, but at last he was speaking.

"It's—it's Marjorie," she said, then

in a lower voice: "Didn't you *know* I'd call you this morning? I just wanted to tell you that I know what I'm going to say to Mr. Windham. I'm going to tell him 'No.'" She hung up the receiver and left the booth.

Mr. Windham did not reach the office until after ten o'clock. Marjorie typed some left-over letters, her hands cold and hot by turns. What would Mr. Windham say to her? A more terrible thought was, what should she say to him? She tried to keep her thoughts firmly centred on Tom's words that morning, swallowed mechanically as she saw Mr. Windham entering. It seemed hours until he had read his letters, talked with Mr. Wrightson, answered a long distance call. Finally, the buzzer sounded. She must obey its summons. Automatically she picked up pad and pencil and went into the president's office. Mr. Windham looked up.

"Ah, Miss Blake," he said, "I was interrupted last evening. You may recall that I had something to discuss with you?"

"Yes, sir."

"I think you may be very pleased to hear—"

Panic made Marjorie desperate. "Oh, Mr. Windham," she interrupted, "if it's all the same to you I think I'd rather not."

Mr. Windham looked surprised.

"Rather not?" he said, "but, my dear Miss Blake, it is an excellent position, really excellent. I'm sure your mother is just the person for it."

"My—my mother?" Marjorie could get no farther.

"Yes," Mr. Windham said, stroking the aggressive whiskers. "One of the hotels in which I am interested has an opening for a woman to take charge of the linen room. The hours are not long and the work is, I believe, pleasant. It occurred to me that it might be just the thing for your mother. I shall see that she has a—h'm—good salary. As you

say, a sitting down job is not always easy to obtain, but I think this one will be ideal."

From behind the barricade of snowy whiskers Mr. Windham beamed mildly. Marjorie opened her mouth, essayed vainly to speak, then gasped. "Oh, Mr. Windham, I—you're—you're just wonderful!"

"I'm!" said Mr. Windham blandly, "and now, if you please, Miss Blake, I'll give you some letters."

Marjorie avoided the rest room at noon, ate her lunch at her desk, her eyes shining like stars as she thought of Mr. Windham's kindness. He hadn't wanted to marry her! She was so glad he hadn't. There wasn't a single reason now why she shouldn't marry Tom! She rose impulsively. She *must* do *something!* Miss Ralston, the general correspondence stenographer, was astounded to see Miss Blake descending on her, carrying a handful of pencils.

"They're my best ones." Marjorie stammered, "I thought you might like them."

She turned back to her desk.

Miss Ralston took the pencils, looked at them, but them carefully in a drawer. "Huh! nutty!" she commented.

Marjorie reached the street as the hands of the office clock pointed to five. Tom was waiting. He took both her hands in his and held them a moment without speaking, then: "You darling girl, you darling!" he said.

She looked about her a few moments later. "We're not going toward the ferry," she said.

"I'll say we're not," Tom King laughed. "We're going to have dinner together first."

After the waiter had left them, Tom reached across and took both her hands tenderly.

"I've got something to tell you," he said. "I guess I might as well say it right now and get it off my chest. I had intended to tell you to-night, any-

way, but—well, when you telephoned this morning it made me ashamed of myself."

Was he really married, after all?

Marjorie withdrew her hands, clenched them desperately in her lap.

"You see," he went on. "Of course, in a way, I *am* a chauffeur. It was just temporary, though, Andrews having quit, and father always feels safer with me driving, anyway. Father's Thomas King, you know, King and Mitchell, steel. Now, what do you say to getting married to-morrow? Thursday's my lucky day."

"I usta think that peroximity was the answer," Marilynne Smith—christened Mary Ellen—took a bite of chocolate cake and gazed gravely at her audience. It was twelve-thirty and the rest room was filled. "But I've kinda changed my mind," she admitted. "Look't Marjorie Blake, marries Tom King, an' him with more money than they can spend if they set up nights tryin' to get rid of it. An' *she* picked *him* up in a traffic jam! Says so herself. Looks to me now like you never can tell when things'll break for you, as the cook said about the china platter."



## GOLDIE OF THE CHORUS

By *Margie Rodger*

I thought I was sick of the theatre,  
Sick of the nightly grind;  
The same old dancing, the rotten songs,  
The clothes,—you know what kind.  
"It's a hell of a life," I said one day,  
"And me for a different pace!"  
So I came to work as an office clerk.  
God, how I hate this place!

Mahogany desks and broad daylight,—  
*All* of it strikes me wrong,—  
The dignity, the quiet tones.  
Oh, it's just that I don't belong.  
I can only dream of the old show shop,  
Drudgery? Yes, and lure;  
And, "It's time to get into your make-up, Kid,  
There goes the overture."

I can see myself in a flimsy dress,  
And round, bare, whited knees,  
With a crimson mouth and a mop of hair.  
Oh, it isn't a life of ease,  
But I'd rather be just a chorus girl  
Than any queen on her throne;  
For my heart's like a twisted, empty thing,  
And I long to get back—to my own.

## PAWN OF MEN

By Frank Spicker

PEGGY LORIMER ran from her limousine up the steps of her home in Fifty-fifth Street, just east of Fifth Avenue.

She fumbled in her purse for her keys. They weren't there; she must have left them on her dressing table. With a frown of annoyance she pushed the bell and waited. Why was Perkins so long in opening the door? It was cold. She drew her moleskin wrap more closely about her and then pushed the bell again.

The door opened; behind it the obsequious Perkins. She stepped into the house.

"Has Mr. Lorimer come in?" she asked.

"No, ma'am. He phoned he'd be a trifle late, ma'am."

With a sigh of relief she ran upstairs to her room. Once in, she shut the door, removed her hat and wrap, and walked to her dressing table and sat down. Her glance fell on the keys. She smiled to herself, and her eyes lifted and gazed upon the picture of her husband, in its heavy silver frame. She bent closer and looked long and earnestly at the hard, square face, the iron-gray hair, the cold, steel-blue eyes.

Eight years ago she had married him. She was only eighteen then, a mere slip of a girl, unworldly and shy. Brought up in a small town, she had come to New York to look for work. She had a good voice; she could dance; and after a few weeks she had got a wretched position in a cabaret, a cheap place, far downtown.

And then, one night, John Lorimer came there. He came with a party of

men. He spoke to her, asked her how she could be happy where she was; and she told him her whole pitiful little story. How she had come to New York when her mother died; how she had looked for a "nice" position and how they had told her everywhere that "we want girls of experience," and how, finally, she had taken this, because all her little money, her mother's insurance, was gone. John Lorimer asked her if she could do secretarial work.

"I'm not sure," she said, "but I'll try. I'll try hard. I want to get away from here."

And so she had become his secretary—six months later she had married him. She didn't love him; but she didn't love anybody else—not then. She told him she didn't love him, but would try and be a good wife to him. And he had picked her up in his arms and kissed her and said he was sure she would.

So they were married.

At first he bothered her with his attentions, but after awhile his work took up all of his time, and he was hardly ever at home. And she was happy, as happy as anyone can be without love. She had everything that money could buy—he hardly looked at the bills—all he wanted was that she should grace his table, play hostess to his friends, and look as well as the wives of the other men.

Except for the fact that they slept under the same roof and bore the same name, they were not husband and wife. He had his own rooms; she had hers. They hardly ever trespassed on one another. She was glad of that; she wanted

it to be so. On the whole she had thought herself very happy—only sometimes she had longed for something—for some one—she hardly knew what.

And now her husband was running for Governor. It was the crowning point of his career. He told her so again and again. He must "get in." There was nothing he wouldn't do to "get in." They gave innumerable dinners. They invited all sorts and kinds of people—rich men, "men," Lorimer said, "who owned the city," politicians, and all the rest, running up and down the social scale.

And then—one night when they gave a ball, the list of guests reading like the *Social Register*—she had met Norman Richardson!

Her husband had introduced them and, as she sat there at her dressing table, fingering the keys, she remembered how he had smiled at her as he bent over her hand, and how handsome she had thought him.

Later on in the evening her husband had drawn her aside and had whispered to her, "Play up to young Richardson, Peg, he's got all kinds of money and influence, and if I can get him to 'back me up,' I'm as good as Governor right now."

So she had danced with young Norman Richardson again and again that evening.

That was four months ago. Since then she had seen him day after day—at dinner, at the Opera, at the club affairs. Her husband was well pleased with the way she had annexed "young Richardson."

And she was pleased, too. At first she had been especially pleasant to Norman Richardson because she wanted to help John; she wanted to repay him in a small way for all that he had done for her. But after a time her husband and his political aspirations had somehow melted into the background, and she began, for an entirely different reason, to

look forward to her meetings with the tall, well-groomed young millionaire. She liked him—liked the way his dark eyebrows shaded his eager brown eyes; liked the way his handsome head was set on his broad, powerful shoulders; the way he carried his straight figure.

And then, one day, when they had driven out of town together, far out into the country, where the leaves were just beginning to turn into hues of gold and crimson, he had taken her in his arms and pressed kiss upon kiss on her moist little mouth.

It was as if something snapped within her. Tears welled to her eyes; she drew away from him, and stumbled blindly back to the car.

That was the beginning. He had been her lover now for three weeks, and she seemed to see the years ahead all full of love and happiness.

When she had left his apartment this afternoon, and told the chauffeur to drive home as fast as the congested traffic would allow, she had thought how wonderful it would be if she didn't have to leave him like this; if she might only stay there with him. How happy they would be, just they two! How she loved him and wanted to belong only to him, to be wholly his. He was her idol, her idol to love and worship. She could still feel his hot hands on her own, could still taste his passionate kisses on her lips. Love! she had found it! Her cup of happiness was almost full. Perhaps after awhile she would tell John and he would give her her freedom. But not now; she owed it to John not to create any scandal which might injure his chances of being elected. Not now—

She got up from her dressing table and rang for her maid. She must dress for dinner,—she must look her best. Norman was coming after dinner to talk with her husband, but she would steal a few moments of his time. John wouldn't mind—she knew John wanted her to "play up" to Norman more than

ever now—election was only two weeks off.

Her dressing finished, she surveyed herself in the long French mirror. She did look lovely! The blue satin dinner gown that hung in such soft clinging folds about her body was of exactly the right shade. Her hair shone gold and luxuriant; the hair of a woman who has every means at her disposal to give her body every attention. She smiled at herself in the glass, and with an involuntary nod of approval, dismissed her maid and opened the door.

At the top of the stairs she paused. She could hear her husband's, "Has Mrs. Lorimer come in yet?" followed by Perkins' servile, "Yes, sir, Mrs. Lorimer has been home some time." She heard her husband's heavy step as he went into the library. With a sigh, she descended the steps. Her husband came from the library to greet her.

"Hello," he said.

"Aren't you going to dress?" she asked.

"No, not until after dinner," he answered. "Richardson's coming."

"Yes, I know," she replied.

She wondered at her voice, so even and calm. She knew her face was placid and betrayed no emotion. Yet her pulses throbbed—her heart sang within her at the very mention of that name.

"Dinner ready?" Her husband's voice brought her out of her reverie to the reality of his presence.

"I suppose so," she answered.

They moved towards the dining-room, and as he stepped aside at the door to let her pass, she noticed how tired he looked, how very old he was getting.

She hardly spoke during the dinner. John talked volubly about his plans, about his electoral campaign, about the new house he was going to buy when he was Governor. She hardly heard him; her mind wandered back over the

hours she had spent with Norman, hours of intoxicating delight.

Dinner over, she roused herself from her lethargy and rose from the table.

"I'm going up to dress," said her husband.

She watched him as he went up the stairs. If he knew!

When he had turned, at the top of the stairs, to go to his room, she went into the drawing-room. It was eight o'clock. Norman ought to be there at any moment now. They would be able to be alone together until her husband came down again.

She walked to the window and looked out. It was a wonderfully lovely night. The moon hung high up in the heavens, the autumnal milky way shone brightly with myriads of stars. Only now and then, a chill wind swept over the now brightly lighted city. If Norman and she could only be alone together on such a night!

She sighed and walked away from the window. The little clock chimed the quarter. Why didn't he come? John would be down in a moment. Nervously, she twisted her hands before her. She saw herself in one of the mirrors, and smiled. How excited she was!—how divinely agitated! Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes sparkled; she was radiant, beautifully perfect. She stood there, in the bright light of the drawing-room, and admired herself.

A door slammed. She started forward, but stopped suddenly, as she heard her husband's step on the stairs. A shadow of a frown crossed her face. They had missed this opportunity, she and Norman.

As her husband reached the bottom of the stairs she heard the bell ring, and a moment later heard her husband's, "Good evening, Richardson."

As they came into the drawing-room she advanced to meet them. She gave her hand to Norman, who pressed it ever so slightly. She looked up at him.

"How are you?" she asked, quite calm outwardly. She was the perfect hostess now, the perfect actress playing her part. No one would have believed that she, who now treated this man as a welcome guest only, had been in his arms but a few short hours ago.

"Oh," he laughed, "we poor single men get along as well as we can. We spend most of our time envying the married men, that is, the lucky ones, like your husband."

Peg looked at her husband. He was smiling—happy—satisfied. Somehow, when he smiled like that, he made her feel like a pet dog who was brought out to show off her stock of tricks.

But she didn't mind it so much to-night. She hardly saw him, her eyes and ears open only to the face and speech of the tall, dark young man who bent over her.

Her husband broke in on her thoughts—

"You'll excuse us, dear, won't you, if we go into my study now? Work, you know."

She smiled.

"Certainly," she answered.

She stretched out her hand again to Norman.

"Perhaps I'll see you later, Mr. Richardson," she said, "or to-morrow. Will you take dinner with us to-morrow?"

He took her hand. The soft, firm, man-fingers sent a strange thrill through her body.

"Thank you, I shall be glad to," he answered.

He bowed and started from the room. Her husband came over to her.

"Come into my study at ten o'clock and bid us 'good night.' I'm going to close the deal with him. He's going to back me to the limit. I'm almost Governor already."

He patted her cheek and went out. She heard them go upstairs, heard them go down the corridor to John's study

and, when she heard the door of the study shut, she started up the stairs to go to her own room.

As she passed the study she could hear them talking, but could not distinguish the words. She stopped. Yes, that was his voice—deep, strong and sonorous, like some great bell. The voice stopped; the other voice began—rough and unmusical. She went on, past the study, past her husband's bedroom, and when she came to her own room, opened the door and went in.

She looked at the clock. It was nine o'clock. One hour to wait. . . .

She rang for her maid.

"I won't need you any more to-night, Louise. You may go."

"Yes, ma'am. Good night, ma'am."

"Good night."

When the maid had gone, Peg lighted the lamp over her bed, and, picking up a book from the night table lay down to read.

Dull story! All stories seemed dull to her now; only life was interesting. The book slipped from her hands; her eyes closed. She slept.

She awoke with a start. What time was it? She looked at the clock. Ten-twenty! She sprang up and went to the mirror to rearrange her hair. A touch here, a hairpin there, and she was more lovely than ever. She opened the door and walked down the corridor to the study. At the door she stopped. Should she go in? She never went into his rooms now—never. Yet he had asked her to come in. He had intimated that it was important. She timidly put out her hand and knocked on the door. A pause. She could hear some one cross the floor. The door opened.

"Come in, dear."

Her husband stood in the doorway, smiling that proprietary smile that always angered her.

She went in. Norman was standing before the desk. He came forward.

"I came to say good night," she said.

"You are very good to me," he answered.

She held out her hand to him.

"Good night," she said. "You won't fail us for dinner to-morrow night, will you?"

"Never fear but that I shall be here," he answered.

As he took her hand she felt him press something into her palm. It was a small ball of paper. She looked up at her husband. He was still smiling that silly smile; he had seen nothing. She almost hated him at that moment. She turned back to Richardson.

"Good night," she said again.

"Good night," he answered.

Her husband followed her to the door. As he bent to kiss her, he whispered, "It's all settled—I'm Governor."

She smiled up at him. She was glad too; but for a different reason.

"Good night," she said.

"Good night."

He closed the door after her; then she heard him go back to the desk.

She ran down the corridor to her bedroom, the door of which she locked after her.

Suddenly she stopped, all trembly and white, in the centre of the room. The little ball of paper! She had dropped it! She fumbled in her dress. No! She looked all over the room—the paper wasn't there!

Her heart thumping wildly, her lips pale and bloodless, she unlocked and opened her door. It wasn't there! As quietly as she could, she crept down the corridor to the study. The paper was nowhere to be seen.

She must have dropped it in the study!

The thought froze her blood; she uttered a little cry. She put her hands to her mouth. It was as if she were momentarily paralyzed.

She only recovered herself when she heard steps coming towards the door

before which she stood. The knob of the door turned. She ran swiftly down the corridor to her own room, locked it again as she had done but a few moments before, and, tottering to the bed, sank down upon it.

It seemed an eternity before she had strength enough to lift herself to her feet. What should she do now? Dare she go back and look again? She unlocked her door, opened it and peered out into the corridor. All was blackness, dark as the grave. Norman must have gone long ago. She switched off her light, took off her shoes and stepped into the corridor. The house was silent; only now and then from the street came the sound of a passing car.

She closed her door slowly and noiselessly and started towards the study. She listened; she could hear nothing inside. She got down on her hands and knees and tried to look between the crack under the door. Blackness there, too. She got up and groped her way to the next door, her husband's bedroom. There was no light under that, either. He must be asleep.

Suddenly a terrible thought seized her. Suppose he had locked the doors; he had so many private papers and things! She fumbled her way back to the study and tried the knob. Slowly, without making a sound, the knob turned under the pressure of her fingers. She pushed ever so gently; the door opened.

She breathed a sigh of relief and walked over to the desk, the outline of which she could just distinguish, because of the little light which came in through the half-closed blinds.

She groped about on the floor for the little ball of paper; but it was nowhere to be found. Perhaps Norman had seen her drop it and had picked it up—or perhaps her husband had thrown it in the paper basket without looking at it. She reached for the wastebasket and put her hand in. She almost laughed in her misery—the basket was full of just such

little paper balls. She would have to unfold each one—it would take so long! And she couldn't see well enough to see anything. She wondered whether she dared light the little desk lamp. She was desperate now, almost hysterical. She would light the lamp, and if her husband came in she would say she had come back to see whether she had dropped her bar-pin or some such thing.

When she had lighted the lamp on the desk she sat down. Taking the basket on her lap she went carefully through its contents. She was trembling and unnerved; her little white hands shook so that she tore almost every piece she smoothed out. But it was all useless; the paper wasn't there.

She put the basket down next to the desk again and, as she straightened up, her eyes fell upon the papers lying there on the desk.

Perhaps it was there!

With feverish fingers she went over the papers on the desk.

Ah!

Her heart pounded wildly, she almost cried out, for she saw Norman's handwriting on a piece of note paper, of which she could only see a part. Hastily she pulled it out from under the other papers and looked at it. It wasn't the one she wanted. It was for her husband, a glance at the top told her that, and was attached by a paper-clip to another paper.

As she laid it back on the desk the words "your wife" caught her eye. That meant herself. What could Norman be writing to her husband about her? She picked the letter up again and, bending over the lamp, read:

*"Dear Lorimer:*

*"Your suggestion amuses me, almost, I might say, startles me.*

*"I am very fond of your lovely little wife, and she attracted me the very first night I met her.*

*"As you have guessed that we have been more than friendly there seems to be no*

*use in my denying it; and I don't see, anyhow, what I would gain by it.*

*"Rather unfortunately for me, you have guessed that I would be placed in an awfully awkward position should you divorce your wife and I, by that, be faced by the duty of marrying her. So I feel constrained to agree to your demands.*

*"However, if I do 'back' you with my money and the political influence you know I have, you will have to sign a paper promising not to interfere in any way with my little affair with your wife, and not, under any circumstances whatsoever, to divorce her.*

*"I don't want any scandal; much less do I want to marry her.*

*"I will come to your house to-morrow night and, if you agree to the above, we can clinch the deal then.*

*"Permit me to say, in closing, that yours is an uncommonly clever business head.*

*"Yours,*

*"NORMAN RICHARDSON."*

Peg sat like a woman turned to stone. She was numb with hurt and anguish. The awful letter fluttered from her nerveless fingers to the floor.

God! How rotten men were! She shut her eyes as if to ward off a blow. It was all plain to her now. She had been the pawn, the useful plaything to get her husband what he wanted. Now she knew why he always smiled like that. And the other man? Norman!

"Norman!"

Involuntarily, the name sprang from her lips. She had loved him so—she had given him all that a woman has to give! And he called it "a little affair!" He was "fond of her" but he didn't want to marry her! Good God! How she hated him! How she hated him!

She looked wildly about her. Her eyes were wide and stary, like the eyes of dead people. She stooped and picked the letter up again. What had her husband written him? Her pulses beat madly as

she folded back Norman's note and began to read the carbon copy of her husband's typewritten letter. Typewritten! How cautious he was! Even the signature was typed, and the paper bore no letterhead nor initials. It was so like him.

She read:

*"Dear Richardson:*

*"For the past week I have had knowledge of your association with my wife—that you are, to be brief, her lover.*

*"Now I have a proposition to make to you. I very much doubt whether you would care to marry her even if I should divorce her. You probably know that a woman who takes one lover generally takes another.*

*"But if I do divorce her, and I have ample proof against you both, and if the whole matter was dragged out in court and in the papers, to save your face you would be forced to make her your wife.*

*"But I don't particularly want anything of the sort. She rather pleases me, and in this case she has unknowingly done exactly what I hoped she would do.*

*"Briefly, my proposition is this,— If you will back me with your money and political influence I am willing to call it 'square.'*

*"What do you say?"*

*"Don't think that this is blackmail; it's advice.*

*"Hoping to hear from you in a day or so, I am,*

*"Sincerely Yours,*

*"JOHN LORIMER."*

Peg sprang up from the chair. It was all over now; all over. Everything was all over. There was only one thing to do.

Blinded with tears she made her way to the door, opened it, and tottered down the corridor to her room. Once inside, she switched on the lights and hastily began to take off her dress.

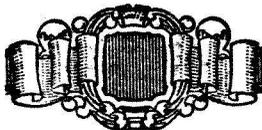
Her face was firm and menacing now. She knew at last just where she stood—what she had to do. There was no other way.

She quickly put on a dark blue suit, high shoes, and a little black velvet hat. She reached for her purse and in so doing her eyes lighted upon her wedding and engagement rings. With a gesture of unutterable loathing she flung them from her across the room. They fell to the floor and rolled with a sharp little noise.

Purse in hand, she looked long and slowly about the room—hers no longer. Then, with her mouth tightly set, with the same determination she had shown years ago when she first came to the city, she opened the door and stepped out into the corridor. With a firm step she walked down the passage and down the stairs.

At the bottom of the stairs she stopped. For a moment she hesitated—she was taking a big step. But it was for a moment only—then she recovered her courage and walked unafraid and firmly to the door. As she passed through and shut the heavy glass door from the outside she looked about her. There was no one in sight. It was cold now; the wind blew fiercely, chilling her through and through.

For a second time she hesitated. Then she straightened up and, her head high, walked quickly down the street.



## BROADWAY DECAMERON NIGHTS

By C. S. Montanye

XXV—INK

SHE was just a little chorine, a pretty child with innocence limned in her piquant face, with sloe eyes that were like brown, velvet stars. Broadway knew her as Miss Feo Marr. The story of her beginnings, like so many other similar volumes, reached back to Gotham's shabby side, to gray tenements, streets that in the summer were open bake ovens, and in the winter freezing Siberian highways, filled with the frosty breath of the Hudson.

She had graduated from cabaret work into vaudeville and from vaudeville had made the next step into musical comedy. Stage managers remarked her intelligence, the rapidity with which she learned songs, her manner of assimilating "business" and dance steps. She made-up wonderfully well, was inspirational with her verve, the sheer bubbling vivacity which she displayed before the footlights. Countless of the tribe of Tired Business Men, to say nothing of Jersey deacons and amateur rounders from points West, felt sluggish pulses stir and thin blood warm at the sight of her twinkling legs, her bodily grace, the flickering sunshine of her smile that came, lingered, vanished.

It was while she was with the "Dancing Widow," at the old Knickerbocker, that Feo first became attracted by and attached to young Mr. "Happy" Osgood. The gentleman in question, a "wise money hopper" had hit the Broadway bookies hard, had cleaned up royally on a "good thing" some "guns" had uncorked at Aqueduct to run for the "family jewels." There was noth-

ing unconventional about their meeting. Osgood, in a box that night, had beheld Feo and had found her good to look upon. Thereafter, he had loitered about the stage entrance until she came out, had presented himself, had taxied her up to the Café de la Paix, there to shoot a lot of seed. Feo liked Osgood from the first; he was so good-looking, so debonair, even-tempered. He wore modish raiment with the genteel air of a Rialto leading man, was a perfect dancer, understood women and made love like they did in the movies. He was also generous to a fault—particularly after he had made a "break."

Later, Feo was to discover that Osgood existed entirely by his wits, maintained an office in his waistcoat pocket, and was married to a girl who had left him for a motion picture director in far Hollywood. Still later it was Feo's privilege to discover that her lover was not above engaging in shady transactions that were on the fringe of the law. Once or twice he had hinted that her assistance in some of his "deals" would be highly appreciated but Feo, despite her affection for him, steadfastly refused material aid. She felt that she could never forget one bleak evening she had known in her twelfth year. Then a couple of very tall patrolmen had entered the tenement to pinch a pickpocket who resided just across the hall. They had used their nightsticks rather vigorously when the poor wretch had tried to make a quick and furtive escape. . . .

It was a morning in August.

The hour was eleven o'clock or something more. The sunshine that poured in the open windows of the two-room and bath suite "Happy" Osgood maintained perennially on the fourth floor of the Hotel Timbledon, was hot and brassy. It painted the windows of the unrepossessing, musty hostelry that had been a gaunt sentinel on the corner of Broadway and Fifty-first Street since the day that the First Crusaders were in bib and rompers. Across a card table, being used for the more worthy purpose of holding breakfast dishes, Osgood alternately endangered his eyesight by drinking coffee with his spoon in the cup and looking sleepily across at Feo who, in her bright tan-and-green kimona, was as radiant as a summer butterfly. He watched her daintily crack one of the eggs she had boiled on the electric grill, yawned once or twice, reached for his Piedmonts, lighted one and inhaled deeply.

"Hot, isn't it?" Osgood murmured. "Must be tough on you, baby doll, down in the show-shop."

Feo, scooping out the egg with a bent spoon, nodded.

"Compared to it a three alarm fire is zero! Still, I don't mind it very much. It's better than rehearsing with a new piece or haunting the agencies."

The reference was made to her present occupation with a summer revue current at the Ambassador. Osgood flipped the ash from his cigarette, some of his enervation patently disappearing.

"If you weren't so damn straight-laced," he growled, "you wouldn't have to be swinging a foot and chirping in this kind of weather. No, the two of us could be down at Atlantic City, having a smoke roll us around in one of them boardwalk chairs. Either that or up at the Spa, making suckers out of the books and running them ragged at the faro layout in Ernie Schwartzbaum's place. I got a deck marked that's money from home, but I've got to have

a rib to help me crack it and," he sighed, "I might as well ask a Methodist minister's wife to help me as to ask you!"

Feo smiled a little but said nothing.

"There's no telling," Osgood continued, "how much jack is in the pot. It's a gold mine, ready to be worked. Not only that but it is as safe as a convent—we could pull it and walk up to a cop on any beat, laugh in his face and say, 'The haitch with you, feller. We've just stuck over a nifty. Let's see you put on the cuffs, you great big fathead, you?' That's the kind of a pipe it is. Feo, it's the cat's pyjamas!"

But the girl opposite him continued to evince no particular interest and Osgood scowled.

"Lemme tell you about it," he said heavily. "I've been on this for the past three days and it's absolutely airtight. It's such a safe bet that I can take an oath and swear that if you'll help me lam it over, I'll be wearing Mortie Quellton as a watch charm. Quellton, mind you! And that's no Spanish cow! It's a cinch to call the turn!"

For the first time Feo stirred a little. Mortie Quellton. The name struck a responsive chord within her and made it vibrate like the plucked string of a violin. She knew Mortimer Quellton; everybody knew him, for Quellton had been one of the sniffing Alley hounds who had excited the envy and reluctant admiration of the Rialto by marrying a million dollars. Some four years previous, Quellton, then a "barber shop chord" baritone, singing at the café of the popular Milt Wimble, had become acquainted with and ultimately married a Mrs. Cary Carney, she, the wealthy widow of an interior decorator upon whom the blight of prohibition had had not the slightest effect.

Rumor tabbed Quellton as being as sharp as a razor, as being as clever as they came; becoming the husband of the former wife of the bibulous Cary Carney, had proved and verified the fact. Quell-

ton had seated himself in the soft lap of luxury. The old haunts along the White Way saw him only infrequently; he dined now at the new Park Avenue place of Monsieur the Sherry, danced at the Club Septembre and got tight in his wife's establishment on East Seventy-first Street.

This information Feo recalled as she looked at the scowling face of her loved one.

"Want to help me?" Osgood asked. She shook her head.

"No."

"Give you half of what I get," he persisted. "How about it?"

She shook her head again.

"Nope."

"Happy" Osgood's scowl darkened.

"Don't!" he snapped. "You and them lily-white ideas of yours give me a pain. I haven't levelled since Miss Lizzie won last month at Belmont. Never mind, I'll stop off at Santanyana's a little later and get a hold of Beth Wildey. She'll get down on her knees and beg me to let her string along, once I pass her the set-up."

Feo stood, went around, hung over the back of Osgood's chair, her arms draped loosely about his shoulders.

"My boy's such a roughneck," she cooed. "He gets as sore as a gumboil and goes away up in the air at the least little thing, doesn't he?"

"You're enough to make me nutty," the object of her attentions said in a more amiable voice. "Can't you ever do anything I ask you to like a regular fem?"

Feo drew a slim, pointed finger across one recently shaven cheek.

"As a matter of fact," she stated, "I'll help you this once and I won't ask for a nickel kick-in if you'll swear an oath that *you'll* do something for *me*."

Osgood jumped up; he caught her elbows in his hands and searched her pretty face with a darting glance.

"What do you want me to do?"

Feo drew a breath. It seemed to require all of her courage to make answer. Yet her voice, when she replied, was curiously cool and calm:

"Get a divorce and marry me!"

She expected Osgood's hands to drop away and his eyes to narrow coldly as they had invariably done on other occasions when she had made the same request. But he stared without blinking and his fingers gripped her arms the harder.

"If you mean that," he said slowly, "I'm on! There'll be enough cash in this to pay Horowitz and Sanger for a gilt-edge divorce decree and a couple of bones left over for a marriage license and one of them orange blossom wedding rings. Baby doll, help me stick this across, be on the level with me and I swear it will be a case of from altar to halter fifteen minutes after Horowitz pries me away from that double-crossing whiff of mine! What do you say to that?"

The brown eyes of Feo were eloquent.

"Hold me tight—just for a minute, Honey Lamb!" she crooned. "Oh, close—close!"

It was perhaps ten minutes later before Osgood was able to briefly outline his idea. Mortie Quellton had been, it appeared, in Dutch with his wife and was on probation. His bank and better half had learned of one of Mortie's indiscretions and while the matter had been patched up, the slightest error on Quellton's part meant a definite and conclusive break. This break, Osgood exclaimed, meant the former café singer would be ousted from the lap or luxury and tossed out into the cold. It was indisputable, he declared, that Quellton would take mighty good care that his wife would have no opportunity to censure him. Yet, so the explanation ran, Mortie had never loved the woman he had married and could no more resist

temptation than a starving man could a plate of steaming soup. It was upon Quellton's known weakness for youth and pretty faces that Osgood laid the foundation for his schemes. And, as he unfolded it, the eyes of the listening Feo widened; her cheeks grew warm and flushed.

"But suppose," she said fiercely, "he got to it before the showdown—before you butted in? I—I simply couldn't—"

Osgood understood and smiled grimly.

"Don't worry. I'll be Sidney on the Spot. You exit with me after the razz and that'll be all."

He took her lips and then consulted his watch.

"Now I gotta breeze. Remember what I told you and don't worry about nothing. I haven't stored this for three days without knowing the words and music from the vamp to the second ending of the chorus."

After Osgood had departed for a pool room on Thirty-sixth Street and Feo was in the privacy of her bedroom, she went retrospectively about the business of dressing. She pondered a number of things as she brushed out the mane of her umber hair, prior to dressing it. She would entice and win through the magnetic appeal of her fringed eyes, the petal-redness of her inviting mouth, the imaginative and inspiring appeal of her rounded, softly-curved body, the charm and animation of her manner. She tried to remember everything that Osgood had told her as she snapped the hooks on her brocaded silk canisole, adjusted the elastics on her pink knickers and swathed her symmetrical legs with gossamer-thin silk hosiery.

"It means so much, so much to me!" was the thought that repeated itself in her mind, like the never ending refrain of a popular song hit heard for the first time.

All afternoon she thought of it; during the evening performance of the

show at the Ambassador it imitated her dance steps, lurked at her elbow.

It's voice dwindled when she had changed to street clothes and had crept down the stage door alley. Now she was face to face with actuality. When she reached Callag's and was seated at a table toward the rear, under the balcony, she was breathlessly aware that the curtain on the stage of her own drama was slowly rising. Osgood had told her that he had positive information that Quellton would be at Callag's around midnight. She realized the magnitude of her lover's knowledge when, as the smoke-wreathed clock at the far end of the café marked midnight precisely, Mortimer Quellton threaded a way down the centre aisle and seated himself, two tables distant from her.

He wore a finely-tailored Tux, a soft silk shirt and a diamond ring that blazed like a ball of fire on the smallest finger of his left hand. Quellton was a well-built, not unattractive young man, evidently in the early thirties, whose mouth was a trifle too thin and whose eyes, small and bright, were set too close to a straightly modelled nose. Broadway had known him well in his singing days and Feo had seen him often around the Lane. Yet, with his present elegance and in his lounging, moneyed ease, she recognized but little of the former Alley hound.

Quellton ordered a drink—this, after a whispered conference with a new waiter. He wedged a cigarette in a jewelled holder and surveyed the place with idle indifference. From the frown that shadowed his face, Feo saw that he was out of temper, was morose, illy-pleased with the world in general and himself in particular. He drank the Pink Baboon—the latest alcoholic concoction served as a slap-in-the-face to the dictates of Mr. Volstead—and drummed on the table top nervously. It was when twenty minutes or more had elapsed that Feo decided it was

high time to get busy, to take her cue and put the stage beneath her feet.

Accordingly she asked for her check; when it came she considered it carefully and then opened her handbag—to search through it first methodically, then anxiously, and finally frantically. Meantime the waiter, a fair specimen of his profession, with distrustful eyes and a bulging jaw, watched her efforts with interest.

"I'm afraid," Feo said at length, "that I left my pocketbook back in the dressing-room at the theatre."

"Left your pocketbook back in the dressing-room at the theatre!" the waiter mimicked.

"Either that or lost it!" Feo went on desperately. "Oh, what shall I do? I—I—"

Her servitor interrupted by taking a step closer to the table. He leaned over and let words fall from the corners of his twisted lips:

"Women, I heard that old jazz a million times! You glad-rag dolls think you can get away with apple sauce just because you've got a good-looking mug, neat scenery and a canary voice! I hate you cheap frails! You break through with the figure on that check and slip me a fat tip or I'll razz you noble!"

Feo, standing, registered utter indignation.

"But I'm telling you the truth," she protested. "You don't suppose I would lie to you, do you? Why should I trouble to tell an untruth to a person of your class?"

This, as she expected, aroused the full ire of the man that confronted her.

"You're all liars!" he said with an oath. Then, raising his voice: "Dig the guilt out of your sock where I know you've got it hid or I'll call a cop! Them's the boss's orders. Put up or get locked up. Chirp an answer!"

The answer he requested was furnished by Mr. Mortimer Quellton:

"What's the amount of the young lady's check?" he asked quietly.

Feo felt the thrum of her heart, the warm flush of victory, Osgood had told her that it would work out just as it had! She encountered Quellton's raking stare, banking on the innocence written in her face; he looked for a full minute then considered the paper slip with her account on it and threw down a bill.

"There's your money."

The waiter looked at it with a sneer.

"How about my tip? Don't I get no tip?"

Quellton's ill-humor flared up in his small, bright eyes. He thrust his face forward:

"I'll give you a tip, you noisy four-flusher! This is it: The next time you shoot off your trap to a lady in a jam, be careful some one don't shove your teeth down your throat! On your way now before I buzz the captain!"

Without further comment the waiter turned on his heel, picked up his tray and departed.

"I have a ring here," Feo quavered, "that I wish you'd keep as security—until I can pay you back to-morrow. I'm with the revue at the Ambassador and I really did leave my little purse on the dressing table. Oh, I'm so ashamed—you have no idea."

They sat down after Quellton had pulled out her chair for her.

"Don't worry about the money," he said kindly. "I happen to know you're telling the truth because I saw you not two hours ago at the theatre in question. Good show—plenty of kick and nice music. Won't you tell me your name?"

Feo did so, recalling Osgood's instructions and adding naively:

"And you're Mr. Quellton, aren't you? I remember I used to see you at Wimble's when I first went on the stage. That's ages and ages ago now. I want you to know how grateful I am for what you did. If you hadn't come to

my rescue and helped me out, that big ham would have called an ossifer. This place isn't what it used to be."

She rattled ingenuously on, giving Quellton ample opportunity to appraise and study her. She saw his gaze drink her in, focus on her face, wander to her shoulders, over her rounded arms. Would she stand inspection? Her spark of hope wavered, went out, then at his next words burst into a tiny flame.

"Let's get out of here," Quellton murmured. "This place is enough to give you a headache."

She tried to lend the impression that, realizing just whom he was, she was slightly awe-stricken by his favor, his attention. Feo waited while he got his smart straw hat and stick at the cloak-room window, then let him take her arm as they traded Callag's for the pavement of the Broadway that was outside.

The Rialto, under the summer moon, was a painted city, so colorful that it might have been designed by either the great Urban or Pierre Markanoff, the famous Hungarian muralist. For all of the heat and humidity, it was as crowded as it might have been on a March night. Those of Flash Alley's inner circle, its women, its parasites, its sharpshooters and the motley mob who were drained away by the shore and Saratoga, had been replaced in generous measure by the out-of-town visitors and vacationists who annually travelled to its Mecca, their prayer rugs ready to be thrown down in the shadow of the minarets of Longacre. The lights of a million incandescents set the night on fire, accentuated the stuffiness of the city, rivalled the promise of dawn which was not many hours distant.

Feo, Quellton's arm holding hers, walked south. She wondered acutely what lay just ahead. Surely it was ordained she was to conquer—otherwise she would have been dismissed ere this. Had she fitted into that hiatus of Quell-

ton's nature that needed always the comforting snuggle of a pretty girl or woman. Was it fated that Osgood was to have the privilege of making a dent in what Quellton was known to have cached and put aside for himself out of the former Mrs. Cary Carney's wealth? The question filled and thrilled her; a satisfactory answer meant the gratification of a dream that had been ever hers by night and day. Marrying her "Happy" was a diadem to be placed on the head of every hope that existed within her, every ardent desire and wish.

"Suppose we take a turn or two through the Park and get a breath of air?" Mortie Quellton suggested, as they passed the Palace and reached a Yellow Taxi stand, where a dozen orderly vehicles with disc wheels were strung out in line.

"I'd like to very much," Feo answered. "Only—"

"Only what?"

"I don't want to get you in any trouble with your wife," she said frankly. "I'm a chorus girl you know and they're all vamps and home-wreckers."

Quellton's reply was to open the door of the nearest taxi, assist her in and speak to the driver.

"My wife," he declared, when the cab edged out into the river of nocturnal traffic, "is up at her camp in the Adirondacks. What goes on down here I take precious good care that she doesn't learn. I'm quite capable," he added, with a smile, "of looking out for myself and for my friends as well."

Feo knew this wasn't exactly the truth but kept silent. She reclined gracefully on the upholstery, glad of the faint, warm breeze the cab created by its own momentum. They passed the Winter Garden, the ugly bulk of the Timbledon; Feo looked up and saw the darkened windows of the room on the fourth floor. In another minute they were over the threshold of Columbus Circle and in the Park, pursuing a smooth course through

a floating island of darkness that was dappled with the shine of the arcs, benched with lovers who exchanged tender vows in the shadows, tenanted by those poor souls who stole out of airless tenements to sleep under the arch of the open sky.

They went up to One Hundred and Tenth street by the west drive, skirted the irregular lake near the old Block House and drifted south by the east side. Feo was able to see the darkened piles of the homes of the children of the rich, mausoleums deserted save for caretakers, silent in the humid night. Far south the Plaza was a pinnacle over the land of smart shops; to the right a glow on the clouds marked the location of Broadway. In the middle distance, to the west, the roof sign of the Century Theatre seemed to hang suspended on golden cords. Back and behind it, huddles of taller buildings made the gully of side street and avenues.

"How about a little drink?" Quellton said, his voice arousing Feo from the lethargy into which she had slipped.

She lifted her gaze to find his small, bright eyes on her face.

"I don't mean in any of those hot Alley dives," he hastened to add. "I've got a few rooms I've kept over from my bachelor days just a little way from here and a cellarette that has some stuff in it that I'm not ashamed to offer anyone. Wouldn't you like something with ice in it?"

Feo dropped the lids over her eyes, tried to mask the satisfaction they might have otherwise revealed. Every new turn of events hinged accurately on "Happy" Osgood's scheme—his plans. She had first anticipated the need of all of her wits, of ingenuity, of crafty stratagems to get him to take her to this same place he mentioned for it was at his "apartment" that Osgood contemplated a crash-in at the proper moment. Luck, to Feo, seemed so great to make her almost suspicious.

"I wouldn't mind it at all," she said slowly. "Only—"

"Only what?"

"Are you sure it is all right?"

Quellton touched her arm reassuringly. He passed an address to the chauffeur and laughed under his breath.

"Believe me, it is! I'm a pretty cagey person as you possibly have heard. I seldom make mistakes and, when I do, I'm ready to pay the penalty. But don't worry—there'll be no penalty I assure you. Like an umbrella I cover myself."

Feo felt she could have made an appropriate reply to him and suppressed a smile of satisfaction as the taxi left the Park and a few minutes later was stopping before the narrow façade of an apartment house in a quiet side-street where the darkness was a murky drugget. Mortimer Quellton settled with the chauffeur, piloted Feo through a front door whose light had long since been extinguished. They went up a flight of stairs together, hesitated while the husband of the wealthy woman who had been Mrs. Cary Carney fumbled for his keys, and then entered the bandbox apartment, penetrating a living-room where an electric fan droned and an artificial spring-time coolness prevailed. The room was furnished with a bachelorian touch; framed nudes by Castigny were on the walls, mingling with photographic posters depicting Montmartre scenes, lettered in French. The room adjoined a bed-chamber and was only indifferently appointed; its furniture had seen signal service, its rug was worn and an air of desuetude lingered over all like a venerable hag, work-weary. Its most modern furnishing was a handsome teakwood cellarette with a shiny brass lock, which Quellton used to house one of the keys on his ring.

"One minute and I'll put together something that will make you think of Greenland on a January afternoon," he said, taking from the cabinet several bottles before wandering off in the direction

of the kitchen at the end of the hall.  
 "Bar-boy is one of the best rôles I play!"

Feo, when she was alone, crouched her chin in the palm of her hand and turned so she might face the whirling fan. She thought of Osgood, of herself, of the significance of the chamber that contained her and shuddered a little. Money, as it invariably did, lay at the root of it. Money, it appeared, was the basis upon which everything was founded, the freshet that nourished every river, every dark and sinister stream, every bright ocean and turgid, unhealthy pool. Its possession was a curse that might never be lifted; it made Broadway what it was, purchased the affection of passion-slaves, sent men down into dark, unholy paths that twisted through the subterranean swamps. Yet, Feo reflected, it was Quellton's money that must purchase her entire happiness, place a golden circlet on her finger, usher her through the swinging doors of Respectability, and make her dreams come true. The irony of it made her smile. . . .

The tray that Mortimer Quellton brought into the room held two frosty goblets, ornamented with the peels of lemons and the cubes of diced oranges. Feo tasted hers and found it delicious; she helped herself to a Russian cigarette and smoked pensively, while Mortie Quellton chatted, his small, bright eyes fastened first on her feet, then on her rounded legs, then on the swelling lines of her torso, her breast, and the rounded column of her throat. While he talked, Feo looked out of the open window into the street below. Her gaze idly roved its deserted length; presently she grew aware a man had turned the corner and was prowling through the shadows. There was a certain familiar swing to the shoulders, the way he held himself, that parted her lips. Nearly opposite the apartment building she saw the saunterer look up, beheld the blurred moon of his face ere he drifted past and merged with

the darker darkness that was between the block's two lamp posts.

The drinks consumed and the cigarettes burnt to their tubed stubs, Quellton got up and seated himself on the arm of Feo's chair. His eyes were filled with a myriad of questions; he inclined forward and touched the thin, silken stuff that shrouded her shoulders.

"I guess you know you're a winner," he said huskily, obviously stirred by the sonnet of her beauty. "I knew you were different the minute I saw you in Callag's. Tell me something about yourself. No, don't! It might spoil it all."

Feo sensed the approaching climax; her breath came more quickly; her eyes were velvet stars. All at once, under the stare he bent upon her she became a fairy, palpitant, night-crowned creature, wrapped in a bit of dawn. Followed a hush; their eyes swam together. She moved only when he had switched the electricity in the floor lamp off and felt him reach for her in the August dimness. There was another interlude of quiet. Quellton's whispered words came from miles away:

"Oh, girl, girl—"

Then she was like a soft fire in his arms, warmer, more penetrating than the sun, knowing he breathed the odor of her skin, hair and breath—keenly sensitive to the lips that found and joined with her own. . . .

Hours or years later, the silence that brooded like a slumbering dragon over the chamber was cleft by the shrill clamor of the front doorbell. It was some time before the floor lamp was lighted and Mortie Quellton had stumbled into the hall. Feo knew the intruder was Osgood, her "Happy," even before she heard his voice in the hall, saw him looming up in the doorway, looking at her with the stricken gaze of a Barrymore.

"You—Feo—" Osgood murmured brokenly. "I thought you were on the level—I thought you were square! Then Eddie Pilzer—it was his taxi that picked

you both up—he told me you were here—”

Mortimer Quellton, halfway between the window and the lamp smiled thinly.

“Well, so long as she is here, what are you going to do about it?”

Osgood turned to him.

“I’ll even up!” he vowed. “I know you—you’re Quellton, Mortie Quellton who married Mrs. Cary Carney! I’ll even up! I guess maybe your wife would be only too happy to know what’s going on down in this dump! You can’t cop my girl and get away with it—”

It was a superb piece of acting—the perfect rôle of an outraged lover, broken, disillusioned, humiliated.

“You’re not going to do anything rash,” Quellton stated pleasantly.

Osgood drew a quivering breath.

“I’ll even up!” he iterated.

“No, you won’t,” Quellton differed affably. “I’ll tell you why you won’t. Suppose I did cut in on your gal? What about it? There’s three women to every one man in the world, and so you’ve got two more coming to you. Not only that, but I’m going to pay you well to keep a padlock on your tongue. I’m going to make you a present of a couple of thousand dollars. What’s a woman compared with two grands, eh?”

Feo’s throbbing blood tingled in her veins. Two thousand dollars! It was a clean-up greater than every expectation!

Mortimer Quellton had lighted a small lamp over a desk in one corner of the room; sat down before it. He spread open a green-leafed check book and, humming, fumbled in a drawer until he discovered an ornamental gold-and-silver fountain pen. This he uncapped, scratched off a check, tore it loose from the book and handed it to Osgood.

“There you are! I wouldn’t,” he advised, “try any monkey-business.”

Osgood nodded, still avoiding Feo’s burning gaze. He crossed to the door that led out into the hall, put on his

checked cap and dug up his cigarettes. It was then that the cold chill of knowledge swept through her, blighting the bud and blossom of the wonderful plant of love that had reared up in her soul like a magic flower. With panic in her heart she stood, took an uncertain step forward, extended both arms.

“Happy,” she faltered.

Osgood turned casually.

“Aw, forget it!” he said curtly.

After a time the door closed.

Some time later Feo lifted her lifeless gaze and saw Quellton was beside the lamp again, fingers lifted to plunge it out. . . .

It was a week later.

In the living-room of the “apartment” out of which “Happy” Osgood had marched seven nights previous, Mortie Quellton paid his tailor, glanced at the neatly pressed pile of garments the man had delivered, and indicated the bill with a gesture.

“Just receipt it, will you?” he asked.

The man of needle and the pressing board, sat down before a desk that was in one corner of the room, spread open the bill and picked up an ornamental gold-and-silver fountain pen. He uncapped it at the same minute that Quellton caught sight of it.

“Here!” he said quickly. “Don’t use that pen—use the quill.”

The tailor raised his head.

“No, why not? There’s ink in it yet.”

Quellton, as if struck by the recollection of something distinctly humorous, smiled.

“To be sure,” he agreed. “But I like my receipts to stay receipted. You see it’s a whim of mine to keep the fountain pen filled with sympathetic ink—the kind that dries up and disappears on hour or two after it is used. Really, you never know when it is going to come in handy.”

The tailor, plainly puzzled, helped himself to the quill.

## THE VANISHING REVENGE

*By Ray St. Vrain*

**F**ROM the hall came a wild cry in my mother's voice. I ran out and saw my brother Toby bringing in my sister Evelyn, carrying her bodily. She gave us one unforgettable look, then hid her face on Toby's shoulder. Against her breast she pressed a small photograph.

After we had put her to bed Toby whispered to me: "Ellen, his lordship says she is ill of a fever."

—I knew better.

In the night I looked at the photograph. It was that of the handsomest man in all England, George Cleland, Lord Lyndall, of Aldyne House, Surrey. I looked at it a long time. Evelyn seemed to be asleep.

In the morning we found her dead; she had stabbed herself through the heart. After the funeral, Toby said to me:

"I've changed my mind; I believe his lordship lied. I'll go and see him."

"No," I said, "leave that to me. . . ."

Only a little while I had been home from Australia and New Zealand, where I had given my pianologue (do not confound it with the usual vaudeville number) with great success; and though I was in trim for my London engagements, I preferred to wait awhile and perfect my act still further. So with my grand piano I went down to an old friend's in Devonshire where I could practice and study undisturbed. The country always steadied me; and just now I doubly wanted to be alone, as the grief of my mother and Toby bore down upon me dreadfully.

By means of the society journals I

kept track of the Earl of Lyndall's doings. At Ascot, Henley, Brighton, he was always in the foreground of things. A great sportsman, he followed the hounds one day, distinguished himself at polo the next, made a phenomenal stroke at golf the next—and always the name of some fair woman was coupled with his: Lady Ann Trevor's, Lady Gwen Gower's, the Hon. Mary Talbot's, as the case might be.

But I was unperturbed. In my patient soul I felt he was not for any of these. I was fair, too, though not so fair as my sister Evelyn. She had been almost moon-white. I had color; and I rather fancied Lord Lyndall would prefer that.

After a flying visit to my mother and Toby (life was picking up a bit for them again), I went up to London, under my stage name of Florence Eustace, and informed my manager that I had changed my plans. I had decided not to play the theatres, but to accept engagements for society functions instead. He was much disappointed, as a gala night had been arranged for me at Albert Hall; but I was firm. So, bowing to my ultimatum, he busied himself securing the sort of engagements I desired. Meanwhile, I replenished my wardrobe to an extent that Lord Lyndall's most fashionable friends would have envied. I had always had a flair for dress.

I gave my first programme at a large reception held at a high government official's house in Hyde Park. I scored brilliantly. Immediately society took me up, and with dizzy rapidity I appeared at various functions in the homes of distinguished commoners, fabulously wealthy social upstarts, members of Par-

liament, cabinet ministers, and even royalty itself. The climax was reached when I gave a special performance at Buckingham Palace in the presence of Their Majesties.

This, of course, was my greatest triumph; and after the King and Queen had most graciously thanked me for my efforts, I was presented to a long line of royalty and nobility. Self-possessed though I usually was, I now seemed moving in some golden, shimmering haze, in which all my senses were merged into one glowing perception of the fairy things about me—so it was no wonder when I found myself face to face with the Earl of Lyndall that he seemed to take on this lovely unreality too. . . .

There was something unreal in the gentle pressure of his hand, his smile, his low-spoken invitation to leave the stupid crowd, go to the buffet (was I not thirsty?), thence to an arbored bench behind a row of syringas in one of the conservatories. It seemed play-acting—on my part at any rate. I had the odd sensation of Evelyn's presence. . . .

He talked much to me, and very prettily, gallantly. His aunt, the Countess of Buckford, was giving a lawn fête the coming week at her country place in Sussex, and had commissioned him to beg me to play for her.

"The countess is a very amiable woman," he said, "and I rather imagine you'd find a day or so at the Gables not so dull. She heard you play at Lady Rawdon's, and was delighted with the engaging originality of your performance. If you go it will be a great favor to her—and to me. Is it yes, Miss Eustace?"

At Lady Buckford's I met Lord Lyndall's younger brother, Lionel Cleland, and his bride of only a few months, *née* Sylvia Crowinshield, whose father was a commanding figure in the business world, and who herself was a lovely little tremulous blonde. Rather naturally

she was quite mad about her tall, good-looking, laughing, wicked-eyed husband.

Lionel, who, as a younger son of the Lyndalls', was not overburdened with riches, had married a fortune, as his wife's father was authoritatively said to be as wealthy as some of the American millionaires. Samuel Crowinshield was a large importer from the Indies, and was known as the Spice King.

Whether Lionel loved his flaxen-haired little bride I could not presume to say; but he flirted outrageously with every young woman at the Gables (and the house was full of guests) excepting myself. Perhaps he found me unattractive—or his brother may have kept him at a distance. I do know that several times when he made as if to approach me Lord Lyndall glowered savagely, so savagely that Lionell boyishly backed away, the picture of mock contrition and alarm. I was sorry for Sylvia, his adoring wife.

Lord Lyndall's courtship of me was precipitate indeed. In three weeks we were married. After a futile, hurried honeymoon on the Continent, we came back to England, stopped only a day in London, and then motored down to Aldyne House, the ancient home of the Lyndalls'. My lord, who adored me, had wanted to take me on a quite preposterous tour of South America, the South Sea Islands, Japan; but I would have none of it; preferring to settle down quietly in the country, where I could think, face the future, map out my course of action.

Once down in Surrey, with Lord Lyndall following the hounds, and dull hours on my hands, I came to myself sharply, jarringly, as though from out of some prolonged and inchoate dream. I had married him, Evelyn's betrayer! Had I really said yes to his pleadings? Had I been in possession of my senses? What mystical nonsense to doubt it! Everything was clear as day; I had married him to avenge my sister.

That was the Scotch in me; from one of the old feudistic clans my family had sprung. They talk about the Italians' lust for vengeance. What is Latin fickleness compared with the cold, deadly unvaryingness of the Celtic North? There was my big brother Toby, for instance. Since once the conviction of Lord Lyndall's guilt had entered his mind, it would never leave it. But how had I kept this tiger leashed? He had simply deferred to me as the eldest of the children, the one with brains. He knew he could only shoot down Lord Lyndall, beat him to death. No doubt he expected a Borgias finesse from me.

Well—now that I had the earl, what was I to do with him? There was only one thing, the essentially feminine thing: break his heart. And I had to begin breaking it soon—before his passion for me grew cold. I was incurably cynical regarding the duration if not the intensity of all men's love.

We had wonderful nights in the huge, oak-raftered old salon, a frankly Norman room, where hung my Lord Lyndall's sport pictures and trophies of the chase. He had the piano moved in from the drawing-room, and I would dally over the keys for hours at a time, playing, improvising—fantastic little nothings he seemed to sail away on. We gambled at cards, he losing cheerfully and enormously; we had teasing little collations on a curious ebony table my lord had carpentered himself; I smoked with him; we ruminated over our travels and experiences. His conversation was enchanting, as he had been everywhere and was gifted with fluidic perceptions and colorful language.

Did I hate him? I did not take the trouble. Vengeance with hatred as the motivating force is cheap, vulgar. As a purely impersonal punitive measure it is quite different. Yet I admit my feelings were hopelessly confused. Sometimes I almost feared he was making his way into my heart.

It was not until many days had passed that I discovered Evelyn's portrait, handsomely framed in gilt, on a small stand in a dark corner of the library. I had seldom entered this room, as it was cold and ill-lighted. My sister smiled at me in all her beauty; and Lord Lyndall, coming in for a book, found me with the portrait in my hand.

"Was she one of your sweethearts, my lord?" I quizzed him lightly. "You had so many!"

He looked into the pictured eyes, then into mine—without the least suspicion.

"Isn't she beautiful?" he said. "She was down here, not so long ago, with my aunt and me. I had a notion (an amusingly insane one which I afterwards gave up) of running for Parliament, and I had her here typing some speeches with which I hoped to electrify my constituents. She was a most charming girl. Unfortunately she fell ill and her brother came and took her home, where she died."

I shivered in the cold room and suggested that we go to the warmer salon.

In the beginning I had told him I had no family in England, that all my people lived in Australia. But—had Evelyn mentioned me? No: we were a taciturn race, given to the ingrained habit of keeping our affairs to ourselves. Yet I had acted, I now realized, with extraordinary impulse and disregard of consequences. What was I pulling down upon my head?

One moonlit midnight a week later as I tossed sleeplessly on my bed I heard a noise on the balcony outside my window and immediately the sash was raised and a man climbed into the room. In the moonlight I recognized him.

"Toby—!" I exclaimed, springing up and throwing on my dressing gown. "Why are you here?"

"For Evelyn's sake," he answered heavily, his great chest rising and falling.

"Evelyn's?" I repeated weakly.

"You were going to even it up with her betrayer, Ellen. What have you done?"

"Toby, you must give me time—"

"Time! It would take me only ten seconds to shoot him, stab him to death."

"You mustn't expect me to do that."

"Well, what *are* you going to do?"

"I'm planning now."

He glowered down at me. "I've already planned. I'm going to kill him."

"No, no!" I cried. "Toby, leave it to me."

"I don't trust you. You're in love with him. I've been hanging around here watching you—and I've made up my mind."

"Toby, you must give me a chance—"

"You've forgotten your blood," he broke in contemptuously. "Back beyond the clan times, even, there never was a man of our family who failed to avenge the honor of one of our women."

"But I'm not a man," I said fatuously.

"That's just it; I'm going to take things into my own hands—"

"Toby!" I begged, throwing my arms around his neck. "Oh, Toby—"

He cursed me savagely and hurled me across the room to the bed, where I fell limply. But I was up again in an instant, fearful lest the noise might wake Lord Lyndall. I ran back to Toby and once more threw my arms about him—

I heard the door open behind me. I knew who stood on the threshold. I did not turn around.

I thanked Heaven Toby stood in shadow—and I realized I must get him out before Lord Lyndall recognized him. Out of the chaos of my thoughts that mandate came, imperative.

"Go," I breathed through my teeth, digging my nails into his neck in a fury to make him understand.

He did. He turned, leaped through the window, climbed down the balcony support.

I turned toward my Lord Lyndall.

He was approaching; halted in the bright shaft of moonlight. His eyes. . . I

"My lord," I said, "that man was a burglar."

His reply was coldly self-possessed: "Your arms were about him. Is it customary to embrace burglars?"

"I was begging him not to take my jewels."

"Your jewels? Don't you remember you yourself put them in the safe downstairs only yesterday?"

"I—I forgot," I murmured, my miserable defense crumbling.

My lord lifted his handsome brows. "He was a rather odd burglar, climbing in here. The safe, the silver, everything is on the lower floor. *Was* he a burglar?" he asked pointedly.

"If he wasn't," I countered doggedly, "what—who—was he?" (I pressed the issue: I wanted to know, once for all, if he suspected my nocturnal visitor was Toby.)

He shrugged. "It's possible he's a man in whom you were once sentimentally interested. Maybe he can't forget he loves you—and that you love him? In any event he took a romantic way to come to you. . . . Good night." And he left me.

His new suspicion of me was horrible enough; but I was vastly relieved that he had not recognized Toby.

Now followed bleak, dreadful days. Lord Lyndall seldom spoke to me, never looked at me. The tedium of it was unbearable: the mornings he spent in his study or in his den; in the afternoons he went out with his gun and the dogs; dinner was almost a state affair with both of us courteously mute; the evenings were given over to stubborn reading on his part and to ruminative staring at the spitting logs in the fireplace on mine. The winter had to add its burden: the weather was execrable, overcast for weeks, with only a pale patch for a sun between whiles.

My lord still suspected me, despised me; and I dared not tell him the truth—at least yet. If he had known that I was Evelyn's sister, that I had married him simply to avenge her— The mere thought shook my soul. For I loved him: at last I had to admit it. Some day perhaps I could tell him that Toby, not a lover, had visited me in my room; meanwhile let him think the other.

The dismal days at last brought a bright change: Lionel and his wife came to pay us a visit. Lionel was gay as ever, his eyes as wickedly mirthful, his tongue as supple. He insisted on jesting with everybody, even with his glowering brother. Sylvia looked peevish and worn.

For a week Lionel and Lord Lyndall followed the hounds while Sylvia and I tried to make friends hanging over the fireplace. The weather continued wretched, and maybe its everlasting chill entered into our moods; for we never got beyond monosyllables. I fancy she did not trust me. I did not blame her. The philandering Lionel was cause enough for his wife to suspect all women.

I was unhappy, so utterly unhappy that I decided to speak to Lord Lyndall and set myself right in his eyes at all hazards. All my resistance was gone: I had come to the point where I could not bear to have him think me unfaithful. I was ready to tell him everything about Evelyn and Toby. I would admit I had married him to break his heart—but now he was breaking mine instead. I would own up—proudly—to loving him and then throw myself on his mercy.

When I spoke to him he did not let me get beyond the first word. He scowled, held up a deterrent fateful hand. His coldness, remoteness froze me, drove me away like a whipped thing.

But I was human—a woman; and the natural reaction set in. I was angry, desperate, defiant. And I was

proud. So (oh, the foolishness of it!) I entered into a fast and furious flirtation with the quite willing Lionel to prove to Lord Lyndall that his cruelty had not consigned me to meek despair utterly.

My lord did not seem to pay any attention to the inane little *divertissement*, never turning from his hounds; but poor Sylvia took it with a tragic seriousness. I pitied her and yet with utter selfishness continued playing my miserable game. I wanted to make the man I loved jealous. Women are always ruthless in such undertakings.

One day after Sylvia had surprised Lionel kissing me she announced her intention of immediately going to her mother in London. I tried to dissuade her, feeling genuinely sorry for what I had done; but she was hysterical and made a scene, accusing her husband of a score of studied infidelities, and, quite naturally, not sparing me. Lionel did not once ask her to reconsider her decision. I fancied he wanted to rid himself of her (he insisted her rich father was parsimonious to an incredible degree) and so rather welcomed anything that might lead to an open rupture. Lord Lyndall was a silent and sullen witness of this unbecoming scene.

As the afternoon waned Sylvia became even firmer in her determination to leave and so at seven o'clock we motored her to the station to meet the evening train. Lord Lyndall drove. Lionel sat beside him. Sylvia and I were in the tonneau.

The poor girl bore up bravely. We had said good-by and were returning to Aldyne House over a moonlit stretch of road through a sparse and straggling forest when Lord Lyndall pulled up suddenly on account of an obstruction that had been placed in our way. It was a log. He quickly alighted, followed by Lionel, and was bending down to remove it when there came the sharp report of a gun to the right of

us and he fell to the ground. As I opened the door of the car and sprang out I looked in the direction whence the bullet had come and caught a distinct glimpse of Toby, his face tragically triumphant, as he moved back into the thicker growth.

I threw myself down beside Lord Lyndall. He had been shot in the breast and was manifestly dying. As I met his filming gaze I pillowed his head on my lap, kissed him, wailed, lamented, like a fate-stricken woman in one of the old Greek dramas.

"Oh, I love you," I moaned, "I have always loved you—even from the beginning—even though I'm Evelyn's sister. Listen, my love! I want you to know everything. I'm Evelyn's sister and Toby is my brother! It was Toby who came here and took Evelyn away. Toby was in my room that night. I was afraid to tell you, and so I let you think the other—Toby—"

"Toby," he whispered, "so he. . ."

"Yes," I said, "Toby has done this awful thing."

"Lionel, he—" My Lord Lyndall made the ultimate effort. "I—I love

you," he gasped, fixing his glazing eyes on mine.

That was all. He was dead, his head on my lap, that handsomest head in all England. In a sort of nightmare of suspended sensation I watched Lionel's frantic efforts to bring him back to consciousness.

I looked at the younger brother. He looked at me.

"And so," he said, "you are Evelyn's sister! Well, *I* was to blame for her sad end. Poor girl, I met her here while she was typing some speeches for my brother. Her beauty attracted me; and she—well, it was a life-and-death thing to her. I didn't realize it then. My brother was a trump through it all, protected me to the limit and kept mum, as my marriage to Sylvia was approaching and we didn't want it to get out. He was kindness itself to your sister—and she realized it. Why did you make the mistake of blaming *him*? Because poor Evelyn, in her gratitude to him, took his picture with her as a sort of talisman? Good God, if you had only known, if your crazy brother had only known. . . ."



## SLIP

*By Edgar Daniel Kramer*

I came to see dear Phyllis,  
And I heard her call:  
"I must slip something on, love;  
I'll be no time at all."

I waited in the hallway  
And dreamed away my cares,  
Until sweet Phyllis roused me  
By slipping on the stairs.

# THE MAN WHO WOULD NOT MARRY

By *Beulah Poynter*

SHE drew from his embrace with a little half sob. Her face was pallid and her great dark eyes, raised to his, were filmy with unshed tears. The man's hands dropped limply to his sides and his eyes wavered as the color surged to the edges of his close-cropped bronze hair.

"Norma," he said huskily.

"No, Jack, no," her voice was tremulous, though she strove to speak lightly. "It's no use. Why try to act with me, dear? You don't love me any longer. Oh, I've known it for a long time, though I've striven to shut out the ugly thought, tried to make myself believe that I just imagined your coldness, tried to cling to the happiness which has meant so much to me—but—" she waved her slim white hands with a little hopeless gesture, "I might as well face it, I'm not blaming you—not at all—you—well, it was our agreement that when either of us tired we were to separate—"

"I told you I never wanted to marry," he stammered, his keen gray eyes looking tenderly into the girl's face.

"I know, dear, I know. I understand your point of view always. I—I was willing to accept you just as you were. It's my misfortune that you should cease to care before—I did," she laughed wistfully.

"You're damn white," he muttered thickly. "You always were a great little pal, Norma. I wish that—"

"No, no," she interrupted, "it's all over. We'll say finis! I'll go my way, you—yours—just a beautiful memory—but Jack—I—" she hesitated and moved across the room in a long gliding manner which he had always admired. In-

wardly he rebelled at a nature that so quickly tired of a thing he desired to love. He wondered why the touch of her fragile fingers no longer thrilled him, why the pressure of her soft red mouth on longer brought response from him, it was as lovely, as passionate as the day he met her, she was as charming, as beautiful as in the first hours of their mad delirium, but he no longer wanted her.

"God!" burst from him. "Norma, I'm sorry, I'd give the world if I were different! I wish I could have married you—in justice to you and to myself—"

"I know, Jackie, I know," she smiled again.

He reached for his hat, which on entering the studio he had tossed upon a dais that Norma used for her models.

"Don't go!" There was a new note in her voice which arrested him. "I've something to tell you before you leave!"

"Not—?" the color faded from his face, leaving him almost as pale as she was. She bowed her head.

"Oh, I'm glad!" she continued breathlessly, seeing the shocked expression on his face. "So don't be sorry, please. When I have faded completely from your mind, I shall have something of yours to cherish, something to live for. Don't you understand? I shan't be alone. It's awful, Jack, to be a woman like I am, and alone. The thought of—my baby makes me almost—happy. I—I—" she laughed a bit hysterically and pressed her closed hand against her mouth to stay the quivering of her lips.

He stared at her, unable to speak. After a second, she went on: "I can manage easily. It isn't as though I were

poor—or—guarded—or—I shall go abroad, to Paris; perhaps—while away, I shall adopt a child—you realize how I mean?"

"I'll marry you, Norma, if you say the word," he stammered awkwardly.

"You are a dear! Thank you, no, Jack. I couldn't do it, now that you no longer love me. You haven't changed in your ideas of marriage and I couldn't accept a sacrifice just because of this—but I'm grateful to you just the same."

"If you need anything you'll let me know?"

"If I need anything, yes." Her lips twitched and a little enigmatical gleam shot through her brown eyes.

"You'll—you'll telephone me?" he fumbled with the door knob, wanting to leave, desiring to break the tension of an unpleasant situation, yet at loss just how to do it.

"I don't think it best," she answered. "But I'll let you know when I sail. It will be some time, yet. A great many things may happen before then."

He drew a deep sigh and held out his hand. "Well?" Hers was like ice when he took it in his grasp. There was a brief hastily withdrawn pressure, then the next moment he was out of the little apartment which two months before had seemed like a paradise to him.

As the tang of the fresh air blowing across the Hudson greeted his nostrils, he drew a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his moist forehead.

"God!" he muttered. "Isn't that just like a woman?"

During the months which followed Talbot did not exactly forget Norma; in fact several times he was tempted to telephone to her, or to jump into his racer and speed up Riverside to her studio apartment, but a little blue-eyed dancer at the Winter Garden now occupied most of his attention, and it was late in the spring, when, upon receiving a wire from Norma which announced that at the time

he was reading it she would be aboard ship on her way to France, he bitterly recalled his neglect of her.

Before he met her again four years had passed. Strolling along Fifth Avenue on a sunshiny Sunday afternoon, he saw just ahead of him a small, slender figure which seemed vaguely familiar; a girl clad in filmy white, with a drooping leg-horn hat trimmed in cornflowers, holding by the hand a tiny boy in a blue sailor suit. The youngster was attracting considerable attention by his prattle and his wide-eyed astonishment at everything he saw.

Talbot hastened his stride and reached the girl, calling her name. She gave a little cry upon turning, then she extended her hand. "Jack!"

"Norma, I thought I recognized you, but I couldn't be sure. You're thinner, yes, and lovelier, by George, you're looking marvelous!"

She flushed, her eyes wandering from his eager face to the baby pink one of the tiny boy at her side. "Thanks, you look well also," she stammered.

"This is—?" he nodded toward the child.

"Jack Halsey, yes."

"Halsey?"

"Yes." She smiled, but there was a proud toss of the head that accompanied it. "That is his name. Isn't he a darling?"

"He does you proud." He touched the small head with its tangled mass of bronze curls, and his fingers lingered in the silky threads as though held by a magnet. "Have you time for a cup of tea?" he asked half timidly.

"I'd love one. Jackie darling," she added to the little boy, "this is Mr. Talbot. He is Jack also, and you are named for him."

"Yes, Mommie," lisped the child.

"He talks!" gasped Talbot, a strange thrill shooting through him. He studied the small features with avid interest trying to find a resemblance either to the

face of the flowerlike girl or his own stronger countenance. "Who does he look like?" he asked at last after they were seated at the tea table under the orchid-shaded lights.

"I fancy—like you," she answered slowly, a wave of color staining the olive of her skin. "Be careful, please, he is very intelligent for his age, and understands, more than most babies, what is being said. I can't have his little heart broken."

"You are wonderful!" Talbot choked. Her answering laughter stung him.

"What an obvious boy you are!" she said. "You are crazy to ask me a lot of questions and you have no idea how to start. Please don't embarrass yourself or me by doing it, Jack; for the years that have past, since we separated belong absolutely to me and my child. What has taken place, how I have lived, how Jackie was born have nothing whatever to do with you; don't think me hard, please, nor bitter, for I'm not. But you have gone out of my life just as though you never existed, and I can't grant you one moment of the fullest, happiest years a woman ever spent!"

"Then you have been happy?" There was surprise and the merest shade of regret in his voice.

"Completely."

"And—you—never missed me?"

"Oh, Jack!" She touched his hand whimsically. He started, almost knocking over the glass of water at his elbow. She laughed. "Eternally masculine, aren't you? Come see me sometime, you may find me interesting. I've re-leased my same little studio on the Drive."

"I'd like to very much. But isn't there something I can do for him?" He lowered his voice as he glanced at the child, who was endeavoring to pat a plate of ice cream into the consistency of liquid. "You promised, you know."

"If it were ever necessary; if I ever needed anything. I haven't so far. Dear me! How late it is. Hurry, Jackie,

and eat your cream. We must be getting home."

The following evening Talbot canceled a dinner engagement and telephoned Norma, begging an invitation to dine with her, and her son. She fenced with him before granting him the privilege; but seven o'clock found him in the studio, which, though familiar, had changed almost as much as the calm smiling, dignified woman who admitted him.

"Like it?" she inquired, noting his glance of surprise as his eyes strayed about the room. "I've been very successful since Jackie came. I brought quite a few of these things from France, others I picked up on the Avenue. I sold everything which acted as a reminder."

Talbot winced. There was something absolutely cold-blooded in the way she kept impressing upon him how little he had counted in her life, and how she looked upon the love she had borne him as an incident more distasteful than otherwise. He was chagrined, strangely hurt at her attitude. His love for her, though dead, always seemed as a very beautiful thing, a memory to cherish.

"It's almost a wonder you don't hate me, feeling as you do," he said quizzically, sinking into the depths of a huge black and gold divan placed comfortably between two windows draped in velvet of the same sombre hue and edged in gilt braid.

"Oh, dear me, no! Why should I?" She lighted a cigarette and extended the lighted match toward him. "You are as a book which I read, enjoyed and have lent to some one else caring little whether it is ever returned to my library or not."

"By Jove, you flatter me!" he ejaculated, feeling unutterably foolish. "You've changed a lot, Norma."

"Perhaps. But you have changed also. You are looking at me with different eyes, don't you know that? Like all your sex, Jack, you find it impossible to believe that a woman can ever cease caring for you once she has loved you. Or that

she can escape regret for having lost you!"

He shifted his position uneasily. "Where is—?" he hesitated over the name.

"Jackie? In his bed. He retires at six, always. Would you like to see him?"

"Sure would."

She led the way down a short corridor and cautiously opening a door, stood aside to allow him to enter a small blue and white nursery. In a crib, faintly outlined by the last rays of the setting sun, which filtered through the shuttered window, lay the chubby figure of the little boy. His tousled mop of yellow curls was spread on the pillow, his rosy cheek pressed hard on one dimpled palm. Soft rounded bosom rose and fell with his rhythmic breathing; and as the man and woman standing there side by side at his bed, watched him in silent awe, he drew a deep quivering sigh and flung forward one little plump leg and a foot.

"Good Lord, he's wonderful!" gasped Talbot. "And I'm his father!" The reverence he put into the words caused the girl to smile, but he did not see the slight twitching of her lips.

All during the meal, exquisitely served and tastefully cooked his thoughts kept wandering to the sleeping child. He wondered why Jackie had sighed, of what he dreamed, what his little thoughts were. Whenever Talbot looked at Norma, he seemed to see her with a sort of halo about her dusky head, and an infant clasped in her arms. Her face took on a radiant beauty that had something holy about it.

Suddenly he burst forth. "You know—you know—regardless of how you feel, he is my son too! I ought to do something for him, Norma, college or—or—something!"

"College is a long way off."

"Let me deposit a sum of money in the bank—or—"

"Impossible." The fork with which she was toying dropped with a clatter to

her plate. "It would leak out some way that you had done it, and create talk, eventually a scandal. I have been so very careful; there is no stigma attached to him as my adopted child, but should you suddenly take an undue interest in him, curiosity would be aroused, and then the whole framework of my deception would come tumbling about my ears. As I told you he has everything he needs—except—"

"Except—?" he leaned eagerly forward, trusting, hoping, almost praying that she would say it. The amber light from the candelabra turned his bronze hair into molten gold.

"Except a father." She said it so coldly he knew the remark was not made to draw a declaration from him, but somehow the words were like a gust of wind blowing upon a flickering spark of fire. The thought that had been beating against his temples in a vague, uncertain fashion, burst into being.

"Norma," he said huskily, "marry me. Let's give the boy a dad."

She laughed. It seemed to him she laughed a great deal and in many different ways. "Oh, Jack, you have changed. Changed in your viewpoint toward marriage as well as life. Now you are getting sentimental, and it isn't worthy of you. Somewhere you have read of delinquent fathers stepping forward at the psychological moment and claiming their sons and henceforth doing their duty toward mankind and the woman in question. No, Jack, dear, not even for the sake of giving my son a name other than my own will I sacrifice you and—myself."

"It would be no sacrifice on my part," he argued. "Am I so distasteful to you?"

She shrugged her shoulders, but the quivering of her mobile lips did not escape him.

He continued, "Besides, I'm his father—"

She rose abruptly. In the long yellow folds of her dinner frock, she took on

new height, an added age. Her face was very pale, her eyes black as she faced him. "How do you know you are his father?" she asked slowly, pausing between each word. "I never said you were."

Talbot rose, also. For a second he stared at her across the snowy linen and sparkling glass, then he said with conviction. "Because I know you, Norma, because I realize that in giving yourself to me, you did it with all the sanctity of a marriage, and that it would be utterly impossible for you to so soon accept another man upon such terms."

Her eyes dropped. "Thanks, Jack," she whispered. "I did you an injustice."

"Injustice? I don't understand."

"I can't deceive you, Jack,—I—I—" her hands moved nervously, plucking at the folds of her gown; she did not raise her eyes to look at him. "Jackie is not your son—nor is he mine—he is just as I have represented him,—a little orphan I have adopted."

"Norma! But—but—our child—the—?"

"Fate—or—God—saw fit to deny me that happiness, so I have Jackie instead."

"Oh." He pushed back his chair, and crossing to her placed his arm about her shoulders with a sympathetic gesture, then almost abruptly passed out of the dining room, asking as he did so. "May I see the little codger again?"

"Surely." There was no surprise in her voice, but a hint of tears gleamed behind the tremulous smile on her lips. She followed him into the nursery. Now it was shadowy dark with the night which had fallen. She turned on a shaded lamp by the baby's bed, placing her hand before it to protect the sleeping eyes.

For some time they stood there and stared at the child. Then Talbot spoke. "You are right, Norma, I have changed. I can understand now, why chaps younger than myself are willing to give

up the bright lights and many women to settle down with one girl and a humdrum existence. They know that home and kids like this count for more than light o' loves. Gad! I wish I had found it out before it was too late!"

"Too late!" she breathed the words.

"Yes. You're the only woman I'd ever marry, Norma, or want to give me little codgers of my own. Somehow you got into my system and—well, you won't have me so—"

"Do you mean—Jack—do you mean you love me—not my motherhood—or because of him—or—" her voice broke.

"Of course I mean it. It took me a long while to find it out; after I lost you, I guess, or his coming woke me up. But I know it now. I think I never really ceased to love you at any time, but my bull-headedness would not let me admit it!"

"Oh, Jack! Jack!" She was in his arms, sobbing against his starched shirt front. "I knew some day you'd come back to me! That you'd realize that love like ours isn't a thrill of a moment!"

He kissed the top of her head in an embarrassed boyish fashion, murmuring endearments which somehow were strangely new to him. After a little he stammered. "Isn't it a shame about—our—about—?"

"Jackie?" she finished for him, then she laughed joyously, the laugh of her student days when he had first met her in an Italian restaurant down in Washington Square. "Oh, Jack, darling! You dear, big stupid! Couldn't you tell I was lying? Just to test you! To wake you up! Can't you see that he is a miniature you? He's your boy, dear, your very own! And because I've dreamed of nothing but you, morning, noon and night he's so much like you I've shuddered for fear every one would see the resemblance! But it doesn't matter now!"

# THE RULES OF THE GAME

By J. Wilkie Rusk

*AT RISE, dark stage. Faint light comes through window R. Must be very faint, as though coming from street light at a distance. Momentary pause. Then a crash off L. as of some heavy object being overturned. A moment later THE GIRL enters quickly door L. Rushes up behind screen L.C. and as she does so bumps into stand and overturns vase with a crash. Immediately THE MAN follows through door in pursuit, slams door behind him and locks it, putting key in pocket. Stands momentarily with his back to closed door, breathing heavily.*

MAN (*tense and excited, as though winded by chase*): Now I've got you, my man. Better give up, if you know what's best for you.

[*Slight pause, then THE GIRL starts quickly and stealthily for door R. from back of screen, across up stage. THE MAN rushes across down stage and intercepts her at table near window L. They stand momentarily at bay here, one at each end of the table, then THE MAN reaches for desk light and turns it on. It flares up, but before one has time to distinguish anything THE GIRL strikes globe and it explodes, leaving stage in darkness as before. Another momentary pause, then THE GIRL starts for door L. throwing chair to the floor in front of THE MAN as she does so. He stumbles over chair and falls to floor centre. She finds door locked, and with a cry of rage turns up to door C. Just as she reaches it THE MAN has recovered his feet and intercepts her, throwing her around and down C. He*

*stands with back to door, reaches up and switches on lights.]*

MAN (*in surprise*): A woman! Well, I'm damned. (*She gets to her feet and goes R. C. standing with back to him, head bowed, speechless with rage and disappointment.*) I'm sorry I had to be so rough my little lady, but I thought you were a man. (*Sarcastically.*) You'll pardon me, I'm sure, but you can easily understand under the circumstances. It was so dark, you know. (*Pause.*) Well, you put up a pretty stiff fight, but you've lost. I suppose you realize that? (*Pause.*) What's your game? (*No answer.*) Oh, you won't talk, eh? Peeved, I suppose. (*Comes down to her slowly.*) Or perhaps you think that words are unnecessary—that the situation speaks for itself. Well, you're right. You're a woman. You're fulfilling woman's destiny. You're here to get all you can without giving anything in return. It is your destiny to get, to gather, to collect, to accumulate. It all belongs to you. That's the idea, isn't it? Well, at least there's some satisfaction in seeing one of your hypocritical, treacherous, vampire-like sex boldly out in the open instead of fawning behind pretenses, false appearances and a violation of every decent human attribute in an effort to bleed some one out of something. Well, what's the next move?

GIRL: Ah, what's the use of all this talk. If it is for my benefit, you can end it. If you love the sound of your voice so well that you can't stop, then hurry and get through with it.

MAN: Spunky, eh? But you didn't answer my question. What are you going to do?

GIRL: What have I got to say about it? It's out of my hands now. What are *you* going to do?

MAN: Really, I hadn't thought of that. Perhaps you can tell me how a man usually acts in a case of this kind. You've probably had considerable experience.

GIRL: One doesn't need experience to tell that. There's only one thing, so why don't you get it over with.

MAN: Oh, the police, I suppose. Well, I'm not so sure of that.

GIRL: The police! Bah! You prattle like a child.

MAN: Well, what else would a man do with a person caught in the very act of looting his home at this hour of the night—a housebreaker, a felon, a burglar—a common thief? If it isn't a case for the police, then in God's name tell me what it is?

GIRL: As if you didn't know. When did a man ever call in the police when he had a girl in his power? Men are superior creatures, of stronger stuff than us poor hypocritical, treacherous, moral weaklings, women. Man is great, good and generous, and would never stoop so low as to hand a girl over to the police. You yourself have not even considered the police in my case—you know you haven't. You've been too busy wondering what other possibilities the adventure may have for you. Besides, I'm not a thief.

MAN (*brutally*): You're not a thief—

GIRL: No!

MAN: —a housebreaker—

GIRL: No!

MAN: —the commonest, vilest kind of a cheap crook—

GIRL: No, no, no!

MAN: —actually caught in the act of stealing.

GIRL: I tell you I'm not.

MAN (*sarcastically*): So? Then I have it. You're a lady author out getting material for your next book at first hand. Miss Laura Jean Libby, I humbly

beg your pardon. (*Elaborate, mocking bow.*) Or perhaps it's one of our famous actresses studying a character from life. Not Mrs. Leslie Carter? Well I swear I never would have recognized you. How wonderfully your hair has changed. What? Wrong again? Then it must be Lady Vere-de-Vere making a social call. You'll be grieved to learn, milady, that both my mother and my sister went abroad yesterday, to be gone until September.

GIRL: What is this—a nut factory?

MAN: A poor, forlorn, down and out thief. Business must be poor, too. Clothes shabby, body thin and half starved. Color very bad. You're a fool. Why don't you play the game as the women of my set play it? Get some good clothes, paint up a little and fawn, and coax, and tease, and smile at some man until the poor fool loses his head. It's easier and safer than this game of yours, and you don't have to pay.

GIRL: I tell you I'm not a thief. I never in my whole life took a single thing that didn't belong to me.

MAN (*Is down L. Turns up and discovers handsome and expensive gown that the girl left on couch behind screen when she first came in. Picks it up.*): Then what were you going to do with this?

GIRL (*turning to him quickly*): Shall I tell you? Do you really want to know, or are you merely amusing yourself?

MAN (*mockingly*): Perhaps both. You know I might really want to know, and at the same time be greatly amused.

GIRL: Amused! Yes, of course. Amusement at all costs. What else could it be but amusement to you—a healthy, well-fed and well-clothed, self-satisfied man. What a chance to gloat over your comfortable position and over my wretchedness. You're right—I am a poor, forlorn, down and out woman. Shabby clothes—yes, barely enough to cover me, and they're all I've got, too. You say I look half starved. I am half

starved—always have been half starved! In all my life I've never known what it meant to have enough to eat. You know what hunger is. No doubt you've felt it many times when you've had a big, rich, satisfying meal awaiting you. But you've never known what it is to have that hunger unsatisfied—to go to bed hungry, to get up in the morning hungry, to continue hungry all day, and yet have to work until you could hardly stand, with that hunger always gnawing away to keep you wretched and miserable. And not only one day but every day—week in and week out, year in and year out. And because I've worked until every drop of vitality and strength has been drained from my body, because I've never been able to save any of that wasting strength by eating enough to keep me going, because I've only clothes enough of the poorest and shabbiest kind to cover me, because my color is unhealthy as a result of all this—you scorn and mock me—make me an object of ridicule for your own amusement. You who have so much that you don't appreciate. It's not fair — It's not fair! It's not fair! (*Head on table sobbing.*)

MAN: So that, in your eyes, is a justification for becoming a thief?

GIRL: And even if I were a thief, could you blame me? I came on this earth through no fault of my own. I was given a strong body, health, strength and a capacity for all human emotions, just the same as the girls of your set you spoke of a moment ago. Why, then, couldn't I have had a share of the things they have enjoyed so abundantly? They do nothing—I slave. They wear furs, fine clothes and jewels—I have just enough to cover me. They feast on the fat of the land—I starve. What have I done that I should never know friendship, love, happiness, motherhood and home ties? I've struggled along year after year until I could struggle no longer, and to-night—now, at this very

moment, if you hadn't interrupted me, I would be out of it all. It isn't right, it isn't just, and I couldn't put up with it any longer. Why did you have to interfere when the end was so near? Why couldn't you have waited a few minutes and it would have been all over? Do you know what I mean? *I was going to kill myself—to kill myself*, do you hear? In this house—in your house, because I can't stand it any longer—I can't stand it, I can't stand it! (*Hysterically.*)

MAN (*after a pause*): You came here to commit suicide?

GIRL: Yes,

MAN: Why did you choose this house?

GIRL: I thought there would be no one at home. None of your family are supposed to be in town. I made up my mind that some of the comforts I hadn't known in my lifetime I would have after I was dead anyway. I intended to put on that gown and then to find the nicest, softest, springiest bed with the richest coverings, stretch myself out on it, and let the end come there. I had never worn a pretty gown and I have never slept in a comfortable bed.

MAN: Strange. This house seems to have been peculiarly in demand to-night.

GIRL: Why?

MAN: I came back home to-night for the same purpose—to commit suicide.

GIRL: You don't believe me? You still think I'm a thief.

MAN: No—I'm in earnest. I was to have been married next week. The girl made me believe she was terribly in love with me—and eloped with another man this afternoon.

GIRL: And for that you would kill yourself. How perfectly terrible. With everything that you could possibly desire to make life worth living—except one worthless girl—and you would commit suicide! There are so many girls too.

MAN: I'll admit my case does look rather silly beside yours.

GIRL: They say your income is a thousand dollars a month. Is that right?

MAN: Something more than that—yes.

GIRL: And it takes me over three years working all the time I am awake to earn that much! But what's the use? We're getting nowhere. What are you going to do with me?

MAN: I don't know. I've half a mind to help you out.

GIRL: With advice I suppose. No thank you. My case is too far advanced for that.

MAN: Advice first probably, but I might help to put it into practice. Would that be any better?

GIRL: That all depends.

MAN: Well, I have a plan. First, get into that gown.

GIRL: You mean for me to put it on?

MAN: Yes, I want to see how you look in it. Get behind the screen there. Go ahead. It'll only take you a moment.

GIRL: Ah, what's the use.

MAN: You're not afraid are you? *(She half-heartedly takes dress, goes behind screen and makes change.)* Good. Now I don't know why you have interested me so deeply, but you have. I suppose it's because I'm just in the mood to-night and you've aroused my sympathy. You've made me realize how I would feel if I were a girl in similar circumstances and what I would do to help myself. Do you want to know what I'd do if I were you?

GIRL: Oh, you'd do wonders I suppose. Most persons would who are not in my position.

MAN: You are right about my case. I have always had everything I wanted. I suppose that's why it upset me so when the girl threw me down. But it did hurt—God how it hurt!

GIRL: Hurt your vanity.

MAN: Perhaps you are right there too. But to your case. By your own admis-

sion you've played the game of life and lost. But for the single accident of my appearance on the scene you would at this moment be sleeping the sleep that won't come off. The books would be closed and the account balanced. There would be no more hunger, no more slaving, no more physical or mental suffering on account of insufficient clothing. The span of your existence under the conditions in which you always have lived would have been complete. You would be dead. Am I right?

GIRL: Unless I should have lost my nerve—yes.

MAN: We'll not consider that possibility. Now, through a lucky accident for which you were in no way responsible, you are in a position to realize all that, and at the same time start a new existence from this moment, an existence planned and executed according to your own ideas. Do you get me?

GIRL: I'm all dressed now.

MAN: Are you? Does it make you feel any better?

GIRL: Oh, I don't know.

MAN: Well, come out and let's have a look at you. *(She does so.)* Well, by George! It doesn't seem possible. Clothes may not make the man but they certainly make the woman.

GIRL: It does make a difference, doesn't it?

MAN: It does. And it shapes up great with my plan. Why girl, if I were in your position I'd kick over the traces right now and have something to say about my life from this time on.

GIRL: Why are you so keen about it all at once?

MAN: Oh, I see the injustice of it all. This old world doesn't give us all a square deal, and I for one wouldn't sit calmly down and take what it had to offer. Now you've lived your life according to all the rules, laws and teachings of our civilization, haven't you?

GIRL: Yes.

MAN: You've always been straight?

GIRL: How on earth could I have been anything else?

MAN: And honest?

GIRL: I think my appearance would have proved that.

MAN: You played the game according to the rules. You made the best of circumstances and fought and struggled through it all, year after year, until you worked out the problem of life to the only logical solution possible for you—death by your own hand here to-night. Am I right?

GIRL: Yes.

MAN: Then that part of it is ended. You're dead.

GIRL: What are you driving at?

MAN: And now—you've lived out your life as it was originally intended—it was a failure and you're dead. But by a lucky accident you are in a position to live another life of your own planning—starting from this moment. A life in which the disagreeable things of the past will have no place—a life made up of the things you have missed—that you have always wanted. The pleasures of life and none of its pains. Why don't you try it?

GIRL: How? You mean—

MAN: Yes. You've lived honestly and faithfully by all the rules of the game and they have played you false. What do you owe these rules? Nothing. Throw them away, live this new life without them—contrary to them if necessary, but at any rate completely ignoring them. Take for your motto, "I am going to live," and make your object in life to get what you want.

GIRL (*Thinking intently*): The rules of the game?

MAN: If I were a girl I'd stand just so much buffeting from the world, then I'd start a little buffeting on my own account. You owe the world nothing, the world owes you a lot.

GIRL: The rules of the game. You're right. It's the rules of the game that have made me what I am—the rotten,

hypocritical, what-will-people-say rules, that were only intended for *poor* girls. They've hindered and hampered and crushed me back at every step of my life and they're false, wicked, merciless. I owe them nothing—I owe the world nothing! But the world owes me a lot. Why not?

MAN: Why not?

GIRL: Oh, to live, to feel, to see. To eat good food, to wear good clothes, to see the beautiful things of the world, to love and be loved. There's nothing else to do!

MAN: Say, you're wonderful when you're aroused. And with only the help of a pretty gown.

GIRL: I'm a different person already. And it could be done too. If I only had a start. There, that's it. I knew there was a joker somewhere. The dream's over. What could I do with my clothes and my half-starved body?

MAN: I'll give you a start.

GIRL: You'll give me a start? Why?

MAN: Just for the pleasure it would give me to see you experiencing the varied sensations of life for the first time. Just a sort of scientific experiment. Why, even with your half-starved body you've got more fire and spirit in you than anyone else I've ever known. What would you be after you had had a good supper—with some wine?

GIRL: Wine?

MAN: Yes, to put some color into those pale cheeks. Think of it. Plenty to eat, good clothes, new sensations! What a treat it will be to see you enjoying these things for the first time! Everything that life has to offer—all new to you. Come. What do you say? I'm anxious to try it immediately.

GIRL: Everything that life has to offer.

MAN: Yes. What do you say?

GIRL: I'll do it.

MAN: At any cost?

GIRL: I don't care what the cost is!

MAN: And the rules?

GIRL: To the devil with the rules.

MAN: Who would have believed that a girl like you could have had such an effect on me. You're wonderful. Come now. We'll see if we can get one of my sister's wraps to go with that dress and we'll have some supper with a little wine to color those cheeks. (*Takes her hand and touches her cheek with a little caressing pat.*)

GIRL (*the moment she comes in physical contact with him a complete change comes over her. She shrinks from him in fear and this increases during the following scene until it becomes hysterical frenzy*): Don't.

MAN (*still holding her hand at arm's length*): What's the matter?

GIRL: I don't know. I—

MAN: Startled, eh? That's only natural. You'll get used to it.

GIRL: Let go please. (*Jerking her hand loose.*)

MAN: Think of it! Startled just at the touch of a hand. You've got a lot coming to you, my girl. You'll have to get used to it gradually.

GIRL: I—I—don't believe I'll—

MAN: And yet what a wonderful thing it would be to take it all at a plunge. You've denied yourself all your life—here you have everything offered at once. Take it. Go the limit. Remember what you said, "To the devil with the rules." Come. (*Goes quickly to take her in his arms.*)

GIRL: No, no, no! I can't—I won't.

MAN: Why?

GIRL: I've—I've changed my mind.

MAN: You shan't. It's too great an opportunity for you. I won't let you. (*Holding her.*)

GIRL (*struggling*): I tell you I won't.

[*She is down R. He is behind her with his arms around her. She struggles and twists around him so that she is to his left, facing him in his arms. She looks at him horrified and backs away until near centre, he following, holding her closely.*]

MAN: Now don't get excited. I'm not going to hurt you. Just one kiss and then we'll go.

GIRL: No, no, no! I won't I say. Stop it. Stop it. Stop it. Let me go—let me go—*let me go!* (*By this time she is in a perfect panic of frenzy and struggles fiercely. Finally takes her two fists and beats him in the face. Then scratches and fights viciously with her hands until he is forced to let go.*)

MAN: You damned little vixen. What is the matter?

GIRL (*hysterically*): Matter? Oh, you don't know what you are doing—you don't know what you are doing.

MAN: Yes I do. And so do you. Still going by the rules of the game, are you?

GIRL: Yes—the rules of the game—and something else! If you only knew what else.

MAN: Well, I don't know, but I'm beginning to suspect. I think you've pulled the wool over my eyes very neatly. On second consideration your story sounds anything but reasonable. I don't believe a word you've told me. I think you're lying—and I'm not in the mood to-night to waste any time over a woman of your stamp. If you don't give me a satisfactory explanation of your presence here in a hurry, I'll put you where you belong.

GIRL: No, no, no!

MAN: Yes—and quickly too.

GIRL: And why not? You haven't spared me—why should I spare you? I will tell you—something that I swore by the memory of my dead mother that I would never reveal to a living soul. And when I am through you will realize that life has no respect for wealth—that your millions are no protection against the stern facts of human existence, and that there are things in life infinitely more serious than being jilted by a fickle girl. What I have told you is true—every word of it. But there is more—oh, so much more! When I told you that I

have slaved my life away for hardly enough to keep me alive—for seven dollars a week to be exact—I didn't tell you that at the same time I was helping you to pile up your millions. But that's just what I've been doing. I am one of hundreds who have *made* the big Broadway store that bears your family name.

MAN: So that's your trump card, eh? One of my poor, down-trodden salesgirls. That story's too old. You and your imaginary troubles are a joke to me.

GIRL: That's it—a joke. And before me was my mother—another joke in the same store—for your family. She spent her life there, struggling helplessly year after year as I have done, until, driven to desperation she took matters in her own hands just as I tried to do to-night. But in her case it was not suicide that offered a solution—but a man, rich, influential, self-satisfied.

MAN: Yes, that's not unusual. Most of them do find that solution.

GIRL: I am speaking of my mother—please don't forget that.

MAN: I beg your pardon.

GIRL: I am the living result of that act of desperation—nameless, hopeless, helpless. And that's why I worked out the problem of life to a different solution—because I will not saddle the miserable struggle on another generation—because

of the uselessness of it all—because it is better ended now for all time.

MAN: I fail to see where all this is of particular interest to me. Is that the best you can do to justify your presence here?

GIRL: No. What I've told you doesn't mean anything yet. I said that what I had to tell you would make you realize that being jilted by a fickle girl was not the most serious thing in life. Unlock the door and I'll give you a shock that you'll remember as long as ever you live.

MAN: No. Tell me first.

GIRL: Unlock the door! Don't be afraid you'll miss it. It's coming to you and you'll get it if it's the last thing I do on this earth. *(He unlocks the door.)* I told you my mother solved the problem of her existence in the only way that seemed possible to her at that time—with the help of a man. They were never married. That man—my father—was—no, no. I cannot tell you in the light. *(Rushes to switch centre, throws off lights, leaving stage in darkness as at opening.)* That man was your father. *I am your half sister! (Has crossed down to door L, speaks last line there and exits quickly, slamming door.)*

MANS: My God! *(Goes to switch C, throws on lights, sinks to chair, head in hands.)*



## JIM'S GIRL

By R. E. D.

Jim's girl was tall and slender,  
 My girl short and thickset;  
 Jim's girl wore silks and satin,  
 My girl flannelette.  
 Jim's girl was wild and woolly,  
 My girl was pure and good;  
 Do you think I'd change my girl for Jim's?  
 You're gol-darned right, I would!

## OGRE

By Clinton Harcourt

ON her way to the ballet school little Fragna Mott used to see old Mr. Secretan staring at her out of the front plate glass windows of the Patroons' Club. He used to sit in his favorite chair and leer at her with sunken eyes and shrivelled lips every time she went by, to and from the subway. The other girls who attended the daily sessions of the Morgana Dancers told Fragna all about Mr. Secretan for it seemed they knew him well. It appeared he was a wealthy old ogre, disgustingly rich and with nothing to do save chase chickens. The sight of him, shrivelled up and mummified in the great chair, invariably aroused Fragna's amusement rather than her indignation.

"The poor old fossil," she would think to herself, "why don't he buy himself a pair of monkey glands. He looks so brittle that it's a wonder he don't break!"

All through the winter, twice a day, Mr. Secretan's ogling stare pursued her up and down Madison Avenue. Once she saw him being assisted out of his luxurious limousine by his footman and one night she saw him at a Broadway playhouse, sitting in a box with a dark, handsome young girl whose hand he continually caressed during the performance. But she never spoke with him until her course at the school was finished and she became one of the ballet girls at the new opera house on Lexington Avenue, visiting the Morgana Dancers only once or twice a month when some special instruction was required.

It was on one of these mornings that she became acquainted with Mr. Secretan.

The month was April in a lachrymose mood. The morning dawned auspiciously

but toward noon it rained and rained. With her usual disregard for material things, Fragna had forgotten her umbrella and was soaking wet before she had gone abreast of the Patroons' Club. It was when she had passed its impressive entrance and was continuing on, listening to the musical slosh of her slippers, that the flutey tones of an agitated voice came to her:

"My dear child, this will never do. You will get pneumonia! You are laying yourself open to all kinds of pulmonary troubles by exposing yourself so recklessly to the elements. One moment, I pray!"

Fragna turned as Mr. Secretan came up beside her. In one talon-fingered hand he held an umbrella that was large enough to shelter three men comfortably. He was hatless and his egg-like head floated like a polished disc in the gloom made by the umbrella. Fragna noticed that his skin was as yellow as parchment and that it was with seeming difficulty he stood erect.

"Did you speak to me?" she asked, astonished.

Mr. Secretan moistened his seamy lips.

"Of course I did," he replied almost testily. "Come, Miss Mott, get under this umbrella until I can telephone my chauffeur to bring a limousine around. It's a long distance from here to Eighteenth Street. I insist that you allow me to accompany you home."

Fragna looked at him with open mouth so amazed at his calm statement that she allowed his umbrella to cover her without speaking for a long minute.

"You're a little surprised that I know all about you, eh? Well, my dear, when-

ever I see a pretty girl who haunts my dreams, I invariably have her looked up. You dance divinely, like a sprite. I was so disappointed the other night that you did not look once in my direction at the opera house. Would you mind holding the umbrella a minute, while I go and telephone. I will return at once—"

He thrust the gold-encrusted handle of the umbrella between Fragna's fingers and hobbled back to the club, quite unmindful of the downpour. Still astonished, Fragna's gaze followed him. She didn't know whether she should vent her emotions in laughter, whether to consign his expensive umbrella to the gutter and walk away, or to await his return and a dry, comfortable ride to her tiny, bandbox apartment on Eighteenth Street. It was almost impossible to be angry or annoyed with him. He was so elderly and feeble, so amusing and ridiculous—a poor old twentieth century great-grandfather who refused to lie down and play dead.

When Mr. Secretan with his hat and another umbrella came out of the Patroons' Club again, Fragan had recovered most of her equanimity.

"The motor will be here directly," he wheezed. "Are your feet very wet? The instant you are home you must take off your stockings and put them in hot water. I recommend two tablespoonfuls of mustard. This has a tendency to start the blood in circulation and ward off the deadly bacilli of grippe."

He was still instructing her when his imported limousine wheeled into the street and stopped at the curb. The interior of the car was upholstered in golden brown and was redolent of roses. Fragna seated herself demurely in one corner.

"I'm afraid," she said, "I'll ruin the seats because I'm dreadfully wet."

Mr. Secretan waited until his footman closed the door and then picked up a silk-corded speaking tube.

"Ruin the upholstery?" he said, finished transmitting their destination to the

chauffeur. "How absurd! I will have the car redecorated very soon now, this brown color scheme harmonizes not at all with those blue eyes of yours."

He was so serious about it that Fragna had to clamp her white teeth down on her nether lip to keep from laughing aloud.

"What pretty hands and feet you have," he went on, his ogling stare sweeping boldly over her. "They are so small and shapely. Small hands and feet denote breeding. You have good blood in you. I knew that the first instant I saw you. You are a beautiful young girl. I like beautiful young girls. Do you think I look old?"

Fragna had to fight desperately to suppress her giggles.

"Anyway," the Ogre went on, "next month I expect to have my face lifted. It's a very simple operation and I am told it takes twenty years off a man's appearance. I'm only fifty now and then I shall look thirty. You're about eighteen aren't you?"

"Nineteen," Fragna corrected.

He wet his lips again.

"Indeed? Really, you don't look over sixteen, particularly in that costume you wear at the theatre. I like girls when they are sweet sixteen. That is the impressionable age, the year of romance. I expect that we are destined to be very good friends, Fragna. Before I drop you off at your apartment may I ask you if there is anything I can send you? I have already decided that Thorley shall send you orchids every morning but is there anything else that you may desire—a new bonnet, a gown, one of those little electric coupés. That would be quite convenient in getting you to and from the theatre, don't you think?"

Slightly awed, Fragna looked at him with wide eyes.

"I don't want anything, thank you," she was finally able to murmur. "And won't you cancel the order for the flowers. I don't like them around

me. Somehow they make me think of funerals."

Mr. Secretan shrugged.

"A new thought! I will cancel the order at once and have nothing to do with flowers in the future. Instead I will see that two or three quarts of pure milk from my farm are left for you every day. Milk is highly nutritious and a valuable food—"

"But I am trying to reduce," Fragna cried.

He was telling her what he considered an ideal diet when the limousine turned into Eighteenth street and stopped before the building that housed her three-room apartment. He took her hand and caressed it tenderly before the footman opened the door and raised an umbrella for her.

"I will see you again, very soon, sweet child," he declared as they parted.

"Not—" Fragna thought as she entered the hallway of her apartment, "if I see you first!"

A week elapsed.

During this interval Fragna fell in love. The object of her disquieting emotion was a likable, attractive young fellow who played a clarinet in the augmented orchestra at the opera house. His name was Bernard Harms. Fragna met him back-stage in a rather striking manner. She was running up the dressing-room stairs at the time and slipped, bringing her heel directly in contact with the pit of Bernard Harms' abdomen. He assisted her to her feet and they considered themselves introduced. After that Harms accompanied her home every night after the performance. On one occasion he presented her with a pound box of bonbons and on the fourth night took her to supper.

It was the following morning that Fragna realized she loved him. She had an inner feeling of breathlessness and an odd little sense of happiness that put silver wings on the minutes. She knew a sort of timid shyness that made her

hope that Bernard Harms would not read the secrets that her eyes revealed. That same night, on the way home, Harms informed her tritely that so far as he was concerned she was the one girl in all the world for him; that he loved her devotedly, desired to marry her immediately if not sooner, and, if she would not consider matrimony at once, wished to be engaged to her for a period not longer than a week.

He also explained that he didn't intend to spend the rest of his life playing the clarinet in an opera house orchestra. He had definitely decided, the instant he could get a thousand dollars together, to go into partnership with a young chap he knew, opening a haberdashery shop on Seventh Avenue in a location unsurpassed for trade.

He kissed Fragna in the vestibule, made her confess that she returned his ardent affection and sent her up to bed to dream of him all through the hours of darkness.

A day or so later, Fragna received a note from the Ogre written on beautifully embossed notepaper. It stated briefly that Mr. Secretan expected to call upon her once he vanquished a slight attack of rheumatism. Fragna read the note, then tore it in half and promptly forgot her aged admirer. Mr. Secretan, however, did not forget about her. At eleven o'clock the next day Fragna, fresh from her bath, attired in a skimpy kimono and with her hair tumbling over her shoulders, answered a ring at the bell and opened the door an inch or two. Mr. Secretan promptly pushed it the rest of the way and stepped through it.

"My dear," he said, when he had followed his nose into the living-room and selected the most comfortable appearing chair in the chamber, "it was the beacon light of your beauty that warmed and cheered me all through the period of my rheumatic attack. I lived for nothing but to keep my promise to see you again. You are as charming as ever,

I perceive. There is a glow in your cheeks like the blush of roses. I venture to say it comes because of the dairy product which I ordered to be delivered at your door. There's nothing like milk for the complexion."

Fragna, who had given the bottles of milk to the janitor each morning, shook her head.

"I'm afraid," she said, "my color is due to embarrassment. You see, I have only just left my bath and—I haven't very much on except this kimono. I—I am not used to receiving gentlemen like this."

The Ogre made a gesture with an arm that creaked.

"I'm not a gentleman," he croaked, "I'm an admirer. Why should you be embarrassed? The ancient Grecians invariably bathed together and were the most moral race at the time. As far as I am concerned, you could greet me entirely unclothed and I would not feet at all humiliated."

Fragna clutched her kimono.

"I called," Mr. Secretan resumed, moistening his lips, "to tell you what my physician has ordered. He has instructed me to have my yacht put in commission immediately, and cruise about Southern seas where the warmth and salt air will act as a rejuvenating tonic. New York is very damp at this season of the year, and dampness is rheumatism's best friend. I contemplate sailing next Tuesday."

Fragna drew a little breath of silent relief.

"Oh," she said, "so you dropped in to say good-by?"

Mr. Secretan shook his egg-like dome.

"Not exactly. Please sit down and cease to look at your feet so frequently. I assure you that your toes are deliciously pink, and that your pedal extremities are most charming. Do sit down like a nice girl and listen to what I have to say. It's important—for you."

Fragna dropped down on a window seat.

"About the yacht," the Ogre went on, moving his talon-like fingers across his face. "I contemplate a six-months' cruise. That is all very well in itself, but a half year without company save those aboard is very distasteful to me. Er—all during my rheumatic attack I thought of nothing but you and your beauty. Suppose you pack your trunk and come aboard with me. I will show you the wonders of the world. Monte Carlo, the Italian Riviera, and the smartest watering places on the Continent. I will dress you like a young princess and give you so many diamonds that you will be the envy of every woman who sees you. Little Fragna, I will do this because I'm afraid I have fallen in love with you—because you are an enchanting person, and because I am quite mad for you. I've made up my mind that you shall be mine, and nothing must interfere—"

His thin, flutey voice trailed into silence. Fragna lifted her glance and encountered his ogling stare, a keen, rapacious look that fixed and fastened upon every curve and contour of her scantily-clad figure.

"Do you really," she inquired innocently, "wish to marry me?"

Mr. Secretan dropped his gold-headed walking stick, picked it up and coughed.

"I," he confessed jerkily, "didn't—er—quite mean that. But I shall, believe me, I will. Suppose we see how we get along on the cruise together, and if our aims and ideals are mutual. Then, when six months are up, and we both are satisfied with each other, we will be united in the holy bonds of matrimony. Is it agreed?"

Fragna wriggled her cold toes, gaze bent on the floor. The offer, to say the least, was remarkable. The Ogre, at best, couldn't last more than a few more years. As his wife she would inherit the fortune that was his, even as

his *chère amie* she could feather her nest in such fashion that the grind of the ballet and the quest of the elusive dollar would be things of the past. Mr. Secretan smiled beneficently at her thoughtful silence.

"A thing of this kind," he murmured, climbing to his feet, "is of such importance as to require meditation. For this reason I would suggest that you think it over carefully for a day or so. Meanwhile, I will send you something to stimulate thought and help you arrive at a decision. In the interim, my dear, think kindly of me, and remember that I am not a youth in the first throes of calf-love. I am a man deeply schooled in feminine understanding, one to whom the secrets of romance is an open book. I can love you and make you happy as no fledgling ever could. Promise me that you will give the matter your earnest attention?"

"I promise," Fragna answered faintly.

After he had kissed her hand and bowed himself out the Ogre entered his limousine and picked up the speaking tube. A recollection of Fragna's tiny pink feet and the scheme that was in the back of his mind merged and joined.

"Drive me to Lavello's, the boot shop on Ninth Avenue," he told the chauffeur. That night, after the performance at the opera house, Bernard Harms accompanied Fragna to the apartment on Eighteenth Street. She noticed he appeared a trifle dejected and taciturn, but thought nothing of it until she invited him up to her three-room suite for crackers, cheese and near-beer. It was when the repast was over and their cigarettes aglow that Harms spoke:

"Fragna, I may as well tell you the worst. To-night I was sacked! The leader of the orchestra has been trying for a long time to get me out and his cousin in as first clarinet. Yesterday at the matinée he picked a quarrel with me, and I was foolish enough to have

lost my temper and said things I should not have. To-night the blow fell. I've been sacrificed to make a musical holiday for a clarinet-playing cousin who can't distinguish A flat from B sharp.

Fragna promptly draped her rounded arms about his neck.

"You poor darling," she wailed. "Don't be so despondent. There are dozens of other orchestras in the city, and a genius like you won't have any trouble in getting another position at once."

The young man shook his head glumly.

"Don't be so sure. There are dozens of musicians out of employment whom the Union can't find work for. I've had applications in for Sousa's band, and several other big orchestras, for months. The worst of it is that this will delay our marriage. Everything would be wonderful if I could only dig up that thousand dollars I need to open that haberdashery store with my friend. If I had that I wouldn't have to worry about the future—anything."

"I've saved up forty-six dollars," Fragna stated softly. "You're welcome to it if it will do you any good, darling."

Harms drew her to him and held her close.

"Angel!" he breathed. "I'm going to marry you, and I'm going to get that thousand dollars if I have to hold up a bank! Every time I think a day unmarried is twelve wonderful hours lost, I almost have a fit. I'm through with playing the clarinet! I'm going into the 'gents' furnishing business," he vowed, "if I have to sprain a rib in the attempt. That's settled."

Before Fragna could reply the door-bell rang. She slipped from the shelter of the arms that held her, and opened the door. The janitor of the building stood in the public hall outside, holding a package under his arm.

"I seen a light in your window, so I knew youse was home," he said. "This here box come for you about eight

o'clock. I signed for it and the boy left it with me to deliver."

Fragna took the package, thanked him and returned to the living-room. She glanced at the label and the card that was attached before dropping the box carelessly in a convenient chair and returned to Harms.

"A present?" he asked absently.

"From an Ogre, who would devour me," Fragna answered cryptically. "Take me in your arms and hold me close. I don't think I ever needed affection more than I do now—"

Some time during the following morning Fragna, alone, opened the package the janitor had given her the previous night. It was from Lavello's, the bootmaker, and contained Mr. Secretan's card and a pair of Cinderella slippers with delicately-curved high heels. The beauty of them was such that a little cry of pleasure surged from her red lips. She drew them out of the box and considered them with misty eyes. At that minute, across her inner vision grew the spread of sapphire seas, a vision of the trim afterdeck of a white yacht, waving palms and coral reefs.

"Shall I?" she asked herself. "Shall I?"

She drew the slippers nervously to her, suddenly aware that one of the heels turned slightly—

Two days later, Mr. Secretan's impressive limousine stopped before the

shop Lavello, the bootmaker, on Ninth Avenue. The liveried footman assisted the Ogre to alight. He hobbled painfully into the shop to be greeted by the great Lavello himself.

"Look here," Mr. Secretan wheezed indignantly. "You've double-crossed me! You've taken advantage of me! And most important, you're responsible for having made me lose a beautiful young girl with a face like an angel and exquisite legs!"

The celebrated cobbler twisted a flowing moustache, his black eyes snapping dangerously.

"Signor," he said, dangerously calm, "if you were a younger man I would keel you. As it is I explain. I made the slippers exactly as you say. I make the heels hollow so they turn and screw on. Into each heel I put the five-hundred-dollar bill you give me. If you say I do not, I cut your throat with a knife—"

Mr. Secretan retreated a step of two.

"Then I can't understand it," he said, bewildered. "Money has never failed me before. I could have sworn my little Fragna was mine. And now—this morning—what do you think I was told by the janitor in her building?"

"What?" the bootmaker asked.

The Ogre drew a quivering breath.

"That she is lost to me forever! That she was married yesterday to some impudent haberdasher who is opening a new store on Seventh Avenue——"



## THE CODE OF THE RANGE

*By J. Gaither Bonniwell*

“UPON what grounds do you wish to base your action—for divorce?”

“Infidelity.”

Winston Reckhart's eyes narrowed a trifle. He rolled the half-burnt stub of his cigar around between his fingers, gazing at its smouldering tip with a peculiar interest.

“Can you—are you prepared to—to prove this charge?” he inquired of his client, his voice lowering slightly.

“How do you mean?”

“I mean that the charge you have just made is one that it would be necessary for you to substantiate—that is with legal proof—if it is the grounds upon which you are going to base your suit.”

“What would be considered legal proof?”

“That depends,” Reckhart paused and looked out the open window for a brief space. “No court in this section of the country,” he finally went on, “is going to condemn a woman upon hearsay—nor upon your personal opinion.”

“But I know it to be so,” Ridley put in vehemently; his thin ascetic face twisted with bitterness. “I know it's so.”

“But that isn't proof,” Reckhart spoke rather curtly. “Of course, if you have—”

In his excitement the other had half risen to his feet and bent over the table. The quick movement and the nervous strain brought on a fit of coughing. He sank back in his chair, limp and flushed, and when he spoke it was with an effort; his words coming chopped off and staccato-like.

“I—I tell you—I know—it's so. I know—damn well I'm right—but the devil of it is I—I can't prove it. Listen.

I was sick—I'm sick now—and—she was away from the house a good deal. She worked then for an insurance office, but she was always home early in the evening. She never failed to come home by six-thirty—never. Then all at once, for several weeks there came to be nights when she would phone that she was delayed at the office, and wouldn't get home until late. Then she'd come in about eight or nine; one night it was ten or later. I got after her about staying out so late, and she said they'd had a rush of business at the office and that she had to put in overtime.

“Then one night came and she didn't come home until nearly twelve,” here Ridley stopped as if for lack of breath. Reckhart made no comment but waited silently for him to go on. “I don't know why I did it. I'd never suspected her. I always trusted her—a man naturally trusts the woman he marries. But that night—I tell you I don't know why I did it—but I phoned her office along about nine o'clock. It happened some one else was in and answered the phone. I asked to speak to—to Vera, and—and they told me she hadn't been there since five-thirty. As I said just now it was almost twelve when she got home that night. I pretended to be asleep when she came in, but I wasn't. I was watching her. Her face was all flushed up like—like she'd been drinking, and all at once when she happened to notice I was awake, she acted—she acted like any woman would act—when they knew they were as guilty—as hell! I accused her then of lying to me. Told her I'd phoned her office and do you think she offered any explanation? No, she wouldn't even answer.

Next morning I asked her again to tell me where she'd been. When I did she turned on me like a—like a wildcat, only she didn't say a word—just looked at me. She left that morning and never came back. It's been nearly eight months now and I haven't seen her since."

Reckhart's gaze never left Ridley's face until the latter stopped speaking; then he turned in his swivel chair and looked out the window, over the broken line of building tops to where the heat waves rose from the rim of the mesa. Beyond it, and the Malpais, the jagged profile of the Fra Cristobals piled up in a reddish purple haze. His thoughts came back at the sound of Ridley's voice.

"Well?" A shade of interrogation was in his client's tone.

"I think," said Reckhart, with measured intonation—almost a drawl. "I think the best thing for you to do is to base your case upon the grounds of desertion. The other—it would be hard for you to prove. The most commonplace explanation would make a joke out of your charges."

"But I tell you I know it's true. It's not a joke."

"I didn't say it was. You misunderstood me. I stated that it could be readily made to appear a joke. This matter of desertion—if you are correct regarding the time—will be the safest."

"All right. Go ahead. I don't care what you use. All I want is to free my name from the woman who's disgraced it."

Reckhart tapped his fingers on the table absently for a moment. Suddenly he turned to Ridley.

"I seldom handle this class of work—divorce cases—would you mind telling me how you came—why you brought this matter to me?"

The other looked at him for a second, then his lips curled in a disagreeable smile.

"That's easy. I overheard a man mention your name in a barber shop one time. He said you was a lawyer that wouldn't

stick a fellow for all he had. I didn't think at the time I'd ever need one, but when I did I remembered."

"Thanks for the compliment."

"Then I understand you'll take the case?"

"Yes, that is—provided you will allow me to handle it in the name of another attorney—a friend of mine. As I said just now, I never take divorce cases, that is under my own name. It's a class of business I prefer not to have. Of course I get a case every now and then, but I always handle them under the name of this friend of mine. He takes care of them for me."

"But won't that make it cost me more?"

"No. The fee will be the same."

"How much?"

Reckhart's glance roved for a moment, then he answered: "Fifty dollars."

An obvious shade of relief crept over Ridley's face.

"That's reasonable. I'm—I'm certain it's worth that much—that much to get free from a woman—from a woman that will do what she did. That reminds me. Speaking of money, that's another thing she lied to me about. When we came west I let her keep our checking account—we didn't have much—but I turned it all over to her. I was sick and couldn't 'tend to business matters at the time. I let her run things. She made out that money was getting low. That's why she took that job with the insurance people. Then when I didn't get better right away and Dr. Hardin said I ought to take certain treatments they were giving at the Sanitarium, I told Vera about it. She went to see the doctor and he told her it would cost about three hundred dollars. She pretended we didn't have that much. Made out we only had enough to keep running, with her salary added. I believed her and gave it up; that is the idea of taking the treatments. But when she left she did have the decency to fill out a check for what money we had in the bank, and do you know it was over four

hundred dollars. She'd lied to me, just like—"

Reckhart interrupted him to ask a question or two. The lawyer had been taking down notes as the other talked. It was plain that Reckhart did not wish his client to go into any further details regarding his personal affairs. After a few minutes' interrogation he ushered Ridley to the door, promising to keep him advised as to the progress of the case.

"Your decree was granted day before yesterday," Reckhart stated crisply. "I tried to reach you sooner by phone but was unable to do so."

"Then I'm—then I'm free?"

The lawyer nodded.

"Yes. Absolutely."

Ridley fumbled for a moment in his pocket, then drew forth his check book.

"If you'll hand me a pen I'll give you a check for your fee," he advanced. "It's been a pretty tough pull for me, but I'm fixed now. My folks'll help me now I've got rid—got rid of that woman."

Reckhart shoved the inkstand toward him. As he wrote the lawyer watched him closely. With deliberate slowness he let his gaze travel upward from the long, thin, snake-like fingers, that as they wrote, wavered with futile weakness. A low soft collar only half concealed the stringy neck, and above it the face bore that unmistakable imprint of pallid waxiness. Ridley looked up when he finished writing and the close-set eyes, small and shifting, only intensified the repulsive impression. He shoved the check across the table. Reckhart picked it up, but as his client rose to go he waved him to be seated.

"Just a moment," he said, speaking slowly. "Before you go it has just occurred to me that I know two little stories—that might interest you."

A puzzled look crossed the other's face as he resumed his seat.

"Thought you might like to hear them," Reckhart smiled, but mirth was absent

from his lips. "Your case has made me think of them. The principals in the first were in much the same position as—as yourself and your former wife. He was an invalid. Came out here for his health . . . didn't get better right away . . . money got low . . . she went to work. Doctor finally told her that if she could afford to give her husband certain treatments that he believed he would get well. It was only a matter of several hundred dollars, but she didn't have it. She was even working then to keep them from starving. A man in an office near-by to where she worked happened to have some stuff that his regular stenographer hadn't had time to get to, so she applied for this extra work and got it. She worked evenings after her other work was done. This went on for several weeks . . . the two became acquainted. . . . He wasn't as good as he should have been . . . woke up to the fact he wanted this woman . . . wanted her with—with all the desires of a red-blooded man for the one woman of his life. He knew it was wrong . . . knew it was impossible . . . she'd told him about her husband, but nevertheless the desire for her grew like a wild madness. She had her troubles too . . . couldn't make this extra money she had to have . . . couldn't make it quick enough . . . and one night . . . she knew the fire she had lighted . . . that one night in desperation she buried that which is uppermost in every good woman . . . and offered . . . offered herself in sacrifice to this man . . . for a few hundred dollars that she must have . . . must have to save her husband. The man was wild . . . fought with the brute in himself . . . and lost. But in the days that followed he paid . . . her Calvary burned from him the last vestige of his madness . . . his days were days of torture and shame. From that night the woman never crossed his path again. He learned, however, that she had left her husband—this man for whom she'd gone down into

the bottom of hell. With this knowledge there came to the other his old desire . . . his desire but purged of every dross. Then circumstances gave a strange twist to things. Fate pulled the strings and this man was instrumental in freeing the woman from this husband she'd left."

Reckhart stopped abruptly. Long before he finished Ridley's eyes had turned a livid hue. The man's breath came in gasps. It was as if he wished to speak but his tongue was paralyzed. His only movement was shrinking when Reckhart slowly opened the drawer to his desk and pulled out an old revolver. The lawyer laid it on the table. Ridley, like an old man, palsied and shrunken, stared at the ugly shining metal with a fascinated terror.

"Don't be alarmed. It isn't loaded," there was a contemptuous softness in Reckhart's voice. "I only pulled this out because it's a part of this other story I'm going to tell you." He stopped and gazed out the open window. "I was brought up out yonder—on the range," he said, waving his hand toward where the Malpais shimmered in the September heat. "Out yonder . . . in the Cristobals. I was raised on a ranch . . . and we

weren't angels . . . red blood flowed in our veins. But out on the range, the meanest cowboy of us had a code . . . the only thing we killed without giving it a fighting chance was a rattlesnake . . . and a skunk. The rattlesnake we respected though, . . . they usually give warning . . . but the skunks . . . we just shot them on sight. Hydrophobia skunks, some folks call 'em, and they bite you at night . . . when you're asleep . . . and you die of rabies. That's why we never gave 'em a chance." He paused and slowly picked up Ridley's check from where he had laid it on the table. Carefully folding it he deliberately tore the paper into bits. When again he spoke a peculiar quiet note in his voice filled the room like a vibrant danger signal.

"The little story I told you first, Ridley, is known only to three people. Vera Morton—your former wife, is one. I am one, and—you are the other." He stopped as if to let his words sink in, then went on: "This morning Vera Morton became my wife. If—if anyone else should ever hear this story—don't forget"; he laid one finger on the pistol in front of him. "Don't forget—if they do—this gun is going to kill another skunk."



## I WONDERED WHAT WAS HAPPENING

*By Henry Hibbard*

I wondered what was happening.

The shades were not pulled down;  
The woman seemed to be insane,  
The man jumped like a clown.

"Surely they are not making love,  
One never does—like that!

If I get a black eye for it  
I must find what they're at."

By luck I reached the door in time  
To hear the woman say:  
"There's nothing like a pesky fly  
To spoil a summer's day."

## BEWARE OF THE REDS!

By Geo. B. Jenkins, Jr.

**Y**OU can disappoint a blonde, and she'll likely forgive you for the first six times. After that, she'll cry a little perhaps, and forgive you for the next six times. But, I've found it's not wise to ring the bell on number thirteen.

A brunette is different. If you have a good excuse, and tell it convincingly, she is likely to let the matter slide twice, or maybe three times. After that, she just doesn't seem to remember you.

But the auburn-haired variety—I mean the kind who were bricktops before henna was invented—talk to 'em quick, and when and if they say, "Exit" you slide for the door!

You can test these statements if you like, but remember I am not responsible for your bruises or broken bones. I become blind when I see a blonde; a brunette makes me lose my hearing as well; and when the auburn-haired variety coo in my direction I can't even talk!

I know the sad and sinister story of James Richard Pennington, and I've never put a finger under a street car just to see if it would mash it flat. Still, James Richard trifled with *two* Titians, and if there ever was a more ruined man, then he deserves all the sympathies in all the dictionaries that were ever printed.

Mazie had burnt orange hair, cool eyes, and the crispest mouth that ever unconsciously pleaded for a kiss. She had sense, both common and color—a combination that is rare. She wore her hair bobbed, which proves the first, and she wore dull browns and dark greens, which proves the second. And James

Richard Pennington tried to—tried to talk *baby talk* to her!

Of course, that wasn't all. He met her in a purposely accidental way at the Prairie Cat. The Prairie Cat is a certain restaurant on a certain street in the thirsty Thirties of New York. It's a nice, refined dive that sports a policeman on guard during six weeks out of seven.

Mazie happened in there during the seventh week. She was not engaged or occupied at the time, nor had she been for half a month. Her boss, at her last place, told her that he was a respectable man, and that he loved his wife, but that said wife had a very cold nature.

"That's too bad," said Mazie. She had heard these words before—every woman hears it from ninety-nine married men out of a hundred—but Mazie thought that perhaps her boss would vary the routine a little. She was wrong.

"Now I," continued the boss, a thin man with a fringy mustache and large rolling eyes, "now I have a very affectionate nature." He tried to demonstrate.

Mazie had two hundred dollars in the bank at the time, and so she didn't care if she lost her job. But she didn't lose it; she resigned. When they pulled her boss out from under his desk, and took the wastebasket from around his neck, and wiped some of the ink from his face, Mazie handed in her resignation. It was accepted.

Mazie rambled into the Prairie Cat one Thursday afternoon, rather tired and bored. Food was a word that had a musical sound. She sat at a small

table against the wall of the restaurant, and watched the thirty squirming dancers who were cat-walking in a space six by eight. Then a waiter approached, and after a short conversation, he insinuated that she could procure a half pint of synthetic gin for six dollars. So Mazie ordered a salad and a pot of coffee.

Mr. James Richard Pennington sat at a near-by table. Apparently, he was the sort of person who is always sitting at a near-by table. So Mazie thought at the time. Mr. Pennington shattered this belief by coming over and saying: "You remind me of a little girl I used to know."

Mazie looked him up and down. He was a short, round, polished man with pale eyebrows and a two-story chin. His hairless head glistened, and his finger nails glistened, and his white teeth glistened.

Mazie answered him truthfully. "I am not," she said, "a little girl you used to know."

"I'm sure, if you will try and remember me—" he smiled with his entire mouth, "that you'll find—"

The waiter appeared with the salad, so Mazie transferred her attention to the nourishment. And James Richard sat down across the table from her.

"You don't mind if I join you?" he asked.

"Not if you buy your own food," said Mazie, replenishing the inward void.

"I'll do that, sweetie." He spoke in a flirtatiously fascinating way.

Mazie let him enjoy himself, which meant let him talk. Pennington remarked that she was "some swell baby," and that she could make him "the happiest man in the world," if she wanted to. She didn't ask for an explanation or a diagram of this remark, and he didn't go any further. Instead, he gave her his business card and told her he needed an expert stenographer.

"I don't know a typewriter from a carbon copy," said Mazie.

"Have you a telephone?" he next inquired.

"Yes, but you'll never know the number," she replied.

Since he didn't seem to be progressing, Pennington looked around the restaurant.

At the next table were two perfumed, rouged, lip-sticked ladies who had been planted there since noon. One was built along the general lines of a mausoleum, and the other had taken a filler for an Eversharp pencil as a model for her general scheme of architecture. Both had been looking for masculine attention ever since Napoleon vamped Josephine, and they were at the stage where anything that didn't wear 'em rolled looked like a composite of Eugene O'Brien and Wally Reid to them.

Mr. Pennington smiled, and these two caricatures moved over to Mazie's table, bringing with them a couple of empty coffee cups, and a cigarette package that contained one Camel. Immediately afterward, a necktie salesman from Houston Street, and a college boy from Spencer's Business Institute gathered around.

"What'll you have?" asked Mr. Pennington foolishly.

The four newcomers gave the menu to the waiter and said, "Bring what you've got that's on there"

A half hour later, Mazie and Mr. Pennington were alone together once more. The two ladies had departed for parts unknown with their "gentlemen friends." A cross-eyed waiter brought the bill, and presented it to the rotund James Richard.

"\$46.52," read Mr. Pennington. "All right. Come back with change for a hundred dollar bill." Then he turned to Mazie. "Won't you be nice to me, cutie-cutie?" he asked.

"Why didn't you stay in the sanatorium for the feeble-minded?" she inno-

cently inquired. "Your grandchildren should take better care of you."

Mr. Pennington saw that he was wasting time. He vanished. He disappeared. Why give something for nothing? He checked out, taking his hat from the check room boy and a taxi from the front of the restaurant.

And Mazie had to pay the bill.

Never, let me repeat, never try to put anything over on the flames. They will make you utter "Uncle!" before they die. Mazie had James Richard's business card in her vanity case. She tipped the waiter a skinny dime, while her hair grew seven shades brighter. Then she snapped her teeth together, and the waiter shivered and shuddered. Mazie didn't kill the waiter. Instead, she made a solemn red-haired vow that Mr. Pennington should agonize.

On the following morning, Mazie called upon Mr. Pennington at his place of business. He was an important pigeon, Vice-president and General Manager of the Tee Kay Co., the incandescent bulb trust. Mazie spent seven days, from nine in the morning until four in the afternoon, waiting in the reception-room to see Mr. Pennington. But he wouldn't see her.

Her auburn hair grew auburner, her cool eyes grew glacial, and still nothing happened. So Mazie tried another tack. She went to the employment office of the Tee Kay Co., and put in an application for a position as a telephone operator. She knew how to handle a switchboard from helping out at her last, previous position.

Now Mazie had a shrewd and rather sound idea that Mr. Pennington would make other acquaintances in other restaurants. Naturally, he wouldn't return soon to the Prairie Cat. And when he whispered sweet words to seductive damsels, Mazie planned to spoil several of his evenings.

She got the job. Of course she got the job! When a scarlet-haired lassie

sets out to get anything, that thing might as well curl up in her lap. For its day is and was done. *Selah!*

On her first morning at her new duties, Mazie made the discovery that Mr. Pennington was the only husband of a wife. The wife was christened Hannah, and she had the sort of voice that goes with that name. It was a strong, domineering voice, and Mr. Pennington answered his wife in a quick, hurried, nervous manner. Mazie soon concluded that Hannah was the tall cedar in the Pennington forest, and that husband wiped his shoes before entering the house, and was always careful to use the ash tray when he was at home.

Mazie drew her pale pink eyebrows together over her Arctic eyes, and listened in on the conversation. Hannah planned to go away for a week. She had called up to say good-bye. Mr. Pennington expressed his regret.

"I shall miss you, dearest," said James Richard, sorrowfully. "Are you sure you will be gone a week?"

"I think it likely," boomed Hannah. "Don't forget to change your socks, and be sure to feed the canary."

"Yes, dear."

"Come home at night before eleven; burglars have been active in the neighborhood, and I don't want the house left alone."

"Yes, dear."

"Write to me every day. Dictate a letter to your stenographer, if you are too busy to write yourself. I insist upon a daily letter."

"Yes, dear."

Mazie smiled into the transmitter. She was very pleased that Mr. Pennington had such a militant wife. She set about discovering more facts about the rotund, smooth-headed gentleman. It developed that James Richard used a dictaphone; he spoke his correspondence into a flexible rubber tube, and his voice was recorded upon a wax cylinder. Mazie spent her noon hour, that day, in friendly

conversation with Mr. Pennington's stenographer, who typed the words from the cylinder.

The crimson-tinted tresses of Mazie were waving on the following morning. She had heard Mr. Pennington's first complete letter to his wife but ten minutes before.

"I played cards at the club last night—" said Mr. Pennington, and the words were on the cylinder. Mazie had listened to the letter, using the apparatus loaned by James Richard's stenographer.

A white slab dropped in the telephone switchboard, and Mr. Pennington gave a number. Naturally, Mazie listened in on the conversation. And she heard:

"—You enjoyed that little dinner at the Ritz?" Mr. Pennington's voice, sweet as saccharine, "—and I'd love to do the same again soon."

A blonde voice gurgled, "You're the most wonderful man! I just think—"

Mazie clicked off the wire. She couldn't listen in on any more goo. She put the blonde's number down on a slip of paper, and marked, "Monday," opposite it. Lie number one.

On the following morning, about eleven o'clock, Mazie went to the dictaphone and adjusted the attachments to her ears. After a description of the weather, Mr. Pennington said, and was recorded on the wax cylinder to this effect:

"At the lodge meeting last night, I saw Fred, and—"

Back to the telephone switchboard. Mr. Pennington had not gone to the lodge meeting. He had returned to his old haunt, the Prairie Cat. The telephone number, this morning, was of an exchange far up in the Bronx. Mazie put it down with the word, "Tuesday," alongside.

When a feminine voice answered, Mr. Pennington spoke large quantities of pleasant words. "I certainly did enjoy the Follies," he declared, "and I enjoyed it a thousand times more because you were with me."

"Oh, Mr. Dobson!" said the girl at the other end of the wire.

Mazie wrote that down on her little pad of paper.

For the rest of the week, the entries were similar, or very much like the first two days. Each day, Mazie's hair calmed in color, and her eyes became less icy: Pennington was a busy little bee, buzzing from flower to flower. He did not know that a maiden with old rose hair was making notes of his letters to his wife, and collecting the telephone numbers of the ladies to whom he telephoned.

Monday arrived, and so did Hannah. Mazie saw Mrs. Pennington for the first time, and her heart bounced with happiness. A large, massive lady was Hannah, six feet tall, with heavy bones and an adequate quantity of solid flesh covering them. She was a modern Juno, and shapely, with all her height and weight. Her eyes were keen and intelligent, and she had humor wrinkles at the corners of her mouth.

Mazie was an animated article on Tuesday morning. Not only did she have the switchboard to handle, she had to arrange for her revenge upon Mr. Pennington. Her vengeful fingers manipulated the plugs and levers, she called and coaxed, or pleaded, or commanded, or beseeched, as the case might demand. And when she had completed her preparations for the downfall of Mr. Pennington, a seraphic smile settled upon her crisp mouth.

And unsuspecting Mr. Pennington signed his name to various papers, smoked good cigars, and damned the income and surtaxes of the Republic. He drew fifty thousand dollars a year from the Tee Kay Co. for the performance of these duties, for he was a shrewd business man. Any male who can snare fifty thousand dollars a year from a corporation is a shrewd business man. Mr. Pennington also contemplated the week that had just passed into the past, and felt rather pleased with himself. One

by one, the evenings floated before his mental gaze, and a sweet smile settled upon his mouth.

Mr. Pennington did not anticipate the horror, the anxiety, the humiliation, and the anguish that the forthcoming hour held for him. He had forgotten that, once upon a time, he had left a bronze-haired damsel in the Prairie Cat confronting a bill for \$46.52.

The door of his office opened, and Mrs. Pennington entered. James Richard stirred to his feet.

"Hannah! I didn't know that you planned to visit me to-day—" his voice grew less assured, and then dwindled into nothingness.

Hannah had a sheaf of letters in her hand, and a hot spot in each eye. "Sit down, husband," she commanded. "Sit down and begin to think of some new, fresh, really convincing lies. You'll need them!"

Mr. Pennington wobbled, and his cigar wilted in the corner of his mouth. He was a man, but he crumbled before the fury in Hannah's eyes.

Standing just inside of the door of the office, was Mazie and her pad of paper.

"Monday," said Mazie, radiating happiness from every vivid hair in her head.

A short, doll-faced blonde entered, and advanced gushingly:

"Oh, Mr. Pennington! I haven't seen you since we had dinner at the Ritz—"

Hannah scored a bull's-eye with a scorching glance, and read from Mr. Pennington's letter to her. "On Monday you said you played cards at the club."

Mr. Pennington caught his breath. "My dear, I have never seen this woman before in my life—"

"Save that lie," ordered Hannah. "You'll need it a little later."

"Tuesday," remarked Mazie, as a slender brunette entered. The brunette had warm, glowing eyes, and very trim ankles.

"Did you ever see this person before?" asked Hannah, indicating her husband.

The brunette answered readily. "Why, yes. He took me to the Follies last Tuesday night."

"Wednesday," said Mazie swiftly. "Be sure you tell the truth."

In the doorway stood a plump, round-eyed girl.

"Hello." In a flat, dry voice, Wednesday addressed Mr. Pennington. "That was a swell ride we had up the Hudson, wasn't it, sweetie?"

Mr. Pennington tried to shrink further into his chair, and the gloss disappeared from his bald head.

"And you wrote," his wife said, "that you were working in the office!"

"Thursday," continued Mazie, sweetly.

A green-eyed girl, with a white face wherein a thin, shaped mouth caught the eye, drifted into the office and nodded to James Richard.

"Did you see my husband on Thursday evening?" Hannah asked politely.

"Yes," most nonchalantly, the green-eyed girl answered. "He took me to a roof garden over in Brooklyn. He's a free spender."

Mr. Pennington was breathing with difficulty.

"Friday," remarked Mazie, and smiled. For "Friday" was a wide girl, built for comfortable chairs, or the entire rear seats in a touring car.

"You know," said the plump girl, eyeing Hannah with tears about to drip upon her cheeks, "that gentleman there told me he wasn't married, and he was so kind and generous, and—I didn't think he could be so wicked. All these girls met him too, and he told me that I was the only girl he'd ever seen in his life that he'd ever looked at twice, and—"

Hannah consulted her husband's letters, and read the last one. "On Friday," she said, "you said that you stayed at home all evening, thinking about me, and wondering if I was ever coming home. Now, James Richard," she waved a hand toward the assemblage, "tell me the lies you have been inventing for the last half

hour. They've got to be good, new, fresh, convincing lies, too!"

James Richard could not think of even one fabrication. With his companions for every evening in the week confronting him, he was tongue-tied and mute.

"It's lucky you haven't said a word," Hannah resumed, after a moment, "because I wouldn't have believed you anyway." Then her glaring eyes slowly burned Mr. Pennington to a delicate brown crisp. For several seconds—that seemed like centuries—Hannah stared at the speechless, humiliated, completely desolated gentleman.

"I think I'll get a divorce," said Hannah, quietly. "I'll name five co-respondents," she laughed slightly, "Monday, Tuesday, Wed—"

A babble of feminine voices rose from the ladies here gathered. Mazie had been enjoying the proceedings from the side lines up to now. She spoke in a whispered aside to Hannah.

That scarlet-topped six-footer stilled the twittering voices. "I'm going to get a divorce," she repeated, "and I'm going to insist on alimony. Now, if you girls think you've been duped by my—my husband, I think you all should begin legal proceedings also."

Mr. Pennington's erstwhile companions were uncertain. They consulted each other doubtfully.

"There will be expenses for lawyers, and so on," Mrs. Pennington remarked, "but—if you'll let me take your cases to my attorney, I'll be responsible for the costs."

The wide girl,—who had made Friday memorious,—spoke for the rest.

"I think that's lovely of you," she said, "because I didn't know what I could do, as I haven't a friend in the world to protect me, except my divorced husband, and he says he still loves me, but he's in the penitentiary—he got two years for burglary—but when he comes out, I'll make him do something, if that old bald-headed fool doesn't—"

"And are the other girls without friends?" Hannah inquired.

Scattering replies came after much thought. "—Brother on the police force—" "My steady is a prize fighter—" "—I don't need anyone, I carry an automatic in my vanity case—"

Hannah turned to her husband. "I'm leaving you, James Richard," she said, addressing her agonized, horror-stricken spouse, "for the second time within a month. This time, I'm going to stay away longer than a week. I'm going to stay away forever."

Slowly the days of the week departed from the office, slowly the memories faded, leaving Mazie behind. She strolled over to the desk.

"Don't you remember me?" she asked. "You look like a boy I used to know."

No sign of recognition appeared in Mr. Pennington's face. He sat shriveled up in his chair.

"I met you one afternoon in the Prairie Cat," Mazie said. "You joined me, and invited four food hounds over, and then left a check for \$46.52 for me to pay. Remember?"

"Go away," said Mr. Pennington weakly.

Mazie went. But first she got the \$46.52.

Now you can understand why I say that the russet-haired variety must not be treated roughly. Blondes are usually weepy, and brunettes are hard, but the carrot-tops—if you double cross a naturally henna lady, you will regret it—then, or later.

James Richard Pennington will give you the same advice. Though he makes fifty thousand a year as Vice-president and General Manager of the Tee Kay Co., he lives in a small room on the East Side, and he owns one suit of clothes. There's alimony to pay, and there's insurance to keep up, and there's five judgments decided against him, and—all because he deceived Hannah, and tricked Mazie, the bricktop twins.

# THE ETERNAL QUADRANGLE

By Dorothy Gardner

**S**AN FRANCISCO at night! A brilliant jewel—dimpling, smiling, challenging, as though in friendly rivalry with the countless stars of the heavens.

San Francisco at night—with the trade wind's amorous breath caressing this fair city that can know no lasting sorrow. Here the mighty waves of the Pacific leaping high to toss a foamy mantle full in the face of lowering cliffs, or rolling with abated fury upon gentle beaches; here the tranquil waters of San Francisco Bay, with craft from every land flaunting gay standards, eternally tugging at anchor.

To Jim Haley, who had touched every port that borders on the earth's greatest waterways, came an unfathomable feeling which alternately thrilled and depressed him. He stood on the bridge that spans the Embarcadero, and looked down upon the crowds swarming to and from the Ferry Building. He longed to be one of the crowd—to be a landsman, instead of a lonely seafarer. This ever-moving mass of humans just below belonged to the land, as he, Jim Haley, belonged to the sea.

For ten years his only home had been aboard ship. He roamed that way because there were no ties to bind him to the shore, and because the youthful love of adventure was strong within him. But now he was touching thirty; one gets to thinking when one draws near thirty. The gallant, irresponsible twenties left behind—the dignity of the thirties looming. One begins to think of life's responsibilities.

And now Jim Haley knew that he was done with the sea. He stood ready for

a good paying land job, a home—and a wife!

Fate was unusually kind to this bold sailorman. He found the girl much sooner than he had expected. She was very beautiful, with blue-gray eyes that somehow made one think of a summer sea. Certainly she was far too beautiful to spend her days poring over a typewriter! This did Jim Haley tell himself the very day he took up his duties as city salesman for the firm where Miss Elinor Martine earned the bread and butter of her existence, without any extra frills.

Haley's work took him out a great deal, but he managed to find many matters to attend to about the office—particularly a fair amount of dictation for the sweet Elinor to take. In fact, he feared he was overworking her. He was very solicitous.

Elinor was flattered. Haley was very good to look upon. Big and brawny, with the ten years of the open sea on his fine face, he had an aggressive yet likable way about him that soon promoted him to head salesman—and won for him the petite Elinor.

They found a modest little nest in the apartment house district, and here Elinor was in her element. She kept the apartment spotless and cooked masterpieces that were nothing short of a revelation to Haley, who imagined that it was a bride's business to bombard her new hubby with heavier-than-lead biscuits and various burnt offerings. Elinor was clever with the needle, too; she kept Jim's socks well darned, and at a moment's notice could convert a strip of satin and a bunch of posies into a *chic* hat.

Elinor's whole life was wrapped about her home and husband. They were very

happy—would be so forever. Jim had one regret. Why had he not met her long before? Those years as a sea-rover were empty years now. Why had he not met this charming little wife of his ten years before?

"Silly!" she favored him with a bewitching *monie*. "Ten years ago—why I wasn't even ten years old then!"

Which was quite true, for Elinor was not yet twenty. Jim was her first and only love. Once she asked him if he had ever loved another girl, and he answered with undue vehemence in the negative.

Of course there had been other girls. The old saying has it that there is a sweet-heart in every port for a sailor. The good-looking Jim had been no exception to the general run of seafaring men. Yes, there had been "sweeties" galore in the life of Jim Haley, but it was only once that the god o' love had reached his heart.

When the Sheridans moved in the apartment just across the hall, Elinor became friendly with Lorette Sheridan before a week had gone by. The Sheridans had been married just three years, and it was quite obvious that they were as madly in love with each other as were the Haleys.

Grant Sheridan was doing well in the business world, and although he might have afforded a more pretentious apartment, he was a thrifty young man, and was quite satisfied to live well within his means.

"Some day I'm going to have a real home," he confided to Haley. "Yes, sir! A real home—chickens, a garden, roses climbing over the front door—"

"Sounds like the words of a song!" grinned the other. Elinor was always talking that way, too. Haley speculated that at some time in the future he might buy just such a place, if it would make his wife any the happier. As for himself—well, an apartment was quite satisfactory to him; home was where the heart was, and his heart was with Elinor.

The Haleys and Sheridans held gay

little bridge parties. It was a weekly occurrence for the four to go to dinner, then to the theatre. Elinor was ever the life of these gatherings. With Lorette Sheridan it was different. She was of a retiring disposition—that made her seem almost shy. Elinor, with her wide blue-gray eyes and flyaway golden hair, seemed much like a happy child by the side of Grant Sheridan's wife.

One would not call Lorette beautiful; as compared with Elinor, she was almost plain. She was tall and slender, and there was nothing striking about her face, unless it was her eyes. They were brown, with little flecks of gold in them—and they were the eyes of one who dreams. They were eyes that could leap to life on the instant, enhancing the calm face of Lorette Sheridan with an unmistakable charm.

The first time Jim Haley saw that light in those eyes he was startled into admiration. Jove! What a transformation! It was at one of the pleasant little card parties held in the Haley apartment. Jim had casually mentioned something about Australia, and she had leaned toward him, her face eager, alight with the sudden flame in those gold-flecked eyes.

"Australia? You've been there? How wonderful!"

But before Haley could reply, Sheridan cut in rudely. "Come, Lorette, we'll be going." Sheridan's usually pleasant face was ugly with a dark scowl.

"I wonder what was the matter with him?" ejaculated Haley, after the visitors had gone. "He seemed downright angry."

The next day Lorette and Jim met quite by chance downtown.

"Perhaps I'd better apologize for the abrupt manner of Grant last night," she was smiling but her voice pleaded. "You see, he was afraid I'd start to talk about the past. I've journeyed about quite a bit—and you know how one gads when one meets a fellow traveler!"

"I can't see why that should rile him," frowned Haley; he wondered why it was

that he should feel such a strange feeling of annoyance toward her husband.

"Well," she hesitated, then rushed on, "You see I used to be on the stage. Grant has rather old-fashioned ideas about stage people. He doesn't care to have it known that his wife was once a girl of the chorus. He gets nervous when I bring up anything of the past—"

"Bosh!" ejaculated Haley. "What a boor Sheridan must be!"

She laughed suddenly. "You know, I'm rather proud of those days. We played in every nook and corner of the United States. The wanderlust got its hold on me. We even went Australia—to get stranded! How did I get home?" Haley was thrilled by the glory of her eyes. "I shipped as stewardess on a home-coming vessel!"

Haley stared at her. He smiled and held out a hand. "As one seafaring person to another—greetings!"

"I think I would follow the sea if I were a man," Lorette's eyes were dreamy now. "Sometimes I go to the hills back of the Presidio, just to watch the ships go out through the Golden Gate. Sometimes I imagine I'm on board—silly, isn't it?"

"No, it isn't!" asserted Haley bluntly. "We'll go out there together some day and spin old seafarers' tales."

That was the start of it. Sunday afternoons found them walking the heights back of the Presidio, talking about those distant places of the earth to which they had journeyed—the exciting life of the stage, the exhilarating life of the ocean. And all the while they watched with wistful eyes the Gate just below; now it was a liner sailing magnificently for the open seas, again a barkentine bravely leaving the shelter of the bay for a voyage of many months in deeper waters.

If Elinor wondered at these Sunday afternoon absences of her husband, she said nothing. And Sheridan had no time to think about how his wife spent the

Sabbath. He had become the proud possessor of a suburban lot, and the long dreamed-of bungalow was well under way. Sheridan's day of rest was given over to puttering around this acquisition.

"Soon these little excursions will be done," sighed Lorette one day, "the house will be finished in six weeks. Then again for the practical side of life, with no time to spare in pampering the spirit of the wanderlust."

They were sitting on a stone wall on the heights. It was close to sunset, with a heavy fog beginning to sweep in from the Pacific. Still they made no effort to depart. In silence they watched the misty host smother the Golden Gate. Just below a foghorn moaned spasmodically.

"I'll have to come on up here alone," said Haley. "I'll miss you, Lorette." Unconsciously he used her first name. "I wouldn't dare ask Elinor to come. She'd be bored to death."

"Elinor is a darling," Lorette spoke impulsively. "Somehow this isn't fair to her."

"She loves to stay at home! I couldn't drag her up here. Maybe she'd thank you for taking her hubby in tow! And how about Grant, Lorette?"

"Grant, like Elinor, would never understand the satisfaction we derive from this," admitted Lorette.

"It's because they're landlubbers," laughed Haley.

After all, it did not seem strange to Haley that he experienced no feelings of compunction that his wife was home darning his socks while he strolled about with the wife of another. There was nothing at all shameful in these mild escapades. Their arms had never embraced; their lips had never touched. It was merely a spirit of comradeship drawing them together in a friendship that was strictly Platonic.

It was late spring now, and the days were long and friendly; they walked

together now in the sweet dusk, while Elinor remained at home to wash the dishes, and Grant was contentedly reading the evening paper in the Sheridan apartment just across the hall.

Of late the four had not gone about as formerly. There was an air of peculiar restraint whenever the Haleys and Sheridans were together. This awkward atmosphere set Jim Haley to thinking. The whole trouble rested with the wife of Grant Sheridan and himself. Although they had committed no actual wrong, they had blundered against the set laws of convention. It was but natural that they should feel ill at ease when in the presence of her husband and his wife.

Early in June, Elinor announced that she was giving a farewell dinner to the Sheridans, who were quitting the apartment the following week for their new home.

"There'll be just the four of us," she told Jim. "It will be the last time we get together."

Haley stared across the breakfast table with frankly admiring eyes. Jove! Elinor was charming this morning. Garbed in a fluffy morning gown of palest blue, with a dainty cap to match, she was decidedly winsome and kissable. He impulsively leaned across the table to brush her smooth white forehead with his lips.

After all, he was glad the Sheridans were going. Of course, he would miss the delightful friendship of Lorette, but he had been leaving Elinor alone too much of late. Why, he had almost neglected her. That would never do! She was all he had in the world. Yes, it was as well that the Sheridans were going.

At the farewell dinner, the old spirit of conviviality came to the surface. There was much laughter and bantering, in the course of which the two culprits managed to forget those stolen walks on the hills.

Later, Jim suggested cards, but Elinor said firmly: "No bridge to-night, sir! We'll have a talkfest—and Mr. Sheridan whispered to me awhile back that he had a surprise in store." She turned an inquisitive face toward Grant Sheridan. "Please don't keep us in suspense!"

Sheridan's face was suddenly grave. "Well," he blurted, "I don't know just how to go about it—"

"Oh, come on, old man! Don't be bashful," implored Haley.

Sheridan bounded to his feet. "All right!" he snapped. "I've managed to make myself agreeable during dinner—now I'm going to be disagreeable. I'm going to give you, Haley—and you, Lorette, the chance to right yourselves in the eyes of the world. I've been told that there's been many a tryst kept—"

Sheridan's further words were lost upon Lorette and Haley. They were discovered! No matter what they would say, they would be charged as guilty.

Haley's first thought was for Elinor. Poor little girl! Her face was white and tense, and she kept repeating in a piteous monotone, "I don't believe it! I don't believe it!" Why had not that beast of a Sheridan spared her this anguish? Haley's eyes turned toward Lorette. On her face there was a look that was almost of death—the death of respectability.

With a mighty effort, Jim Haley endeavored to collect his feverish thoughts as he whirled upon his accuser. "Can you prove it?"

"Do you deny it?" flashed back Sheridan. "Do you deny that you stole out to meet my wife?"

"Jim, say it's a lie!" moaned Elinor, running to his side.

Haley was in misery. "Well, I can't say it's a lie, but before God, there was nothing dishonorable—"

Elinor uttered a little scream and turned from him with a repulsive shudder.

Then Lorette had her say. She was

magnificent as she stood there between the two men, her head thrown back, those glorious eyes flashing. "Grant! Lorette! Listen! This busybody who has spied upon us would do well to tell everything—to repeat our conversation—to prove that the friendship between us was friendship and nothing more!"

"She's right, Nell!" Haley turned to his wife with a fresh hope.

"Don't talk to me, you monster!" screamed Elinor. "You've broken my heart—you've made me hate you!"

Haley stood very still. She hated him! This dear, sweet girl who was his whole life, hated him! Perhaps after her anger had cooled, she would forgive him. Braving the scornful sneer on the face of Grant Sheridan, he held out his arms appealingly: "Nell! You don't hate me—"

"I do! I never want to see you again! I hate you now—as I'll hate you forever. Go!" She pointed to the door and stamped her foot.

And Haley went. He recognized the uselessness of argument. She meant just what she said. She hated him forever—and he was never to come back! After he had gone, Elinor flung herself from the room.

"Well," Sheridan turned to his wife with a short bitter laugh. "You see what you've done. You're as much to blame as he is. I'm to blame, too! I had no business taking a girl from the chorus and try to educate her to the ideals of—"

"You'd better stop right there!" Her eyes glittered dangerously. Then she broke down. "Grant, you've faith in me? You know how I love you!"

"You're unworthy of a decent man's love," he returned coldly.

She drew away from him as though he had struck her. He did not want her now! It was the price one paid for indiscretion. She turned away. "Very well, I will go!"

"Yes. Go—to him!" taunted Sheridan.

At the door she turned to say quietly. "I will never see him again."

It was the truth. She never meant to see Jim Haley again. He would go his way—and she would go hers. Their pure friendship had been a disaster in itself. For them there was no other recourse.

She was gone. The injured husband stood alone.

"Grant, she's gone?" it was Elinor Haley's voice.

He turned to her and held out his arms. "Darling, we're alone together—forever!"

She raised her piquant face to his. Sheridan's lips sought hers. It was merely a kiss that told of other kisses gone before.

"It will take a whole year to get a divorce," sighed the man a moment later. "That was a keen idea of yours—giving a farewell dinner. Caught 'em unawares. It was a farewell dinner, all right—for them!"

Elinor giggled. "Don't you think I'm a splendid actress, Grant?"

"No better actress than I am an actor!" he returned modestly. "You've got to hand it to them—they're pretty slick at it themselves! I almost believed them. It's a wonder they thought they could get away with that eternal triangle stuff."

To which the sweet Elinor replied brilliantly, "You mean the eternal quadrangle, Grant darling!"



## A QUESTION OF PATERNITY

By Leah M. Driesbach

“AND women are the same the world over. A suspicious, jealous lot, without faith in any man.” Ira Jackson squirted a mouthful of tobacco juice on the pillar of the hotel veranda and rolled his wheel chair back a trifle to avoid the glare of the noonday sun.

The traveling man, who sat on the porch railing, smilingly scanned the town philosopher and erstwhile editor of the *Moab Weekly Times*. A man about fifty, was Ira Jackson, whose face revealed deep lines that bespoke resigned suffering. From the waist up, he possessed the robust physique of a strong man, but the wheel chair and outline of shriveled limbs beneath a light carriage robe, revealed plainly his condition of invalidism.

Before the salesman could reply to his cynical utterance, a Ford drove up with much noise and flurry of dust and a girl alighted. Shading her eyes with one hand, she peered up at the men and on perceiving the editor, ran gaily up the steps and toward him.

“Oh! I’m so glad to find you, Mr. Jackson. I didn’t want to leave without bidding you good-by. We are not coming back to Moab, you know.”

She beamed happily at both men and the salesman was attracted by her unconscious charm. She was young, surely not more than eighteen, but her young beauty seemed dignified by a mysterious air of sophistication that enhanced rather than detracted from her enchanting personality. Her hair was decidedly auburn and her complexion was the delicious pink and white that invariably accompanies that shade of hair.

“Good-by, dear Mr. Jackson. You

won’t mind if I kiss you?” Mr. Jackson did not. So after a soft pressure of young lips against the rough cheek of the man, the girl whirled down the steps and toward the car.

Suddenly she stopped, paused a moment irresolutely, then returned to the veranda.

“Mr. Jackson, I’m going to tell you a secret.” She glanced uncertainly at the younger man, then with an apologetic smile, leaned over and whispered in Ira’s ear. The man’s keen eyes twinkled and he patted her hand.

“Sho! I knew it all the time,” he affirmed and smiled tenderly after her disappearing figure.

The salesman caught a glimpse of a nice-looking country boy holding a baby up to the girl as she clambered into the car, then with a snort and a roar, the ancient car left as it had arrived, in a cloud of dust.

“That is Essie Barnes,” informed Ira genially. “Should say Essie Ommen, for she married young Ommen this morning. They are on their way to the train which will carry them west to their new home.” The other man looked up in curious surprise.

“It’s a new thing in honeymoons, isn’t it, to take a baby along?”

“Guess it is, but the baby belongs to the bride.” Ira thoughtfully bit a generous chew from a plug of tobacco. “With Essie Barnes-Ommen gone, the biggest mystery of Moab remains unsolved. There goes Lawyer Mavis’ wife rushing to the depot with a present for Essie,” he chuckled dryly. “Four months ago, she wouldn’t speak to her.”

Both men gazed after the fleshy matron

that had hurried past, bearing a parcel in her hand. Across the street, two other women with packages tucked under their arms, were heading in the same direction, and the salesman noted the sardonic glimmer in Ira's eyes as he observed their haste.

"Essie worked a subtle revenge on the prominent women of this town and made them like it," continued the editor. "For the past three months they have vied with one another for the friendship of Essie Barnes, daughter of a drunken blacksmith."

"You said women were without faith in man," insinuated the salesman, "what has that remark to do with this exceptionally pretty girl?"

Ira sat for a moment in silence, while a smile flickered in his thoughtful eyes, then he leaned forward and the traveling man knew that his was the privilege to hear the tale.

"Her mother died when Essie was a little girl, so her upbringing was left to the father, Tom Barnes. Tom is a good-hearted fellow, but too prone to follow the philosophy of Omar, the Persian poet, so naturally Essie missed the guidance and advice of a good woman. Until she was sixteen, it didn't matter so much, for the town people felt sorry for Essie, everybody sort of mothered her, and the banker's daughter skipped rope with the blacksmith's child, but when culture was instilled in Moab, Essie was left by herself.

"Culture was introduced by Mrs. Lawyer Mavis, whose husband picks up a few dollars in legalized blackmail occasionally. Mrs. Mavis visited some relative in the east and upon her return, started a Woman's Club and after installing herself as President, proceeded to educate the poor, ignorant natives into the mysteries of Culture and Class—and all the rest of it.

"I was visiting with Essie in the post office one day, when Mrs. Mavis breezed in. She came over to us, and avoiding

Essie's eyes, stated in her newly acquired accent:

"Essie, there was a mistake made in the invitations sent for my daughter's coming-out party. I believe that the one intended for Miss Bowness was addressed to you by mistake. Dear Ida is so careless."

"I looked at Essie. There was a hurt expression in her soft, brown eyes, and her lips quivered pitifully. Before she could reply, I dashed into the arena.

"Essie was just telling me that she couldn't accept the invitation, Mrs. Mavis. She had already promised to visit her aunt that day.' Essie flashed me a grateful smile and the Priestess of Caste looked relieved.

"Seems queer to think of your daughter having a coming-out party,' I continued, 'I'll never forget when you and Mavis lived in two rooms on Main Street and Ida played barefooted in the mud puddles.'

"Mrs. Mavis shuddered at my vulgar reminiscence, but recovered in time to give me a nasty look before leaving.

"Don't you care, Essie,' I comforted. 'What's a party more or less?'

"But I do care, Mr. Jackson,' she cried, her eyes sparkling with indignation. 'All the girls are cutting me and I haven't done a wrong thing. The other day, a girl sneered something about the Village Smithy. It's not fair!'

Ira leaned back in his chair and sighed, while an expression of pain clouded his eyes.

"We can skip over the next two years. Only one who has lived their life in a small town, can realize the torture that can be inflicted on a young girl by ostracism. I was having a series of—what proved to be useless—treatments for my paralytic condition, and like most invalids, my interest was centred upon myself.

"Then, like a bolt from the sky, I heard that Essie Barnes had a baby. You can imagine the furore the news caused in this moral atmosphere. I was confined to my

bed at the time so I could not visit the poor lass, but I sent her a note urging her to buck up and take nothing from nobody.

"The next shock, was the report that the Woman's Club was going to call on Essie *en masse*, which they did. I heard of the whole affair from Essie and those present, so I am pretty familiar with what occurred.

"Three weeks after the baby had arrived, they swooped down on Essie, headed by their resolute leader, Mrs. Mavis. Essie met them at the door, white and frail-looking but with a strangely self-possessive gleam in her eyes. She invited them into the small parlor, where they seated themselves gingerly on the chairs and sofa. The sixteen members filled the room with bustling femininity.

"Mrs. Mavis, who had remained standing, faced Essie and announced that the club had called to inform her that her trespasses were forgiven.

"The main reason,' she concluded stiffly, 'is because the Modern Woman has done away with the Single Standard.'

"Esse looked about in bewilderment. She could not understand this line of reasoning, but before she could reply, Mrs. Harlow, our best gossip, arose.

"Neither do I condemn thee,' she quoted with a salacious smirk on her face, 'go, and sin no more!'

"This, Essie understood and she gasped with humiliation and resentment.

"However, there is one duty you owe us,' Mrs. Mavis' voice rose above the confused whispering. 'You must tell us, Essie, who is the father of this child. He must be made to pay the penalty for his wrong. We shall see that he marries you at once.'

"Essie raised a hand to her mouth to prevent an outcry and the red flamed her cheeks. She remained silent, while every eye in the room was directed on her. She looked slowly about examining each face in turn, but nowhere did

she find kindly sympathy. Everywhere was curiosity, malevolence or condemnation. Her eyes narrowed and nervously wetting her dry lips, she turned away from the barrage of unfriendly eyes for a few seconds. Then her slender shoulders straightened, and with a new dignity in face and bearing, she turned and smiled faintly.

"He could not marry me,' she stated simply. 'He is a married man.'

"For a moment, the president's mouth remained open, then it closed with a vicious snap.

"All the more reason that you should tell, Essie,' she urged in a stern voice. 'He cannot marry you, of course, if he is already married, but you owe it to this community to expose this—this libertine.' Essie raised a hand deprecatingly.

"Oh! I wouldn't call him that, Mrs. Mavis. Why, you all know and like him. It is only fair to warn you all, then if you still demand it, I'll tell his name. But it would cause sorrow for his wife and shame and disgrace for the rest of the time that his family lived here.' Her eyes traveled about the room and rested on a framed portrait of her dead mother.

"He is the husband of one of you ladies present!'

"Heavy silence for a moment, then a perfect pandemonium of babble, punctuated by hysterical giggles. Flushed and distraught, Mrs. Mavis rapped for order.

"If that is the case, Essie,' her voice had assumed a friendlier tone, 'Perhaps the question should be put to a vote. As Essie says, the *dénoncement* might cause a lot of misery and no good would be accomplished. I shall pass around slips of paper for your votes. All who desire the man's name to be known, will write "Yes." All who consider it best to remain a secret, will write "No."'

"So," concluded Ira with a dry smile, "the vote was taken and all but one voted, 'No.' And ever since, the women

have been real friendly with Essie; but many a husband in Moab, catches his wife eyeing him with suspicion and distrust over her coffee cup."

"So the paternal mystery remains unsolved?" questioned the salesman. Ira tucked the robe closer about his helpless limbs, then leaned forward.

"To all but me, and I'll tell you because you will help to keep it a secret. When Essie whispered in my ear to-day, it was to tell me that her tale to the women was a hoax and that the daddy of her baby was Ommen, the lad she married this morning."

"But see here," cried the traveling

man, "your first remark to me, was that, 'All women were a suspicious lot. That no woman had faith in man.'"

"I did," acknowledged Ira calmly.

"But you told me that *one* of the women voted to have the man's name published. There was a woman who had faith in her husband! For Heaven's sake! Give her the credit! Who was she?"

Ira had started to propel his chair across the porch, but paused. Smiling ironically, he cut a generous slice from his tobacco plug, and replied in a laconic tone:

"My wife!"



## WHEN TO SAY "NO!"

By Betty Osborn

What a tiny girl on Mother's knee  
A lot of things did not agree  
With my digestion; so, you see,  
I was taught to say "No."

And later, when I went to school  
And did my level best to fool  
The faculty, a little rule  
Taught me to say "No."

And later still, when I grew older  
And men grew bold, and even bolder,  
No iceberg ever did seem colder  
Than I, when I said "No."

But when *you* came along, my dear,  
And looked at me, I had no fear  
Of anything; I just felt queer,  
And I said "No" no longer.

## RETRIEVED

By John V. Watts

PERKINS made one mistake during his married life—a mistake that, coupled with the direct and indirect consequences that followed, he never forgot or was permitted to forget. He is fat, *single* and comfortable now, but the memory of that matrimonial slip and the ensuing penalty will never fade.

Perkins had been married a year when he made the mistake. His wife went to the beach for her health (according to her) and left Perkins to his own diversions. When she returned she found, while rummaging through his clothes in search of "a little bridge money," a square, pink, perfumed envelope. Now Mrs. Perkins, as befits the custom of all loyal, loving wives, had written her husband regularly during her absence—but she had never used square, pink, perfumed envelopes. The inference, to misquote a time-honored epigram, was intuitive.

Mrs. Perkins did not leave her husband or notify him that she would sue him for divorce. With a shrewdness befitting a female Machiavelli, she chose a much more effective course of reprisal.

For six months Mrs. Perkins made Perkins' waking moments, if not exciting, at least unmonotonous. She never let him forget that he had committed a grievous error in carelessly allowing the perfumed missive to fall into her hands. Nor would Perkins' explanation, that the epistle in question had been written by a girlhood sweetheart whom he had not seen in five years, suffice to clear up the veil of doubt and suspicion she enveloped him with.

He was reminded of his unfaithful-

ness at the breakfast table, at lunch, at dinner, and between and after meals. An argument starting with the tranquil discussion of the Bolsheviki or of the patent perils of shedding winter woollens at the first approach of spring (Mrs. Perkins always forced Perkins to wear his until mid-summer in spite of his protests) invariably wound up in a fierce tirade by Mrs. Perkins on the transparent duplicity of the male sex in general and Perkins in particular.

And, strange to say, instead of time and repetition dulling Mrs. Perkins' avidity for these little *mêlées*, like the classic Antæus, she waxed stronger and more eager for the attack with each encounter. Perkins, in turn, grew paler and paler, and thinner and thinner. He begged, he pleaded, he prayed for relief. He threatened desertion, divorce, suicide. But Mrs. Perkins knew him better than that, at least she thought she did.

One night Perkins went to a lodge meeting—he really went there Mrs. Perkins saw to that. In fact, she accompanied him to the lodge rooms and left him safely in the vestibule.

A little after eleven Mrs. Perkins was aroused from a box of chocolates, and the perusal of a novel, of the kind she never let Perkins see her read, by the ring of the telephone. As she unhooked the receiver she wondered who it could be. Probably Mrs. Smith, with a choice bit of news; although the hour was rather late for even such delectable diversion. But the voice that came over the wire, while indubitably feminine, was not Mrs. Smith's. It was strange, fresh, and artfully languorous.

"Is this Mrs. Perkuns?" it asked.

"Mrs. Perkuns?"

"Yes. Who is this?"

"Nemmind. Just a fren'. Say, if you wanna see a sight just come down to Nicoli's an' take a peek at your husban'."

With this remark, followed by an undeniably malicious laugh, the conversation ceased. But it was enough. The damage was done. Mrs. Perkins dressed viciously and rapidly and summoned a taxicab. Five minutes later she stood in the entrance of Nicoli's. She had no difficulty in singling out her husband—and the blond girl sitting across the table from him. Even as she looked, Perkins caught the girl's hand in his and kissed it fervently, looking up into her face with an expression Mrs. Perkins realized she had not seen in his face since—well, since she had found the pink envelope in his pocket. . . .

Mrs. Perkins hated public scenes. So instead of rushing in and getting her name and features in the Sunday Supplements, and perhaps the movies, she turned around and walked out of Nicoli's.

It was five minutes before the curtain rose on the opening scene at the "Gaiety," that precious five minutes when theatrical and untheatrical gossip fliest fastest.

A tall girl, struggling into a carefully abbreviated costume of near-silk, giggled suddenly and turned to a girl at

the mirror busily engaged in accurately misplacing her eyebrows.

"Say, Gert, 'member that guy Teddy interduced me to last night?"

"Mm-mm."

"Well, watta ya think, he took me to Nicoli's an' set me up to a swell feed—an' say—that ain't all—in the middle of it he sez:

"Do me a favor an' this is yours."

"With that he flashes a century on me.

"Sure!" sez I. 'T'd kill the President's cook for that.'

"He scribbles somethin' on the back of a card an' says:

"Call up this number an' ask for Mrs. Perkuns. Tell her her husban's in Nicoli's."

"Well, Gert, yuh know I ain't no scandal houn', but that century looked mighty good to me, so I swallows my rambuncions an' goes to a phone booth an' calls up the number on the card an' tells her what he said. He gives me the century all right an' thanks me, an' we finish the eats. Right at the en' he gets kin' o' nervous an' keeps watchin' the door as if he's lookin' for somebody—then all of a sudden he takes a turrible fancy to me an' kisses my han' an' gives me the calfiest look imaginable. I can't understan' it cause he was right nice up to that minnit—must a' bin the Virginia Dare we was drinkin'. Though God knows how a guy could get jingled with that stuff, especially with all the hoof taken out o' it. . . ."



# When Women Love

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State of New York, County of New York.

Before me, a Notary Public, in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared C. H. Young, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the editor of BREEZY STORIES, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 443, Postal Laws and Regulations, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publishers, editors, managing editor and business managers are: Publishers, C. H. Young Publishing Co., Inc., 377 Fourth Avenue, New York, N. Y.; editor, C. H. Young, 377 Fourth Avenue, New York, N. Y.; managing editor, C. H. Young, 377 Fourth Avenue, New York, N. Y.; business manager, none.

2. That the owners are: C. H. Young Publishing Co., Inc., 377 Fourth Avenue, New York; C. H. Young, 377 Fourth Avenue, New York.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent. or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None.

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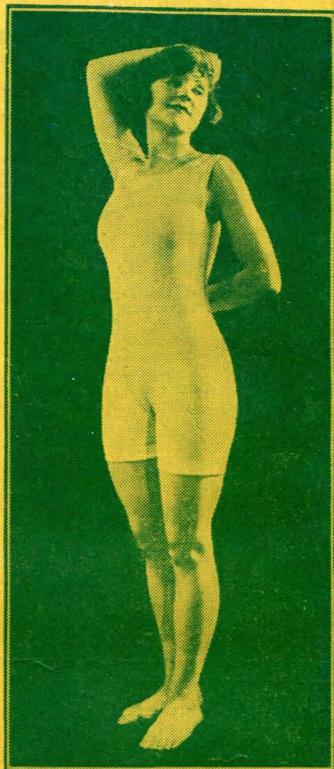
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