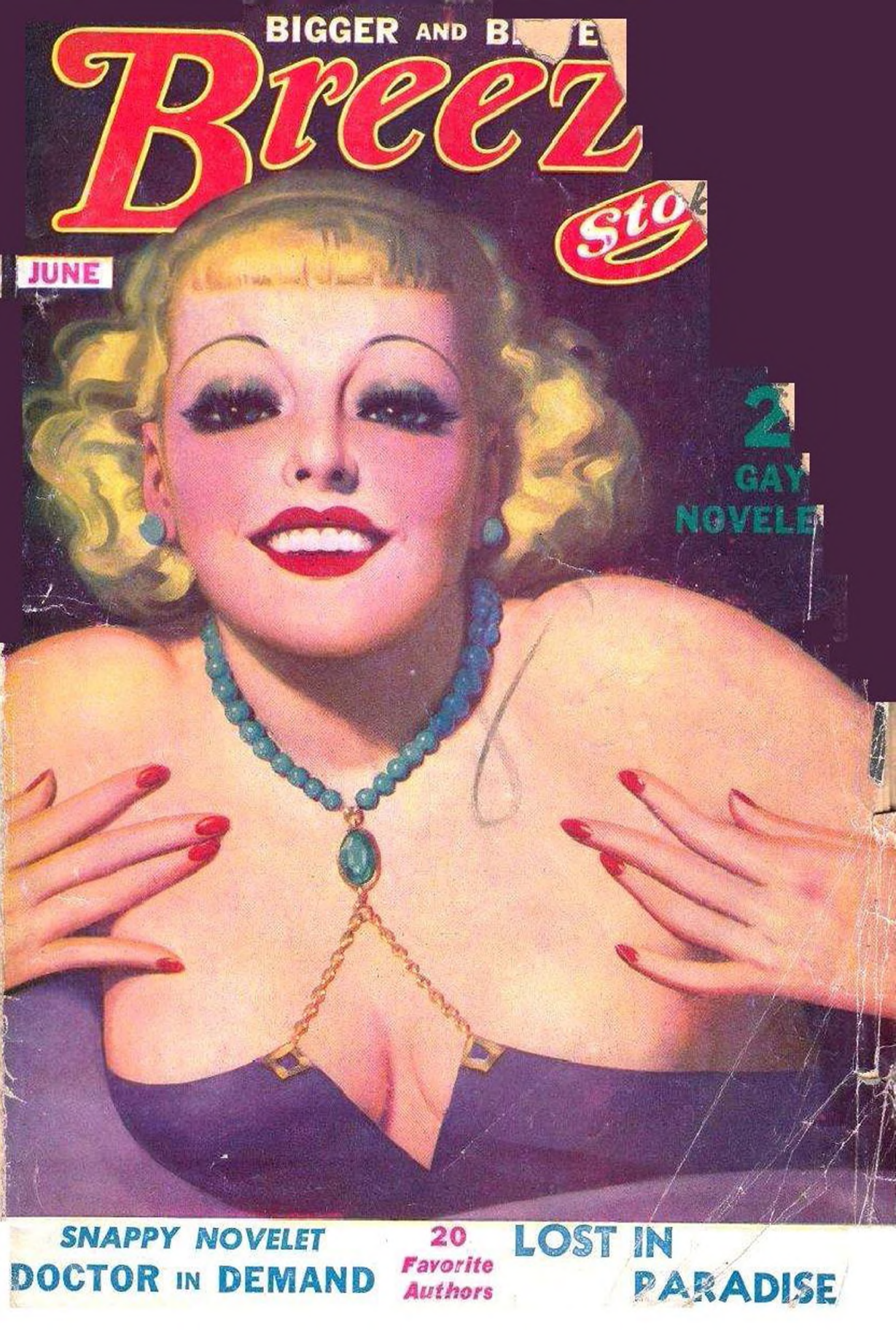
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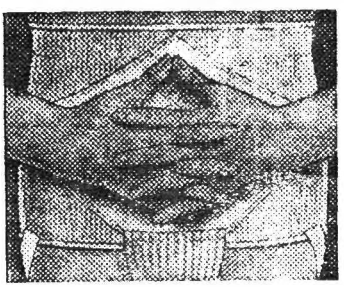

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Vol. 55, No. 12, Breezy Stories for June, 1946. Published bi-monthly by the Phil Painter Publications, Inc., Phil Painter, President. 480 Lexington Ave., New York 17, N. Y. Subscription $1.50 for twelve issues; Foreign, $2.72; Single Copies, 15 cents. Entered as second-class matter at the Post Office at New York, N. Y. Additional entry at the Post Office at Springfield, Mass.

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Lisa Cairns was lovely—very lovely.

The Doctor in Demand

By STEVE MARTIN

FEDORA COTTER'S house-parties were justly famous. She assembled the nicest people who liked to do reckless things. Her nearest neighbor was a mile down the Sound and the atmosphere was perfect for murder—and less dangerous, but more thrilling crimes.

The guests usually assembled on Friday night. Some came before dinner, some after. It didn't matter; there was always a buffet and tinkling shaker. That was the chief joy of Fedora's house-parties. Nothing mattered. The maid showed you to a room with a sort of apologetic air. There was no compulsion about you occupying it, however. There were plenty of rooms and no keys. The servants could be trusted. Oh my, yes; but not the guests. Your money and jewels, of course; that is the mineral jewels. Of course, if you considered your virtue a jewel—well, my dear, keep away from Fedora Cotter's house-parties.

Lisa Cairns yawned over the fireplace with Fay Mannering in the dull minutes between dinner and bridge.

"Not that it matters," Lisa said, "but there are two people I don't know and, of course, it's against Fedora's code ever to introduce anybody."

"Maybe I can help you," Fay Mannering volunteered. "I arrived early—"

"The stunning woman in brown," Lisa indicated, "and the gorgeous man with the devastating black eyes."

"Fedora's mother and physician, respectively and respectably" Fay said with a slightly triumphant manner.

"Why are all these charming women Mrs. Somebody or other," Dr. Gene interrupted.

"You don't mean to tell me that stunning woman is Fedora's own mother; not her real mother? A step or foster, or—or—"

"Or—or nothing. She's her honest-to-goodness mother, and in spite of her looks I understand that she is a creature. Goes in for the uplift, the abolition of divorce, and all that sort of thing."

"Not really! Is Fedora mad to have her here with us?"

"Fedora didn't know it, of course. She just dropped in. Mothers and husbands will, you know. But Fedora says we should be our own, natural selves and let mother get a complete ear and eyeful and it may cure her of the habit of dropping in."

"And then again it may not. I'm sure I saw her taking a glass of wine."

"Oh, I guess she's a good sport; you can tell that from her clothes. When in New York do as the New Yorkers do."

"Well, if she behaves in the New York manner that is usual at Fedora's house-parties, the uplift will be dealt a terrible blow. But I think she has her daughter badly bluffed. You can't tell me a woman who looks as young as she does has led a respectable life, at what must be her age now to have produced Fedora, within the laws of nature? But that settles mother, Fay?"

Where in the world did Fedora find that Mephistopic physician. My jaded eyes haven't looked up anything so grand since I left the old country."

"Where does Fedora find anybody? In a settlement house, or possibly in a basket on her door-step—"

"Now, Fay, darling, that is feline. He isn't that infantile."

"I didn't mean that, but Fedora is just a wizard at producing things—especially men. But I think it is a panic having your own private physician at each and every house-party. Not that it isn't necessary in these days of flu and flutter."

"Well, I for one would certainly have confidence in those eyes."

"That depends, of course, upon what you want to be confident of—"

"Of course, he has a certain appeal."

"Which I have no doubt he is trying to transform into a definite checks appeal. Like most young and struggling doctors just out of the army."

"That one won't struggle long, honey," Lisa opined.

Fedora Cotter wandered over to her guests.

"Mother is having a wonderful time now that she is convinced birth control is a mistake and is investigating divorce, she is quite human. Bridge,

"Oh, of course. Somehow, I must make expenses —"

"Lisa?"

"I think not, unless you need me to complete a table, dear. As a matter of fact, I'm rather off my feed. I suspect I haven't been drinking enough this week."

Fedora looked at her carefully and then laughed. "I get you. I've seen your vampish eye upon Doctor Gene. Very well, I'll bring him to you. He may be wonderful on the operating table, but at the bridge table he is not so hot. I'll send him right over."

"Do. Little as you may believe me, I'm in actual need of him."

"That I might believe."

The tall, dark young man with the destructive eyes came promptly over to Lisa, draped most decoratively on the low bench before the fireplace. He carried two tiny glasses of cordial.

His voice was quite as liquid as the cordial he carried. "Mrs. Cotter said I should introduce myself. I'm Eugene Latham, commonly known as Doctor Gene—just out of the army."

"Oh, never commonly known, I'm sure, Doctor Gene," Lisa purred. She made room for him—but not *too* much room—on the bench beside her.

"Are you prescribing a liqueur for me?" Lisa asked accepting the drink and letting her fingers rest for a moment on his hand. She liked his hand; it was a strong and efficient hand, and —of course—a well-kept hand.

"No indeed! Knowing the quality of most liquors these days, I'm giving it to you in the firm belief that I'll have to prescribe for you later on."

"The prospect doesn't alarm me in the least." She raised her glass to the level of his eyes and sipped the liqueur.

"You haven't told me your name," Doctor Gene pointed out.

Fedora Cotter, charming, broadminded hostess.

"As if that mattered! But if you are interested in statistics, I'm Mrs. Cairns. But for heaven's sake just call me Lisa—formerly Lizzie on Staten Island, now Lisa on Long—"

"Why are all the charming women Mrs. somebody or other?" the doctor interrupted.

"Merely for our self-protection," Lisa assured him. "I trust you don't let that stop you. After all, you're a doctor of medicine, not of divinity, aren't you?"

"Oh, I don't let anything stop me," Doctor Gene firmly assured her.

"That's comforting," Lisa cooed. Her eyes were laughing, but the young doctor did not smile. He was evidently quite an earnest young member of the profession.

Dark-eyed men so often are, Lisa reflected. "Tell me," she said, "what are the chances of grafting a little bit of medical advice? Or do you loathe people who talk shop after hours?"

"I couldn't possibly loathe you un-

der any circumstances," the doctor promptly and correctly replied, "and I adore talking shop."

Lisa sighed comfortably and stretched her feet to the fire. Both the fire and the doctor were apparently slightly inflamed by the sight of her very lovely ankles; the fire sputtered, the doctor remained calm.

"Well, Doctor Gene," Lisa confessed, "I'm a chronic sufferer from insomnia, and I simply cannot get any doctor or specialist to take the slightest interest in my case."

"Impossible!" Doctor Gene said flatly. "You must have written to them."

Her eyes questioned.

"If they had seen you—" he explained.

"Sweet! But do you really think you could do anything for me?"

"I'm sure I can," Doctor Gene replied with a world of confidence, "but of course, I would have to observe all the symptoms."

"Observe! Mayn't I tell them to you?"

"Wouldn't do at all," he explained in a dry, professional voice. "Insomnia is entirely neurotic, and no one can correctly relate their own neurotic experiences. They must be observed."

"Well you sound alarming but efficient, Doctor, and I think I shall put myself in your hands. But how will you observe all my symptoms? Must I go to a hospital—"

"No," he interrupted, "that would be a very poor second best. The most satisfactory thing would be to observe you in your normal surroundings, under all the normal conditions. However—"

"I get your point of view and it seems logical indeed." Her seriousness matched his. "When could you take me on?"

"There is no time like the present," Doctor Gene replied, "while you're in the humor."

"To be sure! While I'm in the humor. I'm on the second floor—the blue wing. You'd never get the right door, of course, so at two o'clock—that should be safe—I'll come out into the hall, and go back into my room. And —do you think you can observe all the necessary symptoms in one night? Hal—my husband—will be here in the morning, and, of course, I don't want to have him worried about this. Sometimes I stay awake all night, so don't take any other patients."

"I don't contemplate being rushed," Doctor Gene assured her.

"You never can tell. And now that our professional appointment is arranged, shall we dance?"

The young doctor sprang to his feet. "Delighted."

The party was a gay one and went its usual course. Doctor Gene danced with the various women as they cut out of the bridge game. That evening they seemed unusually willing to cut out.

"You seem to have made quite a conquest," Fedora, the hostess, teased him. "Lisa is usually quite the icicle—"

"Which is Lisa?" Doctor Gene asked with studied carelessness.

"Now! Now! You know very well which is Lisa; you were in deep consultation by the fire for an hour—"

"Oh, Mrs. Cairns! Very charming, of course. All your guests are charming. But who is the extraordinarily lovely one in brown who has never stopped playing bridge."

Fedora giggled. "That is my mother —and I warn you—she is not one of the bunch—"

"Impossible! Aside from her daughter, she is quite the loveliest person

I've seen for many a moon."

"Don't tell her! She wouldn't be in the least impressed. But if you say you saw her article, in the Sunday papers, on advice to mothers, she'll purr!"

Along towards midnight when the bridge games were breaking up and the liquor and wine bottles were being assaulted, Fedora, Lisa, Fay Mannering, Adele Persons and Sybil Dorsett met for a little conference.

"How do you like my personal physician?"

"I can't make up my mind whether he is ridiculously conceited or unbelievably naïve."

"I think he is charming, but quite aware of it."

The five lovely, hair-dos went close together. A gay laugh rang out.

Adele Persons

II

DOCTOR GENE thought he was being spoofed, but he was conscientious and had never failed to respond to a sick call. Besides Lisa Cairns was lovely—very lovely. But then all of them were stunners. Not since he had left the Irish hospital, where he had been an interne, had he seen so much gorgeous femininity gathered together in one spot.

Still it was rather undignified for an established physician to be waiting in the close confines of the linen closet in the blue wing, second floor, with the door opened just the slightest bit. He was just about to drop off in a doze when he heard a light step. Lisa Cairns, a floating vision of pastel chiffons, sauntered into the hall, gazed from a window in true idyllic fashion, and went back into her room. It was almost somnambulistic. The lights in Fedora's hallways were properly shaded and very dim indeed. Doctor Gene slipped quickly from the linen closet through the almost imperceptibly opened door into Lisa's room.

"Pardon my informal appearance," Doctor Eugene apologized, "but I share a suite with a chap and there didn't seem to be any real excuse for my not undressing. As it happens, he's out too."

"He would be, of course. You aren't acquainted with the little amusements of Fedora's house-party. With whom are you sharing a suite?"

"Keitherling, I think his name is—a rather starved looking chap."

"He isn't starved. He's just too sympathetic with his misunderstood clients, that's all. He's also probably out giving professional advice. He's

Fay Mannering whispered "I haven't got the door key."

a lawyer you know; he gets all of my divorces—"

"How many have you had?" Doctor Eugene demanded.

"Now don't make me do arithmetic."

He suddenly stood up and towered above her. She was curled up on the *chaise-longue,* a breath-taking figure with velvet robe drawn over the chiffon wisps which concealed little of her exquisite body.

"How do men let you go once they have had you? I never should."

She laughed lightly. "Maybe I let them go. It has been done."

His firm fingers encircled her wrist. "I would see to it that you did not let me go!"

"Are you by any chance feeling my pulse? If so it seems to be quite an uncomfortable operation."

"I am not feeling your pulse. Is your heart fluttering? My own is going madly."

"Mine is under better control," she replied drily. "My blood pressure is low, you know. That is probably why I don't sleep. Suppose you go over to that little stand in the corner and fix a little drink."

"I don't want a drink. I'm intoxicated right now. With something far more potent than liquor—"

He sat down quickly on the narrow *chaise-longue* and crushed her into his arms. She disengaged herself and jumped lightly to her feet.

"But I do," she said and moved over to the table where the friendly bottles and bowl of ice were waiting.

Doctor Gene did not move from the *chaise-longue.* He contemplated her quizzically. She returned his gaze calmly enough and went on preparing the drinks.

"So considerate of you to wear a robe to match my suite," Lisa said. "And I'm so glad Fedora didn't put me in the green room. I imagine you would be quite livid in green."

She brought him the drink and he sipped it without enthusiasm. Lisa did not return to the *chaise-longue* but sat rather stiffly upon a chair.

"Now what should I do? That is—so you can properly diagnose my case."

"Relaxing is the most important."

He crossed the room and dropped to his knees by her side. His arms encircled her slim waist and his finger crushed the delicate chiffons of her robe.

"Let me cure your restlessness," he whispered directly into her ear.

Her voice was rather hard. "I'll never relax if you act this way."

"Oh, yes you will. Let me love you

—and make you forget your nerves."

She pushed him away almost roughly and sat upright in a listening attitude.

"What is that? It sounds like a motor. Who in the world could be coming at this hour? I wonder if by any chance it could be Hal? He is the sort of husband who gives one surprises."

Doctor Gene puffed calmly away at his cigarette. After all he was the physician, although he didn't have his diploma or license with him.

"When is he due?" he asked.

Lisa Cairns, he decided, knew well enough it was not her husband and was merely putting him to a test.

"He's not due until morning," Lisa replied. "I guess it isn't he, but he is one of those tricky husbands. He's my last—absolutely my last."

Suddenly without warning, Doctor Gene swept her into his arms and out of the chair.

"Put me down," she said quite crossly.

"I'm going to," he replied, "on the proper place to study your case!"

There was a light tap, tap at the door. Doctor Gene put his patient on her feet somewhat quickly.

"It was Hal," she whispered. "Of course—it's all right—a professional visit, but he doesn't know you, and if he had been drinking— He has a permit to carry a gun."

The knock upon the door was rather peremptorily repeated. The skillful hands of Doctor Gene trembled slightly.

"I think maybe you'd better go into the bathroom. I share it with the Mannerings; they're good sports and will let you go through their room. So sorry."

The knock upon the door was emphatically repeated, and Doctor Gene, without hurrying, went through the door into a beautiful bathroom. There was the other door, slightly open, leading into the room of the mythical Mannerings. He tried to recall the Mannerings. He believed Mannering was the chap who drank a tumblerful of brandy every time any one else had a cocktail. By now, he should be soundly asleep. But there was a light. It seemed rather ridiculous to knock upon a door leading from a bathroom. He wished he could think of the proper etiquette, but he doubted if even Emily Post could help him out. Some action was necessary, since in the room from which he had just emerged, he could hear the heavy footsteps of the unexpected husband. Undoubtedly if he had just arrived by automobile, he would soon seek a bath. Doctor Gene tapped upon the door, slightly ajar, and felt inordinately foolish—but rather foolish than shot.

"I was tight," said Sybil.

III

"COME IN, Lisa," a cheerful voice called. "I was wondering if you weren't coming in to say good night."

Doctor Gene emerged. "It isn't, Lisa, Mrs. Mannering," he said somewhat humbly.

A surprised woman—a very handsome woman (but then all the women at Fedora's house-party were handsome)—sat up in bed and drew the black and purple coverlets up under her chin. She was not creamed or strait-jacketed. She was quite exquisite enough to receive any company—DuBarry waiting for His Majesty. And now that Doctor Gene was recovering his dignity, there was something kingly about him.

"No," the astonished woman said relaxing her hold upon the coverlets, and revealing a night *négligé* of shimmering gold. "I can see it isn't Lisa. I don't believe I called the doctor, but then—"

"Maybe you were thinking of me. I often answer telepathic calls," Doctor Gene suggested.

"That is service."

"And now that I am here, what may I prescribe?"

Doctor Gene drew up a chair and calmly sat at the bedside in his best professional manner. He felt it would be manifestly foolish to offer any explanation; he had come from the bathroom leading from Lisa Cairn's room, and that was that. There was no one's reputation to be considered. When people came to Fedora's house-parties they were supposed to leave their reputations in the city. Mr. Mannering was evidently still consuming tumblerfuls of brandy in the regions below. At any rate, there were no visible signs of him.

"I don't believe I need a prescription," the lady in bed assured the physician, "but if you feel the need of a stimulant—and I rather imagine you do—you'll find the necessary in that small cabinet."

"That's sweet of you, but don't you think I'd better be on my way, before—before—"

"Before what?"

"Before your husband arrives."

The lady in bed appeared to be thinking that over.

"I don't think he'll be here for quite a while yet. He's playing poker and that usually means daylight down here."

Doctor Gene advanced upon the small cabinet. "Anyway that's a good story and I certainly shall have a drink. Unless," he added as an afterthought, "you were expecting some one else."

The lady in bed consulted her gold and black onyx wrist-watch which so perfectly matched her *négligé* and coverlets. "No, I don't think so," she said languidly. "Anyway, have a drink—"

Doctor Gene decided that while the ladies of Fedora's house-party might be loose in their ethics, they were decidedly haughty in their conduct. He rather preferred the more free and easy manner of women he met when he had been an interne. At any rate, he carefully prepared two drinks and bringing one over to the lady, sat down upon the edge of her studio couch.

She accepted the glass. "Please have a chair," she suggested with casual sweetness. "I think sitting on a bed is dreadfully uncomfortable and then it is supposed to be bad luck—"

"Well that depends! Anyway, I thought we could talk better—"

"Oh, so we're going to talk?"

The doctor grinned. "No, I haven't anything to say in particular—"

"If we're going to talk, I mustn't take this drink. One drink at this hour of the night and I always fall into he heaviest slumber."

There was something rather cold, almost premeditated about this Mrs. Mannering, Doctor Gene decided. And yet he was quite disappointed. He thought every one at Fedora's house-parties was—well, more agreeable. And Mrs. Mannering was an exotic, ravishing picture in her purples and blacks and gold. Rather more to his taste than the lovely Lisa in fact. Undoubtedly, she *must* have other plans.

"Then I suppose the thing for me to do," he said somewhat surlily, "is to have my drink and wander out."

"Yes," Mrs. Mannering agreed, "that would be the thing to do—from your point of view—but I have other plans and—"

Doctor Gene looked his question. "Of course, I'm always ready to fit into a lady's plans."

"You're really heaven-sent, Doctor Gene! Almost an answer to the so-as-to-speak maiden's prayer. For years I have wanted to test my husband—"

Doctor Gene sprang to his feet and almost upset his drink. "Oh, I say!"

She stopped him with a gesture. "Please let me finish. He is—apparently—one of the most stupid husbands in the world. This is always the situation I have wished him to discover. I simply must watch his reactions!"

"Very interesting, but even as a physician, I'm afraid I haven't any interest in your husband's reactions."

"No, I suppose not," the lady conceded, "but I'm going to be selfish and gratify my own wishes. After all, when you come bursting into a private bedroom from a supposedly private bath you must take the chance that any burglar would take. You might have been shot as you came through that door."

"That is very true," Doctor Gene admitted, "but since I wasn't, it is manifestly ridiculous for me to sit around, waiting to be shot by a husband with reactions."

"Oh, you won't be shot," the lady assured him. "My husband doesn't carry a gun."

That was something, the doctor reflected. Lisa Cairns had said that her husband had a permit. Doctor Gene decided that if he came to any more of Fedora Cotter's house-parties he would have to get one.

"My husband," the lady went on, "will probably be very drunk and harmless. These wild ones usually are you know when it comes to the showdown."

"So he's a wild one! Well, if I'm going to be caught, I certainly shan't be caught in a Windsor chair."

Again he advanced to tne ornate couch and again the gaudy lady sat stiffly upright and drew the black and purple coverings up to her chin.

"I warn you," she said, and there was something in her voice that was convincing, "if you come any nearer, I shall scream violently. And after all, there are worse things than being caught by an intoxicated husband."

Doctor Gene turned on his heel and away from the gorgeous couch. The woman was making a fool of him and he felt undignified. He went firmly over to the door leading into the hall. It was efficiently locked.

"May I trouble you for the key?" he said frigidly.

The lady relaxed and rested upon the massed pillows. She giggled.

"I wouldn't give it to you if I had it," she informed him, "but fortunate-

ly—since I am so easily persuaded—I'm locked in."

"That's absurd," Doctor Gene snapped, "you can't make me believe your husband is bluebeard enough to lock his wife in her bedroom. That is just too medieval."

"I hadn't thought of it in that way! But you see, I was really dead for sleep—you have a great deal to answer for, doctor—and I didn't want to be bothered by Fedora or Adele or any of them, so I had my ogre husband lock me in."

"But it's dangerous," Doctor Gene pointed out pedantically. "Suppose there were a fire?"

"Everything in life is dangerous," the lady placidly replied, "and the danger from fire is certainly remote. And then there is the bath into Lisa's room as you have discovered. Do sit down and have your drink and stop thinking about absurd dangers."

Doctor Gene obeyed. After all, there didn't seem to be much point arguing with this strong-minded and apparently intoxicated DuBarry. He poured himself a stiff highball and did not even offer the lady one, but she placidly switched off her reading light and closed her eyes. He rather wished he had not left the other room. Still it was probably preferable to meet the intoxicated Mannering than the permit-carrying Hal Cairns. The doctor meditated upon that.

Suddenly, he sat up with a start. Undoubtedly he had been dozing. Well, that showed poise, he reflected with self-congratulation. Or, possibly, potent Scotch, slightly etherized. The gorgeous lady in the ornate couch was breathing heavily; she, too, was asleep. Doctor Gene moved stealthily around the room. There was a French window. He opened it; luck was with him. There was a porch below with a handy, sloping roof. Undoubtedly he would find a window open from the porch. Fedora never locked up. Since that was that, there was no hurry.

He returned to the room and gently kissed the sleeping beauty. And she was a beauty; there was no question about that. She moved slightly and one arm reached up about his neck.

"Lover!" she whispered without opening an eye.

Almost afraid to breathe, Doctor Gene sat down. Then he heard a heavy, unsteady step in the hall-way. The gorgeous lady sat up quickly, and screamed—a ladylike subdued scream but nevertheless a scream.

Doctor Gene, cursing bitterly, fled through the French window, and crawled carefully down the sloping porch of the roof. Quite a preposterous amount of loves' labors lost.

IV

HE reached his room after barking his shins and a few other minor accidents but without disturbing anyone—not even a servant. He felt rather relieved and then disgusted. All these escapes and during exploits and for nothing. He had been to two banquets and then returned home starving. And at Fedora Cotter's house-party—of all places.

He flashed on the lights and looked at his little clock. Three o'clock! Not late as things went on Long Island but what to do? He felt check-mated. The sensible thing to do was to go to bed but he never felt more wide-awake or less sensible in his life. He heard a faint, unmistakable sound and quickly turned. Then he switched off his brilliant, centre lights and turned on one over his dressing table.

Without turning, he could see the lovely vision reflected in the dressing

table mirror. It was charming; an eerie, St. Agnes eve effect. What were the lines of Keats? He couldn't remember but they would have been appropriate.

Curled up on his austere, almost monastic couch was a softly breathing bundle of fair fluffiness. He remembered her from earlier in the evening, but she was very much more attractive now. Strange how evening clothes and heavy make-up ruin some women. She Adele—or Sybil somebody—he couldn't, for the life of him, remember but what difference did it make? Curled up there, breathing so easily, she seemed little more than a child—a kitten with a pink ribbon. But she wasn't a child. Children were not asked to Fedora's house-parties.

Fancy her coming to his room and falling asleep waiting for him. It was positively touching. How long had she been there? Probably several hours. Dreadful to have kept her waiting. He contemplated her. She was far more his type than the gorgeous Lisa or the haughty and analytical Mrs. Mannering. This time he would play safe; he would take no chances.

He tiptoed across the room, locked the door leading into the hall and slipped the key into his pocket. Then he switched off the light over the dressing table. He sat on the floor just below the curled-up bit of fluff. Masterfully, he took her into his arms and kissed her.

She stirred, gasped, and leaped from his arms with all the speed and agility of the kitten she so resembled. She did not scream but she spoke with tearful agitated pleading.

"Oh, please—turn on the light!"

Her voice was desperately imploring and Doctor Gene obeyed. Crouched in the corner of the room, she surveyed him with wide, frightened eyes.

"It's you—doctor! Thank—thank heavens!"

"Why so tragic? Who did you suppose it would be? I suppose you've been sleep-walking."

"No, worse! . was frightfully tight and—"

"You don't show it."

"I must have slept it off. I think I've been here for hours and hours. What must you think of me?"

"Shall I tell you?"

She blushed delightfully. Imagine Fedora having a guest at her house-party who still could blush!

"May I sit down for a minute?" she asked dropping into his reading chair as she asked the question.

"Two minutes," Doctor Gene promptly replied. "But come over here—as you were."

"Dear, no! What must you think of me? I was so ill when I came looking for you. I tried to sit on the chair and I just couldn't hold my head up, and then I flopped on that rug on the floor, but it was so hard. I thought I would just rest—and then I fell asleep."

"And I awakened you. But you don't look in the least tight now."

"I'm not; that's the wonderful part of it. I've slept it off. But I was a wreck when I came in here—I'm really glad now that you didn't see me. I didn't think I would live unless you did something for me. I'm really not accustomed to such intensive drinking. And where were you? Somebody else was ill, I suppose?"

"Well, more or less—"

"I didn't have nerve enough to send one of the maids for you. I thought it would be simpler to come to your room."

"Much simpler," Doctor Gene agreed, "but how did you know which was my room?"

"Madame Zernski happened to say

your room was directly across from hers, and I knew which was her room."

"That was fortunate!" There was irony in his voice.

Her reply was almost tearful. "It wasn't really wrong for me to come to you, was it, doctor? I thought one could always consult a physician with perfect propriety at any time or place."

Doctor Gene laughed. "You adorable child. Come over here, and let me tell you and show you what's right and what's wrong. Doctor knows."

The girl looked at him reproachfully. "Now I know you're teasing me and think I'm horribly forward. If you knew how sick I had been—"

"I am only frightfully ashamed that I was not here when you arrived. You will never have the same feeling about the profession again? Let me see—it's frightfully stupid of me, of course, but you are Adele, aren't you? Or Sybil?"

She had a very definite dimple in her right cheek. Rather high for a dimple, the doctor decided clinically. Almost under her eye. But very lovely.

"I'm Sybil," she said with a dimple demonstration, "or—or Adele. I'll tell you tomorrow and you can tell me all about the proper ethics of consulting a physician."

"I don't care whether you're Sybil or Adele, and I'm going to show you the proper method of consulting a physician tonight—right now!"

She got up from her chair slowly. "Now I don't think you're being very nice and I'm going right back to my room. It's terrible anyway—if one of the girls should have dropped in and found me gone."

The doctor's voice was a little strident; he was becoming annoyed. "Don't be too silly," he suggested. "You came here to consult me and now before I've even felt your pulse, you're going to dash madly to your room. I'm sure my mere presence can't be quite that curative."

"I'm beginning to think I was very foolish to come here at all. But I was tight and I seem to have completely slept it off, so I won't bother you any more—"

She walked over to the door and slowly, quietly turned the knob. But, of course, the door did not respond. The doctor with grim satisfaction felt the key in his dressing-gown pocket.

Her voice quivered with indignation. "You've locked this door. Please open it immediately, or I'll—I'll—"

"Go ahead, scream," Doctor Gene said placidly. "Scream!"

She stamped her foot. "You know very well I can't scream in your room. Now if it were my room, I certainly would."

"I thought you would see that," Doctor Gene said complacently. "So let's talk this thing over."

"There's nothing to talk over—you're being very nasty, and unprofessional—I know that—"

The doctor laughed. 'Now see here, child; don't be that way. You know very well you didn't come here just because you weren't feeling well. As long as you insist upon the professional line, you must admit you were hardly observing office hours."

"Well—maybe, but, anyway, I certainly wouldn't have come if I hadn't been tightish, and—and I slept it all off—"

"Exactly! And woke up with a conscience. Well that's just too bad, because I haven't been asleep at all, and am burning up without any conscience whatsoever."

He took the girl into his arms with a gesture that was more eager than

affectionate.

"I think you're drunk," the girl accused.

"Drunk with love," Doctor Gene said. He had the feeling, and it was correct, that he had said the same thing before that night.

"Please—please—let me go. I—I'm almost a good girl, really—doctor—"

The doctor released her. It was difficult to laugh and be vehemently passionate at the same time and he felt that he had to laugh.

"And just what is 'almost a good girl?' And surely if you are almost a good girl, this won't matter much, and you can be not-quite-so-good a girl. If it's just a question of degree —after all what have you against me?"

"Oh, nothing—nothing at all." She sat down rather breathlessly and the doctor let her talk without interrupting her. "You see, I was married when I was very young—"

"Obviously!" And yet he was glad to hear that she had been married. Now his conscience could absolutely cease to function.

"I soon found out that I had been very, very foolish, and that I didn't love my husband, and I did love some one else. My husband found out and divorced me and I didn't love the other man after all. It showed me that I was not the promiscuous type, and I must wait until my true mate comes along. And so I've really been absolutely straight."

"Not the slightest bit curved?"

"Not the tiniest bit."

"Waiting for your true mate?"

She did not reply but squirmed her toe around on the rug.

"And did you think," Doctor Gene persisted, "that tonight—possibly—I was your true mate?"

"I—I didn't think at all, and I think you're perfectly horrid to tease me. I was so full of liquor—"

Madame X.Y.Z. in her boudoir voice exacted a promise.

"That the true woman asserted herself and you forgot your stupid inhibitions."

"No!"

"Yes, and now I'm just intoxicated enough with Scotch and such-like to assert myself and I'm not going to let you go."

"You'll be sorry!"

"I'll risk that."

His eyes were eager and commanding. He held out his arms with an unspoken demand. She looked around despairingly.

There was a quick, repeated knock upon the hall door. An expression of incredible relief came over the girl's face. Doctor Gene was bitterly furious. He stood motionless and put his finger upon his lips. It was a question of his mesmeric power upon the girl.

The knock was repeated and then a

woman's voice called: "Doctor Gene! Doctor Gene! Please wake up. It's very important. Please, Doctor Gene!"

The voice was undoubtedly that of their hostess, Fedora Cotter. Still Doctor Gene did not move and the girl was equally silent but looking, nevertheless, somewhat triumphant.

Fedora tried the handle of the door. Then she called again. "Doctor Gene! Please—if you're in there—one of my maids is desperately sick."

The devil take the maid. Doctor Gene did not reply. Then the girl—not as yet identified as Adele or Sybil—called out in a shrill, highly affected voice that was not in the least like her own:

"He's in here, Fedora! He's in here."

His mesmerism had not worked.

Now Fedora's voice was furious: "Open this door, Doctor Gene, or I'll have the men break it in!"

Doctor Gene brusquely motioned to his companion to duck into the clothes closet. She promptly obeyed. And then Doctor Gene calmly opened the door. Fedora stood there in picturesque night attire, but not in the least disheveled.

She looked around hastily. "Who is in here?"

Doctor Gene smiled in somewhat tolerant surprise. "After all, my dear Fedora—"

"Oh, of course," Fedora apologized, "but I didn't recognize the voice at all. Your companion is quite an actress—an actress— Oh, of course—how stupid of me!"

Doctor Gene reminded her of her mission. "One of your maids is ill—I believe you were shouting?"

Fedora burst into sudden and unexpected tears. "Poor Selina! For the moment you made me so angry I forgot her. That shows how my jealous nature gets control—"

Doctor Gene patted her shoulder consolingly. "Pull yourself together, Fedora. And I have an idea just how jealous you are!"

"You haven't an idea at all; you treat me shamefully—just shamefully. I invited you down here because I'm a wreck and need your constant care and you make love to every woman in the place. It's just terrible—"

Doctor Gene looked despairingly at the closet. "Please, Fedora—"

"Well, you can't deny it. You told me to go to bed and get a good night's sleep and—and you're up all night long. You're a Don Juan and Casanova all rolled into one."

Doctor Gene laughed sourly. "I'm a colossal failure as both."

"You're—you're terrible. I was here an hour ago and you weren't here. The door wasn't locked then."

Then she should have seen the fluffy one—Adele or Sybil—asleep. That gave Doctor Gene something to think about. Had the fluffy one been fibbing? Hadn't she been there for a couple of hours? Hadn't she been asleep at all when he came in? He looked menacingly to the clothes closet.

"Has your maid been dying all night?" he demanded. "Was she just as sick an hour ago as she is now?"

"It was I an hour ago; I'm just a wreck—a wreck. A fine physician you are. If you have no morals, Doctor Gene, I should think you would at least have a professional conscience. You know I'm upset, anyhow, and then to have mother here, and you know my party disappointed me, and to find you not in your room, and then with—with—"

"Fedora!" said Doctor Gene fiercely, "that will do!"

"That's right! Abuse me! Strike

me! I deserve it, and expect it. And all the time you don't care if my blessed Selina lives or dies. I knew you were heartless, Gene, but I never did suspect that you would be unethical."

"Fedora," Doctor Gene said sternly, "is your maid sick or is she not?"

"Doctor Gene. Do you think I would lie about such a thing?"

"I think," Doctor Gene replied firmly, "you would lie about anything."

Nevertheless he followed her down the hallway as she stalked tragically away.

V

SHE led him through a labyrinth of hallways and back stairways.

"You were showing off," Doctor Gene accused his hostess, holding her arm very firmly. "You wanted to to make my—my guest believe that you owned me, and you know damn' well you's been evading me for months."

"Evading you! Of course, I didn't want your—your guest to think she was stealing the hostess' sweet daddy from right under my nose."

"But I'm not your sweet daddy and that is exactly what I'm complaining about. What is the name without the game?"

"That's your whole attitude—loving me is just a game! If I wanted to evade you, would I have you down to all my parties and pay your wretched bills for professional services?"

"You yourself always preach business to me first and last, my dear Fedora."

"Of course, but then don't say I'm evading you!"

"You are evading me."

In the dimly-lit turn of a stairway he caught her in his arms and held her firmly. His lips feasted on the lovely neck beneath her curly hair.

"You do evade me," he repeated, biting her ear as he whispered into it. "You invite me down here and then always have your husband or your mother or some nieces or nephews with you—"

"They don't share my suite do they? At least mother doesn't—"

"How should I know?"

"I should think you would know the way you were admiring her. But how should you know anything about me, when you're making the rounds half the night and entertaining the other half? Right now I can detect three distinct perfumes on you—*Nuit de Noël, Narcisse Noir,* and *Shalimar.* My goodness! Are you going to let my precious Selina die while you throttle me on the stairway?"

"Don't be ridiculous. Where have you got this dying maid? She must be in some coalbin. I'm not dressed for a professional visit, and I haven't my medicine case—"

"Selina is so sick that your appearance won't make the slightest difference."

"They're never that sick," Doctor Gene said complacently.

The neat room belonging to the maid was quite empty when they reached it. The bed showed signs that some one had been tossing about in it, but otherwise the room was quite immaculate.

"She's dead!" Fedora wailed. "I knew she would die while I was dragging you out of the arms of your vile women."

"Corpses, after all, don't have a habit of leaving their beds after dying," Doctor Gene pointed out.

He lighted a cigarette and offered one to Fedora but she spurned it.

"What shall we de?" she wailed.

"We might as well wait for the patient," Doctor Gene suggested. "Sit down, Fedora, and stop squirming."

"Brute!" Fedora moaned, but nevertheless she sat down.

Doctor Gene leaned forward and put his hands upon her knees.

"Fedora," he said firmly, "we've got to have an understanding."

"How can I have an understanding with you when you treat me so shamefully?"

"I don't treat you shamefully—that's a defense mechanism."

"It isn't at all."

"Now you know very well you've absolutely been stalling for months—"

"I don't know any such thing. I suppose you'll say I deliberately asked mother down."

"I shouldn't be in the least surprised. But, Fedora, I will not stand your pretence of owning me in public and repudiating me in private."

"I don't do any such thing, and nobody except a doctor would expect to make love to a woman so soon after an operation."

"I am the best judge of that," Doctor Gene said firmly.

"I'm not so sure of that," Fedora denied. "Men are always willing to sacrifice women to their passions."

"You'll admit then you are stalling?"

"I certainly will not."

"Then—" Doctor Gene stood up, "we'll go to your suite. You've admitted your mother is not there."

"I wouldn't think of keeping your lady friend waiting in your clothes closet all that time!" Fedora flashed.

"Don't worry—she didn't wait three minutes after we were out of the room."

"Then you were through with her! Your love affair was over! And now you expect me—"

"Never mind that! This is between you and me, Fedora. It's a question whether you care for me or not."

It was a question whether his night was going to be completely wasted or not, and Doctor Gene was getting to be a desperate man. He held her firmly in his arms and she looked up into his eyes with great emotion.

She yielded. "My caveman!"

She took him by the hand and led him through more corridors into her Moonlight Sonata suite. Now the pale light of the artificial electric moon was suffusing the ample form of Selina, who was sleeping very audibly upon the couch of her mistress.

"There's Selina, my precious!"

Doctor Gene felt that the sleeping Selina was anything but precious at that moment. It certainly must be Friday the thirteenth. The sick maid awakened with yawning apologies.

"I didn't think I'd fall asleep, Miss F'dora, but I was just that miserable I couldn't stay in that room of mine."

"Come over here and let me have a look at you," Doctor Gene growled.

"Oh, I'm feeling all right now, Doctor Gene. Joe gave me a swell pill, and I'm feeling all calm now."

"That's fine," Doctor Gene agreed heartily. "Now the thing for you to do is go back to your room and get a good night's sleep—that is, what is left of the night!"

Selina began to weep hysterically. "Oh, Miss F'dora, don't make me go back to that lonesome room. I just get the fever there. Just let me sleep here, and I won't bother you at all. You know how hard I sleeps—"

Fedora looked questioningly at Doc-

tor Gene. He adopted his sternest hospital tone.

"Now, Selina, you're not going to stay here and disturb your mistress. She's not at all well and I can't have her disturbed—"

"I won't disturb her, Doctor Gene," the lonesome maid wailed. "Before the Lord I won't disturb her, and I won't disturb you when you're curing her!"

Doctor Gene turned to Fedora. "Will you please send your maid to her room? It seems that—"

But Selina's wails far outdid his argument. "Miss F'dora, don't make me go back to that lonesome room. You know Doctor Gene, I always sleep here when we ain't got gentlemen guests—"

One of the moon-drenched doors was suddenly opened and a yawning man stood there in his lounging robe. The maid stopped her wailing and Doctor Gene felt somewhat self-conscious.

"Why, Lindley Carter!" Fedora cried. "When on earth did you get here?"

"About an hour ago—"

Doctor Gene decided there must have been an arrival of the husband's special.

"—I thought I might catch a couple of hours' sleep, but I see that was a vain hope. I don't want to be as fussy as funny Bob Hope, but if you're going to put on Eugene O'Neil dramas you might at least use the ballroom for your rehearsals."

"So nice of you to come down while mother is here!"

"My gosh! If she's here I'm off!"

But Doctor Gene was already on his way—stamping down the hall.

Lindley Cotter went over to the door and shouted after him:

"I'll build you a hospital annex, Doctor Gene!"

VI

FOUR-THIRTY! Doctor Gene drank a huge hooker of Scotch and wished he had his car in the garage. He would leave for New York at once, but, of course, there wasn't a train or a bus until morning. But he wouldn't see any one of them again; not a damned one of them!

Then kicking off his slippers he noticed a mauve envelope on the floor; it must have been slipped under the door. He finally deciphered the flourishes:

"*Dear Doctor Gene:*

I am feeling horribly ill, but don't want to arouse the household. I wonder if you would slip across the hall to my room when you get in. It doesn't matter how late, as I know I shan't close an eye. I'm directly across the hall from you, but I'll leave the door ajar just a trifle so you won't disturb anyone.

"*X. Y. Z.*"

The initials looked decidedly phony, and Doctor Gene decided there had been quite enough false alarms for one night. He was not quite sure that they had not all been premeditated. Nevertheless, he stuck his feet into his slippers again.

X. Y. Z.? Xenia Yarboro Zernski, the famous movie actress, of course! She, too, had been playing bridge all evening, but she had managed to whisper that she had been to his office twice, and when was he going to make a special appointment to come to the studio?

Of course, she wasn't as young as the lovely Adele—or had it been Sybil, and she had never been as beautiful as Lisa Cairns or Fay Mannering, or

as luscious as Fedora, but then at four-thirty after a night of successive false alarms—!

Doctor Gene changed into a mauve dressing-gown, a close match to the stationery of the great star, slicked down his hair with a dash of pomade, and sought the open door.

The room was pitch black—no moonlight sonata effects there—and a sweet, low voice guided him through the darkness. Evidently Madame's boudoir voice. Downstairs her tones had been much more strident and throaty.

The night is yet young, Doctor Gene reflected, the midwinter sun is hours off. . . .

VII

HE was rather late to breakfast the next morning. Only one man was left in the room, and he was drinking coffee ravenously. Doctor Gene did not recognize the man—probably one of the nocturnal arriving husbands. Nevertheless, he greeted him with reasonable cordiality.

"I'm Hal Cairns," the coffee fiend introduced himself. "I just got in. You probably know my wife Lisa—"

"To be sure! But I thought you arrived last night?" Doctor Gene wondered who had arrived the night before. Not that he cared now. He had no complaints to make about the night's adventures and misadventures. Shakespeare said it: All's Well That Ends Well. So Doctor Gene reflected, barely hearing his companion as he rattled on:

"We had a dead battery, and had to stop at some filthy inn, but there must have been a dairymaids' convention, and—"

Just then Lisa Cairns blew into the breakfast room and greeted her husband with a casual, wifely kiss.

"You know my wife, I believe you said, doctor—"

"To be sure, and every one of her symptoms!"

"He was cataloguing them last night," Lisa said brightly, "when some one knocked at the door. We thought it was you and it turned out to be one of the servants with fruit. Isn't that a joke?"

Doctor Gene was furious at the wretch, but he contemplated his bacon without a tremor.

Hal Cairns laughed heartily. "I'll say that's a joke on me! One of Feddora's servants. Ho, ho!"

Lisa joined in the laughter. "I rather thought the joke was on Doctor Gene!"

Doctor Gene did not laugh but he had the final word:

"I rather think the joke might be on the servant!"

While they were reflecting on that, a man and two women, in golf-tweeds, walked in. Mannering, his regal wife, Fay, and a colorless blonde whom Doctor Gene vaguely remembered having met the night before.

"Golf, Hal?" Mannering asked Cairns.

"I don't think so," Cairns replied. "I haven't slept a wink—"

"You have nothing on the rest of us!"

"Good morning, Mrs. Mannering," Doctor Gene said to the regal Fay.

But the colorless blonde spoke up. "I'm Mrs. Mannering," she said. "Now, don't apologize, Doctor Gene, but I don't believe you ever met Jeanne—Mrs. Caramey arrived with a headache yesterday." The lady of purples and golds.

"By the way," Mannering shouted, "how did you sleep in my bed, Jeanne?"

Mrs. Mannering explained:

"We changed rooms with Jeanne."

"Doctor Gene knows all about my room," the stately Jeanne interrupted. "I had him locked in last night but he escaped by the porch!"

They laughed and the golfers departed with Lisa. For a moment, Doctor Gene was left alone.

Then the fluffy one—Adele, or was it Sybil?—came in looking fluffier than ever in the morning light and a pink frock.

"I almost asphyxiated in your clothes closet," she complained. "I fell asleep and didn't awaken for hours."

Doctor Gene answered. "It serves you damn' right—if you're telling me the truth?"

"You know I wouldn't lie to you, surely, Doctor Gene!"

But then Madame Zernski swept into the room booming.

"I wonder if I could find a cup of coffee," Decidedly this was her downstairs voice. It seemed incredible—

A servant brought the coffee. The throaty Madame turned to Doctor Gene. "A fine physician you are!"

Doctor Gene bowed. Reticence in the morning was evidently not an attribute of Fedora's house-parties.

"I thought the first article in the physician's code," the Madame boomed on, "was never to disregard an appeal."

"I never do, Madame," he insisted.

"Then you were a bad, bad boy," Madame said playfully. "I wrote you a frantic note last night. I might have died—but instead, I went to sleep."

Doctor Gene almost choked on that swallow of coffee and it was fully a minute before he could reply:

"I didn't disregard your note," he said truthfully enough, "but you were sleeping so peacefully that I didn't have the heart to disturb you, Madame Zernski."

"I don't believe one word of that. But, never mind, I daresay I'll be sick again tonight and don't call me Madame Zernski; I cannot tolerate it. All my friends, husbands and lovers call me X. Y. Z."

Doctor Gene managed to stammer an apology and leaped up the stairs to his room. There were two doors exactly opposite his; that is a half of each door was parallel to his.

Next, Doctor Gene sought out his hostess. She was very scornful.

"I never thought you would let Lindley scare you out. Never spout to me again about your devotion—"

"It wasn't Lindley," Doctor Gene hotly denied. "It was that shrieking, wailing maid of yours. And, Fedora, who has the room just across from mine?"

Fedora snorted. "So that's it! You know damn' well it's X. Y. Z.'s room."

"I mean the room next to hers."

"Why, there's no one in there," she said, and then after a moment: "Oh, yes, I forgot. I gave that to mother when she popped in yesterday afternoon!"

To Mrs. Fedora Cotter, Mrs. Lisa Cairns, Mrs. Jeanne Caramey, Mrs. Adele Persons, and Mrs. Sybil Dorsett, Dr. Eugene Latham sent statements for professional services.

But Fedora's mother receives no bill, and rather regularly she consults Doctor Gene about various phases of her investigations.

Joe Checking Out

By L. H. HAYUM

HE was still wearing his captain's bars. Even though the war was ended that didn't mean that Ricky had to sneak back into civvies. Not on your life. Nor anybody else's. Ricky was a soldier and he meant to die a soldier, say when he was seventy, more or less. He was twenty-four now.

Ricky had on his raincoat so the onslaught tearing down Hollywood Boulevard didn't mean a darn thing to him. But it did call for a cup of coffee. A drugstore cup of coffee. At the one right there on the corner.

She took his order. She had the reddest hair Ricky had ever seen. Even redder than Joan's. And when he began thinking of Joan his long brown fingers began shaking like birch leaves do back home in autumn.

"Oh, hell—" He thought his mind said the words, but maybe his lips helped too.

"What's that, soldier?" Caroline Seymour was her name. Her soldier had called her Foxy. Because of her hair. Maybe. She liked it, no matter from whence it came. So, Foxy she was to everybody. Even to the girls working at the Fountain Lunch.

"I didn't know I said anything." Ricky was puffing smoke faster than a bonfire of dry pine cones. "I guess I was thinking out loud."

"You, too. That makes a pair of us."

The little blue dress was the color of Foxy's eyes. And the five and dime pearls around her throat looked even better than the strand Ricky's dad had given Joan the day she married Ricky.

"Damn her!" But this bit of information did not reach his lips. Instead he said—

Joe and Foxy

"A cup of coffee, please."

Foxy brought it. But she didn't walk away. It was mid-afternoon and Ricky was her only customer, just then. And she couldn't walk away. Ricky looked too much like Joe. "Damn him—" Just a passing

thought that didn't get down as far as her lips, either.

"Raining like all get-out, huh?" she asked. She wanted to hear him talk. Might make her feel good for a few minutes any way. Maybe he talked like Joe. His voice. Not his words. Joe was tough. Joe had been a promising boxer, come up from underground. A coal miner, before he found out how strong he was. Foxy had met up with him at one of the boxing matches. Back East. She had gone with a cheap little bookie, who used to take racing bets from all the girls who waited table at Sammie's Quick Lunch. Sure, Foxy had always been strictly undercrust. She didn't give a darn—

Then Joe had seen her and—asked her to marry him, the third date.

But Joe was a born fool and had funny ideas. When war took over and made a soldier out of him, he wouldn't tie Foxy up to being true by benefit of a marriage license.

"Wait until it's over, Honey. Then I'll come back and marry you, if you're still as good as you are now. Oh, I can spot a girl who's been through the ropes. That's why you're for me, Foxy. I want my wife the same brand as my mother—" Silly trite stuff. But it made good listening to Foxy. "I'll be champion middleweight boxer of these here United States when the damn war is over. Wait for me, Foxy?"

"Till the Pacific freezes over, Joe—"

Then he had been shipped to the West Coast in the flying corps.

"Wish you could make it out here to tell me goodbye, Foxy. Here's a hundred bucks. What say?" The money order enclosed in a letter.

She cashed the money order and hopped a bus headed for Oceanside, California. Joe met the bus. Looked like a million in his uniform.

"Salute me, Honey. I'm a sergeant, Foxy. What say?"

Three days of it. Three days of fun down in L. A. Three days of kisses and love, but—not once did Joe suggest that they take one room at a hotel. Not once did any register call them man and wife.

"Joe—" Their last night. All leaves were cut short. Joe knew they were shoving off. So did Foxy. "Joe, maybe you won't get back."

"So what?" His big strong arm—holding her so tight that she had to catch each breath on the up-take.

"You know what. I want something to remember. I—I want you, Joe."

Like a flash, his arm loosened its hold. Joe's face got as hard as when he caught his opponent in the ring trying to pull off a dirty punch.

"You don't mean that, Foxy. You ain't no cheap girl. I can pick them up for the askin'. I don't want none of them. You wouldn't go off with me, Honey, would you I mean without gettin' hitched Naw, you wouldn't. You're just kiddin'."

"Oh, Joe, I love you so darn much. I—I just can't keep on living without you. Let's—go some place, just for your last night, Joe. Yes?"

She would never forget Joe's face. Funny thing, too. Joe was such an easygoing kid. Always had some offhand remark to blurt out every time a pretty girl passed by. Always kidded ladies of easy virtue. Anybody would think that Joe thought all women were his for the asking and that he would do the asking. Why was he so firm when it came to letting her have the one memory she wanted.

"Listen here, Foxy. I never loved a dame in all my life before I met up with you. You hit the bull's-eye. I want to marry you. What in hell

would I want to spoil the whole thing this way. I'm lucky, Foxy. No Jap is goin' to put no bullet or no bayonet through yours truly. Put that in your hat. Wait for me, Honey?"

She did.

"Yes—" Captain Ricky Donaldson coming back to earth and agreeing with the little redhead that it was raining. "Certainly is raining."

Agreed. So he began sipping his hot cup of coffee. Took his time about it. Might as well kill time here as at a bar. After that party last night—that party up in the hills at the home of some big shot movie director, where liquor splashed over almost as steadily as the rain was coming down today.

Ricky had been frightfully bored. And that was bad. Just starting his career as an officer in the regular peacetime army, where parties were going to be the issue. Hell, he'd rather be over there in Belgium where he was last year. Fighting Jerries in the snow—fighting and hungry and freezing but—with a starlit hope inside of him. A nice, warm cheery hope that some day he would be back with Joan. Redheaded Joan who was wearing a little diamond band that proved she was his wife. Wearing that and the five-carat diamond that had been his mother's. Everything that had belonged to his mother, she was wearing. Or so he thought. Until they gave him her letter there in the hospital in England. Gave him her letter and the Purple Heart on the same day. He was just going to tell them to send Joan the Purple Heart. All the fellows did that. But—after he read her letter, he shoved the Purple Heart under his pillow and never looked at it again.

"You're temperature has gone up like a rocket, Captain. That Purple Heart wasn't a surprise. That didn't do it." The little black-eyed, black-haired nurse was feeling his pulse. "What's the answer, huh?"

Ricky just had to confide in somebody. And the little nurse from Texas already knew about Joan. She had told him of her own man. An ex-football star, who was trying to take all the South Pacific islands single-handed. She had read some of his letters to Ricky. Because they sounded so funny coming from a cattle rancher and quoting slick poetry. Now—turnabout was more than fair play. Ricky handed her Joan's letter—

"Oh—" The little black-eyed, black-haired nurse didn't know what more to say as she kept on reading—reading things like this—"You wouldn't want me to live a lie, would you, Ricky dear. I did love you wnen I married you, and if this dreadful war had not taken you away from me and left me alone, I know our marriage would have turned out fine. But, Ricky dear, I am only human. I am young and—I want my freedom. I want a divorce. I have sent all the jewels back to your father. All the money you put in my name, I have had the bank put to your account. I want nothing of you, Ricky. I am going to marry a chap who will have nothing to support me with but a second lieutenant's pay. But I find out I love him, Ricky. More than I ever loved you. I thought I loved you. Now I am wondering if it was only glamour and your father's money. The war did not give us a chance to prove our love."

The little nurse read more. But the rest of the letter got blurry before her eyes. Love meant so frightfully much to her. And somehow she felt that Ricky had her way of rating love, too—

Ricky was home now! Somebody

had written him of Joan's wedding. And that was that! Home in the States and stationed out in California, miles away from memories. But damn it, memories have no barriers. They stick like flypaper on a hot day. But a guy can get goofy if he don't blot them out.

"Where did you do your fighting? I see you got a Purple Heart. In the Pacific?" Foxy had a nice throaty voice. Like Joan's. She was a lot like Joan.

"Me? Oh, I fought in Germany. Got it in the leg. Okay now. You have somebody in the Pacific?" Over his coffee cup.

"Me?" Foxy felt her face get red. "No. No—nobody."

Someone over on the other end of the counter. Miles away, it seemed from Foxy and Ricky. Somebody down there feeding the juke box nickels. Just slip a nickel through the slot and take whatever music happened to be next. No choice.

"Kiss me once and kiss me twice—
It's been a long, long time—"

Bing Crosby at his best. And ready to attack two broken hearts. That is two hearts mighty near that junction—

Foxy was going to say something when the music started off—then a little lump began taking form down in her throat and cut off words. She saw the soldier, the good-looking officer slip a cigaret between his lips, saw him flip the lighter and—then begin to puff smoke. Foxy saw things in that smoke—things that made her clutch her fingers and make little fists out of her hands.

Joe was every bit as good looking as this young captain. And Joe had come up the hard way. Joe was tops for her money. If— It just didn't seem like Joe to act that way—to tell her in every letter that he loved her like nobody's business. That she was the first and only girl he would ever ask to carry his name on through to the end. Things like that. Then—a short note, telling her he had been slightly

Foxy saw Ricky's picture in the paper.

wounded. That he had been evacuated to some hospital in New Zealand. But that pretty soon he would be okay—

Foxy had kissed that letter and had gone to her little church off the boulevard and put five hard-earned dollars in St. Anthony's box. That was an offering which along with her prayer was to bring Joe back soon and safe.

"I'll take another coffee—" Ricky was aiming towards something. He needed another bracer to get him going.

"Sure thing." Foxy could hardly see

the cup because those nasty tears began going to bat again. Perhaps they would always do that when she took time out to remember that last letter from Joe—that letter which sent her halfway on the road to suicide. Just halfway, because Foxy believed in God and there in her church they made the fact indelible that a person had to wait for orders before taking any short cut to heaven.

But even as Foxy was pouring that second cup of coffee, she was rereading in memory that last letter from Joe—

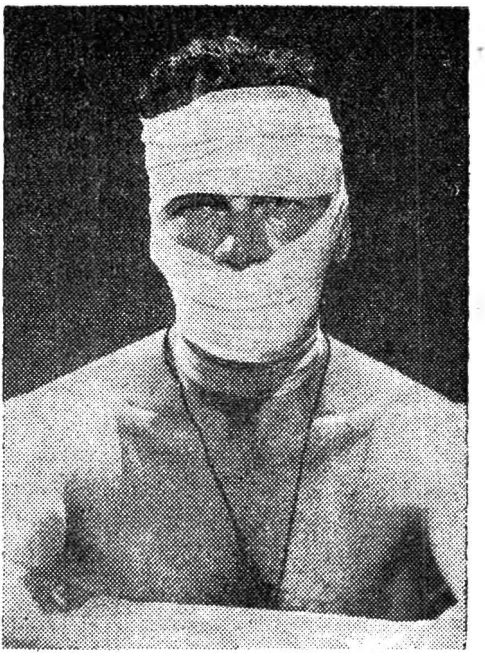
Things like this stood out more brilliantly than the big neon sign down the Boulevard—things like this—"And so I guess I made a mistake. See, it's this way. This nurse has been mighty sweet to me. She has red hair, too. Guess I'm a sucker for red hair. She's got blue eyes, too, Foxy. Get it? She and me are in love all right. So let's make it a clean break, Foxy, and not beat around the bush. See, I'm no good, or else I wouldn't have fell so quick for another pretty face. See? You're lucky, kid, you never was tied up with a guy like, yours truly—"

It was in the midst of that second cup of coffee that Ricky leaned over the counter, more than necessary.

"You married?" Sounded like some truck driver trying to date some cheap floozy at a roadside tavern. So what? People with mussed-up dreams don't give a damn what they do, just so they can keep busy.

"Me? I should say not. I—I hate men." Foxy meant it the first time she said it. Right now, there was something in Ricky's eyes that made her wonder if he couldn't make her forget—forget Joe for a few hours. Anything to wipe out the thought of Joe.

"Sounds bad coming from—you."



Joe was only wounded, not married.

"Why from me especially?"

"Because you're the sort that men like. You know that without me telling you. Look here—you just hate one man. Huh?"

"Maybe." Foxy began wiping the counter with a cloth. Wiping it clean just to be doing something.

"Some fellow walk out on a girl like you?" Ricky was beginning to be sincere. There was something so staunch and trustworthy about her eyes.

"You don't think I'm going to stand here and tell you the story of my life, because you bought a couple of cups of coffee. Nothing doing, soldier."

Ricky lit a second cigarette.

"Sometimes it's sort of restful to spill the story of your life. Say, I have a story of my own." He bit his lips until they were white. He had never let loose of one atom of emotion outwardly since that little nurse back in England had read him Joan's let-

ter. By golly, but he felt low today. And something bigger than himself started his tongue into action, his lips —followed suit. "I've got a story of my own. I hate women. All women just as much as you hate men, girlie. Know what. My wife—she was a redhead. Looked like you. My wife gave me the red light when I was over in Germany and married some chap over here. Cut me out when I was counting days when I'd be with her again. See? You haven't anything on me. Have you?"

Nice brown eyes, had Ricky. And when a young army captain's eyes fill with tears—a young officer who has seen combat, bites his lips to keep them from quivering like some kid's who has been whipped—well, Foxy threw the cleaning cloth back of the counter and hoped no customer would step in and stop her from talking.

"You and me, soldier. What do you think of this one. I was engaged to a flyer. He made sergeant. Gosh, but he looked as good as Eisenhower when he was all dolled up. Big, he was. And his hair and his eyes—" She looked hard at Ricky and squinted. "They were the color of yours. He'd been a coal miner—then a prize fighter. I wanted to marry before he shipped, but he couldn't see it that way. Didn't think it was fair to me. Then, out of a clear sky, he falls in love with his nurse. He just had a slight wound. See? Calls the deal off with me. See?"

"Yes, I see."

A FAT MAN and his fat wife came in and took seats at Foxy's station. They were quarreling with each other and their wet umbrellas, so after Foxy gave them coffee and donuts, they ignored her and Ricky.

But their coming had given Ricky time to think a little.

"Say, are you doing anything this evening?" Ricky said it very low. Sounded so cheap. And down deep, the thought back of the question might have been listed as cheap.

"Why?" Foxy knew the answer. She wasn't born yesterday. This officer was as lonely as she. And two disillusioned, lonely persons on a date usually had but one goal. Did she want a date? By heck,. Yes. She'd been lonely too long. What did it get her? The worst brush-off any girl could get. Sure she'd go with the captain. Life wasn't worth a row of pins without Joe—

"Thought we might take in a couple of bars and—"

"And what, soldier?"

"We'd decide what next when the bars close. Is it a date?"

"Yeah—it's a date. Yeah—sure." She felt as guilty as a traitor selling out his country.

"Shall I pick you up here. Or would you want to—to come over and have a drink in my room at the hotel before we started. I'm at the Roosevelt, Room 1004. Huh?"

"It's in the bag, soldier. I'll be there. How's seven o'clock?"

"Swell. And by the way, what is your name?"

"They call me Foxy."

"That's a funny name. How come?"

"J—Joe gave it to me. I—I like it. And what's yours?"

"Ricky—"

THE fat couple finished their coffee and donuts, just after Roxy left, and Foxy stood there thinking. Then she bit her lips and decided she'd wipe out her past. Take the easy road now. That's what drove girls into hotel rooms with men—broken hearts. Well, maybe not always, but by heck,

Joe sent his nurse's picture to Foxy.

it helped you to forget.

Just then, the boy threw the evening paper on the counter. Foxy read headlines, not much else. Looked at pictures. And on the second page—she saw his picture. Not Joe's. Ricky's. Captain Richard Donaldson, son of William Donaldson, internationally known oil man, is spending a week's leave at the Roosevelt Hotel. Captain Donaldson has been awarded the— A long list of medals that didn't mean anything to Foxy. That chap was rich. His father had millions. And—he liked her. Liked her a lot. She—

"Oh, Joe. Why—way—" She almost said the words aloud, then shoved them back, when she saw a customer. A marine. A young blond fellow. Very pale. Very thin. And ribbons stretched across his chest. All sorts of ribbons.

"What will it be?" Foxy gave him time to order, but he just sat there staring at her. "Okay, speak up, soldier."

"You— Is your name Foxy?"

Somebody who knew Joe. Well, so what? And how did he know where she was. She had been working in defense when she was writing to Joe. And who in thunder was this chap?"

"Sure my name is Foxy. What's the deal?"

His hands were very white, this young marine's. As if he had been sick. And hollows beneath his eyes. Seemed a shame to take her ill will out on him, just because of Joe.

"It's—it's about Joe!"

Foxy stared.

"Just hold it, soldier. I don't want to hear a darn thing about him. Okay, tell me what you want to order and forget him. There's the menu. What will it be?"

But the thin, pale marine didn't even reach for the menu.

"Joe didn't send me. He'd knocked my block off if he knew—"

"Knew what?"

"That I hunted you out."

"Hunted me out? What do you mean?"

"See, Joe used to read me parts of your letters. And I remembered your room address on the envelopes. I went there today and the landlady said you were working here. So—"

"So what?" Foxy bit off the words as a finale to this nonsense.

"Joe would knock—"

"Knock your block off if he knew you came. Okay, you said that. And I'm through with hearing anything about Joe. I said that once before too."

"Joe—" He clenched his fists and started talking and somehow, Foxy knew that nothing this side of an earthquake could shut him off now. "Joe is over at the Vets' hospital with me. We've been there a couple of weeks. Joe talks about you in his sleep even. That's all he talks about. They're sending him back near his home

pretty quick. I told him that if you were the right sort you—you wouldn't mind—" Then he took on an extra dose of strength and shot his next words straight at her—"you wouldn't mind that he lost a leg."

Foxy had never fainted in all her life. But right now, she had to catch hold of the counter to keep from going under. Just one more question—if she had strength enough to speak. But the marine answered it before she could ask it.

"See, Joe lied to you about falling for a nurse. He's a funny guy. Thought you wouldn't want him, maybe after they sawed off his leg. Tried to think of some way to let you out easy. But I sort of made up my mind you were a regular—I knew you were game, but Joe wouldn't listen. So today, when I got a pass, I came to Hollywood. Just on my own. Joe would kill me but—"

Foxy didn't say anything. But her mind was racing—Joe couldn't be a prize fighter now. Poor sweet Joe. Her Joe—But there were other things.

"Joe won't eat and he won't let them take him in to see the movies or the USO shows or anything. All he talks about is you. And—"

The bus left for San Diego at seven. Foxy got a seat. She'd be there soon. Just a little over a hundred miles. Maybe they would let her see Joe tonight. She hoped so. Well, maybe they would give him the flowers she was bringing—roses, red roses that set her back four bucks. And she would write a note and tell him, that even if he had lost both legs and both eyes, she wanted him—and by golly, she would like to see anybody keep her from making him buy the ring and the license this time—

And back at the hotel, Ricky waited until eight o'clock. She—she hadn't seemed the sort to make and break dates without warning. There was something keen and sincere about her—something he remembered all that evening, when he finally accepted an invitation to a party out in Beverly Hills—a party with girls from the same book as he—girls with background and money and—

He tried to forget her all next day, when he was driven up to Malibu for a two-day house party. But her red head blotted out every other girl.

"I want her." He told himself. "I—I believe I love her. I—I'd marry her if she wants it that way."

But when he went to the counter at the drug store, a tired little blonde grew facetious as she came forward to take his order.

"Isn't Foxy here any more?" Out with it.

"Foxy? No sir. She quit her job. Quit Monday night."

"Yes?" Funny, but his heart gave signs of life for the first time, since Joan's letter. "Why?"

"Well, it's this way—She got married. See? Joe, her sweetie-pie, lied to her. Told her he didn't love her no more, when all the time he just didn't want to tell her he lost his leg and she found out and she—"

Ricky walked out on the finale. Stumbled out.

He would need three double shots to work that one off. And all the time he thought he could never love again. What a fool he was—after all.

A Question of Paternity

By LEAH DRIESBACK

"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.

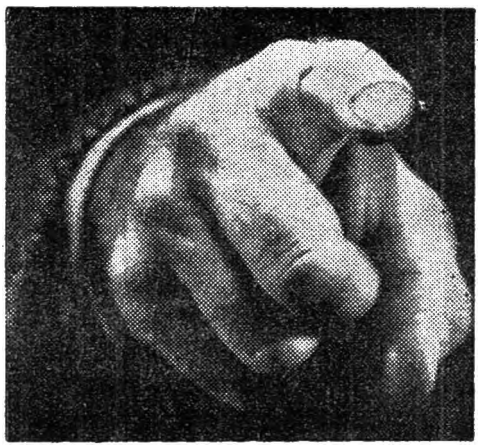
The traveling man, who sat on the porch railing, smilingly scanned the town philosopher and erstwhile editor of the *Moab Weekly Times*. A man about fifty, was Ira Jackson, whose face revealed deep lines that bespoke resigned suffering. From the waist up, he possessed the robust physique of a strong 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 personality. Her hair was 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 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 flashy 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 relatives 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 Moab 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 reminiscence, but recovered in time to give me a nasty look before leaving.

" 'Don't you care, Essie,' I comfort-

ed. '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 tourture 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 centered 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.'

"Essie 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 *dénouement* 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 today, 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!"

Getting Gertie Married

By CAROL BIRD

ACROSS a letter bearing a foreign postmark, which lay spread out on the table before them, Mr. and Mrs. Marshall Frost stared hopelessly at each other.

"Gertie coming to us!" said Mrs. Frost, aghast. "That girl! That mole! That mouse! What in heaven's name are we going to do about it?"

Mr. Marshall Frost, who hated worry as much as he loathed a cold in the head, got up and patted his wife's shoulder.

"Cheer up, Dora," he said, soothingly, trying to comfort her. "We'll marry her off to the first pair of trousers that walks into the house. Even if it's only the iceman."

Mrs. Frost laughed a harsh, mocking laugh.

"Why, even the iceman wouldn't want that girl," she said bitterly. "She hasn't a single gift to enhance her in the marriage market."

"Not even a well-turned ankle?" asked her husband, hopefully, knowing that often it is but a meager charm which starts a man's blood coursing tumultuously through his veins, and the "sign-on-the-dotted-line" idea to obsess him.

"Her leg is straight up and down, just like a pole," said his wife, who by now was plunged in despair at the prospect of raising her brother-in-law's unprepossessing daughter, a girl of seventeen who had just lost her mother. Her woe was intensified by the fact that she had a nineteen year old daughter of her own, who promised to be a huge frost in the marriage game. She had been "out" for a year, but hadn't yet received a

Gertie was hopeless.

single proposal of marriage. And if Effie, who was a fairly personable girl, couldn't line up a single marriage prospect in twelve months, what chances did Gertie have? Gertie, who was lean and sallow and dressed badly?

"How long ago did you see the girl?" asked Mr. Frost, harboring a faint hope that time might have worked a miracle and that the ugly duckling might now be almost a swan.

"Eight months ago—when your brother brought her to Boston for a visit. I was at Sue's at the time, and saw all I wanted to see of Gertie."

Marshall Frost sighed.

"Well, you didn't see her knees," he said, still clinging to his wisp of hope.

"Sometimes nothing more than a dimpled knee will set a man off on the marriage idea, heaven help him!"

His helpmate curled her lips scornfully.

"A girl who is on the husband-hunt cannot display her wares as a market woman might cabbages," she told him. "Gertie's knees are like doorknobs, but even if they weren't, she couldn't very well tell a suitor: 'My eyes may be very poor, and my nose lumpy, but you should see my knees.' "

"Why not?" asked Mr. Frost. "In these days of competition, a girl can't be too modest. She must either show her knees or else subtly boast about them. Feminine charms are like any other kind of merchandise. Why hide them under the counter? Trot 'em out, say I, and display 'em."

Mrs. Frost arose.

"You're so vulgar, Marshall," she said, as she gathered up the letter. Then she sighed. "Well, I suppose I'll have to send your brother Rufus a cable and tell him to send the 'dear child' right along, that we're pining to have her with us."

"Nothing else to be done about it," concurred her husband. "But don't worry about it too much, old girl. Perhaps Gertie isn't as bad as you remember her. Perhaps she's a bit more upholstered now, or has taken to wearing scarlet stockings, or doing things with her eyes, or bathing in passionate perfumes. You'd be surprised how little it takes to set a man off."

"Gertie will set a man off, all right —to the North Pole," said his wife, who, with the vision of the drab and awkward Gertie flashing before her, simply couldn't be optimistic about her and the business of getting rid of her by the slick method of handing her over to a husband.

Well, Gertie arrived from Canada several weeks later. Marshall Frost, who hadn't seen her for several years and had almost forgotten what she looked like, was inclined to agree with his wife.

Gertie was hopeless!

Her uncle had hoped that there would be be a secret voluptuousness about her which his wife had not detected. Women he had argued to himself never see the hidden appeal of another woman. They never know why certain women have that irresistible lure for men. They are too much engrossed with externals. Now Gertie might really have the goods, and his wife be unaware of it.

But when he got a glimpse of Gertie his hopes dropped like the mercury in a thermometer on a cold day. Gertie, he thought, was about as magnetic as a mouse. As voluptuous as a rabbit. She simply didn't register anything to him but a pain in the pit of the stomach. This predestined old maid to be a member of his household for the rest of his natural life. Oh, the Fates could be vindictive all right when they got together on the job!

Mrs. Frost kissed her niece in the wooden manner that one kisses a homely baby whose mother is looking on and expects it.

"Dear, dear child, I hope you'll be happy here with us," she said.

"Yes, ma'am," said Gertie, vigorously blowing her nose with a coarse handkerchief, as she started awkwardly gathering together her bags and bundles preparatory to being taken up to her room.

Mr. Frost looked at his wife's stricken face, and again tried to comfort her.

"You can be grateful for one thing," he reminded her. "Our Effie won't have any competition there."

"I never saw a less attractive girl in my whole life," declared Mrs. Frost.

"We'll have her with us until the crack of doom."

A quavery voice off in the corner of the big living-room was heard:

"Better be careful of that female! Better be careful."

It was Grandpa Frost talking. But when his surprised relatives asked what he meant, he sank back into his speechless, near senile state, and refused to say anything more. Grandpa Frost, though he now sat so still in quiet and warm corners, with a little brown knitted shawl thrown over his shoulders, had, in his day, the reputation of being a great demon with the ladies. Casanova, his friends called him. Women went wild about him. He had a secret charm which he refused to divulge. His son never pitied him now in his ripe old age, for he knew his father had much to think about. Before him there must constantly be enacted a bright pageant of beauty. Lovely dancing girls, fresh young schoolgirls, mature beauties with lissome charm—all the women he had wooed and won and possessed in the days when he was young and dashing and virile. A conqueror. Oh, yes, Grandpa, before the flickering fire, could have a warm and comforting time, all right, drawing on his rich store of memories!

Mr. Frost looked in his direction now, but the old man was nodding, his shawl half fallen from his shoulders.

"What did he mean, do you suppose, Dora, just now when he said for us to be careful of that female?"

Dora Frost shook her head.

"I'm sure I don't know. He might not have meant the female in our midst. Just any female he happened to be dreaming about at the time. That old rascal certainly has played with women from the cradle to the grave."

If only they had credited Grandpa with having a little sense even in his dotage, and had questioned him further, they might have saved themselves a lot of later trouble. But they paid slight attention to his remark, and soon forgot it altogether.

Mrs. Marshall Frost, determined that poor Gertie should be given at least a fighting chance in the precarious business of landing a husband, spent the first few weeks after the girl's arrival on shopping tours. But Gertie failed to show much promise even in the charming flower-like frocks her aunt bought her. Her figure was ungainly, she slouched as she walked, her hands were red and chapped, her hair coarse, and her skin was not exactly of kissable texture.

Her cousin Effie, somehow, managed to look delectable in almost the same kind of clothes. There was an intriguing swell to her young bosom under the thin layer of silk and tulle. A velvet gown clung to her like a sheath, revealing shapely torso and legs. And underneath the short skirts were nice calves and Trilby-like feet.

One Sunday afternoon the Marshall Frosts gave a tea, introducing the Canadian cousin.

Effie said:

"It's a shame to show her off to the boy friends. They won't come to see me any more."

"They don't come to see you anyhow," retorted her father, irritated because he hadn't even had the doubtful pleasure of refusing some young scallawag the hand of his daughter. No youth had as yet asked for it.

"I'll serve very substantial sandwiches, instead of the customary cinnamon toast and macaroons," said Mrs. Frost. "That will bolster up the boys for the ordeal."

And the first shock came the after-

noon of the first tea.

The men flocked around Gertie like flies around a honey pot.

They trailed her all over the place, inveigled her into dim window-seats, engaged her in mysterious tête-à-têtes, almost battled with each other for the opportunity of handing her cakes and tea.

The Marshall Frosts, from Papa Frost down to daughter Effie, were baffled, nonplussed, and altogether puzzled by the phenomenon of seeing the ugly duckling pursued all over the place.

"For all the world like a little alley cat," complained Mrs. Frost, irritated now because her Effie had been entirely eclipsed by the unattractive Gertie. One youth, Bond Chaseman, the most eligible of Effie's acquaintances, had even tipped a cup of hot tea over Effie's new pink frock, in his haste to get back to the side of Gertie, waiting for him over in one dark corner of the room.

"All those Toms chasing her up one alley and down another," said Mr. Marshall Frost. "It's disgusting. You'll have to take the girl to task for it."

After the tea was over the family held a conference, circling about Gertie like hawks ready to pounce on her at the first false move.

"Whatever were those boys telling you, Gertie?" asked Mrs. Frost, coming straight to the point. "Why did they follow you all over the place?"

"Yes, why did they follow *you?*" repeated Effie, forgetting tact in her eagerness to have a key to the mystery.

Gertie brushed out a wrinkle in her green chiffon frock, and said:

"I guess they like me."

This was too much. I guess *they* like me!

"Well, *why* do they like you?" persisted Effie. "*Why*, that's what I'd like to know."

"Why don't you answer?" prompted Mrs. Frost. "You must know why men bumble all over you like bees—"

"Around a hollyhock. Or a sunflower," put in Effie, growing more annoyed at the thought of her man crop—meager at most—being cornered by her ugly cousin.

"I don't know," answered Gertie, very simply. "I don't know why they like me. Or bumble over me, Aunt Dora. Effie's so much prettier."

"Exactly," affirmed her aunt. "So what's the answer?"

"That Chaseman boy—Bond Chaseman—what was he saying to you that time I saw him feeding you an almond macaroon, and looking in your eyes with a funny, intense look?" asked her uncle, sternly, for he was more eager than his womenfolk to unravel the mystery.

"He was asking me to marry him," said Gertie.

"Marry you!" screamed Mrs. Frost. "Marry you! Why he just met you. Boys don't ask girls—nice girls—to marry them on sight."

"Well, Mr. Chaseman—Bond—asked me all right," said Gertie, in her toneless, unemotional voice. "He certainly proposed to me."

"Just what did he say?" persisted Mrs. Frost. "You must have misunderstood him. Perhaps it was a proposal—but an indecent one. Tell us what he said."

Gertie smiled at the memory.

"He said: 'You great darling, I worship you. I adore you. I'd die for you. I fell madly in love with you the minute I stood near you, and clamped your precious hand in mine. Will you marry me, and if so, when?' "

The Frosts stared at each other in

amazement. Mr. Frost punctured the silence.

"Preposterous!"

Gertie arose. She walked over to her uncle, touched his arm, and asked:

"Why is it preposterous, Uncle Marshall? Why shouldn't a nice boy ask me to marry him?"

Mr. Marshall Frost opened his mouth to speak, then changed his mind and remained silent. And then, glancing down at his niece, pressed close to his side, suddenly put an arm around her, drew her closer, and said:

"No reason in the world, dear girl. None whatever. If I were a few years younger, and hadn't already proposed to—and been accepted by—your Auntie, I'd propose to you myself."

"Marshall!"

"Papa!"

His wife and daughter stared at him as though he had suddenly taken leave of his senses.

"He, he, he!" cackled Grandpa, who had been sitting at a small table playing little Casino. "Ha, ha, ha! Watch that female. Don't get too close to her. Watch her, I say!"

Then he laboriously began to get up from his chair. Gertie ran over to help him, and when the old man finally stood on both his tottering legs, he leaned across the table and gave the girl a resounding smack on her lips.

This was too much for the family, and the conclave broke up in a panic, with Grandpa being unceremoniously hustled off to bed by Papa Frost, and Gertie nagged off by her aunt and cousin.

After that tea, events marched hot and fast along the path of Gertie. She received invitations from eligible young men in the Frost sets and other circles to all the important and interesting events of the season. Big football games, the horse show, the Charity Ball, the college hockey games, opening nights of the best Broadway shows. And the night club head waiters came to know her as well as they knew their favorite butter and egg men from the West.

One night after Bond Chaseman had taken her home from a ball at the Ritz, Gertie found her aunt and cousin waiting up for her. Effie's eyes were suspiciously red. She had not had an invitation to the dance. Mrs. Frost looked grim around the corners of her mouth.

"If Bond Chaseman asked you to marry him, why don't you?" asked Mrs. Frost abruptly. She had made up her mind during the evening that Gertie—unattractive, dangerous Gertie—must be gotten out of the way or Effie would be left high and dry in the shallow waters of the matrimonial stream. She hated to see her niece capture the matrimonial prize, but it was better than not capturing him, and staying on to garner the rest of the marrying male crop.

Gertie, stepping out of a ravishing apple green velvet frock, which somehow just fell short of making her appear ravishing, replied:

"I'm undecided whether to take Bond or his cousin Welford."

"Welford, too," wailed Effie. "I think you might at least have left Welford alone."

"I didn't do anything to Welford," said Gertie, by now a bit weary of the constant heckling of the family.

"Didn't do anything to him!" echoed her angry aunt. "Just stood him on his head, that's all. Tell me one thing, Gertie, my girl, how do you do it? Be frank with us. You must understand why we are all so puzzled about you. Here is Effie, your cousin, an attractive, talented girl. She plays, sings, paints, dances beautifully. Yet you

outshine her. You who are—well, dear child, you must know you are not a Helen of Troy. And, as far as I know, you haven't any accomplishment. Or have you? Tell us that?"

"Yes, Gertie, just what are your accomplishments?" asked Effie, insinuatingly. "Do you neck? Do you let the boys paw you? Do you carry a rabbit foot? Do you show your knees? Do you dance the rhumba?"

Gertie looked bewildered.

"I don't do any of those things," she said. "I'm just myself, that's all."

"And that's everything—and still it's nothing," replied her aunt. "I give it up. You're a mystery to me, Gertie. Personally, I think you're bewitched or something. Some evil genius has you in hand."

"I wish he had me," sniffed Effie, as she marched angrily off to bed.

The next day Mrs. Frost walked unexpectedly into the library and found her niece in the arms of her husband.

"Gertie!" shrieked Mrs. Frost, whose wrath was intensified by the fact that she had had a nightmare the night before in which goblins and gnomes had danced around her prodding her with stilettos, and mocking her about Effie and her lack of suitors.

"Gertie! You little hussy! Making love to my husband."

"And her uncle," said Mr. Frost. "Don't be indecent about an innocent embrace, Dora."

"The girl's a witch," retorted Mrs. Frost, now pale and trembling with emotion. "She casts a spell over men. Just look at her face. You'll have to admit she employs witchcraft."

At this point Gertie burst into tears, and flung herself across the knees of Grandpa Frost, who sat in his wheelchair watching the little scene with solemn, unblinking eyes.

Grandpa gathered the forlorn girl into his arms, and kissed her hair, then her hands. Mrs. Frost pointed a quivering finger at the pair:

"Look! I told you the girl was a devil. First she takes away all of Effie's beaux, then she winds you around her finger, and even old Grandpa, tottering to the grave, flames up like a dying bonfire fanned into life the minute she enters the room. I tell you, I won't have that girl around any longer. She'll have to get out."

The next day she got out—with Uncle Marshall. At five o'clock in the morning. They left behind them a cryptic note of four words:

"Try and find us."

Toward evening Mrs. Frost found out that her husband had merely been a chaperone for the elopers—Gertie and Bond Chaseman.

But even before she found out that Bond Chaseman and not her husband was the chief offender, the strangest thing about the seeming domestic debacle was that Mrs. Frost was less interested in the loss of her husband or the finding of him than she was in ferreting out the mystery of Gertie's uncanny power with men. A husband was only a husband after all. After you'd had him more than twenty years he was not such a great prize after all. Losing him no longer a novelty. He was just a bit second hand so to speak and not a prize at all. Losing him to another woman wasn't, of course, a proud achievement. But it was less to be deplored than having on one's hands a withered old maid who had once been a blooming flower. That implied very markedly lack of resourcefulness on the part of the mother.

So, instead of wearing herself down tracking her errant mate, or the mate

that at first she supposed to be errant, she decided to unravel the mystery of Gertie's unholy power. This would directly enable her to help Effie. Once she got the recipe she'd teach it to Effie. Then Effie, too, could make men jump through hoops and sign on the dotted line after the fashion of Gertie, who, apparently, knew all the secrets inside out and upside down. An uncanny and devilish power. But of infinite value when a girl was seeking a mate.

Where, then, would she find the seer who could tear away the veil for her? Who but—Grandpa! Grandpa, of the Casanovish background. Grandpa who had made love to women down the long stretch of his eighty years. If a man who had known intimately all types of women for almost a century—and who had been mightily successful with them—couldn't give her the key to the mystery, who could? And suddenly she remembered the old man's warning: "Better be careful of that female!" Now she knew he had meant Gertie. And she had foolishly thought the female was only one of the phantom hoard of females he dreamed about lazily and happily before the blazing fire.

She sought him out. He was wide awake, practicing a few new chess moves.

"Grandpa," began Mrs. Frost, sternly, frightening the old man into a semblance of attention. "Grandpa, what is it about Gertie that makes men run around in circles? What's her appeal for men?"

"Sex," said Grandpa, succinctly, scared into replying.

"Sex! What do you mean?"

"Sex appeal," said Grandpa. "I guess that's the new-fangled name for it."

"For what?"

"For that potent power some women possess."

"Well what is it? That's just what I'm trying to find out. Analyze it for me."

"It can't be done," said Grandpa. "It's all chemical."

AMOUR MORT

By Marion Hamilton Wood

I used to think that when love died
  There was a sudden, bitter pain—
As though with sharp, cruel, curved knife
  The heart was cleft in twain.

But now I *know* that when love dies
  There is a hopeless, weary ache—
No striving can assuage the throb,
  Nor tears its misery slake!

Gander Sauce

By KATHERINE ROBBINS

"OH, why do men act as they do?" Rosamond asked of her reflection in the mirror, with blue eyes too hurt and angry for tears. Dick had just telephoned that he could not get out to dinner, that an unforeseen business matter would keep him in town quite late. She had half expected some such message since learning in the early afternoon that Coralie Mumford was back from Canada. But Dick had sworn the affair was off, explaining carefully, "There never was anything to it, really. She's a good sort and I like to be with her, but she can't hold a candle to my own silly, suspicious little Rosy," so she had hoped against hope.

She had hoped, had tried with all her strength to believe him, but now she felt that every breath of gossip, every nagging suspicion, of the spring was true. And it was not the first time in their five years of marriage that Dick had so erred; and, as she thought of all the old agony of accusation, tears, reproaches, lies, promises, pleadings, to be gone over again, all her being rose in fierce rebellion.

There must be no more such futile scenes, pride would not stand for it. Either she must close her eyes to his shameless amours and pretend blindness, as did so many women, and hide her breaking heart under smiles; or she must break with him at once, trail her misery through the divorce courts, become an object of pity and gossip to all her world. How bitter was either course! How intolerably humiliating!

Here a rush of self-pitying tears blurred her mirrored image. She blinked them back, swayed forward, and began to study herself with searching scrutiny. What was the matter that she could not hold her husband's exclusive devotion? Surely she was as pretty as Coralie, with her milk-white skin, wavy blonde hair, dainty pink mouth and dark-lashed blue eyes—especially in the orchid georgette she had donned for Dick.

"Let's have a swim, Jack, and not let them make us unhappy," pleaded Rosamond.

Beautiful, young, avid for happiness, yet deserted and alone! How could Dick? But perhaps all men were like that, disloyal, deceitful. What could they mean by such baseness, flouting the vows of love and honor

to chase off after the forbidden? What could they see in it?

They had been so lately reconciled. Less than a month ago she had threatened to leave him and return to her mother, but Coralie had gone off on this camp and Dick had sworn such vehement innocence. They had been trying, after weeks of storm and strife, to re-live their honeymoon; but— Oh, where was the old zest and thrill of evenings alone together? Now there was only a little desultory chat over his newspaper and her novel, a little surreptitious yawning, a little playing on the piano to which Dick did not listen, and an early bedtime, and that, too, matter-of-fact, almost prosaic.

Yet, once just the touch of his hand had thrilled her, and his lips had sent a little fiery stream trickling through her blood. The wonder, the glamour, the ecstasy of it. How could two such ardent explorers of life as she and Dick settle so soon to static dullness? Had it gone forever, that zest and thrill? Other things, better things, might have come with their settled domesticity if Dick hadn't gone off exploring with some one else—Coralie now, with her heavy-lidded gaze and her slow, red smile.

This thought, stabbing its way through Rosamond's breast, stung her to intolerable rage and pain. She sent word that she did not want dinner and, flinging herself on the bed regardless of her careful toilet, buried her face in the pillows to shut out the image of Coralie and Dick. It had not hurt so dreadfully before; the seductive actress and an obscure stenographer had been unknown to her, but Coralie was an old acquaintance, a neighbor, which deepened the humiliation. She would never forgive Dick, never, never! She would hurl his falseness in his face and never speak to him again.

She lay there, raging and helpless, until a sudden revolt against her misery sent her to her feet. Pushing the soft loosened hair off her cheeks, she went over to cool her hot face at the window.

There was a moon and pale scattered stars, and a little breeze, roaming over the terrace, rippled the shadows of trees and shrubs, and stirred the flowers dreaming in languid pallor. Below the terrace stretched the bay in splendid, glowing abandon under the kiss of the moon. It was a beautiful night, made for happiness and love; and, to quiet her aching misery, Rosamond began to tell herself that this time Dick might have told her the truth. His late business appointment and Coralie's unexpected return falling on the same evening might have been a mere coincidence—one chance in a thousand. Were it so, she would wait up for him and be so gay and ardent that, surely, she could conjure some of the old thrilling delight for them both.

This little hope fanned the need to be certain, and any action was better than pent-up tortuous thought. Why not slip over to the Mumfords' and take a peep into their sitting-room? And if Dick were there with Coralie, what fierce satisfaction to burst in on them, blast their enjoyment with her scorn, denounce them for what they were, cover them with shame and confusion!

Rosamond hadn't far to go, for the Mumfords' summer cottage, like her own, faced the bay, with only two others and their wide sloping lawns between. On reaching their place—her pretty gown covered by a long gray cape that blended with the night—she found the front of the house in dark-

ness. But, cutting diagonally across the terrace, she saw a light at the side from the windows of the music-room, back of the parlor, shining dimly through drawn curtains. Although this, on a warm summer night, was more or less suspicious, it by no means furnished conclusive evidence, so she was still left in the old tormenting doubt.

Baffled, worried, indeterminate, she drew up close within the shadow of the projecting roof. Almost as she did so, a match flared up inside, and, for a moment, a dim, but unmistakable, silhouette was thrown against the curtain—Dick's smooth head, straight brow and square-cut chin.

Certainty—instant, stunning, absolute!

Now for the swift, Nemesician entrance, the hurling bolts of wrath and denunciation. But—well, what was the use? What the gain? After any such sensational melodrama she would have to break absolutely with Dick; she couldn't go on, with Coralie knowing that she knew. A break would publish her humiliation to the world and another woman's triumph; and it would set the tongues of scandal wagging.

A sense of helpless frustration sank miserably on her. No, she could not pay the price of invading that curtained seclusion, neither could she endure the thought of returning home and shutting herself in with torturing visions and burning resentment.

She started nervously at sound of footsteps on the cement walk and instinctively shrank farther into the shadow. But when a cautious outglance showed that it was Jack Mumford making toward the house, a sense of impending danger sent her hurrying to him.

He halted, in almost comic surprise at sight of her.

"Why, Mrs. Hilton! What on earth's the matter?"

Confusedly conscious of her fugitive appearance, Rosamond answered somewhat wildly:

"Nothing's the matter. What are you doing, getting home so late?" This wasn't in the least what she meant to say.

"I didn't learn until after dinner that Coralie was at home—I've been staying in town while she was gone, you know."

There was nothing of menace in his tone, and Rosamond's tense nerves relaxed. But, although he suspected nothing yet, how was she to keep him in ignorance and out of that curtained room? It did not so much as occur to her that here was an excellent chance for revenge; her whole mind was absorbed in dread of the two men meeting—of possible conflict, blood, death.

"What makes you think Coralie is back?" she asked, fencing for time. "She isn't expected until tomorrow, is she?"

"One of the fellows told me at the club that he came up on the train with her. Of course, she must have phoned me of her return, but I was out of the office most of the day and did not get the message."

He was larger than Dick; she *must* keep him out of that room so she began desperately to improvise:

"I—er, heard she was back, too, and it is such a lovely evening that one is glad of any excuse to get out, so I strolled over for a little chat. But nobody answered my knock, so I am sure it must be a mistake. Please, would you mind seeing me home, Mr. Mumford?"

"Why didn't you try the front door?" he asked, ignoring her request. "There's a bell on that."

"Oh, I did, but no one answered my ring, so I strolled around to the side to see what sort of vine there was on the trellis."

He was regarding her with frank puzzlement; so, to hide her confusion, she said, with a provocative glance:

"I hope it's not too much of a nuisance—seeing me home."

But this did not seem to penetrate his deeping perplexity. Then, with sudden briskness:

"I am sure Coralie's here. Come on in, and I'll prove it." He took her arm, but, struck with panic, Rosamond cried:

"I can't! I haven't time! Oh, Mr. Mumford—Jack won't you see me home?"

"If you'll wait here, or come with me, while I look over the house." Without awaiting an answer, he took a forward stride. Rosamond made a wild rush after him and grabbed his arm.

"Wait! Oh, please, Jack, wait!"

He whirled on her with a sort of ferocious impatience.

"See here, Mrs. Hilton, the whole thing is plain to me now—your hanging around the side of the house, Coralie's not letting me know she was back, and things I've been hearing—the same you've been hearing, I guess. I was fool enough to take Coralie's word—" he broke off abruptly; then, with a stern effort at self-control, resumed:

"Mrs. Hilton, please go home and leave me to deal with this matter."

His hands involuntarily clinched into two knots of steel as he spoke and his eyes narrowed to mere smouldering slits. It was as though all the anger and fury had seeped from Rosamond's breast into his.

"What good will it do to attack Dick?" she asked.

"It will give me quite some satisfaction, I assure you. Why should you care when he is treating you like this?"

"I hate to see such a waste of energy."

"Women are queer! Now, I'd have thought you'd want to tear out his hair, and Coralie's too."

"I might but for knowing it wouldn't do any more good than for you to beat up Dick."

"*Beat* him up! I'll shoot the life out of his sneaking hide!"

He made another forward lunge and a vision of Dick lying in a pool of blood sent Rosamond dragging on to his arm.

"Stop, Jack! Listen. Don't be foolish. You'd gain nothing by killing Dick except a life term in prison, and Coralie would go off and love somebody else."

"That woman swore to me—"

"Of course she did, and Dick swore to me."

He stared at her a moment as though digesting this, then exclaimed:

"Well, surely we ought to do *something!*"

Rosamond tucked her hand under his arm. For the time she had lost all sense of her own suffering in soothing him, and the relief was almost intoxicating.

"Let's go sit on that bench and talk it over," she proposed.

The bench under the wide-spreading maple gave a beautiful view of the bay; dimpling, sparkling, coquetting with the moon which had cast off her cloud-veils of an hour ago and swam the sky in unblushing splendor.

"I know exactly how you feel," Rosamond began as soon as they were seated, "and I wanted to do what you want to do—that's why I am here. I came over to take them by surprise and make a scene."

"Well, why didn't you?"

He had taken off his hat, and in the moonlight his face had something of the salient regularity of a Roman statue. Rosamond, remembering suddenly that she had on her becoming georgette, threw back her wrap, thereby making an effective background for her white shoulders and slender, round throat.

"Because I hated to make myself so ridiculous. The injured party is always that in a case of this kind, and who wants to be either ridiculous or pitied?"

"I'll stir them up to something stronger than pity!"

"You'll stir up a nasty scandal."

He slumped back in his seat at this and caught his head in his hands.

"Heavens, but it's a rotten world!" he groaned.

"It is that," sighed Rosamond, and the old tide of misery came sweeping back. She sprang to her feet with a sort of desperate determination.

"Jack, let's don't let them make us miserable. Let's do something jolly and forget all about them." Then, at a flash of inspiration: "A moonlight swim wouldn't be so bad if I had a bathing suit."

Mumford, as though infected with her spirit, sprang to his feet.

"By jove, if you're not the gamest girl I know! As for a bathing suit, Coralie has rafts of them down there in the bathhouse."

Ten minutes later, as though having shed worries with their clothes, they were plunging into the bay, their blood quickening at its cold, tingling embrace. They fleated down the silver path the moon had drawn across the water, dived, frolicked, and swam, and finally climbed on a rock to rest. By this time somewhat spent Rosamond felt gay, irresponsible, liberated, as different as possible from the forlorn creature who had gazed out of the shadow of the curtained windows. She spread her hair out on her shoulders and clasped her pink knees, pleasantly aware that no movement was lost on the long-limbed, muscular young giant outstretched beside her. She, and the moon, and the sea, had won him to gaiety; but gradually he fell silent and began to regard her with thoughtful intensity.

Rosamond lent over and shook an imperative finger.

"Stop. Say something, thinking is forbidden," she ordered.

"I was wondering, not thinking, exactly—wondering how any man who owned you could want anybody else."

"Unaccountable, isn't it?" she laughed. "Almost as much so as that any woman who had you could—" She stopped suddenly and dropped her lashes.

He jerked to a sitting posture at this. "Mrs. Hil—Rosamond, I wonder how much of that you mean!"

It was nice to kindle that look in a man's eyes again. She let her own blow shyly through her lashes as she replied:

"How do I know, when you are so big and—er, demoralizing?"

"You are a mermaid, a Lorelei! Weren't they the creatures who used to sit in the rocks and spread out their beautiful hair and lure sailors to destruction?"

"I saved you from destruction," she retorted gaily.

"And I am no end glad you did. Wouldn't I have looked a fool blustering in on Corrie and Dick?"

Corrie and Dick? At the instant vision this conjured to her, Rosamond shivered.

"Cold, little girl?" And, at the tone of half-tender concern, she edged a bit nearer.

A quick sheltering arm went round her; a big, bare arm whose muscular strength gave her the first thrill she had known in months. She drew away after a moment, a bit breathless and confused.

"It is getting chilly. Perhaps we'd better be going," she suggested, but when he rose promptly at this, she felt a sort of flatness.

"I wouldn't have you take cold for the world," he said. "I'll fix you up something warming at the cabana."

They swam back almost in silence. It was as though both felt the shadow of pain waiting to fall on them at the shore; but, on reaching the cabana steps, Rosamond drew all her determination up in combat. It was quite a well-equipped little place; among other conveniences was a small cellarette which held all the necessary ingredients of a bracing cocktail. Rosamond drank hers to a little toast:

"What shall we do with the past?
Forget, forget.
The present is ours,
Strew it with flowers,
And when they are faded, tired, and jaded,
Forget, forget."

"If anybody could make me forget, it would be you," Mumford said, tossing his drink off at a quaff. He looked bigger than ever and rather picturesque in a red crash bathrobe.

Rosamond, once more wrapped in her cape—but not too closely, took her cocktail in little sips that trickled warmly through her blood—that, and the dark smoldering gaze bent upon her.

The moon was sinking, the shadows on the terrace were blurring into the pervading dimness, but through the trees and shrubbery lights still shone against drawn curtains. And back in her own room, thought Rosamond, resentment and misery waiting to reclaim her. No, no, she could not, she *would not* go back to such grim specters! She arched her white throat and tilted a wistful blue gaze close under Mumford's.

"Could you make me forget, I wonder?"

"Heaven knows I'd do my best!"

Then when she did not move or reply, save by a spark that leaped in her eyes, his arms went quickly around her. Again the quick, wild thrill born of his strength and ardor, followed by a flashing perception of the forbidden, the portentous, the dangerous. She began struggling to escape half sobbing, deliciously frightened, but she was glad that the muscular, splendid, conquering arms only tightened their clasp.

"We will forget them—and all the world, Rosamond, my little Lorelei!" he murmured with his lips against hers, his voice vibrant, eager, avid.

To move a man like that, once more! To be desired! To feel the power of her beauty and make it felt. Ah, this was the way to forget. And, on a wave of recklessness, she ceased to struggle.

Dick threw her a glance of some anxiety across the breakfast-table, which Rosamond met with a smile unmarred by any traces of martyred forgiveness.

"Rotten luck our evening had to be spoiled," he said. "You can't imagine how sorry I was about that business engagement—"

"Oh, yes, dear," she interrupted, "I know exactly how you felt!"

The Cat's Paw

By ROY CHALMERS

Part of the harem.

ALL right, Archie, I'll come clean —give you all the facts. Only don't stop me to ask questions, even if you are my lawyer. Let me tell it my own way first.

Well, I hadn't been out to "Tree Boles" since Henry Pottle had that trouble with the wife. I knew—we all did—the court had granted her a separation, with alimony. Extreme cruelty was what she charged; but Alty Banks gave me the low-down about that, how Henry was only cruel to Ping Yawn, her Pekinese, refusing to let it sleep on his twin bed, because the Chinese sausage would only be satisfied with Henry's pillow. You see, Henry, having some notion of independence, would throw it over onto Ma Pottle, in her twin bed, waking her up kind of rudely. It was her dog, anyway.

So, if you can believe Alty, the dog indirectly started the whole trouble—my trouble. Or does that sound selfish?

Anyhow, that was before Henry met Chiquita.

Well, when Henry gets his freedom, the reaction sets in. He's been so henpecked, been living in a strait-jacket so long, that when the emancipation proclamation is signed by the judge, he fills his lungs with air and lets loose a bellow of defiance at society—meaning his proper neighbors out in the suburb where he lives.

I got a phone call inviting me up to "Tree Boles." He was having the crowd out, Henry said, and he had a K. O. surprise for us. I'll say it was that!

Soon as I hopped off the train, to begin with, I saw he had hired a female chauffeur for his Lincoln. She wore a uniform and was some good-looker, too. The five other week-enders who climbed off the L. I. train with me (in the order of their appearance, as the theatre programs say — Lill Swain, Sue Appleby, Honora Heintz, Alty Banks and Joe Smythe), they all had some comment to make regarding the new gas-stepper and hoped she wouldn't ditch us.

We arrived at "Tree Boles" safe, however. As we drove in, there was Henry Pottle sitting on a rustic bench with a handsome brunette. None of

us had ever met her, but we'd heard considerable about his Spanish inamorata. That was surprise number two, and you could see it pleased Sue Appleby even less than it did Lill and Honora, because Sue had been pretty thick with Henry and now she was setting her permanent wave for him.

"The nerve of the man," she said indignantly, "inviting us with that woman here. I've a good mind to go right back home."

"You'll do nothin' of the sort!" said Alty, who was cuckoo about Sue himself. "Why put a damper on the party? Be yourself and show him the difference between a real lady and a vamp off a cigar-box label. Be broad-minded."

Sue didn't go back; but if she had, it wouldn't have mattered anyway.

Henry waddled over to meet us, followed by the Senora. The nearer she got, the more you could understand—I did—why he had fallen for her. I'll say she was soothing to the eye!

No wonder Henry looked good, like he'd got something out of his system. He seemed ten years younger, but he still had that paunch at his waistline, like the fat little satyr holding up the shower over himself in the centre of the swimming-pool.

And he still had his teeth—Henry, I mean. Nice teeth they, too; strong, white toofies. But they were doomed!

He uncorked himself in his genial way and welcomed us to "Tree Boles." Then he introduced her as Senora Chiquita Rodriguez—quite a mouthful, for Henry.

"And Jack Carter," he said, presenting me last; and I bowed so low over her velvety hand.

Chiquita had a delirious laugh—I mean it had that effect on me—emanating out of a scarlet-lipped mouth and pearly teeth that—oh, boy, but she was ravishing! Sort of a vamp type. Sleek raven hair and languorous black eyes, Archie, that made you feel as if you were in the Gulf Stream. She had on something ecru. Sleeveless. Gee, what arms! And the other things! Legs, of course; how dumb you are! When I met her eyes, a naughty little voice whispered to me exactly what Sue Appleby had said, only with a slight variation and meaning: "The nerve of him asking us men to meet her!"

But Henry had a reason, I found out later.

Just then a couple of female footmen appeared and grabbed our bags. They were such handsome, strapping girls, that our eyes nearly popped out. Henry's face was one complete grin. Then he confessed.

The old sybarite, now having the say about the household, had given all the men servants the air!

"He ought to have wised us," grumbled Alty Banks, as Joe Smythe and I tottered up the porch steps with him, following the ladies. "It's going to ruin me, the tips we gotta hand out. They'd blast you with a look, those dames, if you offered 'em less'n a ten-spot apiece."

"Well, maybe it's worth it," I argued.

"You take my advice," Joe Smythe insinuated behind his hand, "and don't get fresh with those amazons.

"Tut, tut," I laughed, "I was only thinking of the pleasure it affords the eye. I'll bet even the scullery maids are blest with pulchritude."

"Gawd!" Alty was almost in tears, "there's them too. And the milkmaids and the haymakers—anyhow I saw a jane out there in over-alls. This weekend will sure send me over the hill to the poor-house."

"Or the hospital," croaked Joe.

But it was only beginning.

Up in my room, I'd just taken off my coat, when there's a tap at the door and in walks a she-valet. A peachy blonde—which peaches always are—and a trim middle-weight. Piquant—if you know what I think I mean.

Well, she dropped me a curtsey and took my coat away from me. Next she proceeded to unpack my kit bag of the usual habiliments and knick-knacks, diurnal and nocturnal, of a perfect gentleman grafting over the week-end, with me standing there gaping like a goldfish through a bowl.

"How would you like your bath, sir?" she asked, matter of factly, having laid out a clean change and put away my other stuff in a closet and chiffonier.

"Well," I answered in a weak voice, coming to life, "I generally like it fifty-fifty, unscented, but suit yourself."

"I am here to please you, sir," she said, dimpling, and was off into the bathroom.

I toddled over to the window and stuck my head out. It was a thirty-foot jump, so I sat down meekly and proceeded to take off my shoes. I'd just removed one when she ran out and getting down on her knees, unlaced the other police pup.

"Thank you—er—Jane," I said, now in my socks and glad they were silk.

"Marilyn, sir," she corrected.

"That's a pretty name, and you are a pretty girl, Marilyn," I told her. "But how come? Don't you find this valeting kind of — well, awkward sometimes?"

"Oh, no, sir; I really prefer it to being a lady's maid. Besides, the pay is better. No, I like it."

"Well, I just wanted to know." I faked a yawn. "It's rather unique for me, but I dare say I'll get used to it. I'll be here till Monday."

The female valet

"I'll take good care of you, sir," she promised. Gee! what dimples the kid had.

"By the way," I inquired, "how long has the Señora been here?" And right away I saw I'd made a dumb crack.

Señora Rodriguez," she informed me, jelling hard, "has been here since Wednesday. Your bath is ready, sir. When you need me, r-ring," and out she goes with a toss of her curly head.

Which shows you female valets are touchy and temperamental. Marilyn, it looked to me, was jealous of Chiquita. But girls will be girls, Archie!

That dinner! Little did I know it was to be my one and only meal at "Tree Boles"—never shall I see the likes of it again. But merely a word about that.

There was a she-butler, a blonde Juno in a white boiled shirt and collar, and a black swallow-tail set off by a low cut, scarlet waistcoat; she wore knee-pants and white silk stockings with silver buckles—I'm not sure they weren't bells—on her patent-leather pumps. She used a lip-stick over at the sideboard between courses! Besides her, there were the two female footmen, in the same costume, who passed the eats.

One of them spilled soup in Alty Banks' lap but Alty confessed later he had playfully pincher her leg. Boys will be boys, Archie.

Henry, at the head of the table, flashing his teeth at the ladies; but it struck me his joviality was forced, that he had something serious on his mind. And so he had!

The ladies—that is, Lill, Honora and Sue, and especially Sue,—you could see were not having a good time.

But the Señora—ah! *She* was wholeheartedly gay. She sat between Henry and me. Along about the Chablis, she dropped her fan on the floor and, both of us ducking together, her ivory-smooth shoulder brushed my cheek—fortunately that had been cleanly shaven, though not by Marilyn.

Well Archie, I pressed the Señora's hand under the table, and I felt a gentle response from hers.

But Henry didn't know that.

After dinner he maneuvered me out to a rustic seat.

"Jack," he began hesitatingly and with a queer face, silly and yet serious, "I hate to tell you, but I must. Fact is, there's a reason why you and the bunch are here. There's a string to my hospitality."

"Well, there never was before," I told him, "so you must have good cause now. But before you elucidate, Hen, please enlighten me about one thing. I know you never had to be dragged to the Follies, and now that you have this freedom, you think it a bright, original idea to surround yourself with—well," I waved my hand toward the house, "this harem atmosphere. But does it pay?"

"It does," he answered, squinting at his cigar ash, "and it doesn't. In fact, I've about decided to go back to the old system."

"Why?"

"Because this has one great drawback. In about a half-hour you'll begin to see them coming—their boy friends—from the north, south, east and west. A dozen or fifteen is putting it conservatively, when you figure I have thirteen girls on my pay-roll, counting the farmhands. Male help go away from home to do their petting, but this—oh, hell, it's simply ruining my shrubbery!"

"I wondered what was the matter with it," I said, looking around. "And the grass."

"It was just a fling, anyway," he went on. "I wanted to show my wife and the neighbors—assert my independence. But it's all a mockery, Jack,"—he pulled a long face and sighed, "I'm a sad and lonely man."

"I wouldn't say that," I laughed. "How about the Señora?"

"That's what I'm coming to," Henry said quickly, putting his hand on my knee. "Listen, old chap: Yesterday I got a tip that my wife, hearing Chiquita was here, means to start some-

thing this week-end—get evidence—personally. That's why I asked you and the others out, so as to—er—be around and make things look more conventional—respectable."

"So that's it!" I winked at the saucy satyr out in the pool.

"Only half," said Henry. "I thought maybe you, for the sake of old times, would do me a favor."

"You know you only have to name it," I promised, though not without misgivings. "Shoot."

"Well, then," he said, eager and anxious, "here's the dope. If Laura," he sketched the plan on his palm with a fat finger, "does start anything—and I heard it would be tonight—I want to create the impression that you and—and Chiquita are here at 'Tree Boles' because you are—ahem—sweet on each other, and I am helping the affair along. What's the matter?"

"Nothing," I said, "only it kinda took my breath. You want me," I tried to sound casual and careless, "to understudy you—that the idea?"

"I mean," Henry said slowly, looking me keenly in the eye, "you're to pretend—act. I'll explain to Chiquita, and she'll play up. You'd get just so far and no further with her, anyway," he added with a smug, confident air, "and it's offering you a very pleasant evening, at that. But of course, if you'd rather not—well, there's Joe, or Alty—"

"Oh, I'll help you out," I hurried, thinking of how nicely Chiquita and I had gotten along at dinner. "I'll see you through, Hen. But tell me, how did you get this tip about the wife?"

Henry grinned, displaying those excellent, but ill-fated, teeth.

"Why," he explained, "you see the detective she hired double-crossed her. Nine out of ten are crooked. They know which side of the bone the tenderloin is on—who's got the money."

"I'm here to please you, sir," said the beautiful housemaid.

"I see," said I. "Well, I'll do what I can for you, old man—not that I like it over-much. All right."

"Attaboy!" he cried, capping me on the shoulder.

At nine o'clock Henry, somewhat like the monkey, having made me his cat's paw to draw the chestnuts out of the fire, was in the house with the others playing bridge. It was somewhat crowded out-of-doors, anyway.

Chiquita and I couldn't find a place

to sit, every bench on Henry's expensively groomed, ten-acre estate being already occupied by his help and their boy friends. This seemed to annoy the Señora, after we'd wandered around twenty minutes or so, and especially when she stumbled over a foot sticking out a rhododendron bush.

"Ca-r-r-ramba!" she exclaimed.

"You said it," I agreed. "All the world loves a lover, but not when they want the whole works. I'm sorry, Señora—"

"Soy Chiquita," she purred. "I mean, I would like if you called me that, Meester Car-r-ter."

"I would like it too," I said. "All right, then: say Chiquita—"

"No, no," she laughed; 'soy' means 'I am—my name is.' Just Chiquita, call me."

"Then soy Jack," I suggested, "Well, Chiquita, I was going to observe that it's being a warm night, we could sit on the grass—you can have my coat—in there back of the hedge."

"I do not mind," she said.

It was a nice secluded nook; fact, I'd had my mind on it all the time, only I had felt a bit faint-hearted about proposing it. The arbor-vitae was high, and the shrubbery behind bosky—thick, you know. Not exactly the place for Ma Pottle to notice us; but then I wasn't worrying so much about that person. If she wanted to find Chiquita, it was up to her.

Not every jane I'd allow to sit on my tuxedo, either; I doubt if Sir Walter would have let his opera cloak be muddied by anybody else than Lizzie. Long head, that bimbo had—but she chopped it off, just the same. I'm going to keep that in mind!

Well, there we were, the Señora and I, with a swooning scent of roses hanging in the air. Chiquita herself was a fragrant rose—or a fragrant Havana. And she seemed so contented I smiled when I thought of Henry's cocksure air.

The way it looked to me, after looking the matter over was that Señora Rodriguez' romance with Henry Pottle already needed new stimulus.

I'll never forget that first kiss! It was a long, close kiss that thrilled. Now, Archie, don't look at me that way; you said you wanted all the details.

"I am surprised, Jack," Chiquita said, after she'd caught her breath. "Did he tell you you might do that?"

"No, he didn't," I confessed. "He said I would get just so far with you, and no further. But he didn't say *how* far."

She raised her beautiful face suddenly to mine. "You have gone farther than he ever did—than I would ever let him—"

"Chiquita!" I caught her in my arms and kissed her warm, sweet mouth passionately. "You are in my blood," I breathed, "You've turned it into a—a Gulf Stream! I love you—yes, I loved you the moment I first saw you!"

"And I wish," she murmured, her lips on mine, "that you had come before," and then her soft arms went up round my neck.

Well, Archie, we were there quite a while. The moon came up; it sailed under clouds and then lay becalmed again in the clear sapphire. Out there the shower splashed in the swimming-pool. Crickets sang and the fireflies winked and twinkled. . . . We forgot Henry and his other guests—his help and their boy friends—forgot everything.

I remember a darker cloud shadowed the moon. Then the moon came out again—

And so did three men from behind

the shrubbery—three dark forms crashing through! Ma Pottle's detectives at last, I thought.

"Caught red-handed!" said one man gruffly, on top of Chiquita's scream. He trained a flashlight on us. "That your wife, Mister?"

"Chiquita Rodriguez!" cried a foreigner in a loud voice of anguish and rage. "So it is true—Dios! The flower of my bosom in another's! Chili con carne!"—or something like that. "And theese Enrique Pottle, eh? Picaro!—Bribonazo! Son of a gun! Get up queek so I can choke you with theese two hands!"

The ugly suspicion that Henry had used me to shield himself, not against his wife, but against Chiquita's husband, was unbelievable; even now I try to think he was unprepared for this denouement. But I don't know. Anyhow, I was in this mess on Henry's account.

"I am not Henry Pottle!" I said, rising and facing the maniac. Not every friend would have done that much for Henry, either; they'd have let the onus rest on Hen.

"Then who are you?" demanded Señor Rodriguez, so utterly flabbergasted I had to laugh.

"Soy Jack," I told him, for what good is a lesson in Spanish if you can't remember it?

"Another man! That makes it worse," he stormed, frothing under his waxed moustache, "she is more of a wanton than I thought!" and he flew at me, with Chiquita, now on her feet, screaming again.

Henry's girls and their lovers were ring-side spectators. The loud voice of Rodriguez and Chiquita's outcries had also been heard in the house, of course, and the whole caboodle had come tearing out.

Well, if only Henry had minded his own business before, instead of now, this part would have been avoided. You see, he tried to stop the mill, getting in the way so that a right hook of mine aimed at the Señor, parked on Henry's ear instead—and Mr. Pottle went spinning around and sprawled face down on the brink of the swimming pool, his mouth hitting the concrete curb—I thought I heard something crack—and then there was the most awful language from Henry.

In the meantime, Señor Rodriguez, taking advantage of my inattention, biffed me on the nose. That was imprudent of him because I, considerably peeved on account of it, nailed him with a flock of wallops the last of which, upper-cutting him on the chin, was a K. O.—or should I say, a K. I.? —for it knocked him white spats over waxed moustache into the swimming pool.

Some of the boy friends pulled the Señor out. He looked like a wet rat and the fight was all out of him.

Oh, say, Archie, may I use your phone? I'll probably be here some time, and I made an engagement.

Hello! that you, Chiquita? Soy Jack. Say, Chiquita, I'll be a little late. Yes,

Now the part that makes Henry sore, Archie, was that he knocked out those five upper front ones, and he accuses me of ruining his chances with Chiquita. He says that if he hadn't lost his magnificent teeth and had to wear a bridge, everything would still be okay between them—all bally foolishness, of course! So out of revenge, he swears he'll make me pay a nine-hundred-dollar dentist's bill. Well, I won't! I believe it was all a plant, anyhow.

But I got the chestnuts out of the fire — for myself. Rather expensive chestnuts, I'm afraid they're going to be. But wait till you *see* her, Archie!

The Blonde On the End

By DAN KNIGHT

"WAITER!" bawled the commanding gentleman in the white waistcoat, above the din of the revue in a well-known New York night club. "Waiter, bring me that blonde on the end!"

"Beg pardon, sir?"

"I say bring me that blonde. That little one on this end!" indicating the line-up of nearly naked girls in the revue. Then, observing the hesitation of even this veteran waiter at so crude and undiplomatic an approach, the gentleman in the white waistcoat unbent to whisper confidentially to the attendant servitor: "It's all right, George. My friend here and I want to buy her a drink. Tell her there are two gentlemen from Famous Films here, that they're interested in her, and would like to talk with her awhile, personally. Bring her to this table as soon as she's dressed—or before, I don't care." And a greenback was slipped quietly into the waiter's palm. The revue ended in a burst of applause and the waiter headed for the performers' dressing room.

The gentleman in the white waistcoat who, for convenience's sake, we shall call Harry, turned to his rather quiet companion, who shall be hereinafter referred to as Larry.

Harry grinned triumphantly. Larry smiled patiently. Each lifted his glass of carbonated rhine that passes for champagne and each drank silently—to his own success.

A splendid-looking pair they were, too, in their evening clothes. Each man was what the world considers a success, and, though both had risen to high places in the same industry, they had no more in common than a Japanese poodle dog and a bloodhound.

Their respective spheres were as far apart as the two poles, yet each was entirely indispensable to the other. Harry represented financial success, and Larry typified artistic success.

For Harry was the general sales manager of one of the greatest motion picture producing firms that ever proved it wasn't a trust, and Larry was the youngest and most artistic director of the same organization. Harry's line was sales and figures. Larry's was tales and figures—but of another sort. Neither could have succeeded without the other. One to create, one to sell. Their occasional evenings out together always brought them into violent discussions or heated arguments, yet each felt that the other had something he lacked.

The waiter returned to beam upon Harry and inform the gentleman that Miss Dewitt, the little blonde on the end, would be pleased to accept the

gentleman's kind invitation to join his party—for a while—as soon as she had dressed.

Harry nodded delightedly and ordered some more "champagne" to pass the time. "What'd I tell you, Larry?" he gloated.

"You haven't won yet," replied Larry dryly. "Remember, you have to take her to your apartment for a quiet little supper—or breakfast, depending upon the time—for two, in order to win that bet. And I'm saying she won't go with you."

"My dear Larry," said Harry pityingly. "With your brains, with your knowledge of life, and in view of your experience with the so-called fair sex, how can you still remain the hopeless romanticist, the impractical idealist, that you are?"

"And," replied Larry heatedly, "with all that women have done for you at some time or another in your misspent life, how can you remain the jeering skeptic, the bitter cynic, that you are? I know that all women are not good, but neither are all women bad. And I'm betting that the good prevails."

"And I'm betting that nothing prevails but the lure of the shekels," returned Harry. "You certainly were a sap to bet me a hundred dollars that I couldn't go home with any woman we selected out of a revue in a place like this. Why, I was so sure of winning that hundred that I even let you pick out the woman to try it on."

Which was true. The pair, having fallen into their usual argumentative mood when together, the talk had turned to women. Larry, the dreamer and artist, was feeling like sentimentalizing over women just then. Harry had naturally swung to the opposite extreme and the verbal battle was on. It had culminated in Larry selecting the little blonde at the end for the test and Harry had sent the waiter after her.

"A woman must have stung you properly at one time or another and you never recovered your equilibrium," observed Larry.

"A woman!" roared Harry. "A woman! A *dozen* women!"

But the obsequious waiter was grandly placing a little doll-like blonde at their table. Both men rose as one. Harry bowed profusely. Larry bent forward in his impetuous manner and his dark eyes flashed into the violet eyes of the angel smiling up at him demurely.

They all seated themselves. The waiter came.

"Just a little ginger ale for me, please. With a little rye in it, Luigi," gurgled Miss Dewitt to the waiter. Harry and Larry ordered some more of whatever it was in their bottle.

"Now, Miss, uh—Miss Dewitt. This is me, you see—" producing a card, "and this is my friend, Mr.—" but Larry already had his card in the lady's hand.

"Oh," cried the young lady delightedly after reading both cards, "put me in the movies, will you?"

Harry darted a triumphant look at Larry, who nodded his concession to the first point in favor of Harry's theory.

Then the three plunged into movie talk. They fell to discussing the stars. Not the heavenly bodies, though some of them had those, too.

Well, to make a long evening short, Harry at length began to "proposition" the little blonde. He was careful to make no promises, though Larry felt that Harry was letting himself in for a lot of future trouble by letting Miss Dewitt believe that personal con-

nections with motion picture executives were highly beneficial to a girl who wished to get into the movies. Harry wanted to win that bet, though.

Miss Dewitt hung on every word, her violet eyes wide, her lips parted, breathlessly. Harry drew forth his watch importantly.

"Miss Dewitt," he began impressively, "I am expecting a long-distance call from Hollywood at my apartment in a few moments. I must be there to receive it. I would very much like to continue our little chat, and if you will do me the honor of accompanying me, I can have my man lay out a little snack while I am waiting for my call. It will be perfectly all right, I assure you. Certainly you know human nature well enough to feel that you can trust me."

"Oh, I do! I do!" Miss Dewitt hastened to reply.

Harry favored Larry with an "I-told-you-so" look. Larry was sprawled out on his haunches, head on chest, toying with the ashtray, and evidently not even listening.

"But," continued Miss Dewitt apologetically, "I just couldn't do that, you see. I'm awfully sorry, but, the truth is, every night when I get through work here I always go home with the head waiter."

Harry blinked.

"You see," went on Miss Dewitt, almost regretfully, "he is my husband!"

Larry sat up, taking a sudden interest. Her husband! This is a rich one on Harry, he exulted. Funny, too, no stipulation had been made concerning husbands. Therefore Harry had lost his bet!

Harry looked as flabbergasted as the traveling auditor who comes on a red-ink entry in the ledger. But he rose, manfully. He had to make good his bluff. He spoke mechanically: "Why, I *am* sorry, Miss Dewitt. Yes, yes! Awfully sorry. Well, I've got to be home for that call. Have to say good night. Hope we meet again, sometime, Miss Dewitt. Coming, Larry?"

But Larry, it seemed, was too comfortable to move. He smoked on lazily. "Music just gettin' good," he murmured. He didn't even notice that Miss Dewitt was on her feet, bidding both of them good-night. She then disappeared toward the dressing rooms.

"Just got a great idea for that sequence that's been sticking me in my new story, Harry," he explained. "Like to stay until I get it all doped out, while it's in my mind."

Harry peeled a hundred dollar bill from his luscious bank roll. "Well, you win this time," he conceded reluctantly. "Didn't expect to find a girl true to her husband in this damned place. But, of course," he added brightly, "she's right under his nose. She had to be good. Well, g'night." And he tossed the century note to Larry. Harry purchased his hat and coat back from the smiling checkroom girl and went.

A few moments after Harry had gone, Larry rose to meet the radiant blonde who had returned in all haste to his table. She talked excitedly, "Why, Larry! For heaven's sake, where'd you come from? Haven't seen you since you and your roughneck gang used to wreck Kennedy's old joint at Thirty-eighth Street! If you hadn't of given me the high sign the minute I stepped up to your high-hat friend, I'd of thrown my arms around your neck. You're like a letter from home. What was it all about, anyhow?"

Larry waved for the waiter, or-

dered, then explained the bet. "I had just recognized you on the floor when my boy friend bet me a hundred he could go home with any girl in the revue that I picked out. So I chose you, then gave you the office to play straight when you came over. But listen, Dollie, is it true you're married now to that headwaiter?"

Dollie's laughter tinkled through the noise and confusion of the crowded night club. "Hell, no!" she giggled. "But I had to have some stall. I didn't want to leave this place so early. Too many butter and egg men craving to spend money."

Larry smiled rather ruefully. "That's too bad, Dollie, for I was just going to ask you to let me take you home. Just for old time's sake, you know."

Dollie flicked her golden bob from port to starboard. "Some other time, Larry. There's man's work to be done here tonight, and Dollie sure does need a new pair of—er, shoes."

Larry leaned closer. "Dollie, I won a hundred dollars on you this evening," and he spread the bill on the table, covering all but the numeral. Dolly appeared interested. "And it's all yours, Dollie—if you'll let me take you home tonight. Just for old time's sake, you know."

AIN'T LOVE GRAND?

By Marion Hamilton Wood

My old maid aunt has got a beau—a "goofy" looking bird—
But she thinks he's just elegant; she does, upon my word!
He's tall and skinny as a rail; his eyes are awful dead—
His feet are really whoppers; and there's no hair on his head.

He wears great horn-rimmed glasses, and flowing "artist" ties;
He looks something like a preacher, and he thinks he's pretty wise.
Aunt Alice never had a beau till Archibald arrived;
But, since he came, she's full of "pep," and gay—you'd be surprised!

She used to wear such funny clothes, as frumpy as could be;
But you should see Aunt Alice *now*—she's different, believe me!
She's bobbed her hair, and curls it, too; she powders and she paints;
She talks of "classy" vices, and strange "pre-natal taints."

Before her beau's time, honestly, we didn't dare to show
We knew that story of the stork, exploded long ago.
"Oh, well, it's strange what love will do to people like Aunt Alice,
With Archibald she'd hardly know a pig-pen from a palace.

And Archibald? The dear, sweet thing—he can't escape her net—
For her face has that determined look which means: "I'll get you yet."
And when my Aunt Alice decides that she'll "get her man"—
He'd better go in training and out-run her, if he can.

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. 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—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 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 couse 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, snakelike 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 writting, 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 nearby 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 Deckhart'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 finfier on the pistol in front of him. "Don't forget—if they do—this gun is going to kill another skunk."

THE TABLES TURNED

By Ella Martin

"Dear wife, I own I was walking last night
With lovely, black-eyed Bess;
You needn't care—you know 'twas all right,
So why should you feel distress?
Yes, darling, I know that I rode today
With Susan, stately and tall;
With Fanny and Jane, who are lively and gay—
But I love you the best of all.
Of course, I am going out tonight,
Though it puts your love to the test;
I may dance and flirt till the morning's light,
But remember, I love you the best."

But when he returned to his home again,
No face on the pillow, no sound.
His heart was pierced with a jealous pain,
When a note on the dresser he found.

"Remember, darling," (so the note ran)
"And let not your teardrops fall;
Though I have eloped with another man,
Yet, I love you the best of all!"

Somebody's Son

By ALAN WILLIAMS

HAL JACKLIN turned away from the telephone, a wrinkle of worry in his rather low brow, a frightened expression in his pallid eyes. The handsome woman, obviously a few—to be kind—years his senior, looked her question.

"Will you wait in the bedroom for a few minutes, my dear?" the young man said. "I've got to see this bore or he'll just make a scene in the lobby."

"Who is it?" the handsome woman asked.

The young man drew his velvet robe around his slim frame with a rather bored gesture.

"His name is Jones—or it may be Smith. Anyway, he's put the wrong construction on a perfectly harmless conversation—or note. His wife's a fool—of course!"

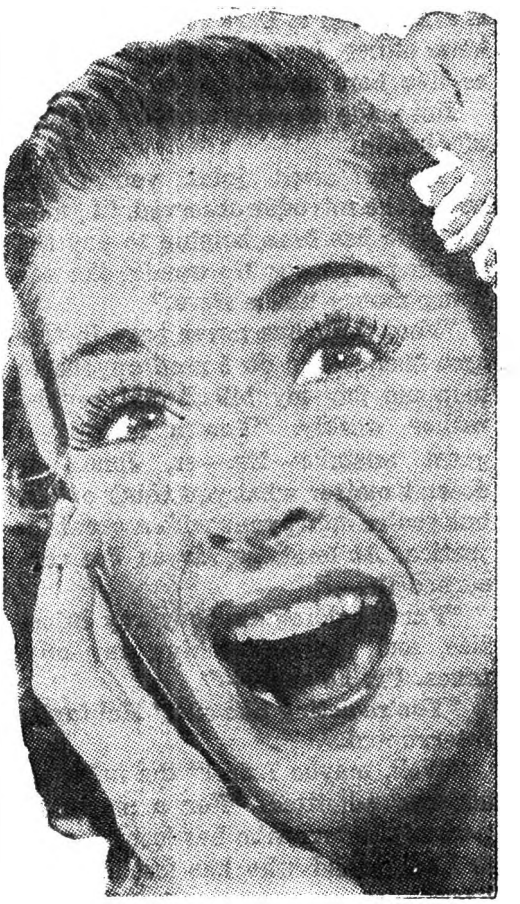
The handsome woman smiled. "All wives are, aren't they, Hal?"

Hal did not answer. His foot was beating a nervous tattoo upon the floor. There was a quick, impatient ring.

The handsome woman got up. Hal kissed her lightly.

"I'll get rid of them as soon as possible," he promised.

The man who came in when Hal opened the door was quite a different type—a very different type. He was big all over and flushed with fury—or liquor; probably both. He was not a young man—his hair was thinning and the rage he was in was doing all sorts of things to his blood pressure. The sheer vitality of his entrance into the room almost floored the slim and wavering Hal.



"Henry Jones," Lydia cried out.

"So you're the guy!" the florid one announced, surveying Hal with a contemptuous, infuriated inspection. "I thought it would be some curly-haired cake-eater."

At that game Hal was adept and the man's insults rather goaded him out of his fright. "Did you come here to call names?" he demanded. "Because if you did, let me say, that you're a bald-headed rum-hound, and what do you mean by shouting filth to me over the telephone from the

public lobby of the hotel."

"Never mind what I called you over the telephone. It all goes double, and it ain't going to hurt your reputation here either, because you ain't going to live here much longer."

Hal made no reply except a gesture of disdain.

"Pretty swell joint you've got here," the intruder observed. "I guess my wife has been helping to pay the running expenses. No wonder she was using money like a sieve."

"Your wife has never been in this apartment—nor do I need anyone to help me pay my bills," Hal replied rather weakly. "You're making a great mistake—Mr.—er, Jones. It doesn't matter what you think of me, but you're doing your wife a great injustice. At least, so far as I'm concerned the—"

"I'm not doing anybody any injustice, and I'm not making any mistakes. I'm no child—"

"You're acting like one," Hal tartly interrupted.

"Well, maybe I am!" the infuriated man admitted. "For a man desperately in love who has lost his wife is like a child who has lost a treasure."

"You haven't lost your wife—at least not to me. I don't want her. Heaven knows I have trouble enough of my own."

"I guess you're tired of her by now. But that doesn't give her back to me. That doesn't change the fact that you took her away from me."

"I didn't take her away from you. I didn't even know your wife was living with her husband when I met her."

"I know all about what happened when you met her. My wife has told me everything!"

That did not particularly surprise Hal. He had faced that situation before.

"She probably told you a pack of lies," he snapped. "Women do when they're sore. If you knew anything about women or your own wife you would know that."

"I guess you could teach me quite a few things about women all right. And why should my wife tell everything to me and be sore at you? Why should she be sore unless you turned her down?"

"Have you come here to find out why I am not able to reciprocate your wife's attentions?" Hal asked somewhat tartly.

"I've come here to see that you don't steal the wives of any more recent men!"

"I didn't steal your wife or anybody's. I meet many women in my business—"

"What is your business—Broadway grafting?"

"If you weren't twice my size you wouldn't be saying these things, you red-faced pig. I'm on the stage and in pictures now. Before that I was a dancing instructor. I met your wife in the ordinary course of business transactions."

"Yes, your business! And you soon began to collect—"

"I've never had one cent from your wife—"

"Don't lie to me! I've got the cancelled checks in my pocket right now."

"If you'll let me finish—I was just about to say that I've never had one cent from your wife except for dancing lessons, and one check, I believe, for a gambling debt."

"Yes—collected from her in a den of vice to which you dragged her."

Hal laughed shortly. "I did not! It was an apartment conducted by some friends of hers. I'd never been

Harry was a plainclothes dick and looked it.

in the place before in my life. There was a handbook, and bridge and poker games."

"It doesn't matter—"

"On that we agree perfectly!"

Since this visit seemed to be developing into a competition of talk and abuse Hal was considerably less nervous.

"I came here today," Mr Jones said suddenly calming down, "with the intention of giving you a first-class thrashing and ordering you to keep away from my wife."

Hal became somewhat pale again. "I have every intention of keeping away from your wife," Hal said promptly. "It is because I kept away that she told you her sad story."

That was not particularly gallant, but then Hal was not an extraordinarly chivalrous young man, and he felt that he was fighting with his back to the wall.

"But what good will that do me?" Mr. Jones commanded. "It won't give me back my wife. She doesn't love me any more; she's through with me—"

"She didn't love me when I met her! She was through with you then or she wouldn't have been on the loose looking for a playmate."

Mr. Jones disregarded that.

"I said to myself," he orated, " 'what is life without Min?' Nothing! The thing for me to do is to see that that miserable low-life scoundrel does not ruin anyone else's life like he's ruined mine and Min's. Why should a scoundrel like that be allowed to live?"

"You're talking a lot of foolishness!"

Mr. Jones was not to be interrupted.

"The thing to do," he pointed out, "is to rid the world of your kind of vermin. And I don't want to live—life without Min is nothing to me!"

"But why should your life be without Min? Get Min and be a man, see that she has a good time and doesn't have time to go about looking for other men."

"It's too late. You've poisoned her with your dancing and your wisecracks and your slick ways. It's too late for me. The only thing I can do is to save some other fellow's home."

"For heaven's sake!" Hal cried, his composure suddenly snapping, "at what are you driving?"

Mr. Jones suddenly whipped out a beautiful bit of blue steel, fashioned in the shape of an automatic revolver.

"This is what I'm driving at! Are you ready to die—because I am."

Hal shrieked, "Listen, man! For heaven's sake! What good will this do; you'll just leave her behind to spend your money on some other guy—"

"I don't care what she does. She's

through with me and nothing else counts."

"But I tell you I had nothing to do with that. My gosh man, you can't do this—you're drunk—"

He broke down completely. He begged for mercy; begged in hysterical, whimpering words.

"I knew you weren't a man!" Mr. Jones snapped scornfully. "You can't even die like one."

He raised his revolver. But there was an interruption. From the door leading into the bedroom a woman's voice rang out: "Henry Jones!"

Mr. Jones lowered his revolver and turned quickly. He evidently recognized the handsome woman framed in the doorway.

"Lydia!" he cried.

The handsome woman nodded ever so slightly. "You remember me," she said.

"Remember you!" Mr. Jones cried. "Do you think I could ever forget you, Lydia?"

The woman smiled rather acridly. "At one time you seemed quite able to —but if we are going to have any conversation, I should prefer that you put your gun on the table."

Mr. Jones obeyed without any objection, and Hal, pale as death, dropped into a chair satisfied that he had received a reprieve for a few minutes at least.

"Only last week," Mr. Jones said, "I saw you in your new play and I said to myself that it was just amazing, just wonderful. You didn't seem a day older, or look a day older—and it's been twenty-three years, hasn't it, Lydia?"

"I'm not quite so mathematical," Lydia replied, "but I daresay you're right."

Suddenly, Mr. Jones remembered Hal. In the excitement of seeing Lydia, he had quite forgotten the young man.

"But what are you doing here?" Mr. Jones demanded. "What are you doing in the apartment of this—this lounge lizard?"

"It is the one place where I should be," Lydia replied with her best third act manner. "It is the one place in the world where I have the right to be."

Mr. Jones was surprised and distressed. "Lydia, don't tell me that you too are one of his victims. I was just about to put an end to him—to scotch a snake in the grass, when you called to me."

"No," Lydia said slowly, "I am not one of his victims; he is one of mine —and yours. Henry Jones, you ought to get down upon your knees and thank your Maker that you did not kill this boy."

"Why? What right have his kind to go around stealing the wives of decent men? Lydia, I adore my wife —my Min, and he stole her from me. It's a different thing than the love I had for you—that was a youthful passion, but my love for my wife is a permanent thing, Lydia. I can't live without her and she's through with me—I can't go on with it now, Lydia—"

Hal took a deep breath of exultant relief.

"But," Mr. Jones went on, "I'm sorry you interrupted me. I would have had no regrets if I had stepped on this worm."

"Henry Jones," Lydia said with deadly earnestness, "you must not talk so about this boy. Have you looked at him well?"

Hal gasped, was about to giggle, and then at a stern look from Lydia relapsed into vacuity.

Mr. Jones did not grasp or did not want to grasp her meaning.

"What are you driving at, Lydia?"

"I tell you to look at him well, Henry Jones!"

"Lydia?"

"That is the reason I say you should get down upon your knees and give thanks that you did not kill—your son!"

"I didn't dream—I cannot believe that—"

"No, of course not! Men never want to believe—never want to dream. It is women who dream, and then must believe—"

"But you didn't say anything—not one word—in all these years—"

"Why should I have said anything? You allowed yourself to be dragged away to Europe by your parents—"

"But they said—you accepted their money—and my letters to you remained unanswered."

"I had no letters from you. They must have intercepted them. Of course,, I took their money. I had none then—you knew that. How else was I to provide for my son—your son—"

"But I didn't know—I didn't dream there was to be—"

"I didn't want you to know! When I found that your love was such a poor thing—I did not want you. I could take care of my son—I have. And if the thing you say about him now is true—then it merely proves that at last—in spite of all I could do—he has come into part of his heritage. He is the son of his father!"

Poor Mr. Jones was in a terrible funk.

"What am I to say? What am I to do? It—it is all so unbelievable."

He turned rather helplessly to Hal, who now sat proudly erect, disdainfully and haughtily surveying the unhappy husband and parent.

Hal accepted his cue. "Say nothing to me!" he announced. "I have nothing to say to you. I have no father—I never had a father—I want no father." Hal sprang to his feet with a tremendous show of anger. "You!" he cried. "Talk about killing me to avenge the houor of your miserable wife!"

"Hal!" the gentle interruption came from Lydia. "Any wife of his would be bound to be miserable."

"I don't mean to be nasty," Hal retorted, "but she was so starved that she flirted with every man and boy in the dancing class. She just told him this ridiculous story because she was furious when I would not give her any more lessons." Again he turned furiously on the dejected Mr. Jones: "And for that you would have shot me down in cold blood! How about the wrong you did—my—my mother, and me! Don't you think that gun would be doing better work if it sent its bullets into your miserable heart?"

Mr. Jones turned to Lydia.

"What can I do?" he implored. "What can I do?"

"You'd better get out of here," Lydia advised; "that's the best thing you can do. And take your gun—I don't want to get arrested for violation of the Sullivan Act!"

Mr. Jones meekly obeyed.

"And," Hal shouted to him by way of parting advice, "if you give that wife of yours a good spanking you might get a little sense into her!"

Rather startling advice for a son to be giving to his papa, but Mr. Jones didn't think about that until later.

Lydia was carefully adjusting her first act make-up when there was a quick knock upon her dressing-room door and before she could answer it, Hal Jacklin bounded into the room,

quite breathless and obviously agitated.

But he was not too agitated to forget his manners. He kissed her—quite as a matter of routine rather than affection. "Forgive me, dear," he said, "for dashing in this way, but—"

Lydia looked at him with affectionate disdain. "Now whose husband, brother, or father is after you?"

"Nobody's, dear. That is." Hal hastened to explain, "I daresay he is somebody's male relative but that has nothing to do with me. That is quite different—but I know this man has been following me since I left the apartment, and so I dashed into the alleyway. But I didn't lose him—I could see him arguing with the doorman as I bolted down this corridor."

"Who is he collecting for?" Lydia asked without any particular show of emotion.

"He isn't a collector," Hal said somewhat indignantly. "I never ran away from a collector in my life. I—I think he's a detective."

"Hal Jacklin! You haven't been stealing—that is just too much!"

"Of course, I haven't. But you know they've been watching the superintendent in my building very closely, so I've been letting him keep some of his black market stuff in my apartment, and occasionally he sends a customer up with a note—"

"How could you be so idiotic? But why should I ask that—how could you be anything else?"

"I couldn't very well refuse. You see I owe him so darn much."

"I told you I wanted to pay your rent."

"And I told you you weren't going to do anything of the sort. But if I've ducked this fellow, it will be quite all right. I'll just phone Riley and tell him to get all the stuff out of my apartment, and then they can't possibly have anything on me."

Lydia continued with her make-up. "You'll be the death of me—"

There was an even, respectful knock upon the door.

"That's probably the dick," Hal whispered.

"Nonsense," Lydia whispered back, "it's probably flowers or an invitation."

The knock was repeated.

"Yes?" Lydia answered.

"It's the doorman, miss," the answer came from outside. "There's a gent'man here who wants to see you —Mr. H. S. Candless."

"Candless? Candless?" Lydia repeated. "Harry Candless — great heavens, I haven't seen him for years and years—"

"Ask what he looks like?" Hal whispered.

Lydia obeyed.

"He's a heavy set sort of guy," the doorman replied. "Looks like he might be a plainclothes dick."

"That's the guy," Hal moaned. "Don't see him, Lydia—don't let him —or stall him until I can phone to Riley."

Lydia considered. "I think I'd better see him. If he's the Candless I used to know maybe I can fix things; if he isn't—there's no harm done. Get behind the screen, and not a chirp out of you."

Hal meekly obeyed. "Do be careful, Lydia; these guys are awfully hardboiled."

"I'm not any shrinking violet, my lad," Lydia pointed out.

Mr. H. S. Candless was ushered in by the well-tipped doorman. Lydia greeted him with outstretched hands. Hal, peeping from behind the screen discovered it was none other than the

sleuth who had tracked him into the theater alley.

"Harry Candless!" Lydia cried. "It has been yeahs and yeahs and yeahs —and see what my brown-eyed boy has grown into."

Mr. H. S. Candless laughed heartily. "A fat middle-aged man!" he admitted. "But you haven't changed a bit, Lydia—not a bit."

"Thanks for that lie, Harry, old dear, and how did you happen to look me up? After all these years—of course, I thought you were dead."

"Well, the fact is—I'm a government officer now and I was after a guy who ducked up this alley somewhere, and then I saw your name on the poster—and it brought back the wonderful old days—I had an impulse and I thought I would say hello! I thought by now you would be willing to let bygones be bygones—"

"And so you abandoned the chase to look me up! I appreciate that Harry."

"Oh, I'll get that guy any time. Lydia, how long ago has it been?"

"I shudder to think! You left me to enlist—the World War, wasn't it?"

"Yes, and I've been in three wars since then—and the big mess. I got the habit of working for Uncle Sam and now I'm still at it."

"Not really! And the months I spent grieving for you—of course, I thought you were killed in France—"

"No, I wasn't killed. But I had a slug and was in the hospital for a long time. When I was getting better a friend wrote me that you were on the stage and had taken up with some rich manager—"

"That was a lie and you should have known it!"

"We were just kids, Lydia—both of us—"

"You wanted to break away, Harry. That was why you went to war."

"No, that isn't so, Lydia. But you know you always were a bit too high-hat for me."

"So you just quit! Without a line—to let me know if you were alive or dead. Harry—if you had any idea what that meant to me—"

"Do you really mean that, Lydia? Gosh, one reason I went away was because I was sure you were getting tired of me—"

"Tired of you! Well, Maybe. But if you knew how I needed you, Harry Candless—"

"What do you mean 'how you needed me,' Lydia?"

"Never mind! I don't need you now. I've been successful and taken care of myself, but those few years after you ran away, Harry— But why think about them? Who were you chasing up into the alley of my theater, Harry?"

"Oh, just some amateur racketeer doing a little business in an apartment. I'm on the apartment house and hotel assignment; they're cutting into the legitimate places too much. This bird may be an actor—of course, if he's a member of your company, we'll just forget all about him. After all, what's one chiseler more or less?"

"What is his name?" Lydia asked with rather indifferent curiosity.

"Jackman or Jackson—something like that."

"Jacklin? Hal Jacklin?"

"Yeah; that's the name."

Lydia clutched at her dressing-table with a gesture of despair and anguish.

"Dear heaven! Dear heaven—"

"Lydia! What's the matter; is he a particular friend of yours? If he is, he's safe. We'll just forget all about it."

"A friend! What a thing to hap-

pen—what a thing—Harry Candless, did you look at that man?"

"I got a few peeps at him. I've been on the trail of that house for a coupla weeks. The superintendent is the guy I'm really after."

"And you didn't see anything familiar about—about Hal Jacklin?"

"Well, come to think of it, his face did seem sorter familiar, but I figured he'd been mixed up with some other racket I might have been trailing."

"Harry, do you remember yourself as you were before you went away from me—before you joined the army in '17? Do you remember yourself as a slim young man with curly brown hair and laughing brown eyes—didn't you see something of yourself as you once were when you chased that young man up this alley."

"Lydia, what are you talking about? Good heavens, you can't mean—"

"Why can't I mean it? Wasn't it the most natural thing—the almost inevitable thing? I was a foolish, silly, ignorant girl."

Mr. Candless, quite stunned, could only make inarticulate, gasping noises.

"It was twenty-eight years ago that you left me, Harry. Hal is twenty-seven although he doesn't look it—"

"And to think I was going to run him in!"

"Yes, Harry. You might have put him in prison as you put me in hell—"

"But Lydia, I never dreamed. Why—why on earth didn't you let me know?"

"I didn't know—I didn't know until days after you had gone. And I didn't hear from you—not one word. I thought you were dead—"

"But if you had written to the War Department—"

"As if I would think of that—or of anything else at the time. And if I had—what claim did I have? I was not your wife. Somehow, I got through and somehow my boy got through—without a father."

"Lydia," Mr. Candless asked imploringly, "what am I to do now?"

"Do? Nothing—nothing," Lydia cried fiercely. "That is all I ask from you—Harry Candless—nothing. I never want him to know of your existence. He thinks his father is dead—he must go on thinking that—"

Mr. Candless mopped his brow and his forehead.

"I think you're right, Lydia; I think you're right. You see, I've got a wife and a coupla kids at home—"

"That makes it all the more certain what we should do. This meeting must be forgotten, Harry—"

Suddenly Mr. Candless had an inspiration. He smiled benignly.

"Of course, I won't pinch him," he said magnanimously. "And you can just tell him I'm an old friend of yours and he can go right on picking up a little easy money around the apartment. I'll see that he's fully protected."

Lydia arose haughtily. "My boy does not have to chisel. He was probably influenced by that superintendent—"

"Don't be too hard on the lad," Mr. Candless suggested. "It ain't like he was a crook or a lawbreaker. It's a good way to make a little extra money. Of course, there really ain't a living in it any more—but where would I be if it wasn't for the black market?"

Lydia held out her hand.

"Good-bye, Harry," she said. "I just have ten minutes before the curtain rings up. Go around out front if you'd like to see the play. But remember—this visit is to be forgotten."

Lydia was just about to have a soli-

tary luncheon when Hal announced himself on the telephone. She told him to come right on up and instructed her maid to prepare a large highball and a small salad.

She kissed him with unusual tenderness because she could see bad news in his eyes.

"Now what's the matter?" she asked sympathetically. "I didn't think you'd be back today—of course," she added hastily, "it's sweet to have you for lunch."

"I didn't expect to be back," Hal said. "I thought everything was settled—and then I didn't get the part. Thanks." This last to the maid who brought the highball.

"Well, that's the show business," Lydia said philosophically. "What happened? Not the type?"

"Didn't even give that excuse. Just —other arrangements had been made. It's that double-damn' casting director. Somebody gave him a bigger rake-off. The filthy grafter! Lyd, darling, this part was made to order for me. If I could only see Livingston, himself —I know he could see I was born for that part. Lyd, I know if I could have gotten that part, I would have been made in pictures—like Jimmy Stewart in 'A Girl from Paris.' Heaven only knows when there'll be another part like that."

"Cheer up! You know you're going to have a good part in my new play."

"Yes, I know, sweet, but it isn't the same thing. I'm sure my real *métier* is pictures. If I could only reach Livingston, direct—"

Lydia displayed a little more interest. What's he got to do with it?"

"He's the director, Hank Livingston—you know, he directed 'Leopard Girl'; he often throws out the people the casting director selects—don't you know anyone who is close to him, Lyd, darling?"

"Hank Livingston . . . he's probably the same one I used to know . . . I heard he was doing well in pictures, but . . ."

"Lyd, darling, will you call him up for me? Will you? Of course, he'd listen to you—"

"No, I won't call him up, little boy, it—"

"Why not? Please, dear. If you know how much this meant to me—if you only knew how much I wanted this chance—I want to do something to make you proud of me!"

"I won't call him up, telephone conversations are always unsatisfactory, but I'll drive over to the studios and see him this afternoon!"

"Lydia, you darling!"

"Watch out—you'll spill my highball."

Hank Livingston, famous director of "Love Starved" and "Leopard Girl," disregarded all other engagements and business, and directed that Lydia should be ushered in immediately, She held out her hands with her usual animation, but she had forgotten that he too—so to speak—was in the business. He accepted only one hand and bent low over it with a kiss which was almost devotional in its intensity.

"Lydia!" he said fervently, "you do me a great honor. I have been waiting—I cannot tell you how anxiously I have been waiting for this day."

"It did not occur to you—that you might have come to the theater to see me?"

"I didn't have the courage, Lydia. After the way I had behaved—I have often wondered: could that have been I? That unspeakable cad—"

"Yes, you did behave abominably,

Hank—but after all, we were both very, very young, and it has been many, many years ago—"

"What I am, I am because of you, Lydia. What of life and love I have been able to get into my pictures is because of what I learned from you, if—"

Lydia smiled. "Then I have not lived in vain, Hank."

Livingston smiled. "The same delicious sense of humor, Lydia. And to what do I owe the honor of this visit? Are you going to let me do a picture with you, adorable one?"

"Oh dear, no! I tried one and I was terrible—"

"You would not be terrible under my direction."

"Yes, I would, and I would ruin your reputation. No, I'm here on behalf of a young friend of mine—"

"Whatever the reason, Lydia, I'm delighted that it brought you here."

"My friend—my protégé, I should say, is Hal Jacklin. He is most anxious to get the part of Roderick in your picture, 'The Cyclone of Shame.' I am sure he is the type—"

"And I am sure you would be an excellent judge, Lydia." The famous director consulted some papers on his desk. "I'm sorry, Lydia, but that part has been cast. I'll see what can be done in some other picture."

Lydia produced some excellent photographs of Hal and placed them on the desk in front of Livingston.

"I want you to look at these, Hank," she said.

Livingston obeyed. "Very handsome," he said somewhat abruptly. He would have been excellent for Roderick; I'm sorry it's cast. I'm sure I can find something else—"

"Hank, I want him to play Roderick."

"Really, my dear Lydia! He seems to be rather young for such a display of interest on your part— Pardon me! I'm thinking in terms of years. I must admit as you sit here before me, Lydia, it doesn't seem possible that you are more than twenty-five—but, I know better—"

"Yes, you know better. Hank, I want you to study that photograph carefully."

"Very handsome as I have said, Lydia. But surely you cannot expect me to share your enthusiasm."

"I certainly do expect you to share it. There is every reason why you should share it."

"Lydia—"

"Can't you see? Have you quite forgotten? Have you forgotten yourself as you were in those days when we were in the Jersey stock, Hank? Your hair wasn't thin then, Hank, and your eyes were not cynical."

The man suddenly clutched the photograph with a dramatic gesture.

"Lydia!"

"Now do you see, Hank? Now can you see?"

The hand of the famous director trembled as he put down the photograph.

"It is incredible, Lydia—incredible!"

"Why incredible, Hank? Isn't it quite the usual thing?"

"But why didn't you let me know? I didn't know what had become of you. For two years, I didn't have the faintest idea what had become of you. When I next heard, you were already on the road to fame."

"For two years no one heard of me, Hank. That was because of you, and—and—"

"But you knew where I was, Lydia."

"Yes, I knew, and I did not care whether you were in heaven or hell. I

would not have sent for you. I knew that you were with that other woman. Not that you cared for her, but because you thought it was an opportunity—"

"But I didn't for an instant think—you believe that, don't you, Lydia?"

"What earthly difference does it make after all these years? All I'm asking is that now you give the boy his chance. He wants to be an actor—it is in the blood—we can't stop him. Otherwise, you never would have known, and he must never know, Hank. He thinks his father is dead."

The great director bowed his head. "I have no rights in the matter, Lydia. I can only do one thing—if he has a spark of talent in him, I shall see that he becomes a great actor. He shall start as Roderick!"

Two of the young ladies in Lydia's company gossiped in bated whispers. Of course, they were alone in the dressing-room, but then the walls were thin.

"I didn't think she'd marry him."

"You never can tell. He's young enough to be her son, but that doesn't mean anything these days, he's doing the juvenile in the new play, you know."

"Yes, Mr. Drake says that's why she married him."

"What does he mean?"

"Well, he says that Hal Jacklin is so flighty and temperamental that the only way she could be sure of him and keep him out of mischief was to marry him. She says she's only trying him out for the run of the play!"

THE UNDERWORLD

By Gwendolen Cumnor

I think that I should like to dwell within
  That purple underworld where passion plays
With virtue in the golden webs of sin,
  And weaves nirvanic night of wisdom's days

I think, when dying Fortune made her will
  And left me barren life for legacy,
She might have framed a tiny codicil
  To give me passport through life's mystery.

The even tenor of existence holds
  The world in balance, yet I feel
The wash of subterranean waters molds
  The rocks we build on into forms unreal.

I long to probe the depths ere far above
  Desire's dim underworld I seek for love.

The Philanderer

By FRANCINE FINDLEY

"You heard me!" stormed Clayton. "From now on I'm running my own affairs."

AND remember, Clayton, no rich desserts—just a bit of jello or some fruit. And don't forget, at least two green vegetables. I don't want to come home and find you suffering from indigestion."

"Yes, Fanny. Some fruit and two green vegetables."

"You'll find plenty of towels and table linen in that little closet off the breakfast nook. Keep out of my big linen closet. I don't want you using everything in the house. And don't go dropping ashes all over the place. Put your ashes in the ashtrays."

"Yes, Fanny!" Clayton Baker glanced at the clock on the mantel and suggested hopefully, "Don't you think you'd better be going now? You haven't much time." But if he expected to hurry his wife or cut short her flowing stream of directions, he was disappointed.

She stooped to pick up a book which had fallen from the table beside the davenport. "That clock's fifteen minutes fast. My, Clayton, I do wish you wouldn't be so careless. The floor is no place for my good, bound books. I hope you won't forget to pay the milk bill and the iceman. And don't sit up reading half the night. Electricity costs money. Besides, you need your rest. And another thing, Clayton, don't think, just because I'm not home that you can ask that Henry Brandon here. I don't want the man in my house."

"Yes, Fanny."

"I believe that's about all." Fanny straightened her hat and picked up her gloves. "I certainly hate to go. It

does seem as if Aunt Clara ought to be all right with a trained nurse. But you know what nurses are! I wouldn't trust any of them!"

Clayton mumbled something affirmative and, picking up his wife's bags, followed her into the hallway and down to the waiting taxicab that was to take her to the station.

"Wouldn't you like me to go to the train with you, Fanny?" he asked as he stowed the bags away.

Fanny shook her head. "No, Clayton. If you hurry, you can dust the living room before you go to the office. It has to be done every day. Don't get too lonesome and write every night and let me know how things are going. I'll come back as soon as I can leave Aunt Clara safely." She stepped into the cab, then leaned forward and gave Clayton a peck of a good-bye kiss.

Clayton watched the taxi move away, then returned to the apartment and mechanically began to search for a dust-cloth. Twenty minutes later, he was on his way to the offices of the Eagleson Insurance Company.

As he seated himself at his desk, a large florid man at an adjoining desk glanced up and smiled broadly. "My wife's gone to the country! Hooray! How about a little game tonight, Clay, up at your place? Say we ask Mort and Jack and Edwards and maybe Paine, if he can get away? We'll have dinner at Fred's, then get some ham and cheese and a loaf of sour rye at the delicatessen for a little snack after the game. I could—"

Clayton looked wistful but he shook his head. "Nope. I think I'll turn in early tonight, Henry. Fact is, I haven't been sleeping very well lately and I promised Fanny—"

"I get you!" Brandon began to drum on the desk with a fat, white hand. "Fanny don't like me! Made you promise to keep away from me, didn't she? It's all right, Clayt. But I'll tell you one thing, you're letting Fanny make an old man out of you. When a guy can't have a few friends in his own home for a little game of cards—not even when his wife's away and wouldn't be disturbed—"

"It isn't that at all, Henry. But you see, somehow, I don't care for cards the way I used to. I—I guess I am getting old. That's why Fanny insists on me getting my rest! Great girl, Fanny! She's always thinking of my comfort!" Clayton added this last with a little flourish of loyalty.

"Yeah? Well, for my part, I'd just as soon be dead as sleep all the time. When you lose your pep you're all washed up as far as getting anything out of life, anyway!" Brandon turned back to his work and Clayton began to sort out the mail on his desk.

At the end of the day, he went home to the empty apartment and began preparations for his solitary dinner. Eggs and a salad of apples and celery and lettuce—two green vegetables and some fruit. Clayton sighed a little as he ate it. If he'd gone to Fred's Chop House with Henry there'd have been oysters and a big steak, maybe with opions and a slab of apple pie with ice cream on top! He could almost see Fanny shudder. Just the same, he liked steak and apple pie! He swallowed the last of his salad distastefully and carried his dishes to the sink.

When they were washed and put away, he went to the living-room and settled down with a book, one of Fanny's good, bound ones. He read for a little while, then put the book away and just sat in his chair staring at the lamp. Funny thing about books—all glowing scarlet and gold on the

outside and then when you opened them—cold black and white. His mind jumped to the poker game that might have been going on right here, if Mort and Edwards and Paine and Henry had come. Too bad Fanny didn't like Henry. He was a little coarse but he was jolly—full of life. Maybe if he hadn't told Fanny about Henry and that little widow— The unworthy thought that perhaps he told Fanny too much about most things crossed Clayton's mind. For instance, he might have had that poker party tonight and Fanny need never have known. Clayton trembled, pleasantly stirred by the bare suggestion. Other man did things—much more daring—and kept their wives in ignorance.

Why, last summer when Mort's wife had been at the seashore, he'd trotted around with that little blonde from the Tempson & Green office the whole time, and he'd laughed when some one had mentioned the fact that his wife might find out.

"Who cares? Besides, I've got Annie trained right. Live and let live! That's my motto. Just because I happen to be married doesn't mean that I've stepped out of the big parade. Not much! Every time you look, you'll find me prancin' along right behind the bandwagon! Marriage may be the main show but it isn't the whole works—not by any means. That is, unless a man's fool enough to let his wife elect herself the ring-master and jump every time she cracks the whip Believe me, if there's any whip-cracking in my shebang, I'll be the one to do it. And if Annie doesn't want to jump—she can always go home to mama!" That was the way Mort put it. And at the time, Clayton had felt pretty sorry for Annie.

He'd asked Mort if he thought that way of looking at things was fair to a little faithful wife like Annie.

"It's fair to me. That's a damn sight more important. What do women know about being fair, anyhow? Just try some of that fifty-fifty business with any of them and see now far you get! They'll go the whole hog, every time! I tried it. I know. When I was first married, Annie asked me to stop smoking cigarettes and smoke a pipe. Well, I did. And pretty soon, she was hiding my pipes and saying that she didn't see why it was necessary for me to smoke at all. It was a dirty habit and a waste of good money! Why, the money I wasted on tobacco would keep her in face cream and powder! See the way they figure? Fair? Hell! It's the only way they know how to figure. Stand up for your rights or you won't have any!"

Of course, Mort exaggerated things, but it did seem as if there was something in what he said. Clayton began to think back. He'd given up a good many things since his marriage to Fanny. He no longer had a membership at the club. That money went for insurance. He no longer went to musical comedies. Fanny thought they were vulgar. Now he went with Fanny to Shaw plays and Russian things. Or to the moving-pictures. Fanny was fond of the pictures. And she liked symphony concerts. Personally, he preferred prize fights, but he no longer mentioned them in Fanny's presence. Their brutality sickened her.

Clayton kicked viciously at one of Fanny's best mahogany chairs. Damn it, Henry was right. Fanny was making an old man out of him. Mort was right, too. Women didn't know anything about being fair. They cracked the whip and you jumped—if you didn't have sense enough to take the whip away from them!

He stood up with a prodigious yawn

and, switching off the lights in the living-room, went into the bedroom. He undressed slowly and got into bed. Nice to have the bed to himself. He'd wanted his own bed from the beginning, but Aunt Clara had given Fanny this old four poster as a wedding gift and nothing could induce her to get rid of it.

He stretched luxuriously and fell into instant sleep. Toward morning he awakened with a start. A vague sense of something wrong filled him. He rose and turned on the light, but it was not until his eye fell upon the desk that he realized what had happened. He hadn't written to Fanny!

His glance turned to the empty bed and rested upon the pillow beside his own. Fanny's pillow! White and smooth and undented!

A few hours before he had been actually rejoicing that Fanny wasn't there. Now a wave of loneliness swept over him. Suppose something should happen to her while she was away? Perhaps she wasn't as jolly as she might be, but she was a good woman and a good wife. He couldn't think of himself as going through life without her.

For nearly two weeks Clayton crept about his house after office hours. Even the time in the office was tinged with melancholy for he kept thinking of his empty nights. Then, on a certain morning, Clayton wakened with a curiously light feeling within his heart. A thrill, that's what it was! Clayton Baker was experiencing a thrill and for no known reason!

All the drabness, all the loneliness, the almost morbid feelings of the last two weeks, were swept away! He began to whistle as he stood under the shower and as he slipped his feet into his shoes, he danced a step or two. Damn nonsense, all that stuff he'd been thinking about Fanny dying. If there were to be any fancy dying in the family, he'd do it himself. Might as well be dead as.... When a man has lost his pep, he's all washed up as far as life is concerned, anyway. . . . A short life and a merry one. . . . Every time you look, you'll find me right in the big parade prancin' along behind the bandwagon! Is this fair to Fanny? It's fair to me and that's a damn sight more important! From now on, I'll do the whip-cracking and if Fanny doesn't like it, she can stay with Aunt Clara. . . . You know what trained nurses are, especially . . .

Clayton's mind was runing on at a mile a minute. It kept shouting things at him—unseemly, wicked little suggestions — disconnected in actual sense but only too definitely related in thought!

He made a valiant effort to steady his giddy brain but the effort was futile. And at last he began to understand that this was no pale rebellion of mind to be mourned and repented later! It was the awakening of the inner man—the man of power that Fanny had bound and kept in leach all these years.

"Can't keep a good man down! I'm a heller! You know what nurses are! You bet your life, you do! Remember that little one with the red hair that Spring in California? Gee, there's something in the air in California! Now, that girl in Sacramento! Little Hot Tamale, that's what you called her. And she called you The Philanderer! Better write and tell Fanny that! You never did tell her, you know! They didn't have wolves in those days but what's in a name? No patent-leather papa ever had anything on you when it came to rushing the janes! Feeding them taffy, they called it then, remember? You haven't changed

a bit, either. By Jimminy, you could have a good time if you wanted to—and you do want to, you old hypocrite! Only thing is, Fanny's got you buffaloed! You're afraid of Fanny!" Clayton stared at himself in the mirror and the Inner Man leered back at him.

"Who's afraid?" Clayton didn't say it out loud, but he snapped his eyes and squared off at the man of power. Of course, the man of power squared off, too, but there was a little twinkle in his eye and anybody could see that he didn't mean Clay any harm.

"As soon as you get it into your bean that I'm you and you're me. you'll get along fine! Just put that on with your necktie!" From that moment Clayton thought of himself only as the man of power—the gay dog—the philanderer that he had been in his youth, before Fanny had started the business of rebuilding him according to her own plans and specifications.

Instead of fussing to get his own breakfast, he breakfasted at a little place on the way to the office. The Blue Mill, it was called, and the waitresses all wore short little blue linen dresses and perky little white aprons. They were all blonde and pink cheeked and plumped armed and they wore sheer white caps over their yellow curls. Clayton thought them all beautiful. They made him think of nurses with their white caps.

He ordered buckwheat cakes and sausages and he drank three cups of coffee generously diluted with thick, rich cream. As he waited for his check he chatted companionably with the girl who had served him. She was from Ohio, she told him between giggles, and her name was Della and she liked it fine in New York. She liked her work at the Blue Mill, too. Such nice young fellows came in to eat and they always left such nice big tips. Kept her in silk stockings, those tips. She blushed and glanced down at her slim pretty legs.

Clayton glanced, too, then he fumbled about in his pocket until he found a quarter to add to his usual ten-cent tip. As business-like as she was beautiful, that Della, with her warm little smile and that deft touch about the nice young men. It was worth a quarter to Clayton to be numbered among them.

"I—I expect to be in here every morning for breakfast. I hope you'll be able to wait on me—er—Della!" He all but winked at her.

Della giggled again and he noted that she had a very attractive dimple at the left corner of her mouth.

As he left the Blue Mill he glanced up at the sky. How blue it was and how warm the sun felt across his face. By George, it might be Spring instead of late September! We walked to the office briskly and hummed a bit as he rode up in the elevator.

Brandon greeted him as he took his seat at the desk, but did not look up from the column of figures that was engaging his attention.

"What's the matter, Hen? Boss making the rounds?" Clayton prodded Brandon playfully with the butt of a pen.

Brandon whirled and stared. "Well, if it isn't little Johnny Cut-Up himself! You've been in bad company, Clayt! You've got a hangover!"

"Nothing like it. But I may have this afternoon, if you'll go to lunch with me. You know that place you were telling me about where they make such good sandwiches—and cocktails? Well, what's the matter with rounding up Mort and Edwards and Paine and going over there this noon? And tonight, come up to the

apartment and we'll have a little game! We'll have dinner at Fred's or maybe we'll go to a new place I know about—the Blue Mill. They've got some of the prettiest little blonde waitresses there. Makes you hungry just to look at them!"

"Clayt, I'm going to wire your wife! You're a sick man! You're raving!"

"I'm raving, but I'm not sick! And I'm going to rave from now on. You might as well get used to it for you'll be hearing a lot of it—unless the organization decides to give me a private office. They might, at that. You can never tell!"

All through the morning, Clayton gave forth bright and merry quips. Even when old Brown, the office dragon, peered at him disapprovingly, Clayton continued his cheery monologue. The rumor spread through the office that his wife's aunt had died and left him a fortune. One, more curious than the rest, asked him outright if this was so.

"She isn't dead yet!" Clayton replied. It wasn't his fault if his questioners read a meaning into his words that he did not give.

At luncheon, Clayton had two cocktails and called for a third. "You're hitting it up pretty strong, Clayt. It won't do to go back to the office half-mulled. You know how Eagleson is about anything like that." Henry Brandon cautioned him.

"Who said so? Ever talk to Eagleson about it? Believe me, that bird likes his little nip as well as the next one. Don't tell me!" Clayton had his cocktail and while the others were finishing their luncheon, he excused himself and went to telephone. That is, he went to the far end of the grill-room and beneath the shadow of a sheltering palm, he sat him down at a little table and ordered a fourth cocktail. What Brandon and the others didn't know wouldn't hurt them. He returned to his own table in time to pay the check.

"And I'll see you all tonight! Better put a dime in your shoe for carfare for I'm out for blood. I play for keeps and don't forget it!" Clayton returned to the office wafted on wings of light; rose-colored light that bore him along gently and spread out on either side of him far and wide, until the whole field of his vision took on rosy hues. Yet, his head remained curiously clear. He carried on a conversation with Brandon that had to do with the dull everyday topics, even argued with him about politics. But all the time, at the back of his mind, he was taking in the beautiful world that he saw bathed in the faint pink glow and though to Henry, he seemed to be stepping along on the pavements, one foot before the other, he knew that he was flying on tinted pinions.

He settled himself at his desk and began his afternoon's routine, but before long he stopped. His heart wasn't in his work. How could it be when he knew as well as the next one that he was doing two men's work for the pay of one? He'd known that for a long time, but Fanny with her cramping, careful little idea had held him down, urged him against making any demands.

"It isn't as if you held some big important position, Clayton, and they couldn't get along without you. The moment you ask for a raise they'll look around and find some other man who will be only too glad to take your place. That was what she'd said to him and he'd listened to her. Well, he'd go in right now and tell old Eagleson where he could get off!

Clayton rose and marched toward Eagleson's private office, with his chin

thrust forward and his shoulders well back. His hand was steady and there was the light of purpose in his eye, as he pounded with his knuckles against the panels of the door.

Without waiting, he opened the door and stepped inside. Eagleson was at his desk and glanced up inquiringly.

"Ah—won't you sit down Baker? I rather expected you'd be coming to see me! I suppose you want to tell me that you'll be leaving us. I'm sorry about that. You've been with us a long time and we look upon you as one of our valuable men!"

"Yeah? That's good. But I don't know where you get that about me leaving. I haven't the slightest intention of leaving. But I want a raise. Two raises. The one I should have had this year and the one I should have had a year ago. Do I get 'em?"

Eagleson smiled. "Certainly! You're wise not to step out of harness just because of that money your aunt left you. But I'm a little disappointed. I thought you'd have your eye on a partnership. It'd be a mighty good investment—however, we'll talk about that later." Eagleson rose and extended his hand. "You'll be wanting a few days off to arrange your affairs, I suppose. It'll be perfectly all right, Baker! You're a very canny young man!"

It was plain to Baker that the rumor of Aunt Clara's death and his supposed inheritance was partly responsible for Eagleson's compliance to his request for the raise. Funny thing about money! Some times, you could make it talk—even if you didn't have it!

Clayton rather fancied his cleverness in the way he had handled the entire business. If he played his cards right, that private office might not be so far away, at that. On the other hand, if Eagleson should ever find out the truth about Aunt Clara, it wouldn't matter. He hadn't told a single lie about the thing. Not once had he referred to himself as an heir. He'd merely taken advantage of circumstances.

The weather was so delightful and the streets looked so pleasant that Clayton decided to walk a bit before he went home. He sauntered toward Fifth Avenue, feeling very much the man of leisure and still glowing a bit from his late triumph and the last lingering effects of the cocktails. If he had a cane, now, and a boutonniere—

A girl in a red hat smiled at him out of the corner of her eye. Clayton straightened and settled his hat at a jauntier angle. By jimminy, he was giving too much thought to business! With all the pretty women in the world, it was high time he turned his attention toward the sentimental phases of life. Why, that little girl in the Blue Mill, she'd hardly been able to keep her hands off him, flying around, getting him extra butter and pots of cream, too. And once or twice she'd put that plump, pretty arm of hers right against his cheek, deliberately!

And now this girl in the red hat, smiling at him! Clayton quickened his pace. Neat little ankles she had. Round, cuddly little figure, too. Clayton liked them that way. None of these lanky, slab-sided wenches for him!

The girl stopped and gazed into a window at a display of French lingerie. Clayton stopped and gazed, too. Delicate, intimate things of rainbow colors and not a petticoat among them. Fanny never wore such garments. Without a pang, Clayton reflected that it made very little difference to him what Fanny wore. He edged a bit

closer to the red hat but just as he was about to make some light and naughty comment, she slipped away. He followed her diffidently for a short half-block, then his eye was caught by a pair of knees beneath a brief green skirt. He lifted his head and found a little crimson mouth pouting at him provocatively and then he followed the pout.

It led him toward the Park and for a while he sat beside it on a green park bench. But when he spoke to it, it up and walked away, swishing its green skirts above its round beige knees.

"The trouble with me," Clayton remarked to himself, "is that I'm not impulsive enough! I don't respond quick enough and that upsets the little dears. Next time—" he turned his steps toward the subway.

As he entered the apartment that housed him along with some twenty other families, he saw Stebbins, the superintendent, standing in the main hall-way talking to a young and very beautiful woman.

"And these are the keys to 2-10, Miss Atkins. This little one here is an extra in case you should lose one!"

"Thank you!" Miss Atkins cast him a brilliant smile that passed him and lingered upon Clayton as he stood with his finger against the elevator bell. She crossed the hall-way and stood beside him.

"Elevator boys are all alike. They always keep people waiting, don't they?" she remarked pleasantly.

"This is one time I don't mind waiting!" Clayton returned boldly and was gratified when the lady laughed in slight confusion.

"Why, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Baker. Clayton Baker. At your service!" He bowed her into the elevator.

"I wonder if you mean that, really? Men so seldom mean what they say in this town! You see, I've just moved in and I need some advice about the arrangement of some pictures! I haven't a soul I can ask and if you really wouldn't mind—if you could spare a few moments—"

"I certainly can! I'll be getting off with the lady, John, 2-10, isn't it?"

"Oh, what long ears you have! Here are the keys!" She thrust the keys into his hand as the elevator stopped. John stared after them as they went down the hall, his eyes popping until they looked like little black islands set in milky seas.

"Hankin' pictuahs! Mis' Bakeh'll hang him when she gets home!" Trust an elevator-boy to know the inner workings of the family machine. The door of 2-10 opened and closed behind Clayton and the delectable Miss Atkins.

"Come right in. I haven't unpacked much but I think I can find the cocktail shaker and a certain square bottle!" She threw open a wardrobe trunk. "Just get down there and you'll find some lemons tucked in the toes of those black slippers. If you dig hard, you might find an orange, who knows? When I packed this trunk—when I packed this trunk—well, I wasn't particular about where I put things. You see, it was after a farewell party—"

"I know! I've been there myself! Good time but a bad head, eh?" Clayton found the lemons and an orange wrapped in a sheer black thing-a-majig which he hastily tucked back into concealment.

"I knew you were regular, the moment I laid eyes on you!" Miss Atkins laughed and flickered her lashes at him.

They made the cocktails and sat for

a half hour getting better and better acquainted. Never in all his life had Clayton met a more charming woman, so natural and so very, very friendly! Under the influence of cocktails, he expanded delightfully. He became the man of big affairs and referred a bit proudly to the fact that he had just put over a fine business deal that very afternoon.

"I feel like celebrating!" he told her.

"I just knew you were a man of importance. There's something so magnetic and powerful about you." Miss Atkins smiled at him with admiring eyes.

"Did you, really?" Clayton decided that Miss Atkins was a woman of keen perception. "And do you know, the minute I saw you I grasped instantly that you were as clever and witty as you were beautiful?"

"Oh, Mr. Baker! I'm afraid you're a flatterer. I'm just a foolish, lonesome little girl! New York is so big and—you see, I haven't been here very long and I don't know many people!"

"You know me and we're going to be very good friends! Very good friends!" Clayton patted her hand.

"Are we, really?" She glanced at him appealingly.

"You bet we are!" Clayton bent forward and kissed her. "You lovely little thing!"

She withdrew herself from his clutching embrace and eyed him gravely. "You mustn't do that Mr. Baker. I'm afraid I've been a very impulsive girl! Maybe I ought to send you away now!" She nestled against him once more.

Clayton wrapped his arms about her. "Why do you say that? Don't you like me?"

"That's just the trouble. I do like you. And I might get to like you very much indeed. And then where would poor little Lola be? I'm terribly afraid you're a philanderer!"

Good, old-fashioned word! Clayton denied her accusation but not too strongly. Canny little Lola was watching him between her lashes and noted the flush of pleasure, the faint swagger, that accompanied this denial.

"You're—you're a dangerous and fascinating man! All the women you know must be mad about you! It would be very hard to resist you. You have such a forceful personality—and you're so poetic!" That was laying it on with a trowel but Lola had met men like Clayton Baker before. She knew the measure of such a man's vanity.

"Not at all! Not at all! I'm a very simple fellow. I'm sure I'm not much of a hand with the ladies!" He said in the tone that implies his conquests were legion. "Just trust me, little girl, and everything will be rosy!"

"I don't trust you at all!" Lola shuddered deliciously. "But you've swept me off my feet. I'm—I'm really quite helpless!"

It was nearly six o'clock before Clayton remembered that he had meant to take Henry Brandon to dinner. Too late now. He might as well ask the little lady.

They didn't go downtown but dined in a little neighborhood place. Chicken and waffles and at the end, apple pie with a blob of ice cream topping it like a fat white cap. Lovely dinner! Lovely girl! Clayton began to regret the impending poker party. Miss Atkins, that is—Lola, regretted it, too!

"Maybe I might come down afterwards!" he suggested daringly.

"Oh, I oughtn't to let you—but—but somehow I can't say no to you!" Lola murmured.

Clayton squeezed her arm a bit as he helped her on with her coat. And

at two o'clock, after the boys had gone, he crept down the three flights of stairs to 2-10.

There was the patter of feet, the turning of a lock and Lola, flushed and pretty, lightly clad in a fluff of baby-blue négligé, ushered him in. "I'd almost given you up. I thought you weren't coming. I thought—that maybe you'd decided that I was a naughty girl—and that maybe you weren't going to have anything more to do with me!"

Clayton closed the door softly behind him. "Maybe I like 'em naughty!" His speech was just a little thick. The sherry that Brandon had brought, had been very potent stuff and coupled with the cocktails that he had drunk earlier in the evening—

"You do like me, don't you?" Lola was purring in his arms as they sat together upon a deeply cushioned divan.

"I adore you!" Clayton assured her fervently and set his lips to the soft angle fronting her rounded elbow. Lola sighed—a wisp of a sound that escaped through softly parted lips. He set his mouth against those lips, firmly, possessively, as befitted a man of passion and power. He held her so closely that he could feel her delicate little bones beneath the swathing of her fragile flesh.

"What a frail little thing you are. I could crush you to powder!" He murmured against her lips. What a conqueror he felt. How unlike the man who had repeated meekly: "Some fresh fruit and two green vegetables! Yes, Fanny!" And to think, all this time, he might have felt just so, if he had asserted himself! Virile! Powerful! It made life worth living!

After a long time, Lola asked him suddenly, "What will happen when your wife comes home?" Clayton had told her about Fanny being away.

"What could happen? Live and let live! That's my motto! I'm master of my own destiny!" He'd made up his mind long since that if there was any whip-cracking to be done, he'd do it! He'd jump no more!

And a little later he bade Lola a lingering good night. Tomorrow night he would take her down town to dinner. They'd go to a show and after that to a night club.

In his own apartment again, he glanced at the disordered living-room. Overflowing ash trays and soiled glasses standing about on the floor and tables—even resting atop one of Fanny's good bound books! Poker chips and cards scattered about! Clayton threw himself down in a chair and lighted a cigarette. He glanced at the filled ash trays and deliberately flicked the ashes upon the floor. Fanny's good rug be damned!

At four o'clock the next afternoon, Clayton dragged himself from his bed. His head felt queer and there was a very dark brown taste in his mouth, but he was happy. He felt just as strong and forceful as he had the night before. After he had bathed and dressed and finished two cups of hot black coffee, he went somewhat reluctantly into the living-room and set things in order.

Just as he had finished and was moving toward the kitchen with a final tray of glasses, there was the sound of a key grating in the lock of the outer door. The door flew open and he was confronted by Fanny. Her eyes were blazing and her hat was slightly askew.

"Well, Clayton Baker! What does this mean? You home at this time of day and with a tray full of glasses! Stale liquor! I can smell it from here!"

Clayton straightened and met her eye squarely. "It means I had a poker

party here last night. Edwards and Paine and Henry Brandon! And I'm home because the boss gave me a vacation and two raises! I told him where he could get off if I didn't get them! Should have done it long ago! Would have too, if you hadn't put your oar in! By the way, is Aunt Clara dead?"

"Certainly not! Why do you ask such a fool question?" Fanny flared at him.

"Oh, I was just curious! Just curious, that's all! Well, I'll have to be getting along. I'm taking a young lady to dinner tonight!"

"You're what!" Fanny all but squawked.

"You heard me! From now on, I'm running my own affairs! Just because I'm married is no sign that women don't find me attractive and as long as they do I—"

"Why you philandering old fool! Taking a young lady out to dinner! You get your hat and coat on this minute. You're taking me to the movies. I haven't been to a picture since—"

"And if you wait for me to take you, you'll be a lot older than you are now! And I'll go to no more of those damned Russian things, either. If there's any whip-cracking done in this house, I'll do it. And if you don't want to jump, you can go live with Aunt Clara. I've had about all—"

"Turn your coat collar down, Clayton and put your hat on straight! You look like a bartender with it cocked over one ear that way. Put the lights out in the living-room and lift this bag into the closet as you come by!" said Fanny as she walked up the hall.

The lights in the living-room flickered out and there was the thump of a bag being lifted into the hall-way closet.

"Be sure the latch is down on the outside door!" Fanny's voice drifted in from the elevator.

"Yes, Fanny!" The Man of Power, the Philanderer, was taking his wife to the picture show.

A YOUNG MAN'S FANCY

By Pamela Greene

He wanted a girl who was quiet and meek—
  His wife has a tongue like a clapper.
He longed for a mate, just old-fashioned and sweet—
  But married a typical flapper.

He sighed for a maid who would sit home at night—
  His spouse is a cabaret rounder.
He yearned for a lass who would hold the dimes tight
  But closed with a high-powered spender.

Kathleen Meets Father

By BILLY F. JAMES

WITH a final protesting wrench the little car settled back in the snow. The motor stalled, for the fifth time, and all seemed well. All, however, was not well. Even to "Sweet William," who was driving, despite his slightly intoxicated condition, the state of affairs seemed to warrant a little improvement.

"I believe," he announced carefully, "that we are stuck in a snow drift." Having delivered himself of this startling statement, he settled himself comfortably behind the wheel, laid his head on the shoulder of the young woman beside him, and prepared to lose the cares of this world, in a little much needed sleep.

Not so the young lady, however. She eyed the comfortably reposing William with cold disfavor and administered a sharp jolt just below the third rib. It served its purpose admirably. William sat up with alacrity and protested loudly.

"What," said the young lady, whose name was Kathleen McLaughlin, "are you going to do?"

William surveyed the snow covered countryside through the frosted windshield and came to an immediate decision.

"Nothing," he said nonchalantly, and prepared to take up his nap where he left it. Another jolt administered by the young lady appraised him otherwise.

"I say," said William restraining himself and speaking with dignity, "I wish you wouldn't do that. It gives me the hiccoughs," he added sadly giving vent to a loud "hic," proving his contention.

"Hiccoughs," replied the young lady in a determined tone, "will not be the half of what I'll give you if we don't get out of this mess." The tone was ominous, her bearing even more so. William prepared to investigate the cause of the car's lack of locomotion.

He opened the door and poised tentatively on the running board, slightly dubious of his next move. He was not left long in doubt.

"Shut that damn door," commanded Kathleen in terms more enlightening than grammatical, "it's cold enough without you standing there holding the door open."

"Well, I can't shut the door unless I get out in the snow," argued William plaintively.

"Too bad, too bad," muttered Kathleen almost inaudibly, and solved the problem by giving him a strenuous shove. The door slammed shut as William disappeared head first in three feet of very cold snow. He fought his way to the top, shook the snow from his ears, dug several handfuls from the back of his neck, and resigned himself to the cold.

Two boxes of matches and three trips around the motionless car finally enabled William to discover the cause of the halt. A rear wheel, taking advantage of a loose nut, had separated itself from the car to such an extent that it was merely acting in the capacity of a jack. The motor might run, but it was a foregone conclusion that the car wouldn't—not for several days.

"To go or not to go, that is the question," murmured William disconso-

lately, "and I think the nays have it."

Fifteen minutes more or less in the open air, particularly when the air is cold, will clear the alcohol fumes from the average head, and Sweet William wasn't drunk, that is, not real drunk, merely sleepy.

He climbed into the stranded car and pressed on the starter. The motor coughed once or twice and then began to purr steadily. Satisfied, apparently, Sweet William again resigned himself to another attempt at sleep.

The young lady, who admitted Irish descent, had watched the proceedings, with some degree of enthusiasm, up to and including the point where William had settled himself comfortably on his spinal column. Then her foot began to hit the floor in a steady tap, tap, tap, that signified disapproval.

"Well?" remarked Kathleen significantly.

"Oh, pretty well thanks," answered William gratefully, "a trifle cold, but then the car will warm up after the motor runs a while." He slid farther down on his backbone and prepared to give a good account of himself in the matter of sleeping under difficulties.

"Well, when are we going to be on our merry way?" inquired Kathleen in an ominously polite tone.

"Not for some time," answered William placidly. "Wheel off the axle; not a chance of moving till some one comes along and gives us a lift." He pulled his neck deeper into the collar of his overcoat and prepared to spend a pleasant evening.

"Well, do something about it," ordered Kathleen peevishly. "I'm not going to sit here all night and freeze. Not only that but mother will be worried to death."

"You *might* get out and walk," suggested William, yawning placidly. "We're only about a mile and a half from Solomon," he added.

Kathleen's lips compressed in a thin white line. The tap, tap of her foot on the floor grew faster. Kathleen was angry, in fact, she was very angry.

"Oh, what a perfect dim-wit I was to go any place with you. I knew you didn't have the brains of a stuffed owl, you didn't have to prove it to me. I hate the very sight of you—one look at you gives me a bad headache." Kathleen paused for want of breath and invective.

"Why Kathleen, how—?"

"Don't talk to me," she cut in fiercely. "I don't want to hear a word you have to say. There isn't a person in town who will believe we had a breakdown, it's so—so—" she paused and groped for the right word.

"Obvious," William finished helpfully. He so like that. Always had the right word ready, took it right out of your month, so to speak. One of the little traits that made strong men wish to kill him.

"You know as well as I do what people will say," Kathleen continued, overlooking the peace offering. "I can just hear them telling each other, 'Oh, my dear! have you heard about the McLaughlin girl? A drunken revel with the Craig boy in his motor car last night. Yes, all night, and then told some yarn about a breakdown.' And the worst of it is that every old woman in town will believe just that," she wailed.

"But Kathleen," protested William, "it isn't my fault if—"

"Shut up! I don't want to hear a word you have to say. I believe you did this on purpose." Kathleen relapsed into silence.

"Well, why don't you say something?" she snapped. "Sit there like a ninny. If you can't do anything to

help the situation you might at least say something and keep me company."

"We might walk back to Solomon and phone your mother from there," he offered hopefully. "That would clear us of any gossip," he added cheerfully.

Kathleen surveyed the road on either side of the car with renewed interest. High drifts of cold white snow lined the sides of the road. On either side, the wind swept prairie of western Kansas stretched away to the sky line. The outlook wasn't cheerful and to add to that the temperature persisted in hovering near the zero mark.

"If I though we could make it I'd be willing to take a chance," declared Kathleen, allowing her gaze to roam from her satin shod feet to her silk sheathed legs. Her skirt fell just even with her knees. A short fur coat offered adequate protection from her hips to her neck. Above that there was nothing, figuratively and literally, nothing.

"It's better than sitting here," argued William, now thoroughly sold on the proposition. "We can follow the ruts in the road back to the main highway, and we may get a lift from there in."

Kathleen pondered deeply.

"You look pretty strong, maybe you could carry me part way," she said thoughtfully.

William let out a yelp of pain. One would almost believe that some one had kicked the Craig shins or stuck a pin in the Craig leg, so agonized was the wail.

"Carry you! Do I look like a horse? I'm a game guy but I know when I'm licked. I couldn't carry you three feet. I'm having a hard enough time carrying this load of gin."

"Up to little Kathleen to walk then," sighed that young lady, climbing reluctantly from the comparative warmth of the car. Without a second glance at William she struck off down the road at a brisk pace—brisk considering the high-heeled shoes and short skirt.

William, not caring to be left alone, followed grumbling. The pair had gone but a short distance when a farm house loomed indistinctly in view. True, it was dark and an air of desertion pervaded the place, but then farmers go to bed at outlandish hours. Reasoning thus, Kathleen turned in at the gate and stopped. Confronting her was a dog—a dog of uncertain breed, but with the mongrel strain dominating. One look at the animal gave rise to the immediate suspicion that it was a Shetland pony, or on closer observation of the long nose, a giant wolf. Certainly he was a most distasteful sort of creature to meet late at night on a deserted country road.

Kathleen remembered a remark her father once made to the effect that a dog would never attack a person that showed no fear. A second glance at the dog persuaded her that perhaps her father was not wholly up to date on matters pertaining to large dogs of uncertain ancestry. Under the circumstances there was only one thing to do. She stepped clear of her shoes and fled down the road, passing William before he was aware that she was in his vicinity. An agonized wail appraised him that all was not well with his fair companion. Had he been made of sterner stuff, it is possible that he would have waited to face the foe. It is even possible that William would have paused to wonder, had not the dog, slightly bewildered at the disappearance of his playmate, trotted out to investigate.

Seeing William standing undecided-

ly in the road he uttered a loud, joyful "woof" and galloped to meet him. William promptly picked up his feet and began setting them down rapidly, one in front of the other, to such good advantage that he overtook Kathleen.

Reaching the car practically neck and neck, they both stopped by common consent. Kathleen recovered her vocal facilities first by the simple expedient of glancing at her stocking feet and turning loose another wail. She scrambled into the car, carefully drew her feet under her, and directed an accusing finger at William.

"You big coward," she said scornfully, "running away from a little puppy. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. A fine Airedale you turned out to be."

William recovered rapidly.

"What d'ye mean coward?" he asked indignantly. "I heard you scream and I was trying to catch up with you to see if you were hurt. A lot of thanks a fellow gets from a girl these days." William was aggrieved; his voice said so plainly. He was being accused unjustly, and William was not the man to suffer an injustice silently, far from it. Kathleen sniffed disdainfully.

"When did you lose your shoes?" William asked, suddenly noticing the vigorous massage Kathleen was giving her pedal extremities.

"Right after the dog barked at me," snapped Kathleen shortly. She rubbed her foot rapidly and wiggled her toes. "Thank heaven they're not frozen," she ejaculated, noting the movement wih satisfaction.

William peered intently through the gloom in the general direction from which he had so lately come. The dog was not in sight.

"Perhaps I'd better go back and get them," he offered magnanimously. He ambled off down the road, his pace becoming slower as he reached the danger area. Directly ahead of him in the road was a shoe—a black satin pump. In the yard, not more than a dozen feet away, was the remains of the other one—between the forepaws of Kathleen's puppy.

The situation was obvious to William. If the dog had eaten part of the shoe there was no use lingering in the neighborhood; the shoe was gone. He returned to Kathleen and silently tendered her the high-heeled satin pump.

"The dog—I mean puppy," he amended hurriedly, "is making a meal of the other, so I didn't disturb him."

Kathleen's retort, and there surely would have been one, was lost to posterity by the timely arrival of a belated motorist. After William had flagged him and explained the situation, the farmer, for such was his occupation — self-confessed— offered them a lift to Solomon.

The dog was not in evidence as they passed the farmhouse and neither William nor Kathleen made any comment. The subject was a tender one to William. Too much time had been devoted to stray dogs already, and the less said the better, so reasoned William.

They arrived at the hotel, a two-story frame building whose age could be computed more or less accurately from the additions that were plainly discernible by the weird style of architecture. There was early Neolithic, chumming with a charming bit of 18th century Kansan, done in rough dressed planks. In the back there was a more modern section slightly reminiscent of the days of the railroad camp. The whole building was surrounded by a veranda of slowly rot-

ting boards. Kathleen entered—in William's arms.

Whatever thoughts the ancient tavern keeper had of this mode of travel he sternly repressed. The demands of business, tempered, of course, by the Christian scruples worthy of an elder of the church, dictated his policy.

"You look awfully young to be married," observed the hotel man dodging behind the desk where he transformed himself into the night clerk by the simple expedient of placing a pencil stub behind his right ear. "Only one room left, so I 'spect you had better be married folks," he continued meaningly. "Of course, I couldn't let you stay unless you were married."

"No—no, of course not," murmured William, casting an agonized glance at Kathleen. The affair was not improving. Any angle from which it was viewed looked like a foreign entanglement to William, and he had always been a good Republican.

Kathleen broke the silence which was rapidly becoming painful.

"Don't stand there staring at me, phone mother and try to explain things. Dad might come for us in the car, and heaven help you if he does," she added darkly.

"Phone!" suggested William politely to the hotel man.

"Phone?" The answer seemed vague.

"Phone," repeated William firmly. Evidently the fellow was slightly deaf.

"Oh, *phone!*" A great light seemed to have dawned on him. He stared at William intently with such an air of concerned curiosity, that Kathleen's voice caused him to jump. The monysyllabic conversation had finally goaded her to protest.

"What is this—a game?" she asked sarcastically, turning to the aged hotel keeper. "We want to use your telephone, the thing you talk over."

The hotel man shook his head sadly. "Phone's out of order," he offered laconically. He tapped the desk with his pen suggestively.

William gazed helplessly at Kathleen, who nodded affirmatively. He strolled to the desk and bravely affixed the signature, Mr. and Mrs. John Smith, Kansas City, to the register.

"S'funny," muttered the innkeeper eyeing the signature. " 'Nother party named Smith and his wife registered here 'bout fifteen minutes ago. Ain't related are you?"

William declined relationship outright. "No, we're the Kansas City Smiths, only family there to my knowledge." This was strictly true for William had never been to Kansas City, therefore his knowledge was slightly limited.

The old man lifted a key from the board, placed an antique motorman's cap on his head, and was transformed into the porter. They followed him up one flight of rickety stairs and into a barren room at the end of the hall. There he left them, much to their relief.

Kathleen surveyed the room and its scant furnishings with distaste. "So this is the love nest that I have read about in the newspapers," she mused aloud, taking in the one rocking chair, the battered washstand, and dented brass bed, at a glance.

To William the situation was beginning to assume a rosy hue. Never in his nineteen years of placid existence had he been cast in the rôle of principal in what his small town friends commonly termed an orgy. Worse things could happen than to spend a night with Kathleen Mc-

Laughlin, he thought. The more he thought of it, the rosier the aspect became.

He sat down beside Kathleen on the bed, experiencing a great thrill when the springs creaked beneath him. It was something in he nature of "the great adventure" for William to be in a situation which was, to say the very least, compromising. Thoughts of an extremely amorous nature were swarming through his brain, fighting each other for utterance. He had just about reached a conclusion to be a gentleman and do right by our little Nell, and marry her.

Our little Nell, better known as Kathleen, had vastly different views, however. William's first half-hearted advance met, not with the timid resistance which he anticipated, but with loud laughter.

The laugh, which greeted William's halting suggestion that they might as well go to bed, had a nasty ring to it, thought William. He hastened to explain that his intentions were most honorable, that marriage, as it invariably did in novels, would surely follow.

"Of which," remarked Kathleen in closing, "I'm afraid. If I was foolish enough to even consider an affair with you, I'd probably have to marry you, and that would be too much—something in the nature of cruel and unusual punishment."

"I take it then you don't care for me," said William aggrievedly.

"You take it correct, young man," answered Kathleen pertly. "'Twas not that I cared for William less, but that I cared for his absence more," she paraphrased, "and now William you can take your presence hence any time the notion strikes—or sooner." She added sweetly, "I want to get a little sleep. I'm going to need it when I meet my folks tomorrow."

"Where'll I go?" bleated William, entertaining visions of spending the night in the lobby in company with the curious ancient who ran the hotel.

"I haven't the slightest idea," said Kathleen nonchalantly peeling off a silk stocking. She glanced at a run with a frown of disapproval and proceeded to remove the other stocking. Accomplishing the latter feat without serious difficulty she rose, and glanced at William, who was standing before the door gaping.

"Outside, and don't let me have to tell you again," she commanded curtly.

His faith in women, and incidentally in his favorite fiction writer, had been shattered, so William opened the door, placed himself outside and closed it. He waited expecting to hear the rush of feet to the door and the click of the key locking him out, but even that satisfaction was denied him. It was finally borne in upon him that he was not even considered dangerous. William heaved a sigh and turned to go.

He did no more than turn, for facing him in the doorway of the adjacent room was a large barefoot man, minus a shirt. Closer inspection disclosed that it was none other than Kathleen's father.

Recognition was mutual, in fact almost simultaneous. The incongruity of Mr. McLaughlin's attire and appearance failed to register with the panic-stricken William. His first and only thought was one of terror. Kathleen's father was here in the rôle of an outraged parent, having discovered in some mysterious manner that his daughter was being brought there by William. William's agile imagination

pictured the tragedy that would be enacted in the dim hallway. Mr. McLaughlin would denounce him as a depraved libertine and then draw his trusty gun and fire.

Meanwhile, the other actor in the drama was performing in a strange manner. Transfixing William with a horrible glare, he reached slowly for his hip pocket. So, the end was at hand, thought William, trying vainly to scream. Fiscinated, he watched the McLaughlin hand travel slowly to the McLaughlin pocket and fumble therein. William closed his eyes and awaited the end. For some seconds he waited patiently, then he allowed his eyes to flutter open.

Mr. McLaughlin was mopping his brow with a large soiled handkerchief. He was doing a very thorough job of it, regarding William in much the same manner of one watching the antics of a ghost or of a diphtheria epidemic.

"What the hell do you want?" muttered Mr. McLaughlin thickly, wetting his lips with the tip of his tongue.

"Why—er—nothing at all. We were just—"

"Then what the hell are you doing here?" Mr. McLaughlin was a man of one idea and little imagination. He stared at William closely. "You're the young man that calls on my daughter Kathleen," he announced finally.

William readily admitted the indictment by nodding his head rapidly.

"That's just what I wanted to tell you. She—" But he never got to finish. Perhaps in the light of what transpired later, it might have been best for William to have broken the news gently. At any rate he was spared further explanations by Kathleen's appearance. For perhaps the first time in her life she was speechless, but not so her father.

"Kathleen! What are you doing here with this—this—" He gazed at William, who was standing with his mouth hanging open, and words failed him. He remained inarticulate. The silence was becoming a bit heavy, and, as far as William was concerned, fraught with danger. He sidled closer to the stairway, determined to have at least a sporting chance for his life, if it came to that.

The situation was further complicated by Kathleen. Women's intuition warned her to get her father away from the vicinity of William before he jumped at conclusions and, incidentally, William. She grasped him by the arm and drew him gently toward the door of the room from which he had so lately emerged.

"Come, daddy. Let's go in and I'll explain it all to you."

The innocent proposal met with determined resistance from Mr. McLaughlin. Strange noises struggled for utterance in his throat. He choked and became very red. Kathleen was alarmed.

William, however, was viewing these symptoms with renewed interest. The large cold hand that had been clutching his heart in an icy grip was beginning to warm up.

"I betcha he's got a woman in that room," blurted William suddenly, in the throes of a great discovery.

"A woman!"

The ejaculation came simultaneously from Kathleen and her father. There was a note of surprise in Mr. McLaughlin's voice. He watched his daughter closely to see the effect of William's statement. Surprise and doubt were all he saw.

"Is that true, father?" she asked, turning to her harassed parent. Without waiting for a reply she slipped un-

der his arm and threw open the door.

Three men, gathered around a table over which a blanket was spread, looked up in startled wonderment. On the table were scattered several handfuls of bills and two ivory cubes.

"A crap game," muttered William. Kathleen stared.

"Had to have it here,' explained Mr. McLaughlin, hurriedly closing the the door. "The police at home are too darn conscientious." Kathleen pondered.

"What will mother say?"

Mr. McLaughlin blinked rapidly. "What will she say to you?" he retaliated defensively. "You're in bad as much as I am."

"I say!" William had been doing some rapid thinking. "Take us home in your car and tell Mrs. McLaughlin that we phoned you at your club that we had had an accident, and that you came after us. That saves your face and ours too."

The McLaughlin hand struck the McLaughlin thigh with a mighty whack. "By Jove! That's an idea." He disappeared into the room and emerged some minutes later fully dressed. Kathleen, meanwhile, had replaced her garments. In silence they paid off the hotel man.

The ride home was made in silence until half the distance had been left behind.

"Damn," muttered Mr. McLaughlin "I had sixty dollars faded when I stepped out into the hall to see what all the noise was about."

AND WHY NOT?

By John McColl

Milady's bed is white and gold;
  Milady's bed has carved feet
Like claws of minotaurs of old;
  The sheets with musk and thyme are sweet.

Milady's bed once framed the love
  Of emperor, who met distress;
And now it is the setting of
  Milady's iv'ry loveliness.

Milady's bed has curtains drawn
  Around, to shield a lover's eyes
From disillusionment of dawn,
  Prolong the waning paradise.

Milady's bed was meant to hold
  My lovely lady and—but, stop—
Her pekingese. You need not scold—
  I watched her buy it in a shop!

Debts

By ALICE GARWOOD

THE crowd parted silently to let me through to the side of the man who lay dying on the sun-heated asphalt, the man who was closer to me than a brother. A pillow from the waiting ambulance had been placed under his head. His crushed body was covered by a blanket. His eyes were closed when I knelt at his side, and the doctor whispered to me that he had only a few minutes to live, at most but half an hour.

"It was hopeless," he said, "so we did not try to move him. He seemed anxious to speak with you, and moving would have shortened the few moments he's got. I've given him a hypodermic. He'll be conscious in a few moments."

I nodded dumbly, and the doctor turned his attention to dispersing the small crowd that had collected even in that quiet street. I lifted the limp hand in mine and kept my gaze fixed on the closed eyes. Vividly through my mind were passing pictures of my life with this man.

John Martin and I had been at school and college together, and our friendship was as close as only friendship formed under such conditions can be. But the tie that bound me closest to the man dying in the city street was one of gratitude. For a whole year, unknown to me, he had supported my mother, while I had battled with the white plague in Arizona. At the time I believed her to be living on the charity of an uncle, but he, professing to disbelieve the story of my illness and refusing to keep a good-for-naught in idleness, had withdrawn his aid. John had found her one day, weak from starvation, when he looked her up to inquire for me, in the mean little room she had taken. Though only a struggling young lawyer, he had not only taken on his shoulders the complete care of her, but had managed, God knows how, to make things somewhat easier for me. I had long since been able to return his money, but I felt that I owed him a debt that I could never pay.

The eyes I knew so well, always full of impish laughter, opened slowly, but there was no impishness in the glance that met mine, only pain and anguish. His face brightened when he saw me, and his lips moved. I bent over him and he whispered:

"Mort, old man! I'm glad you've come."

"Of course I came, John. I'm glad I was so near. What can I do for you?" My own voice was husky.

"I haven't got long?" The words were a question. I shook my head, not caring to speak.

"It's all right, old man, or would be, except for Alicia—" He paused, gasping for breath, and the trouble deepened in his eyes. I waited, knowing he would tell me.

"I've been a cur to her, Mort, but before God, I meant to marry her, after she wrote me about the kid. I can't now—oh, Lord, what will she do? She's only a kid herself."

He paused again, his eyes on mine, and I made the promise I thought he wanted.

"I'll take care of her, John. You know I'll never let her want."

His eyes did not clear. After a moment, during which his labored breathing sounded louder than the distant city noises that drifted into the quiet

side street, he broke out:

"It's more than that, Mort, it's her name. Mort, will you marry her and protect her?" His voice was weak, but terribly earnest. "I swear, except for me she would be as pure as any flower. I know I'm asking a lot, old chap, but I can't die thinking that she must suffer."

His earnestness had exhausted him, and he lay with closed eyes, gasping. It was only when I spoke that he opened them again.

"John," I said, "tell me where to find her. I'll do as you wish if she will let me, and before God, I'll try to make her life as happy for her as possible."

He motioned weakly toward the pocket of his coat and his lips formed the word "letter," but no sound was audible. Then, with a smile, he closed his eyes.

I found the letter in the breast pocket of his coat before they carried the broken body away.

I made my way to my apartment, dazed, and there sitting in the window through which the western sunlight streamed, I read the letter written by the woman I had promised to make my wife to the man who had been my friend.

Wynheld, Conn.
June 10, 1946

Dear Jack:

Oh, I have missed you so. I have tried to be brave, and make my pride keep me from writing to you to beg you to come back, but it's been such hard work. For, Jack, dear, I love you truly, and every minute you are away I miss you.

I know that you do not really love me or you would not stay away. It is my punishment for my sin that you do not. But, Jack, you will have to come back to me and marry me. I will try to win back your love, but whether I do or not you must marry me, for, Jack, there is going to be a little baby. Oh, I wish I could tell it to you instead of writing it. Think of it, dear, a little son with your laughing blue eyes, or maybe a little daughter with brown curls like mine that you used to play with so tenderly.

Oh, Jack, if you will only come back to me I shall be the happiest woman alive—but I am afraid God won't let you come, because of our sin. But you must come, Jack, or else the little baby will be nameless. Not for my sake, dear, but for your little child——

Yours faithfully,

Alicia Lynn

I wondered greatly who and what the girl might be. John Martin had always been fond of women. He had played the game, I knew, but always with women who knew and played by the rules. It was the one point on which our tastes differed radically. But John Martin as a betrayer of a young girl—it was a *role* in which I could not conceive him, and it led me to speculate more and more as to what kind of a woman I had promised to make my wife.

If I pass lightly over the grief which I felt for my friend it is because, though it entered my life deeply, it is not essential to this story. What I did I should have done even had my promise been made to a stranger. Early the next morning I journeyed to Wynheld.

At the little country station I asked where I could find Miss Alicia Lynn, and was directed to the farm of her parents just outside the town.

In the quaint, old, sunny parlor where her mother, a heavy, plain, gray-haired woman had bidden me wait for her, I wondered more than ever what she could be like. No mere country lassie could have roused John Martin's love, nor, having roused it, could have written the letter that lay in the breast pocket of my coat. Yet what else could she be in such surroundings.

A soft footfall made me turn from the window, where I had been gazing out across the sunlit, golden wheat fields. A slender, dark-haired girl stood in the doorway. Her dress of soft

green linen, the color of the trees in April, her wavy hair, the fresh, sweet color in her cheeks, made her seem like a dainty spring flower. Her face was that of some young saint, except the sweetly passionate mouth of vivid crimson. The dark eyes that met mine frankly were full of trouble.

"Mr. Morton Ridgeway?" she questioned softly. Her voice was as rich as organ music. I had never heard a woman's voice of such compelling charm.

"Yes, Miss Lynn," I answered her, "I have something of great importance to tell you. I come to you from John Martin—will you take a little walk, down the lane, with me?"

She looked at me, startled, and a deathlike pallor spread across her face, but she turned without a word, and, opening the screen door, led me out across the shady porch to the elm-arched lane. When we were beyond hearing distance of the house, she turned to me tensely.

"It is bad news from Jack," she said, "tell me quickly. I can bear anything better than suspense."

"You must be brave," I told her, "there was an automobile accident."

"He is dead?"

"Yes, he is dead."

White, except for the crimson of her mouth, she looked at me as one who had received a death blow. I thought she was about to crumple at my feet, and put my arm out to steady her, but she drew away, still keeping that intense gaze on my face.

"I was with him when he died," I continued for a moment, "and his whole thought was of you. Miss Lynn, John Martin and I were friends such as few men are, and you must try not to mind that I know what should be sacred to you and him. Before his death he told me your story, and I promised to do all that lay in my power to comfort you. Miss Lynn, John loved you truly, and his purpose was to make you his wife."

While I spoke the girl had stared at me with a white set face, so that almost doubted if she heard me, but when I finished she broke down, sobbing. It was not like most women's weeping, but rather like that of a man, deep wracking sobs that shook the body and left the eyes dry.

I was frightened at the vehemence of her emotion, but it was not long before she regained her self-control in some measure. When she was calmer I spoke again.

"Miss Lynn, I want to tell you something about myself. I'm a young doctor with a fair and growing practice, but when I was a poor student, unable because of sickness to care for her, John Martin kept my mother from starvation."

Her gaze never left my face, but she seemed not to hear nor understand what I said. My heart ached for her she seemed so young and hopeless, standing there unwincing under the blow that meant shame as well as sorrow and despair to her.

I took her little cold hand in one of mine as I spoke. "I'm glad that in the hour of his death I was able to pay back in part the debt I owed him. Miss Lynn, I promised him that if you were willing I would make you my wife. Will you marry me?"

She started at that and drew away, crying out:

"No, oh, no! How can you?"

Again she broke into sobbing, but this time her tears flowed freely and she regained her control with less effort.

"I know," I told her, when she was quieter, "that your heart was John Martin's. I am not asking for your

love, but for the right to do for my friend what he was prevented from doing himself, for the right to care for you and to give your child a name."

"Oh, I couldn't let you do that. I sinned and I must suffer, but if I let you do that it would be a worse sin. I couldn't let you spend your life and your good name to save me, a—a—" but she could not say it.

"You are a good, true woman," I answered her quickly, and what I said I knew was the truth. "If there was any fault it was my friend's. I who love him say so."

"But that does not change the fact that I—no, no, it is impossible."

"But you—others must know soon. What will you do then?"

She hesitated. "My father will cast me off," she answered in a low voice. Then, "Other women have suffered this before, I can too. I—perhaps you can help me with money— I should take that gladly from you who are his friend—oh, believe me I am not ungrateful for all that you want to do for me, and some day when I can think more clearly I will try to thank you as I should."

She put her hand to her forehead in a dazed sort of way, and turned from me back toward the house.

I laid my hand on her arm.

"And the baby?" I asked. "Have you considered—"

She looked at me imploringly.

"I can't take your help either for me or for my baby—not in that way," she answered dully.

"But it's Jack's child, too," I said, "and his last desire was for it to have a name. He wished it so strongly that he asked me to offer it mine. Do you think you have a right to refuse?"

I saw that I had struck the right note, and hurried on before she could reply.

"You understand that this marriage would be only a form to protect you. No one need know that the child is not my own. I can promise you and it a home and moderate comforts as long as I have them myself. And, Miss Lynn, since I have seen you and realize what a brave, true, unselfish woman you are, I feel that you will honor me by accepting the offer."

She stared at me a minute in silence.

"Oh," she whispered, "oh, you are good. I didn't know people were ever that good."

That was her acceptance. I put my arm about her and led her back to the house. There followed a stormy scene with her parents, a scene which I have no desire to recall. Then I took her to the little old Justice of the Peace, and we were quietly married.

Of my life with Alicia I find it hard to write. She was always pitifully grateful to me and anxious to please me, but otherwise listless and without any desire. I felt that she was happier when I was not with her so I installed her in my little cottage at Hazeldene with old Jane Morris to care for her, and turning over my practice to a young doctor come down to New York to work along my special line.

I admitted to myself that this arrangement was far better for me, though there were hours when it seemed that I must throw aside everything to go back to her. For I had come to love this white slip of a woman with her sorrowful eyes and her scarlet mouth, this woman whom I had married at another man's request that his child might bear a name, with all the passion of a man whose first love comes long after adolescence.

Not that I debarred myself wholly from her society. I didn't. I saw her

every week or so for I had no desire that she should fancy I shunned her. Besides I felt it my duty to keep a close and careful watch over her health.

I was glad to notice that gradually the sunshine and the flowers and the glorious colors of a country fall seemed to work a healing of both spirit and body, and as the time drew near for her great trial she seemed more contented, brighter and more interested in preparing for her baby's birth.

Of my agony during the hours which passed while she struggled for her life and that of my friend's child, I will not write. When the white dawning came and her little daughter, Emily, lay in her arms, she sent for me.

When I sat beside her, her hand in mine, I fet a the bitterness that had been in my heart for the tiny morsel in the curve of her arm melt away.

"Morton," she whispered, and bent forward to catch her words, "Morton, I never dreamed I could be so happy again. And I owe it all to you that my darling is a joy only and not a shame to me. Oh, Morton, I wish I could repay you."

I stooped and kissed her hand.

"Get well, Little Mother," I answered as lightly as I could, "get well, so that you can romp with our little lassie, and it will please me better than anything else you could do."

"Oh," she said her eyes filling with tears of weakness, "you are so good, so good. You loved her father and you'll love her, too, little Emily, not hate her for her mother's sin?"

"I love her all the better for her mother's sake," I answered huskily, and hurried from the room lest the startled look I saw in Alicia's eyes should deepen into fear.

For four years, while Emily grew from a wee wrigging bundle of humanity to a sunny-haired little maid, I lived with Alicia at Hazeldene. During that time my love for her strengthened steadily. Twice and twice only did my emotions break their bounds—once when she came to me in the night alarmed at a sudden attack of croup that little Emily suffered, and once when we walked together in the moonlit garden and I let my imagination picture the woman by my side as mine in reality as well as in name. Both times my sanity returned before the hurt surprise in her eyes, and I left her, calling myself a cad.

At the end of the fourth year of mingled joy and torture our little home burned down.

It was a cold, blowy night, in early fall, when I awakened from a dream in which I was being choked to death, to find my throat full of smoke and someone hammering on my door. I flung it wide. Old Jane Morris stood trembling on the threshold.

"The other wing," she gasped, "it's all ablaze below."

The other wing contained Alicia's rooms and the nursery. Shouting to Jane to get Emily out, I dashed toward the room of my wife. Alicia's door was unlocked, and I caught her up in my arms and ran with her down the stairs. She clung to me in a half stupor, dazed with the smoke, the noise and the sudden awakening. Almost blinded by the smoke I made my way to the stairs and dashed down and out to safety on the lawn. As I crossed the porch I heard the front stairs crash down behind me. I wondered if Jane had succeeded in getting little Emily out in safety.

The local fire department and many of our neighbors were gathered on the lawn. No one had seen anything of

them, so handing my wife over to gentle Mrs. Willis I turned back toward the house.

I had only gone a step or two when I felt hands on my arm and my wife's voice cried:

"No, Morton, don't go. Oh, you will be killed!"

I shook her off roughly and ran on, my heart beating high. Of course she did not realize that Emily was in the house, but even so I dared to hope that the frantic anxiety in her voice meant more than merely friendship or gratitude.

I managed to find my way through the fire and smoke to the back stairway. It was still standing and at the top I found Jane in a crumpled heap with little Emily in her arms. How I got them out I cannot tell. They say it was scarcely a moment too soon, for the roof fell almost as I crossed the sill. I did not know.

The first thing I remember is lying in bed in a sunny room, with Alicia sitting beside me and little Emily playing with her Teddy bear in the sunshine on the floor.

Alicia would not let me talk until I had drunk some broth. Then she told me that she and Emily were none the worse for their narrow escape, that old Jane had suffered only some minor burns and that we were comfortably ensconsed in the apartment that the Willises had turned over to us until we could rebuild. They were going south.

So she rattled on until the west turned gold and old Jane came to take the baby away. When we were alone my wife took my hands in hers and said shyly:

"Morton, you—you talked in your delirium. Is it true—I didn't guess—that you—want me for your wife—really?"

There was a troubled look on her face that made my heart sick. "Fool!" I said to myself, for I had been remembering her cry when I went back to the burning house, "fool!" But my voice shook as I said, as quietly as I could:

"Alicia, dear, I have loved you ever since I saw you first, in the parlor of the old farm house. I have sometimes dared to hope that I might win your love, but always in my saner moments I have known that that was impossible. I love you, and I always shall, but it will make no difference—nothing is changed."

I could not understand the look that crossed my wife's face as she sat there so quietly in the golden light.

"Morton," she said, "you were given the chance to pay your debt to your friend when you married me, but have you ever thought that I owe you a far greater debt than you owed him? And now I owe you for little Emily's life as well. Won't you let me pay what I can?"

"Dearest," I answered her, "all that you could give me would be only part payment. Only your love could pay me in full for what you think you owe, and that I know you cannot give. But you mustn't feel, dear, that you owe me anything. If there ever was a debt it was paid long ago in the joy of serving you."

The look that I did not understand, that was part pity, part gratitude, wholly mystifying deepened on my wife's face. After a moment's silence she said:

"I would so gladly pay what I can toward the debt I do not owe." She smiled sadly. "You are sure you will not let me? I shall not offer again."

"No," I told her huskily, "No."

And then she stooped and kissed me on the forehead and went away.

It was a day or so before they would let me resume my practice, but when I did I felt as fit as a fiddle, or would have but for a lassitude that was far more mental than physical.

My first day back in the harness was a strenuous one. I had many calls to make and at each house I was detained and congratulated on our lucky escape from the fire. Finally I was obliged to phone Alicia that I should not be home for dinner.

"But, Morton," she objected with a note of anxiety in her voice that made my blood beat with more vim than it had before that day, "you will be tired out."

I told her that I was feeling fit and that I would not be late. She must not wait up for me. She said she would not.

I wondered at this as I rode home through the cold moonlight. It did not seem like Alicia. I had usually found her waiting for me when I had been late and we had had a little snack together. I realized with a sudden sharp pain at my heart that it was probably her knowledge of my love that caused the change.

Except for a dim light in the hall the flat was dark. I went directly to my room. At the open door I stopped.

A white figure was standing in the moonlight that poured through the open window.

"Alicia," I cried, my heart thumping, blood pounding in my temples.

"Oh, Morton, my dearest," she answered. "Didn't you guess? I love you, dear. I love you as I never loved poor Jack. You wouldn't let me pay my debt with gratitude—I didn't want you to; I wanted you to want my love —will you let me pay it now, dear, pay with love?"

I caught my dear wife in my arms, and as I held her close against my heart, finding her lips with mine, I knew that her debt was indeed paid in full measure, pressed down and running over.

WHEN LOVE IS YOUNG

By Brand Storm

They stood apart from the station's crowd,
  Clasped close in a last embrace.
"I'll be lonesome for you!" he brokenly said,
  And kissed her tear-wet face.

The train pulled out: "You'll write?" she cried.
  "Every day!" loud the answer came.
A moment he stood, then despairingly ran,
  "Wait a minute!" he yelled. "Whatcha name?"

L'Envoi

Ah! those were the days! Vacation days!
  When fiercely glowed love's flame.
But the clinging kiss was their sad farewell!
  For he never knew her name!

April Magic

By NARD JONES

THE Bordets were giving a dance; that is, Tommy and Edna Bordet were entertaining some young people in their parents' home. Only a few houses in Adams boasted hardwood floors, and the Bordet place was one of them. Somehow, nowadays, hardwood floors have become requisite to the dancing floor of youth; but there were those in Adams who remembered that barn floors, coarse-grained and not free from straw, had been quite satisfactory. But the Bordets never halved things; there was not only the floor, there was also the orchestra, the pink-iced cakes, the Chinese lanterns—all transported, for this occasion, from Centerton. In short, the affair was what would be described in the *Adams Leader* as "an event of the social season."

Yet Evelyn Paul should have been there. She had intended to come, and in a way the dance—at least, Tommy's part of it—was for her. She should have, at that moment, been dancing with Tommy Bordet instead of the pale blonde girl who was taking her place in his arms. Tommy tried to tell himself that he was having a good time, but he knew that he wasn't, not without Evelyn. He was a trifle piqued with her, too. He had called on the telephone to tell her that he would call for her at eight, and it was her aunt, Miss Quackmear, who answered. "Miss Paul is not going to the dance tonight!" No other explanation than that—and one could see that exclamation point in the reply, had one been there, as plainly as if it had been written upon the wall.

It was a devil of a note—Tommy gave a sigh of relief that was almost audible as he was cut in upon and the pale blonde was whirled away from him. Fumbling in his pocket for a cigarette he made for the porch. He found it dark, sensed that couples were seated oblivious to proximities on the various wicker furniture. He discreetly went past the shadows and down the steps into the yard.

Yes, it was a devil of a note! One would have thought, after what had happened, that — well, that Evelyn wouldn't have cut him quite so neatly. Anyway, he had been sort of sorry, but now he needn't be. It evidently meant nothing to her, nothing at all! She was like the rest. *Almost*, he amended, like the rest.

Yet Tommy didn't like that last thought. As a matter of fact, he really hadn't been sorry at all. He'd been perversely glad, and rather frightened, too; frightened the way youth is when something bigger than itself happens to it, bowls it over, any which way. He had remembered how Evelyn had felt about it, and how he had kissed her wet cheeks, and held her close.

"I'm not going to be sorry," he had told her. "I'm not, and I don't want you to be. That's something that can't be helped. Somehow the moon and us got all mixed up together and—and who cares?" Then he had laughed, tried to make her laugh. And then "Besides, I—I love you, dear!"

That last had helped; and it had sounded so funny because once he had vowed he would never use those words.

Ancient, trite, overdone words! Yet

no sooner had they come out of his mouth than they had seemed original, strangely magical. So Eve had kissed him and they had walked home, arm in arm, stricken suddenly silent with the spell of the night. . . .

Tommy Bordet contemplated the glowing end of his cigarette and jerked himself back to the present. There wasn't any use dreaming—not if she didn't care. He listened to the music inside, listened to the thin silver notes of the violin fuse with the wail of the saxophone. He'd go in and dance again with that pale blonde girl. She *was* darned pretty.

"Tommy—"

It was a trailing, curious whisper close by his side. He turned and saw Evelyn cringing by the shrubbery, keeping out of the shafts of light that shot into the dark from the house windows. There was something strange about her manner, as if she were afraid of the Bordet house, of the people inside it, and of the raucous jazz that seeped into the lawn.

"Why—what's wrong, Eve? Why don't you come in? Your aunt said you weren't coming, so I—"

"She wouldn't let me come, Tom. She wouldn't let me answer your call." The girl bent her head as if to keep back tears, or to prevent him from seeing any already in her eyes. "She—she knows about us, Tommy."

The cigarette fell to the ground and was crushed by his step as he came to her. "You mean— Why, how could she? You—" accusation crept into his lowered voice— "you must have told her!'

Eve raised her head unhappily. "I had to, Tommy."

"You mean you're going to" A world tumbled down about Tommy Bordet at that moment, a world of silly plans and ambitions. But there was something else, too; there was a new sort of love aroused in him in that one second. It came too quickly and was too subtle for him to analyze, and Evelyn dispelled it almost before it was born by swiftly shaking her head.

"No. It wasn't that. I—I don't know what it was, Tom. But it just seemed like she knew all along. She kept looking at me in the queerest way—kept asking odd questions until I thought I'd go mad. And—" she gazed about her wildly as if looking for the words with which to explain to him—"I felt like I just had to get it off my mind, somehow. You can't understand how it is, Tommy. Maybe—maybe it was religion or—or something."

Tommy stood silent, oblivious to the din of the imported band, to the laughter that floated from the porch. Could he have been aware of it, the noise would have struck him as an ironic motif to the tragi-comedy in which he and this girl played a part. He straightened:

"What's she going to do?" he asked coldly.

"That's why I sneaked down here tonight—to tell you. She's coming down in the morning to tell your father. She says we've got to be married."

"Good Lord! The old harridan!"

"Tommy! She's right, can't you see? I mean she's right as far as morals are concerned and—standards. But—oh, Tommy, I couldn't bear it, living here and having been married like that! Everybody would know!"

Somehow anger was boiling in Bordet now. It was really anger at whatever April magic the moon works upon a boy and a girl; anger at Miss Quackmear; anger at the standards Adams imposed upon its natives since the pioneers. But, manlike, his anger

focused then upon Evelyn.

"Sure, everybody would know! You've let it out. Why in the devil couldn't you keep it quiet like a good sport. Now you've got me in a fix."

Eve Paul raised herself slightly; there was half a smile on her lips. "Don't worry, Tom, I won't let them make you marry me. You don't have to. I—I don't want you to."

"You don't want me to?" Tommy Bordet's eyes widened. This was unheard of. A girl who didn't want her honor vindicated. Why, it hurt his man's instinct—to protect that honor!

"No!" Evelyn's tone was slightly contemptuous. "You're a handsome devil—and I've been raised to conform to all the old traditional applesauce, but if you think I'd marry a man that way, you're full of red ants!"

It was courageous verbal fireworks, but as she turned into the shadows she was on the verge of tears. She walked swiftly up the street, a slender, adorable creature with brave coppery hair that shone even in the night. Tommy had a sudden impulse to go after her, but it was checked as he visioned her shrewish and tight-lipped old aunt. As he climbed the steps of the porch his head whirled with mixed emotions. . . .

Miss Quackmear, Evelyn's aunt, did not fail her high resolve. She was at the Bordet home early the next morning, before Mr. Bordet had quite finished breakfast. Miss Quackmear found the Bordets in the breakfast-room; Tommy's parents, his sister Edna, and Tommy himself, apprehensive and on guard.

The old lady was both feared and respected in Adams. Gaunt and terrible, thin-lipped and waspish at the waist, she had the small-town spinster's inevitable regard for right and wrong. Between the two, she saw a a sharp line of division, and there was no merging. Somehow she had never found a husband—her youth was so far in the past that Adams had ceased to conjecture upon what had happened or failed to have happened—but Miss Quackmear believed eternally in marriage. She believed firmly in marriage and children. Everything, almost, was a sin to her. She often used the word; from her lips it sounded terrific, matriarchal, old Biblical.

So she came that morning into the Bordet breakfast nook after sweeping by the hired girl without ceremony. She brought Evelyn with her. Tommy had been hoping, all through that nervous breakfast, that she wouldn't. But Evelyn was the spectacle and the example, she was the text of the sermon which Miss Quackmear intended that morning to deliver to Mr. and Mrs. Bordet and their scapegrace son.

Mrs. Bordet arose hastily and tried to hide her surprise. "Why, good morning, Miss Quackmear — and Evelyn!" Mrs. Bordet was small and plump and rosy. She greeted the girl pleasantly. "I'm afraid you'll think we're late risers."

The old lady waved a skinny hand as if to brush away post-prandial trivialities. "I've come to see Mr. Bordet, principally. It's important!"

The head of the family set his coffee-cup down carefully. There had been something cold and demanding in the old girl's voice, something that wanted immediate attention.

"Something wrong at the Church board, Miss Quackmear?" He had visions of a good-sized cheque wafting mission-wards. "Is there some assistance I can render?" he added with as little hesitation as possible.

"There is," she replied coldly. "I

would like to speak with you—and your wife, if she cares to hear. Edna—" Miss Quackmear bent a forbidding gaze on Tommy's sister—"had better leave the room."

She was ignoring Tommy; but it had come to the point where he could no longer remain at ease ignored. The sight of Eve, dragged into the centre of this mess by her righteous aunt, proved too much for him. White and a trifle shaky, he got up from the table. His voice sounded strange in his own ears.

"Wait a minute, Dad, I know what this is about. There's no use in making a drizzly post-mortem out of it. I—I've been a lousy rotter and she—I ought to marry Evelyn!"

That throttled them. It even silenced Miss Quackmear, froze her completely. She resented this bald confession. The climax was Tommy's and it should have been hers, she thought. It cheated her out of her own lengthy tirade against the morals of youth, the iniquity of Adams, and the sins of the parent. Miss Quackmear was proud of that undelivered thesis: she had rehearsed it dramatically, if silently, in bed the night before.

"Well," Tommy burst into the silence, "why don't you say something? Why doesn't somebody say something? You—you all see, don't you?"

If any other person beside Miss Quackmear had speech upon his or her tongue, that speech was anticipated by the old spinster's angered words: "You will please keep quiet, young man! It seems to me that you've been heard from quite enough, and that you should now have no say in this matter. I—"

She was interrupted swiftly by Evelyn who had changed during Tommy's words, changed from the cringing shadow of a girl into an upright, brave young woman taking things into her own inadequate hands. "Aunt Priscilla, it strikes me that it is Tommy Bordet's say—his and mine! And I want to apologize to Mr. and Mrs. Bordet for—for this humiliating experience. I won't marry Tommy! I like him—but not that much." She tried to smile her prettiest for all of them. "I think that settles the whole affair, doesn't it?"

There was a low rumbling as Frank Bordet cleared his throat; as head of the family, as the father of his son, his ego was demanding that he make himself heard, begin some move. "Ah, —Miss Quackmear, this comes as a blow to me." He shot a forbidding look at his male offspring. "A—ah—decided blow! If what you say is—ah—true, then Thomas should certainly enact the role of a gentleman, as foreign as that role seems to be to him."

But Eve Paul stepped forward again to inquire sweetly, "Would Tommy be any more of a gentleman than he was before, if he married me now? Or I any more of a—a lady? I tell you I won't marry him! I don't want to! Not that way! We—we made a mistake, but nobody can correct it now!"

"Evelyn Paul," old Miss Quackmear's voice pierced the air like icicles, "I'm thankful your mother isn't alive to hear you. And to see what a failure I've made in bringing you up. You will do as I say. As your guardian, I owe it to my dead sister. You will become Thomas's wife!"

"I will *not!*" replied Evelyn, and only Tommy who knew her best saw that she was about to cry.

"Then—" said Miss Quackmear dramatically, glad for the chance to use at least a part of her well rehearsed speech—"you will leave my roof."

"I say," interposed young Bordet, at

last coming out from behind his place at the table, "it isn't right! It wasn't right to drag her here in the first place and make her face all this—"

"Thomas!" His father stopped him with the word.

Evelyn turned. The tears were coming; she could feel them hot within her, tears of humiliation, of anger, at the futility which only youth can know. She had one desire: to get out of that house, away from her aunt, from Tommy, and from his father standing there trying to be important in a situation which was too much for his unspectacular soul. Only Mrs. Bordet seemed sympathetic. She had been silent; yet the silence had held more than words. It forgave both her son and Evelyn. It patted Eve Paul on the shoulder and said that she was sorry that it had happened.

The girl rushed out of the door, leaving them, went into the street. It suddenly came to her that she had no place to go. Somehow she was glad, a little. She would have to get out of Adams. To where, though, where?

She walked on up the street, heedlessly. A man passed her and stared at her tear-stained cheeks, her burning eyes. She must remember, next time, to hold her head erect as if nothing had happened. Oh, the hateful things people could do! The way they could transform something that had the essence of beauty into a pervading ugliness! Before, it had seemed some sort of a golden secret, something so big that it couldn't be understood. Something out of Ishtar's temple, something that came down to youth from ancient people. And now—well, the way that man had looked at her, as if he knew! As if, since Miss Quackmear had brought things to a point, some mark had been put upon her.

How long she walked, she didn't know. But her steps took her far out of Adams, into the country. She walked on and on, not noticing that she was hungry, thirsty, that her feet felt tired and the sun was too hot to be walking.

So at last she stopped, sank down on some grass that grew beneath a tree by the side of the dusty road. It was coarse grass—cheat grass, the farmers called it, because it wasn't really anything but a weed—and it was almost as dusty as the road. But to Evelyn it was a carpet, soft and inviting. She fell asleep against it, her mind holding fast to two whole thoughts that would not be dispelled: she must get away, and she mustn't let Tommy marry her—do the gentlemanly thing. . . .

She was awakened rudely, and was startled because when she had stopped there the sun had been glaring while now it was a cool red ball against a changing sky. The rudeness of her awakening had been caused by a roadster, a long gray impatient car that belonged to Tommy Bordet. But he wasn't in it, he was at her side. In another moment he had her head in his arms, was murmuring something to her.

She jerked away. "You're not going to take me back, Tommy!"

"No," he said, "we're going on to Centerton."

Eve sat upright. Her touseled head vied with the sun for glory and her blue eyes flashed. "We're not! I won't have us bullied into anything!"

Tommy smiled that particular crooked smile that she had always liked. "I'm not being bullied! They don't know I'm out hunting you, and I had the deuce's own time finding you, too."

"Why—why do you want to take me to Centerton?"

"To marry you! Why, I love you, Eve!" He said it with such sincerity, with such ferocity, even, that she was forced to believe it a bit right then, but incredulity crept into her eyes. Tommy sought to dispel it; he began to explain: "You see, I didn't really know I loved you. And then, back there, your aunt was kicking up such a fuss. And I was like you—I didn't want to be run into it by people who didn't know how we felt, couldn't know how it really was. They were messing it up, making it—making it a soiled thing. Then, as soon as you'd gone and I didn't know where, I knew I'd loved you all the time! And I'm—well, I'm glad because it really is—the decent thing."

Evelyn laughed, a little weakly. She was tired. "But I hope it's really mostly because you love me, Tommy."

They kissed each other and the sun obligingly withdrew itself behind the horizon hills. Presently a long green car sped down the road toward Centerton; two were in it who had come under April magic in their youth.

TO A LADY LIGHTLY LOVED

By T. E. Caufield

Tell me with your painted mouth
  Why I love that mouth so much.
North and east and west and south,
  Are there not a thousand such?

Look at me with beaded eyes;
  Tell me why I love them. Say—
Are there not, beneath the skies,
  More than many such as they?

Though you have a honeyed voice,
  There are words as sweet elsewhere—
Face as comely, flesh as choice
  Just such hands and just such hair!

Is there any reason why?—
  After all, why should there be?
Now we live, and soon we die,
  And love is new, for you and me!

A Hot Romeo

By FRANK WILLIAMS

SO here they were now, running away together—Jim Hostetter and Mrs. Clara Malcom—leaving their lawfully wedded spouses behind them. And the sin of it all was resting heavily upon Jimmy's poor, timid soul.

That was the way with Jimmy, always imagining himself as a Don Juan or a hell roaring owner of a large and voluptuous harem, and in practice shivering with dread if anyone looked cockeyed at him.

For weeks and for months he'd been carrying on this affair with beautiful and wholly desirable Mrs. Malcom. He'd danced with her more frequently at the neighborhood affairs than the marital law allows; he'd staged numerous necking parties with her in the dim lit hallways and on back stairs and here and there, and, finally, he'd proposed this elopement.

Jimmy had been entirely unprepared for the impetuous, amatorial fashion in which Mrs. Malcom threw herself into his arms and mauled him good and plenty at his proposal. He'd never thought she'd fall for it, but she had, and here they were in Jimmy's roadster tearing down the road to sin and destruction, as Jimmy pictured it.

Yes, here they were, and with every further mile Jim's heart dropped still lower, until it seemed as though it must now be in the extreme end of his big toe at least.

What would be the end of it? Jimmy pictured huge Mr. Malcom trailing them with a gun in either hand and a knife between his teeth and blood in his eyes. It would be terrible to be carved into minute little bits by the impulsive Mr. Malcom. And he pictured Bertha—his wife—crying her pretty eyes out and wailing that it was a wicked, wicked world. It would be tough for Bertha, it sure would. Jimmy felt his heart swell and throb at thought of her sorrow.

Not that Jimmy exactly loved his wife. He'd been crazy about her when she had, for quite a while, re-

fused to say "yes." But after getting her, his affection had dwindled away considerably.

That, too, was the way with Jimmy. The unattainable always got him going, especially when it was women. But once he'd attained 'em, that was a different matter, and his interest lagged.

That was at the bottom, of course, of his present lack of pep in squeezing Mrs. Malcom and imprinting not so chaste kisses upon her ruby lips. She'd seemed simply wonderful to him when she was another man's private property. At that time she'd looked like a million dollars in cold cash, a prize beauty and just about the most desirable thing in all the wide world. But now, when she was snuggled up close to him and raising her head practically all the time for caresses, she didn't seem so muchy-much. She seemed more like a too chubby, rather nit-witted bunch of silliness.

And now, because, by his own actions, he was putting Bertha in the unattainable class, she became again desirable and lovely to Jimmy.

Maybe there are plenty of other men like Jimmy. Some of 'em act that way, anyhow, don't they?

Farther and farther along on the road to ruin the car buzzed sturdily. Now the sun was sinking in the west and in a short time it would be dark. That's the way it seems in Southern California—one minute it is late afternoon, the next minute it is evening and the following minute it is the middle of the night.

Mrs. Malcom's head rested more heavily against Jimmy's shoulder. Jimmy forced himself into the procedure of implanting another smack where it belonged with a semblance of zest in the matter.

"Getting sleepy, honey?" Jimmy whispered to her.

"Uh-huh," she baby-talked back to him.

"It won't be long now," whispered Jimmy again. "I know a place—you'll love it. It's cosy and quiet—you'll like it."

"Uh-huh," she murmured, raising her lips again.

Ye gods, she demanded a lot of petting!

As Jimmy said, it wasn't long. Yellowish lights appeared in the distance on the side of the road. Soon they were right up with the lights and Jimmy stopped his car in front of a low, shingle-sided bungalow with a wide veranda. Warm lights inside gave view of a pleasing room with a big fireplace at the end where a log fire was blazing.

"This is the office," Jimmy explained. "There are detached bungalows for guests—I wired for one of 'em, for myself and—wife!"

"Uh-huh," murmured Mrs. Malcom again, once more raising her lips.

"Not here!" exclaimed Jimmy quickly. "It's too public."

He felt something akin to disgust arising in his soul. If this woman pulled another one of those "uh-huh" things he had a good mind to put her out of the car for good and make her walk home.

She didn't "uh-huh" any more, not immediately, and with considerable trepidation Jimmy got out of the car, showed a bell-hop how to take their grips from the car and then helped Mrs. Malcom to alight.

There was more than trepidation in Jimmy's heart when they entered the office to register. It seemed to Jimmy as though his face must tell the world that he was running away with another man's wife. He felt as though

every one in the office, the bell-hop, the clerk at the desk, the guests sitting around in chairs, must know just who he was and what he was doing. He half expected, at any moment, to hear the clerk denouncing him in a large, repugnant voice followed by lusty yells for the police.

That was the way with Jimmy—always afraid, never putting things through with the effrontery and fearlessness of a stronger man.

Nothing happened of a disconcerting nature, however.

Upon reaching the registration desk Jimmy recalled his wire to the clerk. The clerk said, "Oh, yes," and assigned Jimmy and Mrs. Malcom to a bungalow.

And, a few minutes later, here they were together, registered as man and wife, in a delightful little bungalow, with bath, where there was no one to disturb them or pry upon them.

It should have been very pleasing to Jimmy, considering the fact that he was the one who had suggested the elopement and planned the whole thing. It would be expected, under the circumstances, that he'd fold the lady in his arms and crack a couple of her ribs or something.

But although Mrs. Malcom hovered near him with her chin raised and her ruby lips adorably puckered, Jimmy heeded her not. Instead he moved about the room restlessly, his brow corrugated with lines of anxiety.

"This has been too easy," Jimmy declared, fearfully. "It makes me suspicious. Didn't it seem to you the clerk looked at us pretty knowingly?"

"I wasn't thinking of the clerk—I was only thinking of you," declared Mrs. Malcom, fretfully.

"Maybe the clerk is phoning for the police right now!" exclaimed Jimmy.

Mrs. Malcom looked a trifle disturbed for a moment at this. Then her face cleared.

"But even if he was, it would be some time before they could get here," she suggested, with a sly smile.

Jimmy ignored the suggestion.

"I've got a feeling that something may happen," he went on shivering slightly. "It's what you might call a premonition, I guess."

"Oh, I hope not!" cried Mrs. Malcom with a real note of fear in her voice.

Jimmy's thoughts leaped back to his wife, with a little stab of anguish at his heart. How desirable his wife looked now that she had become unattainable for him. She hadn't seemed so wholly desirable to him since the day before they were married.

Then he resolutely brought his thoughts back to the present and to Mrs. Malcom, whose lips were still in a receptive mood, albeit, not quite so much so as formerly. For a moment Mrs. Malcom seemed as tantalizingly appetizing as she had just before the elopement. She certainly was good to look at—almost good enough to deserve the anxiety now sweeping through Jimmy's soul. So he gathered her up and engaged in prolonged osculation with her. And while thus engaged Jimmy was almost happy.

Almost, that is, but not quite.

It was the sound of an auto driving up in front of the inn that made him lift his head quickly from its recumbent position atop Mrs. Malcom's lips.

Somehow, someway, that auto sounded strangely familiar.

Whose was it?

Sudden acute fear swept through Jim—fear that was very real, very present.

He broke away from Mrs. Malcom.

"Who was that?" he cried suddenly, in a tense whisper.

"Who was what?" echoed Mrs. Malcom, in a startled voice.

"That auto that just drove up?"

Jimmy, looking at Mrs. Malcom, saw something like a spasm of fear come to her face.

"I—I didn't hear it," she replied.

Jimmy felt himself grow cold. Then he shivered.

"I'm afraid," he half whispered to Mrs. Malcom. "I've been feeling something would happen. I'm afraid. I—"

He stopped, raising his head to listen. But no new sounds came to him.

"I better go and see who it was," Jimmy declared.

He took Mrs. Malcom in his arms and found that she was trembling, too.

"You think there's something to be afraid of?" she questioned in a whisper.

"I don't know," Jimmy replied truthfully. "I want to find out, that's all. That auto surely sounded familiar. And I've been feeling all along that something might happen."

"Oh, dear, I'm so worried," whispered Mrs. Malcom.

Jimmy kissed her and then let himself out of the room cautiously. He was thankful that it was quite dark at their bungalow with no lights nearby.

Jimmy stole around to the front of the office for the purpose of looking the cars over carefully. At first glance none of the cars looked familiar. Then, at the end of the line, he saw a car that caused him to gasp. Unless he was mistaken, unless he was quite badly mistaken, that car belonged to Mr. Malcom—the husband of the woman with whom he was eloping!

Jimmy felt himself go cold all over at this. His legs trembled beneath him so much that they became unsteady and he was forced to grab at a nearby car for support.

Mr. Malcom here!

This was terrible, terrible! It could mean but one thing—it could mean only that Mr. Malcom had discovered his wife's elopement and had, in some way, traced them to this spot.

A feeling of physical sickness swept over Jimmy. What would be the outcome of the whole sorry mess? Would there be a shooting? Would there be bloodshed—perhaps death? Would he ever again see his wife, who now seemed to him unapproachably beautiful and desirable?

This last question was answered in a surprising way.

Jimmy looking toward the office, saw three people standing at the desk. One of these was the clerk, the second was Mr. Malcom and the third was —most surprisingly, startlingly—the third was Jimmy's own wife!

All three were in close conversation. Jimmy saw Malcom lean over and look at the register while the clerk pointed to the register.

To Jimmy it seemed plainly evident just what was going on. The clerk was pointing to the alias under which Jimmy had registered and was telling the trackers—Malcom and Jimmy's wife—just where the elopers were located.

It was a terrifying situation indeed. Almost anything could come out of it. But one thing stood out above everything else in Jimmy's mind. This was the fact that he wanted his wife back again. He wanted her badly, now that every moment was making her more unattainable.

But what could he do to get her back? And what could he say or do to stave off the disaster which seemed to be hovering so closely?

Jimmy did some quick, hard thinking.

"There's no use of fighting," Jimmy told himself. "They're on to me. They've tracked us here. So there's no use of fighting or brazening it out. The only thing for me to do—the only thing that can possibly be of any help in smoothing things over and in getting back to where we were before I started this crazy elopement, is for me to throw myself on their mercy. If I go to them and tell them everything is still all right—if I tell them nothing's happened between Mrs. Malcom and me, except a few kisses, they'll surely believe me. I've got the evidence to back it up. The clerk will prove that we only just arrived. And then, maybe, there won't be any trouble. Maybe I'll get my wife back again."

Yes, this seemed to be the wise thing to do, Jimmy felt.

So, taking a firm grip on his not too extensive courage, Jimmy dashed straight for the office door before he could take a second thought and hesitate about the matter.

Straight into the office he ran, unmindful of the startled looks and gasps of the guests, and straight up to the desk at the side of the room.

As he ran toward the little group of three at the desk, he saw his wife turn and look at him and saw a look of horror come into her face at sight of him. He saw an amazed expression come into clerk's face. And he saw Malcom's face grow dark and his eyes ominous while Malcom's right hand went quickly to his hip pocket.

Jimmy felt he knew what it meant when Malcom's right hand made this gesture—it meant that Malcom had a gun hidden on him; it meant that Malcom might pull the gun and begin firing at any moment.

Something desperate must be done to prevent gunplay.

And Jimmy did the desperate thing his panting heart told him to do. He dropped to his feet in front of the little group of three and held up his clasped hands in front of them imploringly.

"Don't shoot—please don't shoot!" Jimmy cried frantically. "I'm telling you the truth—there's been nothing really wrong between your wife and me, Malcom."

Jimmy, gazing fearfully at Malcom, saw the latter's hand relax. That was the only thing Jimmy was looking at —Malcom's menacing right hand which might pull out a gun at any minute.

"It was a crazy thing for us to elope," cried Jimmy. "I've been sorry ever since we started. I haven't liked it at all and," he lied, "I was just going to call the whole thing off and drive your wife home when I heard your car drive up. It's all right, Malcom, everything's O. K. There's nothing to worry about."

To Jimmy's fear-stricken gaze, Malcom had never seemed so enormous and so sinister as at this moment. It seemed to Jimmy, in fact, as though Malcom towered above him a score of feet or more. And the worst of it was, there was no compromise visible in Malcom's attitude.

Heavens, wasn't what he said sufficient, Jimmy wondered. Would Malcom shoot in spite of everything? Surely there was something else that might be done to keep clear of destruction.

Impulsively Jimmy turned to his wife:

"You believe in me, Bertha, don't you? You know I'm telling the truth, don't you? Tell Malcom I'm telling the truth. Make him lay off me. And,

oh, Bertha, take me back again! Forgive me for this fool stunt. Take me back again, Bertha; I'm crazy about you!"

As he moaned all this Jimmy became conscious of the fact that all the guests were gathered around in an intent semi-circle. He had created a sensation in this quiet little inn—there was no doubt of that.

But though, ordinarily, Jimmy's timid heart made him hate to be at all prominent or to be mixed up in a scene of any kind, he didn't mind his prominence now. All he was interested in was the satisfactory outcome of this affair which seemed so portentous.

Looking intently at Malcom and Bertha, Jimmy saw Malcom turn toward Bertha.

"Do you believe him?" questioned Malcom, with an odd tone in his voice.

Jimmy, with immense relief, saw his wife nod.

"Yes," she said, in a tone of voice he'd never heard before. "Yes, I believe him. I know him so well. I know that's just the way he'd act."

Jimmy's spirits shot upward. This was fine. Perhaps everything would turn out right after all.

He got to his feet quickly, momentarily regretful at having made such a scene, rather remorseful at having prostrated himself at the feet of Bertha and Malcom.

"You'll come home with me, at once?" questioned Jimmy eagerly, of his wife. "My car is right out in front."

Jimmy saw his wife hesitate. He saw her look at Malcom as though she didn't know what to say.

"I must think it over," she said slowly. "Give me a little time. This has been such a terrible thing. I—"

Jimmy interrupted her with still higher spirits.

"I know you'll forgive me, Bertha," he declared. "If you only knew how badly I feel about this whole thing. If you only knew how good you look to me now and how much I want you."

Jimmy looked intently at his wife as he said this. But though her face was deeply flushed, and though it was evident that she was greatly excited, her eyes were inscrutable.

"Go somewhere where the crowd won't see you," said Jimmy's wife to him at this in a low tone. "Get out of sight. You've made enough of a scene for one night. Then come out to your car in ten minutes."

"I will—I will!" cried Jimmy, as he rushed into the crowd.

Jimmy could hardly believe that Bertha had forgiven him! And she had even believed him, he knew that. She'd told him to come to his car in ten minutes. That could mean only that she would be there to drive back to their home with him.

Everything was coming out all right, after all, even though for a time it had looked as though he'd smashed up everything. What a relief, what a wonderful relief!

With Jimmy's rising spirits came a feeling that he'd put the thing over in pretty good shape. Here he'd been faced by a fierce situation—a situation that might have ended up with shooting and deaths and everything else, and he'd smoothed everything over by throwing himself on the mercy of Bertha and Malcom. It had been a wise move when he had done that.

Jimmy felt quite proud of himself. Not every man would have had the sense to see what was the right thing to do under the circumstances. Not every man would have been so disdainful of what people might think as

to drop down on his knees in a public place, in front of a scorned wife and a deluded husband. But he'd done it and had saved the day by doing so.

While thinking along these lines, Jimmy referred repeatedly to his watch. How the time dragged. Would the ten minutes never be up.

Now, at last, it was only two minutes more to wait; then only a minute and a half. Slowly the second hand crept around. Now there was but a minute more to wait and now only a half minute and now Jimmy was sneaking out the back way at the end of the hall.

Cautiously, but quickly, he stole around the side of the inn.

Looking in at the windows as he passed, he saw the guests gathered in little groups talking excitedly. He knew they were talking about him. The buzz of their conversation came to him quite loudly.

Well, he didn't mind what they were saying—he only wanted to get to his car and to his wife quickly.

But when Jimmy came in sight of his roadster at the far end of the line, he saw there was no one sitting in it or standing near it waiting for him. For an instant his spirits dropped. Then he comforted himself with the idea that he was a little early.

He continued creeping to the car, however, even though he might be early.

And when he was close to it he saw, with startled surprise, that a paper had been pinned to the back of the seat.

With a stab of fear at his heart, Jimmy leaped at the paper, tore it from the seat and read it quickly by the light of the moon.

He read the note quickly:

"Dear Jim,

"If you hadn't been so panic-stricken you wouldn't have gotten things all balled up the way you did. I'm not going back to you ever, although for a time today I thought I would. When I saw you groveling at my feet like a yellow cur I knew I was through with you for good. Your timidity and constant fear is too much for me. If you'd been a real man and had really wanted me back, you'd have grabbed me when you saw me tonight and carried me away in spite of everything, instead of sobbing out about not having done anything wrong. You've never acted like a real man—you've always been cowardly, fearful, so terribly timid about everything all the time that you turned me against you. As I say, if you hadn't been so panicky you'd have seen what was really going on. Mr. Malcom and I were not tracing you and Mrs. Malcom—we were eloping ourselves. He's a real man, not a weakling. By the time you read this we will be far on our way. It will be no use to try and follow us. You will never see me again.

"Bertha"

Once more Jimmy trembled all over. His knees weakened. He had to grab at his car for support.

Bertha had eloped with Malcom!

Half remembered things came to his mind showing how things had been going for weeks. If he hadn't been so intent upon Mrs. Malcom he might have seen what was going on.

But now it was too late. He'd made a fool of himself. Instead of winning out by throwing himself on the mercy of Bertha and Malcom, he'd lost her forever.

What a fearful, timid, cowardly fool he'd been! The memory of the way he'd groveled there in the inn

office just a short time ago seared his very soul. A cowardly, groveling, sneaking coward—that's what he was. A real man would grab the woman he wanted in spite of hell, just as Malcom had done.

Well, it was too late now—too late.

What was there left for him now?

The sudden thought of Mrs. Malcom shot into his brain at this question. Mrs. Malcom was still left—Mrs. Malcom who was young and pretty and amorous.

And now, if he went to Mrs. Malcom there was nothing to fear—not a thing in the world to fear, for the very worst had happened.

Jimmy shrugged his shoulders. Well, why not get something out of the mess, why not go to Mrs. Malcom right now?

He would! He'd charge in on her unafraid. He'd treat her as a regular he-man who took what he wanted, when he wanted it, in spite of the world and the devil.

He straightened his shoulders, thrust Bertha's note into his pocket and strode to the bungalow where he'd left Mrs. Malcom.

There was a light in the bungalow, of course. She was probably waiting for him anxiously.

He knocked discreetly on the door before opening it.

"It's me," he said.

Then he opened the door and entered.

But Mrs. Malcom wasn't in the bedroom. Nor was she in the bathroom.

But pinned on one of the pillows on the bed was a note.

Two notes from ladies in one night! Jimmy gingerly and with sinking spirits took up the note and read it. Here's what it said:

"Jimmy

"You've got me all worked up with your anxiety and have made me afraid of something happening. There's no fun in an elopement when you've made me half scared to death. I'm afraid you'd be like that all the time—always afraid something was going to happen and always making me worried and anxious.

"I figure I'll be a lot better off if I don't go through with this elopement, so I'm leaving you for good. I'll get a car down the road and get the chauffeur to drive me back home. Don't ever call me up or write me letters or anything, because I don't want to ever see you again."

"Clara"

Jimmy, trembling violently, read the note the second time, bracing himself against the bed as he did so.

Then he thrust the note into his pocket beside the note from his wife.

He walked restlessly about the room, his brain in a whirl.

Finally he stopped near the center of the room where he kicked one of the chairs peevishly.

"Oh, hell!" he cried, "I'm a hot Romeo!"

WHY

By Belle Harrington Hall

I have given to you two years of my life
  At a time when I needed them most;
I have given you all, withholding no thing,
  And I say it not meaning to boast.
I have given my face to be kissed and caressed,
  I have given my soft hands to work,
I have given my jewels, my money, my friends,
  No single thing did I shirk.
I have given my smiles, I have given my tears,
  I have given my minutes and hours;
I have knelt at your feet to be crowned with thorns,
  I have woven you garlands of flowers.
I have taken your curses, I've laughed at your threats,
  I've "kissed and made up" times galore;
Then, if my reward was to be this, my dear,
  Why didn't you tell me before?
Why didn't you tell me I served in your life
  To be used till you needed me not?
Why didn't you say, "I am going away,
  Prepare to be kissed and forgot."
Why were you afraid? I have taken all else,
  The camel's back bends to the load.
You could bind on one more without fear of collapse;
  Why didn't you show me my road?
Why didn't you say, "My dear girl, you've been good,
  I have liked you so much, but I go,
And if I return or if I write back
  Will depend on the future, you know.
For I am so fair and I am so free,
  And you are so worn and so old,
I think 'twill be best to forget about me
  And go back to be safe in the fold,
I need you no more, I can look to myself,
  I've enjoyed you and now I must go.
Goodby! Thank you, dear, for your love and your care—"
  Why couldn't you tell me, just so?

The Other Mr. Smythe

By H. W. DUNNING

HARRELSON VAN ALLEN, president of the Van Allen Insurance Company, retained one characteristic and enjoyed one hobby. The characteristic had been developed in the early days of his business career when he had peddled books from door to door. It was a matter of speech—voluble, rapid speech that ran on like the famous brook, brooking no interference as it were, trickling through the crevices between others' words, flooding low conversational spaces, drowning out entire sentences as they issued from lesser mouths. In that way, he had gained success; even his wife hesitated to start an argument with him.

Van Allen's hobby was to sit in the luxurious quietness of his office on the tenth floor of the Trust Company building after the day's work, feel the touch of his profits and review his immediate present life and the lives of others as he had domineered them.

He was engaged in this self-satisfying occupation now—thinking particularly of his daughter Margaret.

Margaret had informed him the evening before that she wanted to marry. He had opposed. He usually opposed anything his family suggested, on the half-hidden belief that if they had the things they wanted he wouldn't be among them.

He had loosened a flood of oratory.

Margaret had let him talk while she watched the minute hand of the clock crawl from the hour to half-past.

"But, daddy, you've never seen him—don't even know his name," she had objected at last. "He is—"

What did it matter who "he" was, he had demanded in exasperation, and forthwith the flood became a raging torrent.

"That's the way we feel," Margaret had edged in from long practice. "No money—you're rich—let us have enough—start off on."

An hour later, without having had another opportunity to make herself heard, she had sighed wearily and retired to her room. He had followed her to her door to insure the last word, then wandered about the house in search of another audience. The rest of the family had chosen the better part of valor. They had disappeared.

Not to be defeated in his intent to continue talking, he had gone to the apartment of Mrs. Smythe. Frances had the habit of looking soulfully into his eyes and never opening her pretty mouth. He liked Frances—had spent some very pleasant hours talking to her.

The only unpleasant feature of their acquaintance was a shadowy husband somewhere in the background. Van Allen had never met him, for occasional warnings over the telephone, such as had arrived that morning, always reported his presence. And Van Allen did not want to meet him. He was a little doubtful that even his eloquence could subdue an irate and outraged husband, and he was deathly afraid of physical combat.

With a sigh that the world could have treated him so badly, he slipped a rubber band about the bundle of money that lay on his desk and prepared to put it in the office safe.

Someone came through the outer room and knocked on his door.

Then, before he could respond, it

opened and a nervous, white-faced but determined young man stood on the threshold.

"Name's Smythe," the intruder stuttered. "I've come—"

"Yes, yes," Van Allen interrupted swiftly, his heart missing a beat.

"—with the determination—"

"Now, now, you mustn't say anything rash," Van Allen feigned while marshaling his words for a counter-assault. "Put your hat on the desk. Have a chair. Make yourself comfortable—"

"I know—"

"Ah, yes. Won't you have a cigar? No? Cigarette? Sorry that I haven't a bottle around—comes in handy sometimes." Van Allen felt that this was one of the times, for he was so weak he hardly could talk, yet talk he must if he were to save himself. "Do you smoke a pipe? Light up if you care to; in fact, I prefer it—great thing, tobacco. Calms one's nerves and lends one reason—"

The intruder had been talking, but Van Allen, as usual, had smothered his words.

"—make—my wife," Van Allen heard above the shrill, wobbly tones of his own voice, and his worst suspicions were confirmed.

At last, he had the irate, outraged husband to deal with. Could he do it and get away with a whole skin? If only his vocal muscles would do their duty!

"Yes, yes, wife. Fine girl. Most enjoyable companion. Congratulate you. Have known her since childhood," he lied nobly, hoping that Smythe knew nothing to contradict this. "I feel a very fatherly affection for her," he continued more easily, although the perspiration was forming on his forehead. "Purely platonic, you understand," he hastened to add as Symthe eyed him in a peculiar manner. "I

find a great deal of pleasure in her companionship after a hard day at the office. My wife knows her, too," he ventured another lie as his visitor made no effort to contradict him in the first one. "Thinks a lot of her."

"See here—" Smythe attempted to interrupt, his eyes groggy with bewilderment.

"Ah, I understand," Van Allen shut him off. "You feel that it is perhaps improper that I should know her and see her occasionally, but I assure you that our friendship is only of the purest and most disinterested kind. Nothing base about it—"

"This has gone far enough," Smythe shouted determinedly, leaping from his chair. "I want—"

"Calm yourself, calm yourself," Van Allen urged frantically. "It is dangerous for one to excite oneself needlessly. I have known of cases where death resulted." He failed to specify whose death. "You must allow me—"

"Damn—money!" Smythe stuttered advancing.

"Money, money, oh, yes, money," Van Allen cried, grasping at straws. "Here you are, five thousand, one hundred and eighty-four dollars and forty-five cents—take it. I never gave you two a wedding present, so consider this as one," and he thrust his day's receipts into the hand that Smythe had extended towards him. "Only too glad to let you have it. Again, I congratulate you in having won that girl. Hope that you and she pass a long and happy life together. No reason why you shouldn't. You have my blessings."

Smythe was standing, staring at the money, as though in a daze.

Cautiously, Van Allen gripped him lightly by his arm and led him to the door.

"Give her my best regards and as-

sure her of my highest esteem. I hope to see both of you again soon," was his third and final fib as he urged his visitor into the outer office.

He could hear Smythe stumbling over the waste baskets and mumbling wildly to himself as he passed into the hallway.

Weakly, Van Allen tumbled into a chair and mopped his face with his handkerchief.

He was there fifteen minutes later when his telephone rang.

Nervously, he picked up the receiver.

"This is Margaret, dad," came the voice over the wire. "John Smythe, my fiancé, just telephoned me that he had seen you and that you had given him your congratulations on winning me and presented him with a wedding present of five thousand dollars—but he said you were acting queerly. You are not sick, are you?" (He was, but he didn't tell her so.) "You are a dear to give us that money. We are going to be married in a few minutes. Have you anything to say?"

For the first time in his life, he had nothing to say!

DISCOVERED

By Edith Loomis

They say that skies shone blue,
That violets grew,
And pale winds brought the spring.
They say that days were fair,
Long, long ago,
Ere I found you.

But this I know is true:
I did not see the flowers,
The sun, the birds that sing.
I had not learned to care
For beauty so,
Ere I found you.

Retrieved

By JOHN 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 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 Machivelli, 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 unfaithfulness at the breakfast table, at lunch, at dinner, and between and after meals. An argument starting with the tranquil discussion of the weather or of the patent perils of shedding winter woolens 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 Antaeus, 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 stranger, 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 papers, 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. 'I'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 rambunctions 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 stuff we was drinkin' . . ."

SPRING in the SOUTH

By Elsy Wilson

Fragrant breathless nights in Spring,
Banjoes hum and darkies sing,
Orange trees are all abloom
Scattering their sweet perfume;

Youth and love—hot lips that meet—
Reason captive at our feet;
Magic lure of passion lies
In the depths of your dark eyes!

Careless, care-free love in May,
Love that reckons but today—
Throbbing restless hearts that sing
Of the warm South in the Spring!

Something in His Face

By R. S. HOLGATE

HIS eyes, moody, unsteady of vision, glanced the length of twisted pavement forming part of Gay Street. "A sodden night," ran his bitter thoughts. "A sodden night, a sodden drunk."

He leaned against the one lamp-post the street boasted, and its dreary light touched, with a gleam of gold, unkempt hair straggling from beneath his soiled soft hat. If people wouldn't keep harping and harping on it, the people he occasionally met when avoidance was impossible, that theme of his having given so much promise, the promise he threw daily away. Then his lips sneered. Plainly, he hadn't had enough. For he waxed sentimental about a past which was past, something destined for the limbo of forgotten things.

What did he care about what he might have been? Unhappiness surely allowed a man some latitude to throw what might have been into the discard. And he and Laura—well, they simply didn't hit it off. He was more contented—a sodden drunk.

But drizzling rain is not pleasant, even for a disciple of Bacchus. James Calvert began to remember more desirable places to lounge, places where they served it in glasses while the money held out. For James Calvert still had some money, and this was nineteen-forty to be exact. So he lurched along Gay Street, that dismal street that so belies its name in its sordid misery, his head bent, for,

much against his desire, he continued to think. Soon he would lose even this ability, so bent was a yet strong will on destruction. And he did not see that other unhappy shape weaving its uncertain way toward him until hands clutched, making his effort to retain his balance a dizzy sway.

"What the—" he began, angrily.

The hands continued to clutch. A croaking voice almost shouted in his face, "F'r Gawd's sake, fren', buy m' drink. Mos' dippy, fren'. Mus' have it."

The dim light made her a most repulsive creature. For a woman it was—a woman with a mass of tangled hair lumped on the back of her head, crushed hat awry, a woman blotched of face, ungainly of form, lacking every vestige of the grace associated with the sex. And from her James Calvert recoiled with much of the disgust of the perfectly sober. A fit setting, Gay Street, for—this.

The woman laughed, the senseless, tragic laughter of her kind. "Sing'd cat—better'n I look. Buy the drink, fren'. 'N we can chew it over. 'Snawful night to be 'lone!"

The clutching fingers attempted the semblance of a caress. The swollen features tried to twist into a luring smile. The awfulness of it sent shuddering horror through Calvert. Then something else stirred, pity for another most unhappy.

"I'll buy you two—jus' two, that's all," he promised. "Then I'll go on. But it'll get you out of the rain I'il while."

Together, the halt leading the halt, they swayed out of Gay Street, managed, somehow, to reach a dingy basement where liquor was dispensed—for an exorbitant price. It was rather early for the gathering of the sad clan of habitués. Calvert and his companion slumped into seats and leaned weary elbows on the uncompromising

hardness of a table. Here the rain no longer irritated with its drizzling.

Calvert ordered "two whiskies" of the indifferent waiter, and then passed under the cloud engendered of alcohol, oblivious of his companions, his surroundings. This was the thing he sought—oblivion. He wished he could make it last forever. Who wanted to remember, anyhow?

The voice came to him sharply, dispelling oblivion, making things horribly real, with the reality Calvert so sought to forget. It was a voice difficult to associate with the sorry creature staring at him across the table.

"What are you doing here, a man like you—a man with somethin' in his face you have—a man with a beau'ful, 'telligent head like yours?"

The words struck a peculiar chord long silent in Calvert's symphony of life. And the striking of this chord annoyed. He frowned, grasped the glass just placed before him by a grimy hand, raised it, would have downed the contents. But the woman's hand moved quicker than his. The whiskey became a dripping pool on the table. His eyes met those of this dismal woman defiantly.

"What—what you doin' here?" he countered.

"Me?" Her laughter blended many emotions. "Me? Say, I was jus' a pretty, silly fool. Fool, that's me. No brains, not a one. I—I mus' a' been meant for this. My kind—jus' meat for the slaughter. I hadn't much chance, likin' good food and pretty duds. But you—" across the table her eyes blazed, indicting, accusing. "What you doin' here with that somethin' in your face? Tell me that! Tell me that! You—a man like you!"

And James Calvert's soul writhed in the pillory, unable to escape, in torment because of his wasted promise.

For this woman, no longer a drab thing of the streets, but an angel with a flaming sword, barred the way his will had elected to go.

James Calvert looked deep into the glowing coals, coals that formed memories. In his eager eyes filmed a trace of tears. A woman of the streets—the kind they used to stone—and yet—and yet his angel with a flaming sword winning one man back to the better things.

IN THE DARK

By Terrell Love Holliday

I pack each souvenir
And o'er it shake my head,
For all are doubly dear,
Since finis has been said.
This hairpin made of shell,
Was worn by buxom Bet;
The orchid by Estelle;
The ribbon—I forget—
Was it Rita, Carmencita,
Or stately Antoinette?

No matter. Ere 'tis dawn
I must be far away.
My fate I've placed in pawn.
'Twere madness here to stay.
Last night I loved, and though
Intentionless as wind,
I erred, but do not know
Against which girl I sinned.
Was it Lena, Clementina,
Or charming Rosalind?

Aweary of the dance,
I sought a bower dim,
And resting there, by chance,
I found a figure slim.
She let my arms entwine
And set my head a-whirl
With lips that clung to mine.
She whispered Yes, that girl.
Was it Phyllis, Amaryllis,
Or clever Clarimerle?

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