

In This Issue: **STAY AT HOME WIFE** by Elizabeth Blair

EXCITING LOVE

Combined with **THRILLING LOVE** and **POPULAR LOVE**

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

FALL 25c

FEATURING

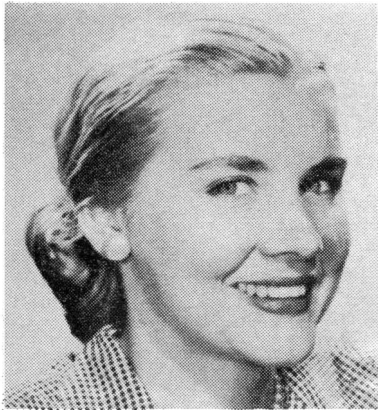
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By **PEGGY GADDIS**



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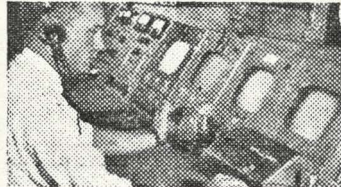
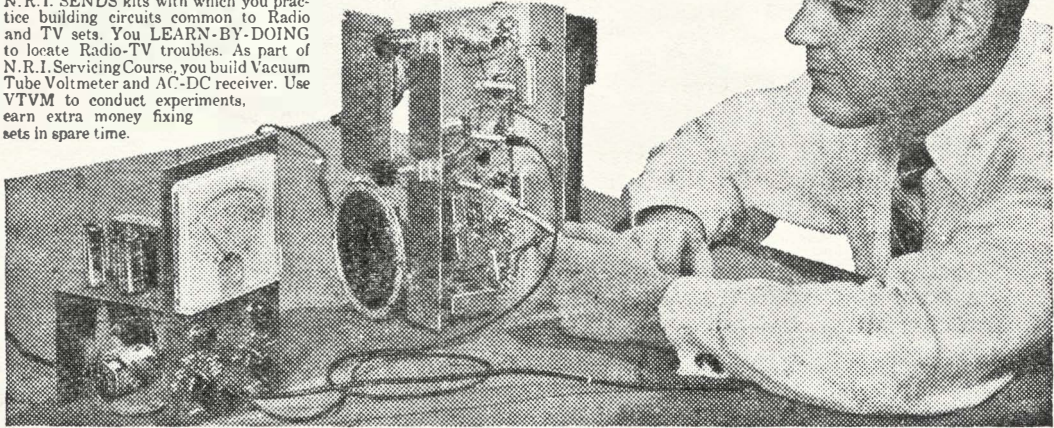
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Combined with
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 and **POPULAR LOVE**

VOL. 25, NO. 3, FALL ISSUE

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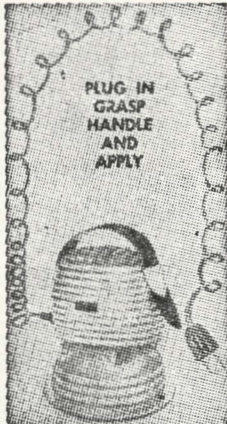
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IF YOU ARE INTERESTED in making new friends and having pen pals, please write to Mrs. Faith Simpson, care of **EXCITING LOVE**, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. Introduce yourself by writing an interesting letter that will make others eager to know more about you. Be sure to sign your full name and state your address, age and sex. Please provide at least one reference. We will use only your first name or a nickname when your letter is printed. We will forward all mail received for you. Please do not seal any letter which you wish to have forwarded, and kindly remember to enclose a stamped envelope.

NICE VIEW ON LIFE

Dear Mrs. Simpson: I am a widow, 61 years old, with gray hair and blue eyes, 5'2" tall, weighing 179 lbs. I'm very fond of music and dancing, and can play several instruments. Am fond of traveling and fun. I believe age is more determined by one's emotional reactions than by years. I love nature, good books, and records. Have my own home and a small income. I'm a good cook and bread maker.

GALE #1160

WANTS NEW FRIENDS

Dear Mrs. Simpson: If possible, I would like to join your pen pal club. I think it would be very interesting to make friends through correspondence. I'm 30 years old, 5'7" tall, weigh 145 lbs., have auburn hair and brown eyes, and am single. I like all sports, especially football. Also like dancing, square and round, and go to the movies a great deal. I work as a drill press operator. Would like to hear from young ladies around my age.

DANNY #1161

NEEDS CHEERING

Dear Mrs. Simpson: My boy friend was killed in Korea and I still can't get over it. I just can't seem to be interested in my old gang. My mother suggested that I write to you and that maybe receiving many different letters would help to cheer me up. I'm 17 years old, have blonde hair and blue eyes, and stand 5'5½" tall. My hobby is painting. Hope to hear from a lot of folks.

BARBIE #1162

LONELY WAR VETERAN

Dear Mrs. Simpson: I would appreciate it very much if you could enter my name in your pen pal section. I'm single, 43 years old, 5'6½" tall, weigh 150 lbs., and have dark hair and hazel eyes. I'm a Second World War and a Korean veteran. My hobbies include bowling and playing the guitar and mouth organ. Would like to hear from women between the ages of 30 and 42. Will try to answer all letters, and will exchange snapshots.

JOHNNIE #1163

SMALL TOWN GIRL

Dear Mrs. Simpson: I live in a small town and all my childhood friends have either left the state to attend college or else are now married. I am very lonesome and would like to correspond with fellows between the ages of 22 and 25. I am 20 years old and have blonde hair and hazel eyes. My main interest is music, but I also like sports, and enjoy letter writing. I promise to answer all letters I receive, and will exchange snapshots.

FREIDA #1164

EX-WAC

Dear Mrs. Simpson: I have just gotten out of the Wacs and am deciding whether I'll join again. In the meantime, some girl friends and I are planning to take a fishing trip. I'm 20 years old, weigh 129 lbs., stand 5'5" tall, and have brown hair and blue eyes. I enjoy all sports, music—especially the hillbilly kind—and also enjoy collecting stamps and taking photographs. Do hope that you'll be sending a lot of letters my way.

WILLENE #1165

THE FRIENDLY TYPE

Dear Mrs. Simpson: I'm 22 years old, 5'2" tall, weigh 110 lbs., and have black hair and brown eyes. My likes include dancing, going to shows, and listening to music. Would like to correspond with servicemen around my own age, and I'll be glad to exchange photographs with those who would like to.

MARY-ANN #1166

YOUNG AND WILLING

Dear Mrs. Simpson: I am 15 years old, 5'4" tall, weigh 120 lbs., and have short dark hair and dark eyes. I like dancing, roller skating, basketball and swimming. Also I like to go for long walks and discover new roads and different streets and houses. Would like to hear from both boys and girls, and hope that my mailbox is filled to the brim.

DORIS #1167

(Continued on page 112)



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LOVE comes home

a novel

by PEGGY GADDIS

Martie knew Lisa was afraid . . . but she couldn't believe there was anything but romance on this magic island

I

THE long living room, quiet except for the faint rustling of the breeze through the tall palms and banana trees outside, with its soft pools of light beneath the big reading lamp where Lisa sat studying a script, was a pleasant though unfamiliar place to Martie.

She, too, sat beneath a reading lamp, but she had not turned a page of the book in her hands for half an hour or more. Her thoughts were much more exciting than any book could have been.

It was fantastic, she told herself, that two weeks ago she had been plodding through the snow and slush on her way to the big literary agency where she worked. She was one of six typists in the "pool," whose duty it was to type copies of play scripts. She had had no higher hope than that some day she might be a private secretary.

Yet here she was, secretary-companion to Lisa Sinton, sometimes called "The First Lady of the American stage." She, Martie Hartlee, who had never been farther from her home in the Bronx than lower Manhattan, was

spending a long vacation in Port-au-Prince, on the island of Haiti, with Lisa. Martie would never forget the day she had delivered a play script to Lisa, backstage at the theatre where her play, "Dark of Night" was in its second year.

Lisa had been very tired, and was resting after the matinee performance. She hadn't been very interested in the script, but she had asked Martie to read her the first act. She had watched Martie with a curious alertness. But she said nothing except that she didn't like the basic idea of the script and she would get in touch with the agency later.

Martie had thought the whole incident finished. Then had come the startling interview with Mr. Campbell, head of the agency. He had told her that Lisa was closing the show, on her doctor's orders, and leaving for a long rest in the tropics. And she wanted to take Martie with her. There had been no difficulty about Martie's getting a leave of absence from her job. Mr. Campbell had been delighted to accede to Lisa's request. So here Martie was.

On the boat coming down, she had met Jonny. At the thought of Jonny Baird, Martie's heart purred like a cream-fed kitten. She drew a deep, happy breath—and then was jerked out of her pleasant thoughts by a sound from Lisa.

Martie turned and Lisa hissed, "*Stay where you are.*"

Startled, Martie saw that Lisa was as white as her thin cotton dress. Though her eyes were still riveted to the blue-jacketed script she held, her hands were shaking.

"What is it, Lisa?" Martie asked, bewildered.

"There's a man lurking under the banyan tree, Martie." Lisa's voice was a faint husky sound.

"I'll call the police." Martie reached for the telephone on the stand beside her.

"No, not the police, Martie." Lisa's voice was strained, sharp with urgency, edged with terror. "Call Jonny. Ask

him to come immediately. Hurry, Martie, hurry!"

Martie's hand shook as she took up the telephone. She realized that, in the corner of the room where she sat, she was not visible to whoever lurked outside. But Lisa, who sat between the two wide-open French doors, would be completely within the intruder's view.

Jonny's voice sounded in Martie's ear, and she said hurriedly, her voice low, "Jonny, this is Martie."

"As if I didn't know." Jonny's voice was light and gay. Then, as the urgency in her voice suddenly registered with him, he added sharply, "What is it, Martie? What's wrong?"

"Can you come over, Jonny—quickly" Her voice shook.

"I'm on my way."

The telephone clicked in her ear and she turned to look at Lisa, who still sat, rigid and white-faced, beneath the lamp. Before Martie could speak, there was a sound outside. Footsteps echoed as someone walked along the path from the gate, then crossed the wide terrace.

Then a man stood lounging in the open French door, his hands jammed deeply into the pockets of his well-tailored white dinner jacket. His handsome mahogany-brown face was turned toward Lisa as though he saw no one else in the room.

"Hello, Lisa," he said quietly. "You're even more beautiful than I remembered you."

"Come in, Blake." Lisa's voice was almost natural, her face composed as she looked up at him. Martie wondered for an instant whether she had just imagined Lisa's terror, a moment ago. "You're looking well. Martie, this is Blake Enslee, an old—acquaintance." There was the barest instant of hesitation between the last two words.

The man flung Martie a glance, then looked back at Lisa.

"Just an old acquaintance, Lisa? An ex-fiance, but now not even an old friend?" His voice was a drawl, deep-toned, touched with bitterness. "Hello,

Martie. Are you an aspiring ingenue worshipping at the feet of the theater's First Lady?"

"Martie is my secretary and my very good friend, Blake," said Lisa before Martie could answer.

"I congratulate you, Martie. You're a friend, not merely an old acquaintance," the man drawled mockingly.

There was the sound of an approaching car entering the drive. Lisa said harshly, "That must be Jonny, Martie. Run along and have fun."

Bewildered, Martie protested, "Don't you want me to bring him inside?"

SHE saw a brief flash of anger on Lisa's taut face, an anger faintly touched with fear. But before Lisa could answer, the stranger laughed, a not too pleasant laugh. He said lightly. "You don't have to stay and protect her, Martie. I mean no harm to your dear friend. This is purely a social call. I heard she was here and I stopped in to pay my—shall we say respects?"

Lisa drew a deep, hard breath and said sharply, "Go on, Martie. Get out!"

Martie blinked, even more bewildered. Color rose in her cheeks and she went quickly out of the room. The man who stood in the doorway drew aside with a slight bow as she passed him. Jonny was coming swiftly toward her, and she ran to meet him. He caught her in his arms, giving her a slight shake as he peered down at her through the thick dusk.

"Martie, what's wrong?" he demanded swiftly.

"Oh, Jonny, I'm scared!" she stammered foolishly.

"Well, stop being scared and tell me all about it," he ordered.

In a little stammering rush of words she told him of Lisa's agitation, of her orders for Martie to call Jonny, and then of the man's sudden appearance in the doorway.

"Jonny, he's perfectly beautiful! He's all dressed up and elegant looking; he can't be a burglar or a prowler or any-

thing like that," she finished. "Lisa introduced him to me as Blake Enslee, an 'old acquaintance.' That seemed to make him angry. He said something about being an ex-fiance, and he seemed to think he should rate being called more than just an old acquaintance."

"Blake Enslee?" Jonny repeated, as though he could not believe she had really said that. "Are you sure that was the name?"

"Of course I'm sure," Martie insisted, puzzled. "Do you know him?"

"Everybody on the island and far beyond it knows him," Jonny said. "He's one of the richest men in the whole bloomin' Caribbean, and his is one of the oldest white families here. Now why should Lisa be afraid of him? I seem to remember hearing that they were engaged some years ago, before she became famous."

"She wanted me to call you, and then when he came in and she heard your car, she told me to go meet you. When I asked if she didn't want me to bring you in, she seemed to get angry, and told me to get out! And the man laughed and said he meant her no harm and that it was a purely social visit," Martie said. "Oh Jonny, what's it all about?"

"Hanged if I know, Martie," Jonny said. "But I do know that Blake Enslee's not the kind of man to be lurking in the shrubbery spying on anybody."

"Even if they used to be engaged, and she broke the engagement to go to New York to become an actress, that shouldn't be enough to frighten her out of her wits at the sight of him," Martie said, puzzled.

"Or if she was so afraid of him, why did she come back to Port-au-Prince, when she knows he's always lived here? There are lots of tropical islands around where she would be in no danger of running into him." Jonny was thinking aloud.

"Even if she was frightened by seeing a man spying on her, surely when he came into the living room and she recognized him—but even then she was

afraid. I think she was almost more afraid when she recognized him."

They turned back toward the house. Instinctively, with the feeling that Lisa, whom she adored, might need her, Martie took a few steps forward. That brought her to a spot from which she could look into the living room. It was the same vantage point, she realized an instant later, where Blake Enslee had been standing when Lisa first glimpsed him and became so frightened.

Now Martie stood still, shocked to immobility by the scene in the living room. She was not close enough to hear anything, but Lisa and Blake were revealed like images on an old-fashioned silent movie screen.

They were standing facing each other, only a few inches apart, and Lisa's lifted face was wet with tears. Then she moved, and Blake's arms caught her close. Her own arms went about him, and he bent his head and kissed her tear-stained face.

Jonny drew Martie away toward his car. There was a hint of a chuckle in his voice as he said softly, "Well, that's that. She may have been frightened of him before, but she isn't any more, that's for sure."

Martie said awkwardly, "Jonny, I feel like an utter fool. But she *was* frightened when she asked me to call you."

"She probably only saw a man outside in the darkness and didn't dream it was Blake."

"But she was still afraid of him when he came inside."

"Well, she's not afraid now, lovely one."

"Lovely?" she gasped incredulously. "Me, with this red hair and freckles and turned-up nose?"

Jonny laughed, and his arm was warm about her as he guided her into his car. "Maybe it's just that I have a mad passion for red hair, freckles, and a turned-up nose, to say nothing of green eyes," he teased. "Let's go somewhere and dance, or go for a ride. You haven't had time for much sightseeing,

and a night like this is a wonderful time to see Haiti. The frangi-pani is in bloom, and the wild oranges, and all sorts of fragrant things. And the wind from the sea rattles the tchia-tchia pods like castanets."

"It sounds wonderful, Jonny. But I don't like to leave Lisa; she might need me," Martie said.

"Isn't her faithful maidservant Janie about?"

"Yes, of course, but she's probably in bed and asleep," said Martie. "She'd hate me if she heard me say it, but Janie is old and needs her rest. And there should be somebody around, just in case. The servants are all strangers, and besides none of them sleeps in the house. The cook and her husband have the apartment above the garage, and the others go home at night."

"If you think you'd better stay, I won't try to persuade you against your sense of duty," said Jonny. Even in the shadows cast by the giant banyan, she saw the white flash of his smile. "Some other night."

"Jonny, you're sweet," Martie said gratefully.

"Of course I am. Haven't I been trying to convince you ever since that morning on shipboard when we met? You were watching the sunrise like a child who's been warned there is no Santa Claus, and wakes up to find that the old gentleman has dumped his pack under her tree."

She managed a small, unsteady laugh. "That was the way I felt," she answered.

"Do you still love Haiti, Martie—even after tonight? Please do. It's such a wonderful old place, and once you get to know it you won't want to live anywhere else."

"That wouldn't do me much good, would it? I'll be going back to New York, and my job at the agency, as soon as Lisa is ready to return."

Jonny looked down at her and, though the shadows would not permit her to see his expression, his voice, low

and vibrant and tender, brought warm color to her face. He said, "I wouldn't be too sure of that if I were you. People call Haiti the 'Magic Island,' and wonderful things can happen on magic islands."

He bent his head and brushed her cheek with his lips, then turned and got into his car. Martie stood watching until the small red tail light had twinkled out of sight through the big gates. And then she put up an unsteady hand and touched the cheek his lips had brushed.

MARTIE stood entranced, the following morning, on the curbstone in front of the Cathedral, watching the ceaseless flow of traffic. Native women in brightly colored cotton dresses passed, some of them on foot, balancing vast burdens on their proudly held heads; some mounted on donkeys which seemed much too small to support a person's weight. Men went by in brightly patterned shirts and cotton pants, some of them ragged but all quite clean.

Here and there a woman walked proudly erect, barefooted, with her shoes, tied together by their laces, slung over a shoulder. Now and then there were groups of young girls in starched, immaculate dresses, wearing both stockings and shoes. Almost invariably they had a scarlet hibiscus or a spray of mimosa tucked behind one ear.

There were, too, flashing motor cars, their horns honking and blaring as they crept through the vari-colored river of people; there were white people in tropical garb; military personnel; and some chattering tourists from a cruise ship that had paused for a few hours in the harbor.

Martie felt that she could never absorb all of this dazzling picture—the sights, the sounds, the smells. She was so completely lost in contemplation of it that she did not see Blake Enslee stop beside her. When he spoke she turned sharply, startled.

"Hello, there." He smiled pleasantly

at her. "I take it this is your first trip to the island. Although people who have visited here often—even some who live here—never get tired of all this."

"I love it. I'll never get over being grateful to Lisa for bringing me here," Martie said happily. Last night and its puzzle were momentarily forgotten.

"How is Lisa this morning?" His tone was merely polite, as though his interest was slight.

"I don't know," Martie answered. "I never see her before lunchtime. The doctor wanted her to get all the rest she could, and to sleep until noon."

"She's been ill?" Blake's tone was not quite so polite, but more interested.

"She's suffering from overwork and exhaustion," Martie told him. "Her play is in its second year, and it's a very long and difficult part. She collapsed backstage one night after the performance, and the doctor insisted she take a long vacation, get the sun and so on. So she decided to come here."

Blake's expression was unreadable. Then he said quickly, "It's too early for lunch, but we could have coffee and talk for a while. There's a sidewalk cafe where you can watch all of this scene, and I can find out what I need to know about Lisa. It's been five years since I've seen her."

Martie hesitated, seeking an excuse, but he seemed completely unaware of her hesitation. Almost before she knew how it had happened, she was seated across a small table from him, and a waiter was placing coffee and strange small cakes before them.

"They're quite harmless," Blake assured her, laughing as she eyed the cakes. "And delicious. You'll like them."

Martie looked across the table at him, and words she had not had the faintest intention of speaking tumbled from her tongue. "Why did you frighten Lisa last night?"

He put down the coffee cup without drinking, and stared at her in utter amazement. "Frighten her?" he re-

peated. "Did I?"

"Of course you did—lurking out there under the banyan tree, spying on her," Martie answered hotly. But the look on his handsome face was like a hand laid on her lips, silencing her words.

"My dear child!" his tone was sharp with anger. "Lurking in the patio? Spying on her? Are you out of your mind? Why should I lurk? By the way, I dislike that word very much."

"She saw you and she was frightened out of her wits. She asked me to call Jonny. And then you came in—"

"I parked my car in front of the house, came straight along the walk, and saw her in the living room, with the French doors open. So, instead of going to the front door, I simply entered through the French door. I did *not* lurk, and I went nowhere near the banyan."

She could not doubt his sincerity. She made a little gesture of bewilderment. "Then who was it she saw?"

"Probably one of the servants."

"They are all natives—black people. The shadows were thick beneath the banyan; she couldn't have seen them in the darkness. Anyway, why would one of the servants go to so much trouble to spy on her? And why would any of them want to?"

Blake nodded thoughtfully, his face set and grave. "That makes sense," he admitted. "That villa you're renting belongs to the Fontaines, and they're in Europe. They left their servants to look after Lisa—servants who've been with them for years and whose loyalty, I feel sure, is unquestioned. I can't think of anyone who would want to frighten or injure her. After all, this is her first visit to the island in five years, and nobody could possibly hold a grudge that long—that is, if anybody could hold a grudge against Lisa in the first place, which I doubt." He was thoughtful, scowling for a moment. "Who is Jonny?" he demanded unexpectedly, and watched the color rise in her face.

"Someone I met on the boat coming

down—Jonny Baird. His father has a business here."

"Oh, of course. Jonathan Baird, import and export." Blake nodded. "I seem to remember he has a son, but the boy went to the States to college, I believe."

Martie nodded. "And now he's come home to go into the business, so his father can retire and go back to his old home town in Ohio," she said. "Jonny doesn't believe his mother and father will be happy there after all their years in Haiti, but it's what they want to do. And of course if they aren't happy, they can always come back here."

Blake smiled faintly. "Yes, Haiti will always be here, as it has been for a vast number of years and I hope will be for many more."

"That sounds as if you love it," Martie said.

"I do, of course. No other place in the world could seem like home to me. But then I'm the fourth generation of Enslees to call it home." He added, as though his interest in the previous subject had died, "Martie, will you do something for me?"

STARTLED at the touch of urgency, almost of pleading, in his voice, she answered, "If I can, Mr. Enslee."

"I want you to watch over Lisa, to take very good care of her, and to call me if anything unpleasant happens."

Martie's eyes widened. "You're asking me to spy on her? I'll do nothing of the sort!" she said hotly.

His face altered, and for a moment his eyes were angry. "My dear child," he began.

"I'm not a child, I'm almost twenty! And I adore Lisa."

"I once loved her very much too."

Instantly that scene last night, when he had drawn Lisa into his arms and kissed her, came back to Martie. "*Once?*" she repeated skeptically.

There was bitterness in his eyes now. "Love has to be fed occasionally, Martie, like any other human emotion. Oth-

Blake said, "Even before I saw you, I loved the kind of girl you are—sweet and good."



erwise, it starves to death. Once you have accepted and faced up to the fact that your love is completely hopeless, if you have any sense at all you let it die. But there is always left behind a—well, an affectionate regard for the one you loved, and an interest in her welfare."

He paused, as if not quite sure how to go on. Then, after a moment, he looked at her so gravely, so solemnly, that somehow she was touched with a creeping uneasiness.

"Lisa could easily feel that she's in danger here, Martie," he continued. "Mind you, I don't believe she is, or could be. But Lisa is superstitious, and Haiti has a strange effect on people who are. Things could happen that she would misunderstand, that in her present condition of nervous exhaustion might even be dangerous, once she gives way to fear. That's why I'm asking you, if anything happens that upsets or fright-

ens her, to call me instead of Jonny. Will you do that, Martie?"

"I don't know."

He took a card from his wallet, scribbled a number on it, and handed it to her. "That's my private unlisted number here in town, Martie," he told her. "I'm staying in town for awhile. If I'm needed, I know I can get to Lisa as fast as Johnny could. And I am sure to be of more help to her in an emergency."

Martie studied the card for a moment, hesitating. Blake spoke again, his voice deepening with urgency. "It's for her sake, Martie—perhaps even for her mental safety."

Martie caught her breath. The color faded in her piquant young face, so that the dusting of freckles stood out against her pallor. "*Mental safety?*" she repeated, as if not quite sure of the meaning of the word.

"In Lisa's condition, while she's exhausted, nervous, overwrought, fear could be a very dangerous thing."

With a shaking hand, Martie tucked the card into her white handbag and stood up, smoothing her green-and-white cotton frock neatly about her slender body. She was still pale, but there was a look in her eyes that erased some of the anxiety from Blake's face as he, too, stood up.

"Then you will, Martie? You'll watch over her, and if I'm needed you'll call me?"

"If Janie thinks I should. I'll have to tell Janie," she said.

He frowned. "Who's Janie?"

"Lisa's maid. She's really Lisa's closest friend, more like family than a servant. Janie used to be a character woman in a company that starred Lisa. They became great friends, and eventually Janie came to live with Lisa and to look after her. Lisa trusts Janie above everybody in the world, I think, and Janie adores her," Martie tried to explain.

"It's difficult to understand just what Janie is to Lisa. I think she's almost like Lisa's mother, who died when Lisa was quite small. She can be very stern and very bossy when she wants to be, but Lisa never minds because she knows Janie acts that way only because she loves Lisa."

Blake nodded, and his relief was plain. "I can't tell you how glad I am to know that Lisa has two such devoted friends as you and Janie," he said. "I won't worry about her quite so much now. Come along, Martie; I'll drive you back."

He tucked her into the English sports car that was parked around the corner, and they rode without further speech until they reached the tall cream-colored stucco wall, splashed with purple bougainvillea, that surrounded the Fontaine villa.

At the gate, he stopped the car and studied the villa. It was built in Spanish style, of cream-colored stucco, surrounded by bougainvillea and some ex-

otic shrubs whose names Martie hadn't had time to learn.

"Thanks for everything," he said then, smiling. "I hope you'll let me take you out to my place in the hills. The coffee trees are in bloom, and on a moonlight night the fragrance of the flamboyants is intoxicating."

MARTIE smiled her thanks and went swiftly up the walk to the house. She paused at the steps to look across the velvety, close-cropped green lawn to where the gigantic banyan stood, dark and sinister. Its tendrils reached down for the lush dark earth, its great smooth branches with their thick green leaves reached up toward the cloudless sky and the hot golden sunshine.

Now who, she wondered uneasily, had stood beneath that tree spying on Lisa last night, frightening her out of her wits? Out of her wits!

Martie caught her breath at the phrase that had slipped so easily into her mind. Then she went hastily into the house.

Janie, comfortably fat, comfortably clad in a thin printed sleeveless cotton sundress against the increasing heat of the day, was coming down the stairs. She grinned at Martie.

"Such energy, on a morning like this!" she derided lightly. "That's what it is to be young, I suppose. I can't remember that I ever had so much energy even when I was your age; though I admit that shows I have a terrific memory. It's been a lot of years since I was your age."

"How is Lisa this morning?" demanded Martie anxiously.

Janie paused on the bottom step of the stairs, frowning, her lightness of manner vanished. "Now why would you ask a thing like that?" she demanded.

Martie made a little gesture, and felt her face grow hot. "Well, it's just that—" she began awkwardly.

"Don't lie to me, Martie. Why did you ask?"

"Well, because I wanted to know—"

"She had a grand night's sleep, without sleeping pills, for the first time in longer than I care to think. Now she's feeling fine and rested," Janie said sharply. "What made you think she wouldn't be?"

Martie said quietly, "She was very frightened last night. She thought she saw a prowler lurking under the ban-yan. But then it was only Mr. Enslee."

Janie caught her breath, and her plump face darkened. "Blake Enslee was here last night?" she demanded sharply. "Why wasn't I told?"

"I *am* telling you, Janie. This is the first time I've seen you since then."

"Blake Enslee skulking about in the garden instead of coming straight on to the house?" Janie worried the thought for a moment, then finished firmly, "I don't believe it."

"Well, today he told me it wasn't like that. He said he parked his car and came straight to the house. He couldn't imagine who it could have been that frightened her."

"You've seen him this morning?" Janie demanded.

"In the Plaza. We had coffee together, and then he brought me home."

Janie was silent for a long moment, her face troubled, uneasy. "So that's why Lisa was so full of bounce this morning—because Blake had been here," she mused at last.

"Janie, shall I let her know I saw him this morning?"

Janie's head went up, and her eyes grew cool.

"Why not? He's nothing to her any more. Go after him if you want to. It won't mean a thing to her," she snapped.

Martie's face was scarlet, and her eyes blazed. "Go after him? Janie, how dare you say that?" she gasped.

Janie smiled unpleasantly. "He's probably the most eligible man on this island—or any of the islands round about—and you're a very pretty girl, just the sort who might land him."

"Any man who's in love with Lisa would never give me a second glance.

You and I both know that," Martie protested hotly.

Janie's smile was cynical, her eyes derisive. "*Was* in love with Lisa, not *is*," she corrected grimly. "All that is over and done with. Five years is a long time."

"Were you here on the island with her five years ago?"

"No, I was starving to death in a cold-water flat in New York, beating my brains out trying to find a part I could play," answered Janie unpleasantly. "But Lisa told me all about it when she decided to come back here for her vacation. I tried my darndest to talk her out of it, but she would come. Lisa has no secrets from me."

"I don't see why she should have."

"You'd better go up and see what she wants done with the morning mail," said Janie. "It will soon be lunch-time."

She vanished toward the service area, leaving Martie to stand uncertain and bewildered, watching her big body swaying its way down the hall.

II



LISA half lay, half sat, on a big chintz-covered chaise lounge. As Martie came in she looked up, smiling gaily. "Hi, there. You look disgustingly fresh and blooming," she said.

"You make me feel like a hag."

"That's just plain silly. The most beautiful woman in the whole world would suffer by comparison with your looks," Martie assured her.

Lisa's lovely brows went up. "What a very pretty speech!" she mocked. She brushed the letters from the chaise-lounge and stood up, stretching like a cat. "I refuse to be bothered with mail today. It's much too perfect a day. Let's have lunch and then go somewhere exciting."

"That sounds wonderful," Martie an-

swered happily. "Of course, anywhere on the whole island is exciting to me. I've never seen anything so gorgeous as the Plaza this morning, with all the people, and the funny little donkeys, and the flowers. *Everything* blooms and smells good down here!"

"It is lovely, isn't it?" Lisa looked out of the window at the sparkling view, the hot, clear bright light that lay like a caress over flowering shrubbery and tall exotic trees.

"I saw Mr. Enslee this morning," said Martie quietly.

She saw the sharp, hard-drawn breath that shook Lisa, and then the glory that touched her face as she smiled and said, "Did you? He's very nice, isn't he?"

"I think he's wonderful," Martie agreed happily. "We had coffee and odd little cakes."

A sharp ugly scream tore the golden morning air to shreds; a scream of mortal terror, that rose and fell and was repeated again and again, as Martie and Lisa stood, shocked to immobility.

Janie's voice, sharp and angry, rose above the screaming. Lisa and Martie ran across the boudoir, into the bedroom beyond. There they stood still. A maid, her dark face almost ashen with terror, huddled in an attitude of fear so abject it was like a sickness. And Janie stood above her, her hand raised for another slap like the one that had silenced the wild screaming.

"Janie, what on earth—" Lisa began. Then her eyes followed the direction of the maid's shaking fingers, and her voice died.

The maid had been evidently making the bed. She had pulled aside a pillow and there beneath it, stark and incredibly ugly against the immaculate linen sheet, lay a small dark object. Martie, glimpsing it, thought it was a tarantula, of which she was in deathly fear; but the small dark thing did not move.

But Lisa recognized the thing, and suddenly she too screamed. Instantly Janie was beside her, catching her arms,

shaking her hard.

Lisa gave a babbling cry of terror that sounded like, "*It's beginning again. It's beginning again.*"

The maid whimpered, huddled in a corner, her hands over her face. Janie gestured to Martie, indicating the dark thing beneath the overturned pillow.

She said under her breath, "Get that damned thing out of here. Don't let her see it again." To Lisa she said sharply, "Now, stop that foolishness. You're a sensible, intelligent woman. I didn't want you to come back here, but you swore you had to, that you had to lick this thing. Now get busy and do it, or so help me I'll give you what I gave that fool maid."

Even while she was talking she was urging Lisa out of the room and back to the boudoir. The door closed, shutting off the sound of Janie's voice and of Lisa's broken sobbing. Bewildered, Martie moved to the bed and looked down at the object that had lain beneath the pillow. It was a small doll, with a wax face that was an ugly and ludicrous caricature of Lisa's. Its dark hair was tied back, its small body wrapped in a scrap of brightly colored silk. Thrust through the body were two sharp pins.

Martie reached for it, and the maid wailed, "*Non, Missy, non! Don't touch. Evil spirits, Missy, evil spirits!*"

Martie stared at the girl's ashen face, and saw that her eyes were enormous and filled with terror.

"What are you talking about? It's only a silly little doll," she protested angrily.

"*Ouanga, Missy, ouanga. Evil, evil!*" wailed the maid, and scurried out of the room.

Martie looked down at the small dark thing that seemed so innocent yet had caused all this turmoil. Janie had said to get rid of it and not let Lisa see it again. Martie picked it up, and even as she touched it she felt a sense of loathing and disgust. Yet it was only a scrap of wax and hair and cloth. Why

should anybody be frightened of the silly thing? Revolted, yes; but why frightened?

She turned toward the door, the doll in her hand, and then she had the craziest feeling that the thing quivered, that it had in it a pulse of life. Startled and sickened, she dropped the thing and for a moment stood looking down at it, wide-eyed. Vague memories came back to her of something she had once read about Haiti. *Voodoo!*

She scolded herself furiously, and tried to toss the word out of her mind. But she shivered as she remembered more of the book she had read. *Voodoo's* been outlawed for ages down here, she reminded herself. It's like witchcraft and black magic, that they used to burn people at the stake for practicing, hundreds of years ago. It's just what Janie called it, a silly superstition.

She forced herself to pick up the tiny doll, and this time there was no quiver of life, no pulse. It was just a scrap of wax and hair and cloth. She went down the service stairs and out through the kitchen where the servants, busy with lunch preparations, eyed her curiously but said nothing as she passed.

A yard boy was busy in the backyard beyond the patio, and there was a small trash fire burning there. Marie walked toward it. The yard boy looked up, greeting her with a white-toothed smile, lifting his ragged-brimmed straw hat as she approached. Then his eyes fell on what she carried in her hand, and she saw his face go ashen, as the maid's had. As she tossed the doll into the fire, the boy cried out and fled.

Martie looked down at the tiny doll that seemed to writhe as the fire caught it. It almost seemed to be crying out against the destruction of the flames. And then it was gone, swallowed up in the fire. She tossed her head and told herself, stop it, you idiot! It was only a scrap of wax and cloth and hair. Now it's gone, and that's that.

But when she got back to the house, she went up to her bathroom and

scrubbed her hands hard with soap and a nail brush, even while she tried to laugh at the memory of that moment when she had first touched the doll and it seemed to pulse with life.

IT WAS more than an hour before Janie came down to the living room where Martie sat, uneasily turning over the pages of a magazine. Janie looked tired and harassed as she came into the room. She selected a cigarette from a box on the table, tapped it on her wrist, and then stood holding it as though she hadn't the faintest idea what to do with it.

"How is Lisa?" asked Martie anxiously.

"I finally got her quieted down, and got her to take a couple of sleeping pills. She's asleep now," said Janie grimly. She added, "What did you do with the damned thing?"

"I threw it into a trash fire in the backyard, and frightened the yard boy out of his wits," said Martie. "Janie, what is this all about?"

"According to Lisa, somebody wants to kill her."

"Oh, Janie, *no!*"

"She claims a spell has been put on her that will end in her death."

"A spell? Janie, that's crazy! She couldn't possibly believe anything like that," protested Martie.

"Oh, couldn't she?" Janie's tone was wry. "It's only superstition, of course, but do you know anybody in the world who's more superstitious than people in show business? She firmly believes that someone has cast a spell on her, and the doll is a symbol of what's going to happen to her. Did you see the two pins thrust through it? She believes that whoever put the spell on her has a duplicate of the doll, and that every day that person will thrust another pin into the duplicate—and eventually she'll die."

"Is that voodoo?" asked Martie uneasily.

"It's nothing else but!" said Janie.

"But isn't voodoo against the law here?"

Janie's eyebrows went up. Her smile was cynical. "Against the law? So were apples in the Garden of Eden, remember?"

"But even if there were anything to this crazy idea of Lisa's, who'd want to hurt her?"

"It seems that when she was here five years ago, and got herself engaged to this man Enslee, his mother was still alive," Janie explained, looking thoughtful and worried. "His mother was very much opposed to the marriage. It seems she had a candidate of her own she was backing—one of the local damsels.

"When she couldn't talk her son out of the engagement, she had one of her servants bring in a woman from the back country—a voodoo woman they call a 'mamaloi,' sort of a voodoo priestess—and had one of these spells cast on Lisa. Lisa got very sick and—well, I suppose she got scared and left the island. Back in New York, she felt fine again, and was more than ever convinced that the old gal had hexed her."

"That's the silliest thing I ever heard of," protested Martie.

"That's only the first half of it, lamb. Wait until you hear what she wants to do now!"

"Go back to New York?"

"That would be *sensible!* No, what she wants to do is visit the Enslee place."

"Why?"

"She knows that Mrs. Enslee is dead, and she thinks that if she goes out there for a few days and gets a grip on herself, she'll be able to convince herself that this business today was just a bad joke."

Martie stared at her. "Well, maybe that might be a good idea," she agreed slowly.

"You, too?" snapped Janie. "Lisa thinks she can slay this idea and get it out of her mind. Well, good—if she really does. But have you thought what it would mean if she goes out there and

runs up against something she can't handle?"

"Janie, *you* don't believe in this voodoo business?" gasped Martie.

Janie avoided her eyes. "Certainly not! Only I'm like the man who said 'I don't believe in ghosts, but I don't want one of them coming around trying to convince me, either.' Some darned funny things have happened in these Caribbean islands. I can't attempt to explain them; I only want to stay clear of 'em. Here in Port-au-Prince it's reasonably civilized, so there's some protection. But out in the hills where the Enslee estate is—damn it, Martie, I don't like it!"

"Janie, is Lisa still in love with Blake Enslee?" asked Martie after a thoughtful moment.

Janie glared at her. "That's a foolish question. Of course not. Can you imagine her giving up the career that she's fought and slaved for, to vegetate down here with him? Or can you imagine *him* giving up the island where his family has been important for so many years, and settling down in New York?"

"Well, no, unless they loved each other an awful lot."

"Take it from me, Martie, Lisa could *never* love any man enough to give up her career. It's her life; it's all she knows, all she's ever wanted."

"Blake's pretty wonderful."

"For somebody who doesn't have Lisa's place in the theatrical world, maybe. For some little snippet who wouldn't mind being buried down here the rest of her life. But for Lisa, it's no good!"

"I suppose you're right."

"Of course I'm right," snapped Janie. "You'd better get in touch with the fellow and tell him Lisa wants to come out for a few days. I don't suppose he'll mind."

"No, I guess he'll be pleased," said Martie.

"You and I will go with her, of course," Janie said firmly.

"Yes, of course."

"Then you'd better call him. I imagine

his number is in the book."

"I have his private unlisted telephone number," Martie said.

Janie stared at her, her head a little on one side. "His private number, eh? I must say you did all right for yourself this morning, didn't you?" she said unpleasantly. "Still waters run deep, I've always heard it said."

"He only gave me his private number so I could call him if anything happened to Lisa."

"Oh, so he was *expecting* something to happen, was he?"

"Well, I suppose he knew that she had been frightened last night. And maybe, when she was here before—"

"Well, get on with it," Janie cut in sharply. "Call him and tell him she wants to come out for the week end, and that you and I are coming with her."

She stalked from the room, and Martie reached for the telephone.

Blake answered at the second ring. His voice was touched with anxiety, "Yes?"

"Mr. Enslee, this is Martie."

"Has anything happened?"

"Lisa wants to come out to you place for the week end," Martie said, and added hastily, "That is, of course, if it's convenient for you to have us."

"Us?"

"Well, Janie thinks she and I should come, too."

"Naturally," said Blake swiftly. "I'd be delighted, of course. Shall I ask Jonny to come, too?"

"That won't be necessary."

She heard a small sound that might have been a chuckle.

"Not necessary, but pleasant, eh, Martie? He's a nice lad. I'll pick you up Friday afternoon. All right?"

"You're sure it won't be a bother?"

"I'm quite sure it will be a very great pleasure," Blake assured her. "Remember I told you I very much wanted you to see the *estancia*? And it's at its best now. See you tomorrow, Martie."

The telephone clicked, and she sat for a moment holding the receiver, smiling

a little. She thought of a whole week end with Jonny in what she knew must be a beautiful and romantic place—a big coffee plantation, an *estancia*!

"Well?"

She looked up, startled, as Janie, on her way upstairs, paused in the doorway. "What did he say?" Janie demanded.

"He said he'd be delighted, and he'd pick us up here tomorrow afternoon," answered Martie.

Janie nodded, her face grim. "Well, I only hope Lisa will be delighted with whatever it is she hopes to find out there. For my money, the whole thing is a crazy business she'd be better off without. Janie turned abruptly and went on upstairs.

"Whatever she hopes to find out there —" Martie repeated Janie's words to herself slowly and thoughtfully. What could Lisa hope to find at the *estancia*—unless it was the love she had given up there, five years ago. Martie assured herself swiftly that Lisa couldn't really believe there had been any evil spell cast upon her while she was a guest there, while Blake's mother lived. No sane, sensible, intelligent woman *could* believe anything so silly.

And yet, even as Martie tried to convince herself of that, she seemed to see again the tiny, ugly doll, and to feel the pulse with which it had beat. She remembered, too, the way it had writhed and twisted in the trash fire, as though protesting its destruction.

III



LISA did not come down until lunch-time the following day. But when she did, she was almost feverishly gay and light-hearted. She chattered happily throughout the meal, as though trying to prevent Janie and

Martie from realizing that she ate al-

most nothing. And when, at a little after one, Blake and Jonny arrived, she ran to the hall to welcome them.

"Jonny!" she cried in girlish delight, and flung herself into his startled arms, that opened automatically to receive her. "Darling, I didn't know Blake had asked you, too. This is perfect! Oh, Jonny, I'm so glad you're coming with us."

She tucked her hand possessively through Jonny's arm. Martie saw that she was trembling slightly, and her voice was higher than normal as she turned and spoke to Blake.

"Hello, Blake. It's nice of you to have us," she said politely.

Blake gave her a small, slightly mocking bow, his eyes inscrutable. "It's a pleasure and a privilege," he assured her ironically. "It's a long drive. Shall we get started?"

Lisa looked up at Jonny. "You've got your car, Jonny?" she asked eagerly.

"Why, yes, of course." Jonny was frankly bewildered by the warmth of her greeting.

"Oh, wonderful!" Lisa enthused. "Then you and I will go in your car and Janie and Martie can ride with Blake. Come along, let's get started."

Jonny gave Martie a bewildered glance, raised his eyebrows slightly, and let Lisa guide him out of the house.

Janie was supervising the servants who were stowing the luggage in the back of Blake's car. Blake stood for a moment smiling down at Martie, but it was a smile that did not reach his eyes. They remained bleak and cold.

"Don't let it bother you, little Martie. She's only doing it to punish me," he said quietly, in a tone that matched the smile.

Martie flushed uncomfortably and could not quite meet his eyes, for all his kindness. "I don't know what you mean," she stammered foolishly.

"I mean Lisa's sudden pursuit of Jonny, of course," Blake said. "But don't let it bother you; it doesn't mean a thing. Jonny is yours if you want him—as any man that you wanted

would be, Martie."

For a long startled moment Martie's wide eyes met his, and now his look was no longer bleak and cold. What she saw in the depths of his eyes jerked Martie's heart to a sudden startled thumping that seemed to shake her body. It was so loud she was afraid he would hear.

"But Jonny and I are only friends. I mean he's not even remotely interested in me."

Janie appeared in the open doorway with word that the luggage had been loaded, Lisa and Jonny were gone, and they might as well get started. Blake guided Martie out to the car and helped her into the front seat. Then he held the door to the back open for Janie, who heaved herself in and settled down with a long sigh.

The car rolled away from town and through the countryside, along a road bordered by blossoming mimosa and wild orange trees, whose fragrance was almost cloyingly sweet. Blake chatted lightly, pointing out things that would be of interest to anyone seeing the country for the first time.

Martie listened with only part of her mind, and tried to ask questions that showed an intelligent interest; but beneath the surface she was thinking about the way Lisa had so suddenly appropriated Jonny. She had been gay and amusing in her contacts with him, on the boat coming down to the island. But not for a moment had her interest in Jonny been more than she would have displayed to any friend of Martie's. Yet now she was flinging herself into his arms, calling him "darling," and making every pretense of being madly in love with him.

Why, Martie asked herself? Why had Lisa insisted that Jonny, and not the police, be called when she had been frightened of a prowler in the garden? Lisa was perfectly beautiful, of course, Martie reminded herself loyally; but she was considerably older than Jonny, and surely her sudden interest in him could not be really serious. It just had to be,

she finally decided, what Blake had said—that Lisa was punishing him. But that only added another “why” to Martie’s jumbled thoughts.

She was jerked from her reverie when the car turned from the steep, winding mountain road to a wide sweep of drive that led up to a stately Spanish *hacienda* crowning a hill. The house was of gray stone, half smothered in great masses of scarlet bougainvillea, and surrounded by a mass of hibiscus.

The air was pleasantly cool after the heat of the city, and fragrant with a thousand odors that Martie could not identify. There was the scent of orange blossoms, of frangi-pani, and over and above these a tangy, exquisite fragrance that made her sniff like an eager puppy.

Blake smiled down at her. “Coffee blossoms,” he told her, and indicated a steep slope where rows and rows of trees stood, so covered with white flowers they looked as if snow had fallen on them. Between the rows, bright slashes of scarlet waved in the breeze. “Coffee trees and flamboyants. Between each row of coffee trees we plant a row of flamboyants—which, back in Florida, are called royal poinciana. They’re used here as a wind-break to protect the coffee trees.”

“Hi, you slowpokes,” Lisa called girlishly, from the wide terrace before the house. “Jonny and I have been here for ages! Where have you been dawdling?”

SHE stood on the terrace, her slender body in the crisp white sharkskin frock outlined vividly against the gray stone of the house. The scarlet bougainvillea framed the picture enchantingly. Behind her, Jonny stood smiling, with a slightly dazed look that said he didn’t understand Lisa’s sudden interest in him, but he was enjoying it.

Blake stopped his car and helped Janie and Martie out. Behind Lisa stood a houseman, his immaculately laundered white coat in startling contrast to his dark face, lit now with a pleasant grin. Behind him, several

maids in crisp, clean cotton frocks, with saucy white caps on their heads, hovered expectantly.

“Why didn’t you let John and the maids show you to your rooms?” Blake asked Lisa, as he came across the terrace.

Martie saw the glance Lisa flung behind her at the big, beautiful house, and the slight shudder that touched her. Why, thought Martie, she’s afraid to go into the house!

“We wanted to wait for you,” Lisa said gaily. “And besides, I wanted Jonny to enjoy the view. Isn’t it marvelous, darling?”

Her hand was tucked through the crook of Jonny’s arm. As she beamed up at him, Jonny covered her hand with his other one and said warmly, “The most beautiful I’ve ever seen.”

Martie glanced up at Blake and saw the hard set of his jaw, the bleakness of his eyes. He turned abruptly to the houseman, who was supervising the removal of the luggage from the car.

“You know where everything goes, John,” he said. The man assented. “Shall we go in?” Blake added.

He turned to Janie and Martie, but Martie’s eyes were on Lisa. So, she realized an instant later, were Janie’s. Janie looked worried and anxious as Lisa turned, her head held high. Still clinging to Jonny’s arm, she walked into the house.

Inside, an enormous hall with a cool tiled floor in black and white led to a staircase at the back that mounted to the upper floor. Lisa, still with her head held high, her eyes straight ahead, and clinging to Jonny’s arm, marched up the stairs, following the maid who was showing the way. Janie, her face set and grim, plodded after them.

But when Martie would have followed that the others could not hear him, smiling down at her. “There’s something I want you to see before you go to your room.” His voice was pitched so low that the others could not hear him. He turned her about, and walked her

across the hall and through a wide door. They crossed an enormous living room and went out to a terrace at the back of the house.

For a moment Martie forgot everything but the scene before her. The terrace had been built out so that, standing on it, she looked straight down into a vastness of mountains and woodland that took her breath away.

"This was my mother's favorite spot," Blake told her quietly. "She spent the last days of her life here, after she got sick. She loved it very much."

"I don't wonder," said Martie softly, her eyes entranced as she took it all in.

"Martie, what happened?" Blake's tone was low and urgent, and Martie turned startled eyes to him. "Why did Lisa suddenly decide she wanted to come out here?"

Martie hesitated, and Blake's tone deepened. "Martie, I *have* to know why she wanted to come," he told her. "I've got to know what happened, why she's so afraid, if I'm going to help her. I know she *is* afraid; she's terrified. You must tell me why."

"It's because she feels that someone wants to kill her," Martie burst out. She told him of the voodoo doll, and of her own destruction of it.

Blake said nothing when she had finished. He merely stood still, his face blank, his eyes gray and cold as he stared out over that breathtaking view.

"Thanks, Martie," said Blake at last. His tone was low, vibrant with tenderness, and as he looked down at her there was warmth in his eyes. "Thanks for telling me. Maybe I can help her. At least I can try. I know there was some sort of nonsense five years ago, something that sent her running off to New York with only the most casual of good-byes.

"I thought then that it was because of her ambition, that she was merely amusing herself with me; that she couldn't bear the thought of giving up her career to marry a man whose whole life was fixed here. But maybe there

was more to it than that. There just has to be."

He straightened, tucked his hand beneath her elbow, and turned her back toward the house. "You're very sweet, Martie," he said softly. "And now you'd better run along to your room and get unpacked and settled in. There'll be tea and cocktails in an hour, and dinner's at eight."

At the foot of the stairs he bent his head suddenly and brushed her cheek with his lips. Then he turned and was gone, back through the living room and to the terrace. Martie stood, wide-eyed and breathless, where he had left her, one hand touching the cheek he had kissed as though she expected to find there some tangible evidence of that butterfly kiss.

She became aware at last of a maid who was hovering at the top of the stairs, obviously waiting to show her to her room. Her cheeks flamed with the knowledge that the maid must have witnessed that kiss. But she went quickly up the stairs, smiling shyly at the maid, who showed her to her room and then vanished.

THE others were already downstairs when Martie came down. She followed the sound of their voices to the back terrace, where they were all lounging. They looked the very picture of well-bred ease and content, until you looked into Lisa's white, strained face and saw the terror in her eyes.

Suddenly Lisa sprang to her feet, dropped her cocktail glass on the paved floor, and cried out raggedly, "I hate this place! I *hate* it!"

Before anyone could speak, she turned to Jonny and thrust out an urgent hand. "Come along Jonny. Let's explore. This terrace gives me the horrors."

Jonny got up, almost pulled to his feet by Lisa's insistent hand. His face flushed darkly with embarrassment as he looked from one to the other, mumbling the brief apology that was all

Lisa's insistence would permit.

Janie sat dazed and shocked to silence, before she managed to raise unhappy eyes to Blake's and say awkwardly, "I can't tell you how sorry I am for Lisa's bad manners, Mr. Enslee."

"It's quite all right, Janie," said Blake quietly. "I'm beginning to understand, I think."

Janie stood up. "Well, darn it, I wish I did! I'm beginning not to understand anything Lisa does! If you'll excuse me?"

She walked through the door into the living room. For a long moment Blake and Martie sat silent. Martie wanted to offer him some word of comfort, but couldn't think of what to say.

Blake glanced at her, and his eyes caught the look in hers. Suddenly he smiled a warm, endearing smile. "Don't look so unhappy, little Martie," he said gently. "It's nothing for *you* to be unhappy about."

"But I hate seeing her make *you* unhappy," Martie burst out impulsively, and then felt the color rise to her cheeks.

Blake's eyebrows went up slightly in surprise. "But, my darling little Martie, why should Lisa's tantrums make me unhappy?" he asked.

"When you love somebody—" Martie's voice stumbled to silence beneath his look.

"But I told you my romance with Lisa happened a long time ago," he protested.

"I know. But when you love somebody like Lisa, you don't get over it."

"Martie, darling!" Incredibly, there was the ghost of laughter in his voice. "Are you saying that love lasts forever?"

"If it's *really* love, doesn't it?"

He studied her for a long moment, his eyes unexpectedly warm, his tone very gentle. "It would be like that with you, wouldn't it, Martie?"

"Of course, if I really loved somebody."

"As you love Jonny?"

She protested hotly, "But I *don't* love Jonny—I keep on telling you that! We're just friends, that's all. We don't know each other well enough to be in love. You can't just look at somebody and say "There, now I'm in love."

"Oh *can't* you?"

Blake's tone brought the color to her cheeks. Suddenly she couldn't meet his eyes any more. At last he turned away, and Martie drew in a deep breath that seemed to shake her whole body.

"I'm beginning to remember," he said slowly, his tone deeply thoughtful. "I told you this was my mother's favorite spot. She and Lisa used to sit here when Lisa was visiting us, five years ago. They quarreled violently here, the day before Lisa left. My mother wouldn't tell me the reason for the quarrel; she said it was something Lisa herself must tell me, if she felt I should know. But the next day, when I came back from the packing sheds, Lisa was gone. I never saw her again until the night I first saw you."

Martie waited, holding her breath as he went back through those memories, obviously searching for some clue to Lisa's behavior five years ago, as well as tonight.

"I thought then that Lisa and my mother had quarreled because my mother knew Lisa would not be happy here, married to me, when she was so determined on becoming a great actress. And, of course, my whole life is here, I couldn't leave if I wanted to, because I have too many responsibilities here. Too many of the workers on the places where the Enslees have interests depend on the family for survival."

Suddenly he seemed to realize that he and Martie were alone on the terrace. He pulled his thoughts back from the past and smiled at her. "Sorry, Martie, darling. I was wool-gathering, and that's very rude to a guest, isn't it? Do you like the island?"

"I love it," Martie assured him, with honest enthusiasm. "It's like something out of a story book. I can't believe that

I'm *me*, and that when Lisa is ready I'll have to return to the States. I'll go back to the office, and to sharing an apartment in the Bronx with three other girls, and I'll never see this lovely, fabulous place again! It makes me want to cry just to think of it."

"Could you be happy living here, Martie?" he asked. Beneath the tone that made it merely a polite question, there was the hint of an urgency that puzzled her.

"Couldn't anybody? I mean, anybody who wasn't ambitious for stage success or something like that?" Martie flushed, for it had sounded as though she were criticising Lisa, which she would never want to do.

BLAKE studied her with a curious intentness. "And what *are* you ambitious for, Martie?" he asked after a moment.

"Oh, all the things most girl wants, I suppose," she confessed. "A husband, a home, and children." She looked up at him and then away, and added awkwardly, "I suppose that sounds corny, but then I guess maybe I *am* corny."

"It sounds very sweet and sane and wonderful, Martie," said Blake. He added, his tone growing a trifle harsh, "I'm sure Jonny will be delighted to supply all those things. I hope you'll both be very happy."

"I've tried and *tried* to tell you that Jonny and I are not in love."

Blake smiled at her. "So you have. Forgive me if I find it hard to believe that."

"Do you think Jonny would be so fascinated by Lisa if he was in love with me?"

Blake nodded, his jaw set. "I'm afraid that's exactly what I think," he admitted. "Lisa is a very charming and alluring creature; Jonny wouldn't be the first man to lose his head over her. But take my word for it, Martie—in the end he'll come running back to you."

Martie's head was up, her eyes frosty. "And you think I'd take him back?"

she demanded.

"Of course you would, Martie, if you loved him."

"But I don't! I've told you I *don't!*" she protested, and now she was really angry and her tongue ran away from her. "Don't you suppose I have sense enough to know when I'm in love, and who I love?"

Blake's brows went up slightly, and she thought his hands clenched into fists; but she had to turn her eyes away lest he see in them something that he must not know.

"Oh, then there is someone you love?" said Blake, his tone making it a statement rather than a question. Under his breath he muttered something that sounded like, "I should have known it of course."

"Yes, there's someone I love," said Martie through her teeth. "And a heck of a lot of good it's going to do me, because he barely knows that I'm alive."

"Then he's either blind or a complete fool," said Blake.

Martie managed to muster a faint smile, and shook her head. "He's neither. He's just a man who saw Lisa before he saw me, and of course that lets me out. No man could turn from Lisa to me."

There was, for an instant, a startled look on Blake's handsome face. But then he turned his eyes away from her and made quite a business of scrubbing out his cigarette in a nearby ash tray.

After what seemed to Martie a very long silence, though it could only have been a matter of seconds, he said quietly, "This man you're in love with—well, I know it's very presumptuous of me, but it couldn't possibly be me, could it?"

Martie lowered her head. She stared at her hands clenched tightly in her lap so that they could not tremble. "That would be pretty presumptuous of me, don't you think?" she whispered. "We barely know each other. Love doesn't happen all at once."

She broke off, flushed and shy, because he was smiling at her, a smile that

was as tender as a kiss. "Doesn't it, little Martie? How long does it take lightning to strike? And love can come like that, Martie. Believe me, because I know."

Now he was on his feet, standing beside her, holding out his hands, drawing her up and into his arms, where she went with the instinctive feeling of a bird settling into its nest. "Martie, I can't believe it! I've been in love with you from the very first moment. I think, even before I saw you, even before I ever knew you existed, I loved the kind of girl you are—sweet and good and kind and beautiful."

She looked up at him, feeling the wonder of his arms close about her, knowing the glory of the look in his eyes, yet not even now quite managing to believe that this was really happening.

"I can't believe it," she whispered, her voice edged with awe. She stood looking up at him.

Blake bent his head and set his mouth on hers. Martie's heart stirred and trembled, like a bird trying its wings for flight, yet not wanting to fly from this moment of exquisite ecstasy. When he raised his head, as though the exquisite delight of that kiss was more than he could endure any longer, his eyes adored her.

He asked in a husky whisper, "Believe it now, darling?"

"Oh, yes!" Her voice was a mere whisper, but his ears caught it and his arms tightened about her. He laid his cheek against hers.

"You'd better believe it," he told her very softly, his voice vibrant with tenderness, "because you're going to be married to me just as soon as it can be arranged. And you're never going to be more than five steps away from me or I from you, again as long as we both shall live!"

It was a vow and a pledge, and it shook her to the depths of her being as she raised her soft, tremulous mouth for his ardent kiss.

IV



LATER, in her own room, changing for dinner, she still could not quite make herself believe that it had really happened. It was so fantastic, so incredible, that Blake Enslee, handsome, rich, once engaged to Lisa, could possibly turn to her, Martie, with love.

She studied herself in the mirror with a painstaking honesty. Trying to compare herself to Lisa, she flushed at the audacity of such an attempt. But her heart lifted with the lovely memory of Blake's caresses, his arms about her, his voice, quickened and eager, as he made plans for their future together.

It was utterly absurd, she told herself when she was ready to go down, to be shy of facing him again before the others, knowing the lovely secret that lay between them. Part of her strained eagerly toward their meeting; but another part of her wanted to run away and hide. The foolishness of that made her laugh a little at her self and gave her the necessary courage to go down the stairs and into the big living room, where the others were having before-dinner cocktails.

She paused shyly in the doorway, looking at the group. Lisa was wearing a simple scarlet chiffon frock that bared her beautiful shoulders and arms. Her hair was drawn sleekly into a chignon, and a scarlet hibiscus blossom was tucked into it, above her ear. Janie wore her inevitable black dinner dress, whose draperies emphasized her bulk, and her eyes were fixed anxiously on Lisa. Jonny looked ruggedly attractive in his white dinner jacket. His eyes, too, were riveted on Lisa. Martie dared not look at Blake; who was busy at the cocktail table.

Lisa, relaxed in a deep chair, her face white and inscrutable as she tasted her cocktail, looked at Blake and spoke with

an attempted casualness that was grotesquely unconvincing. "Whatever became of old Chloe?" she asked.

Blake straightened and looked at her, frowning. "Old Chloe?" he repeated, as though he had never heard the name before.

Lisa looked up at him over her cocktail glass and her eyes were avid, though she spoke in that same would-be casual tone. "Your mother's pet voodoo priestess," she drawled.

Blake put down the cocktail pitcher with a force that threatened its safety and straightened, his eyes hard and cold, his face set. "That's a pretty foul joke, Lisa. And may I point out that it's in the very worst possible taste? My mother is dead!"

Lisa held the cocktail glass in one hand, her slender fingers tense, her eyes meeting Blake's, a smile that was almost a grimace on her lovely mouth. "It was old Chloe I was asking about," she said silkily.

Standing straight and tall, obviously deeply angry but controlling his anger because of the laws of hospitality, Blake said through his teeth, "Chloe is dead, too. She died about six months after Mother did."

For a moment Lisa sat as though turned to stone, her eyes widening until they seemed to swallow her pallid face. Her breath seemed to hang suspended. Then, with a single fluid movement of her lovely body, she came to her feet, the cocktail glass slipping from her hand.

"*Chloe is dead!*" she whispered as though she could not quite believe it.

Then, moving swiftly, she was in Blake's arms, clinging to him, shaking with the violent storm of her weeping as her arms closed about him. To keep her trembling body from collapsing at his feet, Blake's arms closed about her, but above her lovely head his face was touched with a bewilderment too deep for words.

"Oh, Blake, my darling, my dearest," Lisa was babbling, her tone edged with hysteria. "Now we are free. Now I

can stay and marry you. Now all our dreams and the plans we made five years ago can come true! If Chloe is dead, then I don't have to be afraid anymore. Oh, Blake, dearest—my darling, my darling!" She hid her face against his shoulder, and her body was shaken by the violence of her hysterical emotion.

Martie stood quite still in the doorway, one hand clutching the massive folds of the handsome drapery that masked the door. An icy grip seemed to close about her heart as she stood rooted to the spot, wide-eyed and incredulous, hearing Lisa's babbling words that rang with deep emotion.

Lisa clung to Blake desperately. "Don't you understand, darling?" She raised her tear-wet face, her eyes shining, her unsteady lips trying to frame a smile. "Your mother hated me. She tried to bribe me to go away and leave you alone. But when I wouldn't, because I loved you, she sent for Chloe. You remember that I was violently ill and the doctor said I'd been poisoned. But I had eaten nothing that everybody else hadn't eaten. So I knew Chloe had put a spell on me and that if I stayed I'd be murdered. So I went away."

Blake held her away from him, his face now like one carved from stone. He shook her, by no means gently, and his eyes blazed with anger.

"Lisa, you're raving!" he said hotly. "You're accusing my mother of hideous things, crazy, impossible things."

But Lisa crept closer to him, and once more her arms were tightly about him. "Don't let's quarrel now, darling. Oh, Blake, my precious, it's all over now and we can be together always. I've never for a moment stopped loving you; I couldn't and go on living. That's why I came back, even though I thought that Chloe was still alive. When I found that horrible little doll in my bed, I was sure it must be Chloe, still loyal to your mother," she babbled.

"Stop that!" Blake shook her again. "Don't you dare say things like that about my mother!"

"Oh, darling, I'm sorry," Lisa pleaded with him eagerly. "I'll never say it again. I know how much you loved her. I only wish she had liked me, but she didn't. Anyway it's you and I that matter now! I'll marry you tomorrow, Blake, if you still want me." She looked up at him anxiously. "You do, don't you, darling?"

"I'm sorry, Lisa," said Blake quietly, and the very quietness of his tone was like a slap in Lisa's face.

FOR a long, dazed moment she stood immobile, her arms still about him. Then she took a backward step, and her arms fell to her sides, her fists clenching tightly. Her wide dark eyes never left his face. She looked as though she had received a blow straight against her naked heart.

"You don't want to marry me, Blake?" she whispered. Then, before he could answer, she rushed on, "I'll give up the stage; I'll stay here with you. We'll have children and bring them up to carry on the family. It will be wonderful, darling! It's all I've ever wanted, from the time I first met you. Only I was terrified of your mother."

"It wouldn't work, Lisa," Blake stated flatly.

"But darling, we'd make it work!"

Blake shook his head. "It couldn't be made to work, Lisa," he told her. "Besides, I'm already engaged to someone else."

Martie caught an inaudible breath and her hand clenched more tightly on the drapery. Her wide eyes were fixed on his face as he looked down at Lisa. No one in the room was aware of her as she stood there, half concealed by the drapery.

Lisa took the blow hard. She swayed a little, and her hand went out instinctively for support. Then Janie was there, an arm about that slender, wracked figure. Lisa's eyes never left Blake's face.

"To the girl your mother was so anxious for you to marry?"

Blake shook his head.

"No. To Martie."

Martie's heart stirred and fluttered its wings again, and life seemed to pour once more into her cold body. Lisa stared at him as though she could not believe her ears.

"To Martie?" she repeated incredulously. "My Martie?"

"As soon as it can be arranged, she'll be my Martie," Blake told her quietly, gently.

Now he saw Martie, perhaps because she had moved slightly beneath the impact of his words. He smiled and came toward her, drawing her with him into the room, an arm about her. His smile was very tender as it rested on her uplifted face.

Lisa watched them for a moment, dazed and unbelieving. "This is some sort of a bad joke, isn't it, Blake?" she asked at last, her voice ragged. "You can't possibly be serious?"

His arm tight about Martie, Blake smiled down at Lisa. "I was never more serious in my life," he said. His voice deepened as he added to Martie, "And never happier."

"But Blake, she's just nobody at all—a silly, romantic child!" protested Lisa.

"Meaning I'm too old for her?" Blake smiled down at Martie. "Am I, darling?"

"Oh, no!" said Martie, her tone ardent and her face glowing. "I'm twenty, you know. That's not a child. And you're—oh, Blake, darling, you're just exactly the right age."

Blake chuckled, and kissed her deliberately, not caring that the others were staring. As though the kiss had jerked her from the paralysis of shocked incredulity, Lisa's face was convulsed with a fury that robbed it of its last vestige of beauty.

"You rotten, sneaking little double-crosser," she spat at Martie. She leaped forward, her hands extended, her sharp nails gleaming like an enraged cat's.

"Hey!" snapped Jonny. He caught her by the arms and jerked her back-

ward, holding her despite her frantic struggles. "Let Martie alone! Knock it off, can't you?"

Lisa screamed an ugly epithet at him, struggling, kicking, trying to free herself, hysteria in her voice. Then Janie, as though she had just come to her senses, stepped forward and slapped Lisa hard across the face.

"Stop it, Lisa," she ordered sharply. "Do you want to ruin your voice, shrieking like a crazy thing? Behave yourself."

Lisa stopped fighting and sagged in Jonny's grasp. Janie turned angry eyes on Jonny, as she put her arm about Lisa.

"Take your hands off her," she ordered.

Jonny relaxed his grip. Holding Lisa close, soothing her gently, Janie turned to Blake.

"All right, so this voodoo priestess is dead," she snapped. "Then who hid that doll in Lisa's bed and scared her out of her wits?"

"I haven't the faintest idea," Blake told her quietly. "Unless one of the servants had any reason to be annoyed with Lisa. Can you think of anyone?"

Startled, Janie stood silent for a moment, her mind busy with the problem. Then in a sudden flash of remembrance she said, "Why, yes, I remember now. There *was* a woman, a maid. She was clumsy and awkward, and Lisa ordered her fired. Yes, I remember. She was a very queer old soul."

"Then that was probably her revenge," said Blake. "Most of the natives know that white people are afraid of the weird things they've heard about the island. She did it for spite."

"I'd like to get my hands on her!" grated Janie through her teeth. "I'd make her wish she'd never been born."

She turned once more to the sobbing woman in her arms and her voice ached with tenderness as she said, "Come along, honey, and let Janie get you to bed. We'll sail for home just as soon as we can get passage, and you can forget

all this mess."

The three left behind stood in silence as Janie's voice died away, up the stairs. Then Jonny drew a deep breath and expelled it with an explosive sound as he ran nervous fingers through his towseled hair.

"Women! How can a fellow hope to understand what makes 'em tick?" he burst out.

Blake laughed, his eyes warm and friendly. "We can't, Jonny," he admitted. "We just have to trust to luck that some day we'll find one like Martie."

Jonny looked down at Martie's flushed, radiant face, and his glance was tender. "They don't come like Martie more than once in a man's lifetime, do they?" he asked.

"They don't indeed, Jonny," Blake agreed, his arm tightening about Martie. "I'm sorry, Jonny."

Puzzled, Jonny asked, "Sorry? Why, because you found Martie?"

"Before *you* did."

"But you didn't," Jonny protested. "I saw her first, remember? But it didn't do me any good. I knew from the first that she wasn't for me. For her sake as well as yours I'm delighted you found each other."

"You see?" Martie crowed triumphantly up at Blake. "I *told* you Jonny and I were just friends—that we were not in love. But you wouldn't believe it."

Both men laughed, and Jonny held out his hand.

"Congratulations, Blake. That's quite a girl you've got there," said Jonny.

Blake wrung his hand happily. "Isn't she, though?" he beamed. "How I ever had the colossal luck to find her, I'll never know."

Jonny grinned at them and went out. And it was then that Blake realized Martie was trembling, her face hidden against his shoulder. "Why, darling, you're shaking," he said tenderly, anxiously. "What is it?"

"I can't forget Lisa's face," said Martie tearfully. "Blake, she *hates* me, and

I owe her so much. If she hadn't brought me down here with her, I'd never have met you."

It was a thought almost too horrible to be endured, and with its appearance in her mind she crept still closer into his arms and her trembling increased.

"My sweetest, if she hadn't brought you down here, we would have met some other way," Blake assured her ardently. "When two people are meant for each other as you and I are, Fate steps in and sees to it they find each other. Be sure of that, darling."

"I think so, too," she admitted, and lifted a tear-wet face. "But I don't want Lisa to hate me."

"I'm afraid there's nothing we can do about that now, darling," Blake told her gently. "She's a very proud and tempestuous woman. She doesn't take kindly to competition. I suppose that's why she's gone so far in the theatrical world. Her ruthless determination makes her fight, regardless of who gets in her way."

"And the bitter humiliation of offering to marry you, thinking you'd be pleased, and then finding that you didn't want to marry her. Oh, Blake, she'll never forgive me for that," Martie said miserably.

Blake framed her piquant face between his palms and gently kissed first her wet eyelids and then her tremulous mouth. "Dearest, must we go on talking about Lisa when there are so many more important things to be said and done?" he asked.

"No, of course we don't," she told him.

He said at long last, with trouble and hurt in his voice, "Darling, the ugly things she said about my mother—"

"Were lies, of course," Martie cut in swiftly. "They couldn't have been true. *Your* mother couldn't have been anything but fine and sweet and wonderful.

Blake laughed softly, tenderly. "Bless you! I wish you could have known her. I wish she could have known you. You're exactly the sort of girl she always wanted me to marry. She felt that

Lisa was all wrong for me, that we were wrong for each other." He broke off, and a startled look crept into his face.

"What is it?" asked Martie.

"I'm remembering something," Blake told her slowly, his brows drawn together in a frown of concentration. "Lisa *was* violently ill while she was a guest here, and the doctor said the evidence was of some sort of poisoning. But she had eaten only what the other guests at dinner that night ate. So *that's* why she ran away!

"And after she had gone—I remember now—the doctor came back and told us that he had been very puzzled by her case. He had run some tests, made a thorough investigation, and discovered that she had an allergy to something served that night. I can't remember now, after all this time, what it was. Of course, neither Mother nor I dreamed that she had been afraid for her life, or that that was why she'd gone away."

He pulled himself out of those memories and smiled down at her. "Didn't I just say we shouldn't talk about Lisa, but about ourselves?" he suggested.

Martie laughed up at him. "I do seem to recall you said something like that," she admitted joyously.

"I love you very much," said Blake.

"I'm glad!" Martie's voice was a wisp of sound straight from her heart. "Because I love you too. Oh, isn't it wonderful? I feel as if I'd come home!"

Blake drew her close to him, his cheek against hers. "And so you have, my dearest—home to my heart. I'm never going to let you get more than five feet away from me again. Promise you'll remember that?"

Martie could find no words to answer, above the clamor in her heart and the thickness in her throat, that was made up of tears from a happiness deeper than anything she had ever hoped to know. But she could stand on tiptoe and set her mouth on his in a kiss that offered him her heart while it took his; and he seemed to find the answer he wanted in that kiss.



Lullaby for Two

PPETER FLEMING was well aware of the fact that he was a most average young man. He had never wanted to do anything spectacular. His great-grandfather had opened what was to become one of the largest department stores in New Orleans, his grandfather and father

in their turns had owned and operated the store. When Peter was just a child he had decided he would like nothing better than to follow in their footsteps.

The job wasn't wished on him. His father had often remarked that it was against nature for so many generations



By RUTH BRANDON

There were plenty of girls Peter could marry . . . but none shared his dream of simple bliss in a vine-covered cottage

to be content to remain in the family business, and had conscientiously turned Peter's attention to the many careers that were open to him.

But Peter simply wanted to manage Fleming's. He was perfectly aware that it wasn't the most exciting work in the world, but, on the other hand, he had no desire to be a barnstorming pilot or an explorer or a great statesman. He didn't want an adventurous and public life; but he knew exactly what he did want.

He wanted, for example, to meet and marry a sweet, pretty, simple girl who was domestically inclined. Nightclubs bored him, and one party a month was more than ample. He liked to eat dinner at home at six thirty on the dot; in fact, he never enjoyed dinner if he had it at any other hour.

He liked to putter around a garden on Sunday, to fix screens when they needed fixing, even to wax floors. He wanted to have a couple of daughters to spoil, and a couple of sons to play baseball with.

Above all, he wanted a wife who wouldn't think him a fool for wanting these things. It was unfortunate that everybody in New Orleans knew how much money the Flemings had. As soon as Peter had three dates with a girl, she started talking about a big house with butlers and such.

His mother died when he was twenty, his father when he was twenty-one. For four years Peter lived alone in the huge mansion on St. Charles Avenue. Then he decided regretfully that a man who worked full time in a department store couldn't cope with the servant problem. He hadn't found the girl he was looking for, and he didn't believe in compromise, so he sold the house and went to live in an apartment hotel.

He made arrangements to have his breakfast served at precisely seven, in his apartment, and his dinner at precisely six-thirty. Life fell into a comfortable routine. While he missed having a garden and a lot of other things, he was happy enough with the apartment,

which he thought as merely a stopgap.

Of course, like any other eligible bachelor, Peter had to go to nightclubs sometimes, especially when he had a date with Lydia Landry. Lydia was a very pretty ex-debutante who had made it perfectly clear to Peter that she had matrimony in mind. But he simply couldn't picture her spending a quiet evening at home with him once, much less twenty-nine times, a month.

However, he liked Lydia. So, to please her, he went one Saturday night to the Palm Gardens, a new and very fancy nightclub, with a party of six.

The other two girls were slightly on edge because their dates kept saying, "Wait till you see the singer. Just wait till you see her!"

Bill Adams explained to Peter, "Her name's Joy Lawrence, and is she something! But a lot of good it does. I went to college with her brother in Missouri, and he wrote me that she was down here, so the first time I came here, I sent her a note. She came to our table and was pleasant enough, but I sure couldn't get a date with her. Knowing Ken Lawrence didn't help a bit. So far nobody else has even been able to drive her home. But is she a knockout!"

Peter smiled in a superior fashion. Nightclub singers were not his dish. You surely couldn't imagine them in the sunlight, puttering around gardens. And then there was a moment of hushed silence, and a girl stepped into the spotlight. Something terrible happened to Peter, something that had no right happening to a methodical young man whose life was all cut out for him.

The girl had long hair so light that it looked like moonlight, and Peter knew instinctively that nature had fashioned it that way. Her enormous eyes were probably the shade writers had in mind when they used the inadequate word violet. Her nose was straight and lovely, her mouth soft and full, the sort that made you think right away of kisses. Her tall young body had been moulded by a sculptor who knew his business.

Lydia snapped, "Peter, your mouth is open," but he scarcely heard her.

The other two young men were staring at Joy Lawrence raptly, but they were still at the table. Peter Fleming was somewhere else. The girl started to sing "Some Enchanted Evening," and her eyes locked with Peter's.

She was singing the song directly to him; he knew she was. He wasn't simply a stranger across a smoke-filled room, he was the man she had been waiting for. And for a few delirious moments he wasn't Peter Fleming, with his life cut out for him. He was just a wildly beating heart, spontaneously in love.

WHEN she'd finished half a dozen encores, Bill motioned her to their table and she came, walking with a soft grace that was part of her charm. She stayed only a few minutes, chatting in her sweet, low voice about impersonal things, but her eyes never left those of Peter, who had been struck dumb.

When she had left, Bill remarked enviously, "You're the first man I ever saw her really look at. Are you lucky?"

Was he lucky? Peter wondered, as he endured the rest of the evening with Lydia pouting beside him. Was it lucky to feel this way about a nightclub singer who was obviously made for a life of glamour? The emotion Joy Lawrence had so immediately aroused in him was not a yearning for a brief romance. It was exactly the feeling he'd hoped to have some day for the sweet, simple, domestic girl who would fit into his plans.

After a sleepless night, the feeling hadn't diminished one bit. So the next day Peter Fleming did an unheard-of thing. He phoned the Palm Gardens and reserved a ringside table for one.

This time she sang "One Enchanted Evening" for her last encore. When Peter half rose, she came toward him, as though it had all been planned.

She sat down and said softly, "Hello. I was hoping you'd come."

He answered simply, "You knew I

couldn't stay away."

From then on they talked in that vein, saying things that might have meant nothing to anyone else, but meant everything to them. They danced together wordlessly, and Peter wondered why he'd never particularly liked to dance before. Probably it was because it had never been like this.

When he asked to drive her home she assented casually, as though that too had been understood. He had rather expected her to live in a hotel, and was surprised when she gave the address of a small house in a quiet residential district.

"I rented it when I came here," she explained briefly.

He realized suddenly that she'd told him nothing about herself. But it seemed almost like desecration to ask questions. They had found something lovely, something out of this world. He wanted to keep it that way, avoiding the mundane.

At the door of the house she turned and said "Thanks for the ride, Peter."

"Can't I come in?" he asked, awkward and shy as a schoolboy.

She shook her head regretfully. "It's too late for that. But I hope to see you again at the Palm Gardens."

She held out her hand, and he took it, though he longed to kiss her. But she wasn't ready to kiss him, and he wasn't going to rush things. Just holding her hand was enough—for tonight. He phoned the next day and reserved the same table for a week.

Monday evening, Peter was eating his solitary dinner when he heard a baby wailing next door. That apartment had long been vacant, and Peter grinned at the realization that the management had seen fit to relax its "no children" rule in order to rent it. Peter objected to "no children" rules on principle.

Dreamily he wondered how Joy felt about children and caught himself up short. Joy obviously wasn't domestic. If he couldn't help thinking about her, he could at least be careful not to think of her in terms of reality.

There was a frantic knock at his door, and when he opened it a flustered, plump young woman cried. "May I use your phone, please? I have the apartment next door. I went downstairs to get a magazine, and when I came up I'd either lost my key or left it inside, and my baby's crying. I want to phone downstairs for another key."

Peter grinned. "I'll tell you a secret; my key will open your door. I discovered that a year ago when a friend of mine had that apartment. Come on, I'll let you in."

He opened the door for the grateful little woman and she dashed inside, crying over her shoulder, "Please come in."

She picked up a fat baby from some sort of basket arrangement on wheels, and the howls stopped immediately.

Peter stepped in. He didn't know exactly why he did, except that he hadn't seen a baby in a long time and felt like looking at one.

"Sit down." The young woman was beaming now. "My name's May Thomas. Oh, isn't it awful having to live in an apartment with a baby? But you see, my husband's an airline pilot. He doesn't have a regular route yet, and we don't want to settle anywhere and get a house until we know where he'll be sent permanently."

Peter nodded sympathetically. This was the sort of girl who ought to have a husband who stayed put, like a department store manager. And, conversely, this was the sort of girl a department store manager ought to find for himself, instead of a glamorous nightclub singer.

He said, "I'm Peter Fleming. What sort of baby is it?"

She giggled. "A very nice baby. But I suppose you mean is it a boy. Yes, it is. His name is Franklin Thomas III."

She had dropped down on the sofa beside Peter. He stretched out a finger, which the baby grabbed. Peter knew the crazy thrill so many otherwise sane adults get when an infant appears to notice them.

"You like babies, don't you?" May Thomas asked. "Are you married?"

"Oh, no."

"Engaged?"

"No."

"Well, I don't know how that happened."

She rattled on about the house she and Frank hoped to have some day. Then she let Peter hold the baby while she went to warm his bottle. Peter, who had never before held a baby, was as proud of not dropping him as though he'd found a new continent.

He left a little later, and at ten o'clock he went to the Palm Gardens in time for the floor show. Joy sang to him and danced with him and let him drive her home, but he knew she was as far removed from his life as ever.

BUT that was the evening Peter started his double life. He dropped in after dinner next evening to see how the baby was, and found the mother munching a sandwich. Then he heard himself offer to step in every night and watch the baby while she went downstairs for a real dinner. She accepted gratefully, and they fell into a routine.

He always left before ten o'clock, and never mentioned the Palm Gardens or Joy. May often lamented the fact that he didn't have a girl and she didn't know anybody in New Orleans to introduce him to. He didn't want to talk about Joy, and of course she wasn't really his girl; she was just a dream.

But on Tuesday night Joy let him kiss her, in the car, just before she went in, and that kiss was the sort of thing that doesn't happen, even in dreams. Peter Fleming was in love, and it was for keeps. The next day he asked Joy casually about her plans for the future. She remarked, as casually, that she was counting on a good offer from a New York nightclub the following winter.

Peter shut up. He wondered whether nightclub singers expected their husbands to follow them around the country,

or what they did after they married. He'd never known any singers, so he couldn't tell.

On Friday Linda Fairchild came to work at the Fleming Department Store. At first sight of her, Peter knew that it was a pity she hadn't come a week earlier. Then he would never have gone to the Palm Gardens in the first place—because Linda was exactly the girl he had planned to meet some day.

The Personnel Manager hired her, of course, but Peter still followed his grandfather's custom of interviewing new employees before they went to work. Linda came into his office timidly, a small, rounded, dark-haired girl with a fresh complexion and wistful brown eyes.

She told Peter that she had come from the country, and was twenty years old, though she didn't look it. Her eyes shone when she said how happy she was to be assigned to the baby department of the store, because she just loved handling baby clothes and waiting on small children.

She looked like a girl who ought to have a dozen children of her own, and Peter told her softly that she would be an asset to Fleming's baby department. Then he forgot her, because he'd be meeting Joy that night, as usual.

Saturday after he'd kissed Joy good-night, he asked her if she'd like to get up early next morning for a fishing trip and picnic. She seemed to hesitate a minute, then she laughed.

"It's impossible, of course," she said. "If I didn't sleep till noon every day I'd look like the mischief at night. And think what the sun would do to my complexion."

He told her good-night coldly. Naturally she wasn't a girl for picnics and fishing trips. She was a girl who lay in bed all morning and ate lunch in bed. She was the kind to shine under electric lights, not the kind for Peter Fleming.

He spent a miserable Sunday morning, and in the afternoon took May and the baby for a ride to the shore. Somewhere

in the course of the day he resolved that he'd stay away from the Palm Gardens that night.

When two people were headed in entirely different directions, it was simply absurd for them to try to get together. He was just torturing himself, seeing Joy every night. But it was even more torture to stay away, he discovered that Sunday.

So the next day he decided to ask Linda Fairchild for a date. He got out her employee's card, thinking it would be better to take down her phone number and call her after store hours. But he found that she lived with a cousin who had no telephone. So he dropped by the baby department and asked if she'd care to go out with him that evening.

"Oh, that will be wonderful," she breathed. "About nine?"

That struck him as rather late, but he said okay. At least it wouldn't interfere with his precious dinner hour, or the time he baby-sat for May.

When he opened his door that evening, he saw not only his neatly set table, but the bassinette on wheels and a sleeping Franklin Thomas III. Pinned to the sheet was a note.

"Dear Peter:

I had a long-distance call from Frank. He'll be in Mobile just till midnight. My only hope was to take the six o'clock plane. He's going to be shifted to cross country for awhile, and it may be my last chance to see him for weeks.

"You're such an angel, and I felt sure you'd come home on time and wouldn't be tied up with a date, so I used my key and put young Franklin in your room. I just couldn't trust a strange baby sitter to spend the night.

"His bottle is in your refrigerator, and you won't have to do anything but warm it and give it to him at seven. He'll sleep all night, and I'll be home about four and will come get him as soon as you're up. I know I'm imposing terribly, but I also know you'll understand and be sweet about it.

May."

He liked May Thomas tremendously, but at the moment he could have wrung her neck. He had a date with just the sort of girl he'd always been looking for,

and she didn't have any telephone, so he couldn't break it. It would be fatal to stand her up, but what could he do with the baby?

The waiter brought his dinner and cast sidelong glances at the sleeping baby. Peter ate thoughtfully, mulling over his problem. Well, Linda was a sweet, domestic girl who was fascinated by baby clothes. She'd understand about little Franklin. Maybe she'd even be pleased.

WHILE the baby had his bottle, lying on a pillow on the floor, Peter experimented with the basket bassinette. Yes, the legs folded up, and there was a handle. It could be put in the car. The only trouble was carrying it through the lobby. But he could take the stares and smirks.

He found some dry diapers in the bassinette and achieved a change with some difficulty. May hadn't mentioned that necessity in her note, which had made everything sound easy. But Peter felt oddly triumphant as he picked up the dry, fully clothed, not-stuck-with-a-safety-pin baby at last.

He created a minor sensation going through the lobby, and felt his ears go pink. He left the baby in the car when he went in for Linda. He found to his horror that she was dressed in a sophisticated white evening gown. He hadn't thought ahead to how they would spend the evening, but he certainly hadn't contemplated a nightclub complete with baby.

On the way to the car, she cooed, "Oh, this is wonderful. If you knew how I've been dying to see the Palm Gardens!"

"The Palm Gardens?" he repeated, stunned.

"Why, certainly. One of the girls at the store told me you go there every night." How news travels, Peter thought feebly.

They were at the car now. "There's a complication," he understated. "Look in the back seat."

Linda's eyes widened in horror. She

didn't look at all like a girl who longed to clasp a cherub to the breast of her white evening coat. Peter explained the whole story, but Linda merely pouted.

"Oh, well," she said finally, "we can go back to your hotel and ask one of the maids to look after the kid. Then we can go on to the Palm Gardens."

"No," Peter declared obstinately. "If May was afraid to trust one of the maids, so am I. I'm responsible for this child, you know. Let's just ride around."

"When I bought this evening dress today just to wear tonight! Oh, Peter," she wheedled, "let's go to the Palm Gardens. I know what—there must be a maid in the dressing room there. Let's go ask the manager if we can't take the baby in some back door and leave him with her, and I'll look in on him every few minutes. Please, Peter. I've never been to a nightclub in my whole life."

Afterward he was never quite sure why he consented. The reasons were too involved. For one thing, he hated to disappoint Linda, when he'd let her think he would show her a good time, and she'd bought an evening dress she probably couldn't afford. For another thing, he still had an uncontrollable desire to look at Joy.

For a third thing, he thought it might be a good idea—a final touch—for Joy to see him with another girl. There'd been no verbal understanding between them, but surely his kisses had told her how he felt. Now he was through—he hoped. He'd come to his senses.

She could probably guess why. In a week's time she must have realized what sort of person he was—not her sort. Taking a girl like Linda out would say clearly that he had waked up to the hopelessness of falling in love with Joy. It was better to say it that way than in crude words.

Anyway, he drove to the Palm Gardens with a now triumphant Linda. He went in and explained the crazy situation to an obliging manager, who had saved a ringside table for Peter, even though he hadn't reserved it. A few

minutes later Peter was spiriting the baby through a rear door and handing it over to Linda who, gingerly he noticed, carried it into the Ladies Lounge.

She returned, beaming. "I promised the maid five dollars for taking care of him. Was that all right? We made a nest for the baby out of pillows on the floor, and he didn't even wake up."

But Peter was nervous. Five times before the floor show started he insisted that Linda go have a look at little Franklin. The fifth time she seemed edgy.

"People will wonder what ails me, going into the dressing room so often," she snapped. Funny, he hadn't thought Linda would act that way.

Then Joy stepped into the spotlight, and he forgot Linda, who had slipped into the chair beside him. Joy's eyes met his. She signalled the orchestra for a change of tune and led them off in "Some Enchanted Evening." She was ignoring the girl at Peter's side, and her eyes were speaking volumes, as they had that first night.

Darn her, she acted as though she loved him. And she must know as well as he did that they wouldn't fit. What could she possibly want with the sort of marriage he had to offer?

She took a dozen encores, then announced at last, "Just one more. That's positively all."

She was singing an old song, "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes," when there was an interruption. A stout Negro maid appeared behind Peter's table, bearing a squalling baby.

"I can't do anything with him," she announced to Linda. "Take him."

PETER turned abruptly, hearing the titters and gasps all around them. The baby had been dumped into Linda's unwilling arms, and the maid was disappearing toward the lounge.

Linda cried, "Ugh, he's wet! My dress! Take him, Peter."

Unceremoniously the child was dumped into Peter's stiff arms, still

howling. Then Joy took command of the situation. She stopped in the middle of a note, signalled the orchestra, and began singing softly, "Rockabye, Baby."

Gracefully she headed toward Peter's table, and held out her arms. "He's wet," Peter murmured inadequately, but she only smiled and took the baby.

She waltzed back and forth, singing the old tune, which the orchestra had readily caught up. They switched to Brahm's "Lullaby," and she crooned that one.

The baby had stopped crying and was smiling up at her, and the audience was entranced. When at last Joy took a bow and disappeared behind the curtain with the baby, the applause was deafening. This had been something entirely new in nightclub entertainment.

But Linda didn't applaud. "Everybody's staring at us, Peter," she mourned. "They think we're crazy. My first nightclub, and to have things go this way."

He hardly heard her. He was thinking of Joy with that baby in her arms. He asked absently, "What's the difference?"

"Do you think it's nice to have people think we take our baby to nightclubs? I don't enjoy making a spectacle of myself the way that entertainer does. Let's get out and leave the brat with her."

He stared at Linda as though she were a stranger. She was, at that. She'd only looked like the girl he'd always dreamed of.

He said absently, "I'll put you in a cab, Linda. I have to see about the baby."

She didn't like that, but he didn't give her much chance to complain. He hurried her to the door and had the doorman flag a cab. When it pulled away, with Linda in it, he felt as though he'd dropped a weight from his shoulders.

The manager showed him to Joy's dressing room. She was sitting in a chair, singing little Franklin to sleep. She motioned Peter to be quiet until the

(Continued on page 40)

Boys' Clubs of America

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heavy lids closed.

Then she demanded, "What on earth is this all about? The poor baby! Whose is he, and why did you bring him here?"

He explained as best he could. "Well," Joy declared firmly, "I'm taking him home tonight, and you can get him in the morning. You obviously don't know how to take care of a baby."

It made him mad. Taking the baby to the Palm Gardens hadn't been his idea. He snapped, "You can't take him. He has to eat at seven, and you sleep all morning."

She cast him a contemptuous glance. "Come by for him tomorrow."

She flounced out with the baby. Peter followed, feeling woefully inadequate. He drove her home, but every time he tried to say something she motioned him to silence, indicating the sleeping baby in her arms. He followed her into the front hall, carrying the bassinette, and then she made him go away.

"Come around at nine, Peter," she said coldly. "There are a few things you ought to learn, for your own good."

He didn't know what she was talking about. He only felt dreadfully confused. And of course he ought to be at the store by nine. But tomorrow he wouldn't be.

May knocked at his door at seven. He gave her a brief account of what had happened, and said, "I'll get the baby at nine for you. Don't worry, he's in good hands."

Funny, he was terribly sure of that. He realized suddenly that he wouldn't have been so sure, had Linda taken the baby home with her. In fact he wouldn't have let Linda take little Franklin. He wouldn't have given the baby to anybody but Joy.

Two hours later he was at Joy's house. He rang the bell and she called, "Come in."

He went in through the hall to the combination living-dining room, and stopped short. Linda, wearing a blue housedress, was feeding the baby some soft stuff. A little girl about a year old, sitting in a high chair, was inefficiently

spooning some more of the soft stuff into her own mouth.

Peter sank down weakly in a chair. "Who is that?" he demanded.

"That is the reason I can't go on picnics mornings, and why I don't invite people over," Joy said crisply. "The management of the Palm Gardens considers babies bad publicity."

"You mean she's yours?"

HE DIDN'T know what a man in love was supposed to feel at a time like this, but he knew what he felt—overwhelming relief. If Joy had a child, she would want a home. She'd be willing to give up the glamorous life for domesticity, if she were interested in keeping her child, as she obviously was. She might look like a creature made for bright lights, but babies needed the sun.

"Oh, Joy," he breathed, "that's wonderful. Now I can ask you to marry me. Oh, darling, I thought you wanted that spot in New York next year. I couldn't follow a nightclub singer around. But if you have a baby— Well, I'm not much to look at, but I can give you a good home, and take care of both of you."

He stopped short, because, incredibly. Joy was laughing. "Oh, Peter," she gasped, "you're wonderful. Wait till I put this baby down so I can kiss you!"

A dozen kisses later she said softly, "You didn't come to the Palm Gardens Sunday night, and I was heartbroken. It was even worse for a while when I saw you with that girl, until I realized you'd forgotten she was there. Then last night, after you'd left me with the baby, I figured everything out.

"You've got your life all cut out for you, haven't you, Peter? I gathered that from little things you said. And you thought I wouldn't fit. How little you know about women, Peter Fleming. That job I mentioned in New York—sure I wanted it. If I were going to keep on singing. But any girl in her right mind would rather get married.

"You had some goofy idea that a nightclub singer would abhor the domes-

tic life, didn't you? That's why you were trying to forget me, wasn't it?"

"Yes, darling. But when I saw you with that baby in your arms last night—and now— Oh, Joy, marry me! I love you so. And I'll love your baby."

"I hope so, when I have one. But you see, this one isn't mine. She belongs to a girl I was in the chorus with in New York. The husband left her, and Doris was going to have to let somebody adopt the baby, because she couldn't take care of her.

"I knew she'd regret that later, so when I got this job with a pretty good salary, I offered to take little Dot until Doris could provide for her.

"The management here didn't like it, so I agreed to live quietly and not let people know. That's why I couldn't go

on the picnic with you, Peter. You see, I had nobody to leave Dot with. I don't have any help on Sunday, or any time except at night, when I'm working. I'd rather do my own housework.

"I wanted to tell you all about it, but I'd promised the boss I wouldn't tell anybody. He said that if the story got around, people would say that baby was mine. The Palm Gardens doesn't care for that sort of publicity. I knew he'd say it was all right to tell you if we were engaged. But you didn't ask me to marry you until you thought I had a child."

"I," Peter declared solemnly, "am the world's biggest fool."

She didn't dispute that point, but it was all right because her kisses told him that she was capable of loving the world's biggest fool.

RULES FOR ROMANCE



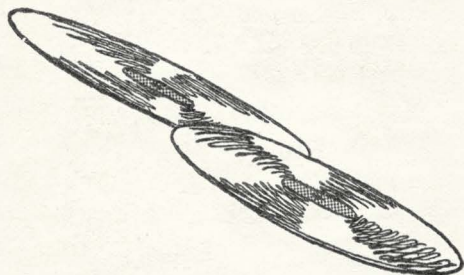
SOME of the ways in which long-ago and far-away ladies were courted would seem quite fantastic to women today. For example, when "knighthood was in flower" in the Middle Ages, a man could tell the girl of his dreams the way he felt while they were having dinner together. All he had to do was offer her a piece of his bread, after cutting off all the hardened crusts. She, in her turn, acknowledged the message by soaking the bread carefully in her soup.

In Lapland, a man proposed marriage to a maiden when he brewed her a potful of ordinary coffee. However, there were definite rules attached to this ritual. It was a requirement that permission be granted by the parents, that the cooking be done at the girl's hearthside, and that everybody in the family got a cup full of the beverage.

Kings, it seems, made their own regulations with regard to romance. Or, at least, Henry II of England did. His wooing consisted of sending a pair of shoes to the love of his life. It doesn't sound like a very "royal" gift, until one realizes that the footwear was made of solid gold.

Another king, Henry VIII, was of the opinion that the way to a maid's heart was mainly through her stomach. Consequently he sent his favorite sweetheart, Jane Seymour, a delicious pie, every day for an entire year. He also tucked short notes underneath the crusts. But he didn't waste paper on idle love words. Instead, he wrote on more practical subjects—such as how Jane could improve her looks, her health, and—most of all—her disposition.

Meet
JILL COREY
young thrush



DISCWAYS

A RECORD DEPARTMENT

JILL COREY is a young lady who knows where she's going, and she's getting there mighty fast. And when you hear her current COLUMBIA recording, *Make Like A Bunny, Honey* backed by *Let It Be Me*, you'll be glad that you're going to hear a lot more from this young lady.

Sitting in her charming New York apartment, the dark-eyed lass was ecstatic about being picked as one of the new singers on the "Hit Parade" television show.

"You see," she said in her soft throaty voice, "not only will this give me a chance to sing the most popular songs in the country, but the "Hit Parade" program has a special meaning for me. It started in September, 1935, the same year I was born."

Even though the sparkling Miss Corey is only 22, her show-business achievements are very impressive. She continued, "My career really started at the

age of eight, at church socials in my home town of Avonmore, Pennsylvania. As I grew older I just continued singing, in high school and with local bands in the town."

Jill's gradually rising star started zooming back in 1953. A Pittsburgh radio station manager happened to hear her sing with a local band and was very much impressed. He taped a recording of her voice and sent it to the Pittsburgh distributor of COLUMBIA records. This distributor, in turn, got so excited about her that he sent the tapes direct to Mitch Miller, head of COLUMBIA records in New York. Miller sent for Jill to audition for him personally.

And that's when the fairy story really started. Miller signed her to a contract, and then Dave Garroway took notice of her. She became the singer on his coast-to-coast television network show.

After that, *Life* magazine ran a story, with her picture on their cover—some-

thing this magazine almost never does for an unknown show-business personality. She has also appeared on the Johnny Carson and Robert Q. Lewis TV shows.

"But," she said, "that's all in the past, and now I have to settle down to more serious work. You see, I hope someday to be an actress, not just a singer. I'm taking lessons from Stella Adler—she taught Marlon Brando—and I hope someday to be good enough to appear in a Broadway musical. I'd also like to try the movies, if a good picture presents itself."

Jill, whose real name is Norma Jean Speranza, is the youngest of a family of five. Even though her work keeps her in New York most of the time, she's very close to her father, a seventy-year-old miner, who still lives in Avonmore. Mr. Speranza is very proud of his daughter.

Jill is still single. She hasn't met the right guy yet, but is looking around. She doesn't know what he'll be like, but thinks that he'll probably be in show business.

"My career means so much to me that I have to meet someone who understands how I feel," she explained.

Besides acting lessons, she also takes singing and dancing lessons, so she doesn't have time to indulge in hobbies. But she's an avid hi-fi fan, and has a large collection of records. Her favorite singers are Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett, Ella Fitzgerald and Peggy Lee.

She likes to read a great deal and, when her career permits, hopes to travel extensively. Her friends are few, because she just likes people who are sincere. She doesn't care at all for large parties. Currently she's experimenting with cooking recipes, and says, "I've been trying them out on my friends."

For one so young, Jill takes a long-range, sensible view of her career. Instead of being satisfied with what she has attained, she's constantly aiming for bigger and better things. And by the looks of things, new horizons will be opening to her for many years to come.

—Betsy Katzin

LATEST PLATTER PATTERN

Calypsomania is on! Calypso songs are not only holding their own, but giving rock-and-roll a good race for the top.

Columbia presents King Flash, accompanied by the Calypso Carnival, in **ZOMBIE JAMBOREE** (Back To Back). The flip side, **MAMA LOOKA BOO BOO**, is just as good.

NAUGHTY LITTLE FLEA, recorded on *Capitol* by none other than Lord Flea, is a must for you Calypso fans.

For a change of pace, don't miss one of your favorite movie stars, Sal Mineo, doing his first recording for *Epic*. **START MOVIN'** is capably done in Mr. Mineo's hillbilly vocal style.

Another young movie star turned singer, Dean Jones, does a good job for *MGM* with **YOUNG AND IN LOVE**. This will be a hit.

The Four Lads do a neatly fashioned job on **GOLLY**. This catchy novelty, on *Columbia*, is due for a lot of spins.

BLUE JEAN BETTY, sung in the high tenor voice of Norman Kaye, is good rock-and-roll. This disc is on the *Decca* label.

Harry Belafonte is still going strong with Calypso tunes. His latest for *RCA Victor*, **COCOANUT WOMAN** is a lively song you'll play over and over.

A FACE IN THE CROWD, from the pictures of the same name, is given an excellent rendition by the vocal ensemble The Hi-Lo's. This

Columbia disc has great commercial potency.

All-time favorite Perry Como does an able job for *RCA Victor* on **THE GIRL WITH THE GOLDEN BRAIDS**. This top-notch rhythm disc is set for many spins.

Joni James offers a beautiful collection of familiar songs of inspiration in her new album, **GIVE US THIS DAY**, on the *MGM* label.

A CHILD'S GARDEN OF FREBERG by Stan Freberg is a must for all you fans of this comedian-singer. This is a *Capitol* album.

Columbia's Erroll Garner displays many facets of his talent in his new album **GARNER ALONE**. Wonderful listening for music lovers.

WRAPPIN' IT UP is a piano salute, neatly styled by keyboard wizard Cass Harrison and his Trio. This *MGM* album is dedicated to favorite compositions by some of the all-time great pianist-composers of the past and present.

Jazz favorite Dave Brubeck and his Quartet are back with **JAZZ IMPRESSIONS OF THE U.S.A.** I'm sure after you hear this *Columbia* disc you'll agree that no one can beat Dave.

Back again to Calypso, Lord Flea and His Calypsonians combine some of his hits into an album, **SWINGIN' CALYPSOS**. This amusing collection of calypso songs is on the *Capitol* label.

—Z. FORMAN

Stay at Home Wife

A Novelette

By ELIZABETH BLAIR

Susan had found her Mr. Right . . .
but he gave all the wrong answers

I

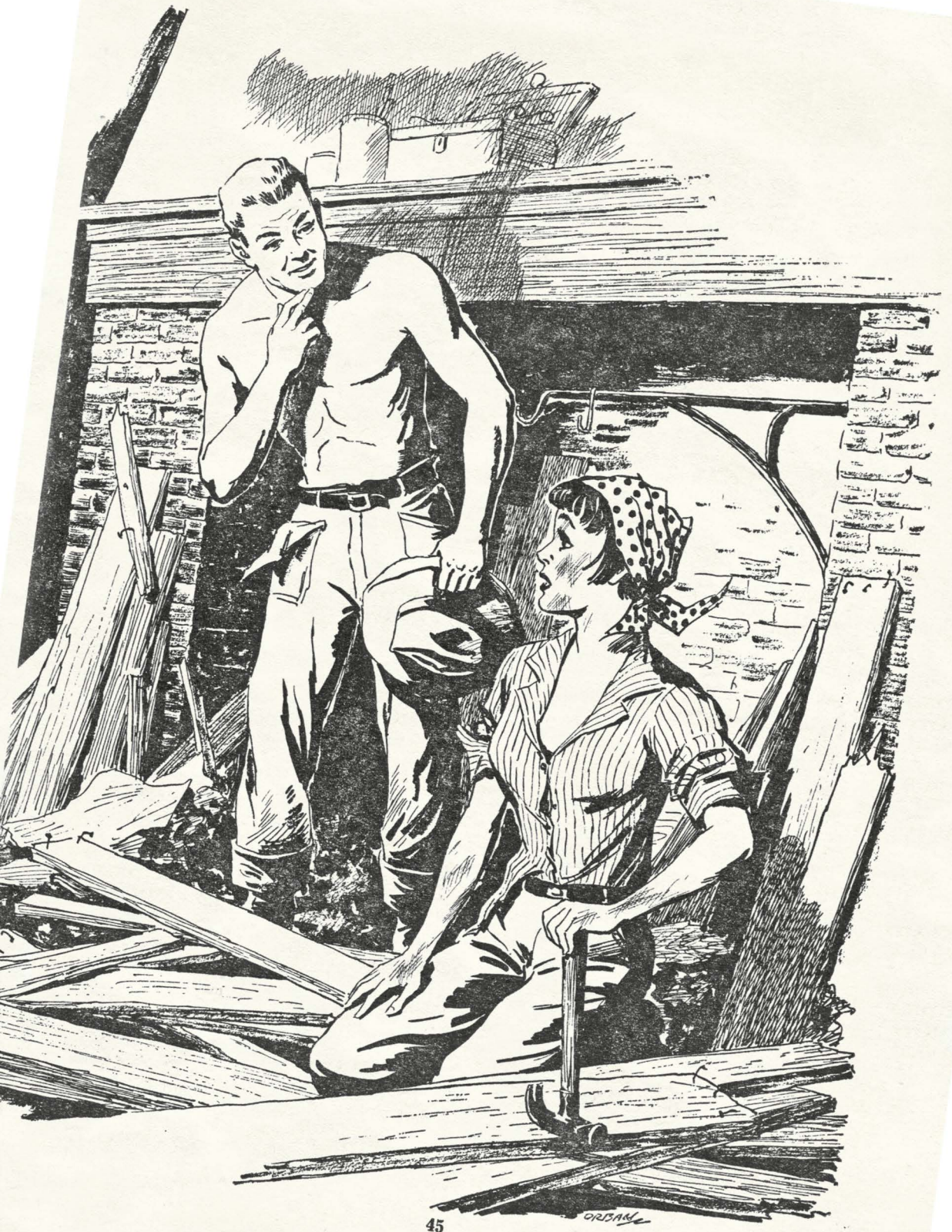
IT WAS late afternoon when the bus driver let Susan off at the big stone gateway. She was a small girl, carrying two pieces of red lizard luggage. She wore a green wool suit and low shoes. A hand-tooled bag, big enough to carry half her clothes, hung from her shoulder.

She had straight black hair cut in bangs across the front, and her black eyes, now that she had reached her destination, were shining with happiness in the small oval of her face.

Henry had wanted her to wait until next Sunday so he could drive her up from the city, but she hadn't wanted him with her when she arrived, and had refused his offer.

Henry had never known Gran or Gramps; he had never seen the farm. It was Henry Bramwell, senior, who





had bought the farm when her father had his first heart attack and needed the money to take care of his hospital bills and Susan's college expenses. Gramps had wanted to keep intact for Susan his half of the florist shop which he and Henry Bramwell, senior, owned. So it was the farm that had to be sold. Susan hadn't known about the transfer of ownership until long after Gramps died, two months before she graduated.

Although it was only early September now, vivid patches of autumn foliage were so thick she could just catch, here and there, a vague outline of the faded old brick house at the other end of the lane. The white wooden gates, now badly in need of paint, swung wide, and Susan pretended she was coming home from college for the summer. She pretended Gran and Gramps were waiting to help carry her bags to the house.

But she wasn't coming home from college, and Gran and Gramps weren't here to meet her. A couple of years ago Henry Bramwell, junior, now her fiance, had inherited the farm, along with his father's half of the florist shop. The furniture and the pearls, which Gran had kept secreted in one of the posts of the handsome hand-carved bed in the front bedroom upstairs, were her excuse for being here.

They were dime store pearls, but Henry didn't know that. He had agreed that he could spare her from their florist shop for a couple of weeks, while she came back to claim anything of value still left on the farm, before it was sold to the tenant who was now renting it.

Susan knew she was being silly and sentimental. She could no more recapture the past by spending the next two weeks out here in Ohio, on the farm, than could the dried leaves of yesteryear be restored to their original tree. It wasn't until she found the front door locked that she realized she should have gone on into town and gotten the key from Mr. Langley, Henry's real-estate agent.

But it was too late for that now. She

tossed her bags in through the kitchen window and clambered in after them. Once inside, she was surprised at the lived-in look. There was nothing she could put her finger on. But the place just didn't have the cold and empty feel of a house that has been closed.

The hum of the refrigerator was a mirage, she told herself. When she was two she had lost her mother in an automobile accident, and her father had brought her here to Gran and Gramps. There had always been noises in this house that couldn't be accounted for.

But they were friendly noises, and Susan had never been frightened by them. The house had never felt empty or cold or alien to her. Now, as then, Susan could feel all about her the warmth and love she had known in this house.

Perhaps it was because she was so steeped in memories of this old house that she had been unable to feel any warmth toward the home Henry was building for them, an ultra-modern ranch type with split levels, indirect heating, and an electric dishwasher and garbage disposal.

Going up the stairs with the white spindles and cherry handrail that circled gracefully to the second floor, she promised herself she wouldn't think of Henry or their future together until she had been here a week.

The bedroom at the head of the stairs was large and high ceilinged. There were white indoor shutters at the lower half of the three small-paned windows, and short red print curtains, now faded and dusty, at the upper half, matching the duster around the bottom of the big four-poster bed. She had made the curtains for Gran on her last visit here.

On either side of the fireplace were large clothes closets, and above each of these, accessible only by a sturdy hickory ladder, kept out of sight under the bed, were closets high enough to stand in and long enough to lie down in. There Gran had kept her bed clothes and Christmas tree ornaments, and a cradle

that had rocked all the past generations of Van Leighs.

SHE was kneeling on the gayly colored quilt on the bed, trying to unscrew a pineapple off the post, when the front door creaked in resistance to efforts from the outside to push it open.

Someone who knew the place was vacant had seen her come up the lane alone and had followed her. Maybe it was a teenage gang or an escaped convict! Chilled into immobility, she saw herself bound and gagged, or murdered and hidden in the attic. Escape was impossible!

In a moment she had the ladder out from under the bed and was halfway up to the high closet with her bags and purse. The closet had been her favorite hideout from Gran. To remove evidence of her presence, she drew the ladder up after her. She had just maneuvered it in beside her and gotten the big doors pulled together, when the front door crashed back into the umbrella stand.

It must be a gangster's moll, she told herself when she heard the click of heels on the stairs. But the casually elegant blonde Susan glimpsed was no gangster's moll. She wore a brown suit, and straw sandals and a matching shoulder bag, that looked like Saks Fifth Avenue. Nor had nature had a hand in the silvery sheen of the hair coiled into huge soft knot on the back of her head. She had heavy black brows, and wide eyes as green as aquamarine.

She could be an angel escaped from the top of a Christmas tree, she was so fragilely beautiful. She must have gossamer wings tucked away someplace, on which she could float up around the room and find Susan, huddled on her knees in the closet, peering through the crack in the door like some old witch. Heaven forbid!

The girl called back to the heavy steps following her up the stairs, "Hurry, Mother. Steve will be here in a few minutes. I want you to see the place first. Then you'll understand why I refuse to

live here after Steve and I are married. He wants to be a farmer, with law as his hobby, instead of the other way around."

Steve, the man who was renting the place, and now wanted to buy it. Woe unto him! That girl was no angel, in spite of her appearance. An older and stouter edition of the girl, breathless from the stairs, puffed into the room.

She should make herself known, Susan told herself. But then she'd look like a monkey clambering down from a tree. Susan would hide up here forever before she would make a spectacle of herself before the girl.

"It's impossible, Angela," the mother agreed.

"You try to tell him that." Angela's voice was scornful. "If there were a few more eligible men in Lee's Creek, I'd leave him. Then he could forget all about law and be a full-time hick."

"A girl without a husband in a small town is like a car with three wheels," her mother reminded her. "She never gets anywhere."

"I'm not giving up my dress shop to try to live on what he makes as a farmer, and the few law cases he finds time to take. It would be impossible for me to get help out here, and it would be impossible for me to run my shop and commute. But he says this is the friendliest house he's ever been in." Angela made a helpless gesture with both hands.

Susan felt a sudden kinship toward Steve. It *was* a friendly house.

Angela's mother took a look around, as if trying to locate the friendliness, pushed down on the bedsprings, and gave up. "I'd say it's full of bad dreams and ghosts."

Bad dreams and ghosts! Susan wanted to order these women out of the house. Instead she sneezed.

"Ghosts!" Angela screamed. "Steve!"

Running for Steve, the women bumped into each other at the door, but they finally managed to untangle themselves and get out of the room. Susan, ashamed of herself, hurriedly let down the ladder to come down and make her-

self known. Five years ago she had maneuvered the ladder into position as easily as if it were featherweight. Today, it felt unwieldy and heavy. She didn't have the strength in her arms to control it. While trying to anchor it against the lower door, it slipped from her hands and clattered to the floor.

Gran had warned her, "You'll get caught up in that cupboard someday, and will have to stay until someone comes to help you out." Now she was stuck up here. Angela would return with Steve, and Steve would be furious with Susan for scaring his fiancée half out of her wits.

Susan pushed the bedclothes stored in the closet to the side, so she could rest comfortably against them. She sighed. Left alone here, she couldn't help thinking about Henry. She hadn't protested when he told her he was selling the farm so he would have money to put into their house. The farm was his to do with as he liked. But she could not reconcile herself to Henry's wanting her to keep her job after they were married.

She had wanted to buy an old house and restore it. But Henry was not the old-house type. The electric dishwasher had been the last straw. A working wife, Henry said, needed all the modern-day conveniences. But Susan didn't want to be a working wife.

THEIR fathers had been partners in a flourishing little florist shop in the city. Susan and Henry had lost both their parents within six months of each other. It was all right for Henry. After he had graduated from Floriculture College, he had taken to carnations and roses like chocolate sauce to ice cream.

It was he who had insisted Susan forget her teaching job last year, and take over the weddings and parties and window displays for the florist shop, because she seemed to have inherited some of her father's flair for such things. That was a year ago, and still Henry hadn't gotten anyone to replace her in the shop, nor did he have money to buy her half.

It was he who had sold her on the idea that they were in love, because they had enjoyed a few movies and dinners together. Had he asked her to marry him so he wouldn't have to buy out her half of the business? So he could have a working wife and save a clerk's salary? When their fathers were partners, there had been no hired help.

She dozed and didn't hear a car drive up, or steps on the stairs, until Angela's voice awakened her. "Be careful, Steve. You don't know what might be up there."

"If there are any ghosts up here I want to meet them face to face. Say, what were you doing with a ladder up here?"

Susan saw him come into the room then. He wore faded jeans and no shirt, and his body was as brown and lean as a Comanche's. His blond hair, worn crew cut, was sunbleached almost white against his narrow, dark face. His eyes, a brilliant blue, were laughing at Angela as they searched the room for an intruder.

"We didn't have a ladder!" Angela's voice was thin and hysterical.

Susan pushed the closet door wide. "It's me."

Steve's eyes slanted upward. "Well, I'll be—" His shout of laughter hit against Susan like a physical blow. "Angela, I've found your ghost," he shouted.

The angry click of Angela's heels were on the stairs. "What's so funny?"

"No," Susan whispered. She couldn't face Angela. Her hands folded in an attitude of prayer. "Please don't tell," she begged. Then she pulled the closet doors shut.

Steve halted Angela at the head of the stairs. "It was a nest of mice in the closet."

Susan clasped her hands to her mouth to keep from screaming. She squirmed to be free of the mice. Then she realized Steve was using the mice story to hold off Angela and torture them both.

His heavy boots followed Angela's re-

Henry said stiffly, "I told you my fiancee was here."



treating steps down the stairs. "A couple of mice never hurt anyone."

Angela was furious. "I don't think it's funny, Steve, to be frightened half to death by mice or by a ghost's sneeze. You can have your old house."

Steve was immediately penitent. "Now, honey, you don't mean that."

Susan forgave him the mouse story. She had escaped the humility of facing Angela, and her anger at being frightened. Then relief changed swiftly to dismay when Susan realized that Steve had left with Angela and her mother. He knew she couldn't get down without a stepladder.

Tears of anger and frustration rolled down her cheeks. An hour passed, and

dark shadows grew in the corners. Susan felt the gnawing pangs of hunger. How could he leave her stranded here like this?

It was almost dark when Steve returned. He came lightly up the stairs and snapped on the electricity. He looked terrific in a tuxedo and black tie, his hair still wet from his shower. There was mock surprise in his voice.

"Are you still up there?"

"Of all the despicable, inconsiderate —" Susan took off her shoe and aimed it at him.

He ducked the shoe and lifted the ladder from the floor. "I thought a little time up there would be good for your soul. It would give you time to think

about your sins."

"My sins?"

His eyes, as brilliant blue as the patches on Gran's bedspread, slanted obliquely up to her. "Housebreaking isn't done in the best families."

"Housebreaking?" Susan cried. "This is my home; I'm not housebreaking. I'm going to spend the next few weeks here. Now put that ladder up."

He held the ladder out to her. "There seems to be slight misunderstanding someplace. I leased this farm from Henry Bramwell. It's my intention to buy the place when my lease is up next month."

Susan fingered her other shoe, but he shook his head. "I'm due at my fiancee's right now. You've caused me enough trouble already, scaring her so that now she says she'll never set foot inside the house again. You throw another shoe, and you'll spend the night up there. Now, what gives?"

II



SUSAN took a deep breath, restraining the sharp words. "My grandparents reared me in this house. They died during my sophomore year at college. My father and Henry Bramwell's father had a florist shop in the city. My father became ill the year after my grandparents died. In order to keep his interest in the shop intact for me, yet pay his expenses, he sold the farm to Henry's father. Now Henry and I own the shop together, and Henry also owns the farm you're going to buy."

Steve moved the ladder toward her. "Quite an explanation. What's your name?"

"Susan Van Leigh."

He sighed, and moved the ladder toward her. "Since this is the old Van Leigh farm, I guess you are speaking the truth. Come down and I'll take you into town."

"Henry Bramwell said I could spend a few weeks here, go through the place, and take what personal things I wanted before the sale is completed." Her eyes questioned him. "You aren't living here?"

"Sometimes I spend the week end out here. Sometimes I cook my noon meal or my evening meal here. That's why the electricity is turned on," he explained patiently. "If you want to stay tonight—"

"Certainly I'm staying tonight. I'm staying two weeks. If you want to share the kitchen with me, I can't stop you."

"I could make myself very obnoxious."

She faced him. "I doubt if it's possible for you to make yourself any more obnoxious than you already have, leaving me stranded in that closet."

His eyes glinted as he caught her into his arms. "Oh, can't I?"

He laughed softly, and then his mouth found hers. For a moment Susan pushed angrily against him. Then she became aware of the lean hard strength of his arms about her, the clean scent of his after-shave lotion.

Suddenly she knew why she didn't want a ranch-type house or an electric dishwasher, or working in the florist shop after she was married. She didn't love Henry. All these years she had been marking time, waiting to meet a too-thin blond man named Steve.

Abruptly he released her, and the narrow lines about his mouth tightened. "I don't know why I did that. I apologize. I guess I am pretty obnoxious."

Susan shook her head slowly, scarcely aware of what she was saying. "I think you're wonderful."

He stared down at her as though she had sprouted horns. "Are you crazy?"

Susan shook her head in denial. "I'm the one you should marry. While I was up in the closet I heard something."

His face darkened. "As it happens, I'm engaged to Angela. Nice girls don't go around asking strange men to marry them."

"What's wrong with a girl's asking a

man to marry her if he's right for her? Besides, you love this place. You say it's the friendliest house you ever saw—I'm quoting Angela. We must have the same vibrations."

Her words tumbled out, one after the other, with no volition on her part. "The minute I stepped into this house again I could feel all the happiness and love and warmth about me. Everything seemed right for me. I'd like to spend the rest of my life out here."

He held his hands before him as if to ward her off. "Not with me."

"If you bring an alien character like Angela into this house, it will be disastrous for both of you," Susan warned quickly. "You need a stay-at-home wife, not one who spends her days in a dress shop and her vacations on buying trips to the city."

He said, "When I first saw you perched up in that closet, I wondered why anyone as cute you should be running around loose." His eyes looked her over curiously, as though she were something in leopard skins, Susan thought. He added, "Now I understand. You're as wacky as a hoot owl."

"You're sweet to be wondering about me." Susan gave him her sweetest smile. "I was engaged five times. Do you know why each time I gave back the ring?"

"Because you wanted a bigger and better one."

"Because each one of those gentlemen felt the wife should work for at least three years. If they could find suitable baby sitters, they wanted their wives to work forever," Susan explained patiently. "I want to be a stay-at-home wife like Granny was, so I'll be able to can beans and cherries, and care for my own children. I'm looking for a man who needs a stay-at-home wife. You're the first one I've found."

Steve took an immaculate handkerchief from his breast pocket and wiped his brow. "Brother!" Then he shoved the handkerchief back into his pocket in a ball, oblivious of the ugly bulge. "I'm leaving."

Susan followed him down the stairs. "I'm hungry."

"You know all the answers; why don't you try turning a piece of wood into steak and french fries?" But at the door he relented. "There's some food in the refrigerator, if you can cook it."

Susan threw her shoe at him as he ducked out the door.

HUNGER and thirst forgotten, she sank down on the bottom step. Wrapping her arms about her knees, she propped her chin on her hands. It was fate, she told herself, that had brought her back here. If all her days had been spent in searching the earth up and down, she could never have found anyone so ideal to face the future with.

She wished Gran and Gramps were here to approve. She reminded herself about Angela, but she felt no guilt, because Angela and Steve were so wrong for each other.

In the kitchen, she found that Steve had eggs and bacon in the refrigerator. In the pie cupboard with the perforated tin panels, there was canned soup and coffee. She shuddered. No wonder he was bone thin. He apparently didn't go in for much cooking. Suddenly she winked at Gran's old electric stove. She was just the person to do something about that.

When she wakened next morning, the sun was high in the sky. Steve's dusty Ford was already parked in the barn lot. Hatless, his back bared to the sun, he was mowing weeds in the field below the barn lot.

Drinking her coffee, she considered the low-ceilinged kitchen. If it were her house, she would tear off the plastering on the ceiling to expose the heavy oaken rafters. She'd open up the old fireplace, and tear up the linoleum so the fine wooden floor would show. How crazy can you get, she asked herself? Then she reminded herself that faint heart ne'er won anything. When Steve started back across the cornfield toward the house, she ran down to the barn lot.

He maneuvered the tractor to a halt alongside the fence. "Now what?" he asked warily.

"I realize you have this place rented, and I have no business being here, but I would like to make a bargain."

"Shoot."

"If you'll let me stay here for the next month and borrow your car now and then to go into town for groceries, I'll share my meals with you and clean your house. If your fiancée saw this house looking spic and span, she might like it better."

He agreed, "She might, but—" his mouth twisted crookedly—"I don't know how I would explain you. After all, you aren't exactly a bundle from heaven."

Susan had an answer. "Tell her you hired me to clean up the place; I'm sure that would please her. And it certainly needs cleaning."

Still he hesitated.

Susan urged, "If you let me do it, you can keep all the furniture except a few special pieces, like the four-poster bed and the cherry gate-leg table in the living room."

He shrugged, maneuvering the tractor away from the fence. "What've I got to lose? The key is in the car."

Later, when she had a roast nicely browning in the oven, and potatoes peeled, she rolled the round pine table to the cool of the brick walk outside the back door, shielded by the grapevines from the hot September sun.

Then she covered the table with an old red-and-white checked cloth. She filled a wooden butter bowl with some potatoes and carrots and green peppers, and was taking it out to use as a centerpiece, when Steve came up to the pump for a drink of water.

He knocked his hat against the grape arbor to clear it of dust, and grinned quizzically. "Think you could manage to bake a pie?"

Gran always said the way to a man's heart was through his stomach. Susan forgot the vanilla ice cream in the refrigerator that she had been planning

to use for dessert. "If you'll go down to the fruit cellar with me, I'll try to find a jar of something for pie."

Steve followed her into the kitchen. "I didn't know there was such a thing here."

Susan slid back a small linoleum rug under the side casement window, revealing a trap door. "This leads to Gran's fruit cellar."

Steve pulled up the heavy door, while she got the lantern hanging on the wall and lighted it.

"What am I supposed to do down here?" Steve wanted to know, following her down the damp wooden steps into the musty cellar.

Susan hung the lantern on a long nail in the thick oaken timber that supported the kitchen floor. "Keep the spooks away," she said.

The floor was of flagstone, and there were shelves of canned fruit lining three walls. Steve went ahead, striking at the cobwebs, so Susan could get to the shelves.

"I didn't know women did this sort of thing any more."

"Only stay-at-home wives do."

His eyes slanted down at her, expressionless. "You've made your point. Now how about picking out the fruit. I've got to get back to my mowing."

"Okay. Cherries coming up."

Susan pushed aside some of the pint jars in the front row and reached to the back for the quart jar, when her hand touched soft fur. A mouse! She jerked back, the blood congealing in her veins. Her heel, catching in a crevice in the flagstones, threw her back against Steve. A scream rose in her throat, but no sound came.

STEVE'S arms went out to keep her from falling. "So that's it." He swung her about, his mouth finding hers. Sick with shame that he thought she had used such a subterfuge to get him into the cellar, her nails cut into his lean, naked chest to free herself.

He released her suddenly. In the dim

light from the lantern, his mouth twisted derisively. "Didn't I get the cue?"

Too angry to trust her voice, Susan reached up and slapped him hard on the face. She struggled for self-control. "I touched a mouse."

Steve's hand nursed his smarting cheek. "Is that all?"

"All? What did you expect, an elephant?" Susan ran up the steps so he wouldn't see the tears blinding her eyes. "If you want a pie, find the cherries yourself."

Could she appear so cheap to him that he would think she had deliberately connived to get him into the cellar, then pretended fright to get into his arms? She reminded herself she had been wearing her heart on her sleeve, big as a headlight, since last night.

She had insisted he needed a stay-at-home wife, and had suggested they share their meals. No wonder he had misinterpreted her fright. The thing for her to do was to get back to Henry, before she made a complete fool of herself.

In a moment he followed her with the cherries. He picked up his hat, his eyes avoiding hers. "Sorry," he apologized gruffly.

Susan bit her lips to still their trembling. "I guess I asked for it," she said swiftly. "The whole house looks hopeless. I think I might as well give up the project."

"You needn't worry. It won't happen again," he told her awkwardly.

When she slid the pie into the oven, it was only ten-thirty. She got a crowbar and hammer from the toolshed, and started prying loose the boards that closed up the fireplace. Half an hour later, brick, mortar, boards, and debris were in front of the fireplace, which was so big Susan could stand in it. Already she could see a giant log blazing there, and smell vegetable soup bubbling in the black iron pot swinging from the crane.

"May I ask what's going on here?"

Startled, Susan swung around. It was

Angela. Poised and slim in a green linen dress, she halted in the doorway, eyeing the rubble in the middle of the floor in frank annoyance.

Susan recovered herself quickly. "I'm tearing open the fireplace. I think it will give the kitchen a cozy look."

Steve followed Angela into the kitchen. "Hi, honey." He gave her shoulder a quick squeeze. "I saw you drive up. What tears you away from your shop at this hour of the morning?"

Angela moved free of his arm. "I didn't know you were sharing the house with anyone."

"Sharing? Oh, you mean Susan." He gave a quick, depreciating laugh. "I almost forgot. Angela, this is Susan. Hey, you look as if you slid down the chimney. What gives?"

"I'm opening up the fireplace," Susan said.

Angela wasn't interested in what she was doing. "Steve, I don't understand. The table out there is set for two. If I'm intruding—"

Steve halted her impatiently. "Don't be silly. Susan is—"

Sure, go on, Susan thought. Susan is a girl who thinks she will make a better wife than you, and who has been doing everything possible to prove it.

Instead, he told Angela, "I thought if you saw this place as it used to be, with the furniture polished, and this kitchen like it was a hundred years ago, you might enjoy spending our week ends out here. I could spend the weekdays in your apartment." He shrugged and made a swift little gesture with his hands. "It's—well—a thought."

"It might be fun at that." Angela had caught his enthusiasm. "Perhaps you do have something, darling. Cocktail parties in an eighteenth-century kitchen—it might be fun."

The possession of even a little homemade wine, for medicinal purposes, had seemed almost a sacrilege to Gran. Now—cocktail parties in Gran's kitchen. Never!

Susan told Angela, "I don't think the chimney is going to draw. There seems to be some sort of obstruction. I'll board up the fireplace again."

Steve stopped her. "If it doesn't draw, I'll get someone to clear away the obstruction."

"I'll tear off the mantel. I can put plastic brick wallpaper all over this side of the kitchen," Susan told him eagerly. "You'll never know there was a fireplace here."

Steve's grin was infuriating. "You've done enough demolition work today, Susan."

"If the wind is blowing the wrong way it will sweep the smoke down into this room like an evil spirit," she warned.

Angela asked, "Why don't you want us to have that fireplace open?"

"This house used to belong to my family. I wouldn't have opened it up if I had known this kitchen would be used for cocktail parties. Gran wouldn't have liked it."

"How quaint. I thought hired girls were a thing of the past." Angela smiled at Susan, and asked Steve, "How did you find such a capable one?"

Steve beamed. "I didn't find her, she found me. She heard the place was going to be sold and wanted the job of cleaning it up."

ANGELA turned back to Susan. "When you get through here, I'd like to have you work at my apartment. Oh, I know it's nicer to work for Steve than it would be for me, and he's probably paying you a fabulous hourly rate, but eventually all good things come to an end. When this does, look me up."

"You can have her anytime you want her," Steve assured Angela.

He was throwing her away like an old rag. Sudden rage bubbled through Susan. "I'm already promised when I'm through here."

Angela shrugged. "It's of no importance. I don't have any fireplaces to be torn out, or walls to be covered with

plastic brick paper."

Steve's eyes found Susan's pie, which was cooling on the window sill. "Cherry pie! Let's eat." He pulled the oven open. "Roast beef and carrots and potatoes."

Angela put her hand daintily on his arm. "I want to talk with you, darling, but I couldn't possibly eat in this mess. Come into town and have lunch at my apartment. I think Chloe is preparing tuna fish salad."

"I've got weeds to mow," Steve protested. He stuck out his foot in his heavy, thick-soled shoe. "Look at my shoes, caked with dirt from the fields. I couldn't set foot inside your door."

"You're right, you couldn't," Angela agreed. "That's why I cannot be enthused about your farming. If you would start practising law again you wouldn't have to dress like a hillbilly."

Steve's face flushed at her criticism. "Come on. I'll stop at my apartment and change."

Susan watched him slide under the wheel of his dusty Ford and follow Angela's yellow-and-chrome convertible down the lane. He had said no good-bye, no sorry, Susan, to walk out on your dinner. She swiped with the back of her hand at her tears of rage and frustration, and caught up an armload of the boards she had torn loose from the fireplace.

She carried out the debris, then tore up the old linoleum. She was on her knees with a pail of sudsy water and a brush, scrubbing the wide poplar boards of the floor, when Steve dashed into the kitchen.

"Come on, let's eat." He halted. "Or have you eaten?"

Susan straightened, sinking back on her heels, wishing desperately she had taken time to wash her face. She shook her head; she hadn't eaten.

"Didn't you eat with Angela?" she asked.

Steve pulled open the oven door to look inside. "I'll get the dinner on the table. You get washed up." He found a towel,

pulled the roaster from the oven, and set it on top of the stove. Then he went to get a meat platter.

"You don't think I can work all afternoon on tuna fish salad, do you?" he added.

While Steve got the food on the table, Susan dashed up the stairs two at a time. Five minutes later, in a fresh blue cotton blouse and matching skirt, her hair still damp from the shower, she outlined her lips softly with lipstick. Her face was pink from soap and water, and glowed with so much happiness that she tried to draw down the corners of her mouth to keep Steve from knowing.

She might as well have saved herself the trouble of cleaning up, for all the notice Steve gave to her appearance as she joined him at the table. "This sure is good roast beef," was all he said.

"Thank you," Susan murmured politely. To start a conversation she said, "I know Gran wouldn't have liked a cocktail party in her kitchen."

"Forget it," he told her easily, giving himself another generous helping of roast beef and potatoes. "In another week Angela will be hating the house again."

"I think it would be mighty nice to sit in a rocker before the fireplace in the winter, eating popcorn and apples."

He shrugged. "If there's any roast beef left, I could eat some hash," he told her, "if you could make it."

Susan exploded. "Is that all you think about—eating?"

He grinned. "Can't run an engine without gasoline."

"You'd better tell Angela that," Susan snapped.

His display of white teeth in a wide grin was infuriating. "Not jealous, are you?"

"Me, jealous of you and Angela? Certainly not," Susan denied, but she was—terribly.

As the meal progressed, he started to talk, and told her something about himself. Both of his parents were dead. He

had put himself through law school by working at night on the switchboard at an apartment hotel, and waiting on tables at Angela's sorority. He had come to Lee's Creek because the youngest lawyer there was over sixty, so, while the town had a population of only four thousand, there was a good opportunity for a newcomer. He had gotten several worthwhile estates to settle, and had then met Angela again.

He wanted his children reared on a farm, and he had the money for a down payment on one. But he hadn't sold Angela on the idea. She owned the only really good dress shop in town and didn't want to give it up.

"A farmer needs a stay-at-home wife," Susan reminded him.

He laughed at her. "I'm sold on Angela. We just have a few differences to iron out."

III



SUSAN was ashamed of herself. If she had any thoughts that she might step into Angela's shoes with Steve because of Angela's concern for her shop, she might as well forget it. If Angela wanted

to keep her shop, it seemed to be all right with Steve.

The sooner Susan got away the better. She was falling in love with Steve, and there could be only heartbreak in it for her.

"There's no use in my staying here any longer," she said. "Angela won't like the place any better cleaned than she does now."

He said stubbornly, "You made your bargain. Angela is my worry."

His words stung like well-aimed blows. He saw her tears and came around the table, immediately penitent. "I'm sorry."

Susan rose to her feet, eager to get away before she started crying. "Y-you

should be," Susan choked. "I'm not a paid scrubwoman."

"I didn't mean that, Susan. I—I—oh, heck!" With a sudden laugh he caught her to him. His lips whispered close above her ear, "Susy, you crazy kid."

Without any volition of her own, Susan's face lifted until their lips touched. "Susan," he whispered, his arms tightening around her shoulders. For one brief moment the past faded away, and there was no future. There was only the sweetness of Steve's lips on hers, the strength of his arms about her, the throb of his heart in union with hers.

She pulled away. "Steve, you don't love Angela."

He released her suddenly. "Don't get any ideas."

"But you kissed me, Steve."

One brow lifted crookedly, while his eyes laughed at her. "What's a guy supposed to do when a girl starts crying? What did your grandmother do when you started crying?"

"She kissed me." Furious, Susan added, "You're not supposed to go around kissing girls as if you mean it, even if they are crying."

Suddenly furious himself, he told her, "You know Angela is my fiancée. Hell's bells, what's wrong with my kissing you if it made you feel better?"

"It didn't make me feel better. It made me feel worse." Susan's voice trailed off miserably. To keep him from seeing her tears, she pretended to start clearing the table.

"You just haven't met the right guy."

"I have, Steve. You don't love Angela. If you did, you wouldn't have kissed me. If Angela loved you, she'd live here or anyplace else, just so you were there. And it wouldn't matter whether you tilled the soil or were a butcher or a—oh, get out."

Steve caught up his hat, grinning. "How about hash for supper?"

"You can make it yourself," Susan told him. "I'm leaving."

"Remember your bargain," he said.

Remember your bargain. Sure, she'd remember, because she loved Steve. No matter what she tried to tell herself, she couldn't leave so long as there was a shred of hope. And so long as Steve stuck to his farming, there was hope.

At six-thirty Steve came up the path from the barn, dusty and hot, his feet in his heavy shoes almost dragging. He splashed water over himself at the pump to get the dust off his face and neck, then threw his hat in the door.

"Friendly?"

Susan laughed in spite of herself. "I baked hash. I never made it before, so you eat it at your own risk."

Steve came into the kitchen, catching up his hat from the floor and tossing it to a nail beside the door. "I'll risk anything you shove into the oven."

Susan took the casserole of hash from the stove and carried it to the table. "They used to say the way to a man's heart is through his stomach."

Steve slid into his chair. "You can practice on me."

"I'm sorry for the things I said about Angela at noon," Susan apologized, pouring coffee and sitting down opposite him.

He grinned at her. "Disappointment in love will sour any girl."

"I'm not disappointed in love." Susan bit back her words. "I'm not going to talk with you any more. You have the obnoxious ability to bring out the worst in me."

Steve grinned. "If you'd stop trying to capture me for your own, we'd get along fine. Actually—" he tried to laugh—"I'm not available."

Too angry for words, Susan gaped at him, speechless. How could she think he was the answer to her prayer for a husband?

He sampled her hash and told her appreciately, "If this is any sample of what our meals will be for the next two weeks, I should put on ten pounds."

"You'll never put on ten pounds eating tuna fish salad," Susan retorted, forgetting her resolution not to speak.

He wagged his fork at her. "There you go again. Your gaining ten pounds might sort of cushion your disposition, as well as your joints."

After a second wedge of pie, with more coffee, he pushed himself away from the table. "Please concentrate more on your cooking, and don't do any more demolition work."

IN THE week that followed, Susan didn't tear out any more walls, and she restrained herself from pulling down the kitchen ceiling to bare the huge beams which she felt must be there. Instead, she painted the walls and ceiling flat white. She made little red-and-white-sash curtains from an old tablecloth, and scrubbed the wide floor boards again and again, until they were spotless and glowing. After she had applied thick coatings of wax, she got out some of Gran's bright rag rugs and placed them in front of the fireplace and stove.

"It looks cozy," Steve told her. He added hastily. "But I don't think it's Angela's type."

I don't think you are Angela's type either, she wanted to tell him, but held back her words. Except at meal times, she didn't see him. She was glad that Angela was so busy with a sale of fall clothes that she didn't come out often. Even when she did, she seldom came into the house.

Susan learned that Steve liked good substantial meals, with plenty of meat and potatoes, and that in the middle of the morning he wanted a piece of pie and a cup of coffee. Each morning she put a pie into the oven before she began any cleaning. By ten o'clock, when he came in for a snack, it was out of the oven and cool enough to eat.

"It's a good thing this is going to last only two weeks, or I'd be bursting out of my clothes," Steve told her one morning, after he had consumed almost half a pumpkin pie. "You'll make someone a good stay-at-home wife."

Not someone, she wanted to tell him;

your stay-at-home wife, Steve darling. Aloud, she asked, "Do you think Angela will like the house?"

He grinned down at her. "Suzy, my corn is almost ready for the corn picker. I have about forty hogs ready for market. Next year I expect to have some beef cattle. If Angela doesn't like it out here, she'll have to make room for me and my clothes in her apartment, and I'll rent this house. You seem to have a hankering for the furniture. You can have it."

She did love the furniture—the love seat and matching chairs, upholstered in sage-green velvet; the rosewood desk made from a spinet piano, passed down from generation to generation of her family.

Angela's fall sale ended and she planned spending a few days in New York to buy for her Christmas trade. She came out about four the evening she was leaving, to be sure Steve was not late to take her to the city to catch her plane. Susan had hung the last pair of fresh ruffled curtains in the dining room that morning. Steve wanted to take Angela through the house so she could see it at its best before she made any decision about living here.

Susan heard Angela talking as Steve brought her out through the dining room, after her tour of the upper floor. "Darling, even if ruffled curtains billow in the breeze, the dining-room furniture is all solid cherry, and the floors have boards a foot wide, waxed slick as glass, this house still looks like something out of the dark ages. I'd just die in such surroundings."

Her steps halted, and in her mind's eye Susan could see her looping her arms around Steve's neck. Her big blue eyes would be lifted to his, beseeching prettily.

"Steve, darling, when you open up your law office again you'll be glad we kept my apartment. There'll be no worrying about shoveling away snow drifts in the lane in the morning, so we can get out;

no carrying of logs for the fireplace, just because it makes the kitchen look cheery; no drying dishes on quaint red-and-white checked towels.

"I have an apartment that is automatically heated, an electric dishwasher, and all the other necessary gadgets. Believe me, when you get over the Grandma Moses effect Susan has created out here, you'll be glad to be in my apartment, with all its comfort and convenience."

In her mind's eyes, Susan saw Steve lowering his head until his lips touched Angela's. She heard his muffled whisper, "You're the boss."

Susan's heart twisted inside her. She tried to control the shaking of her fingers, that were arranging a bowl of vegetables as the centerpiece for the table.

Coming to the kitchen, Angela put on her most devastating smile for Susan. "I know you tried. But antiques to me are just so much firewood."

Scarcely daring to trust her voice, Susan told her, "I've loved every moment of it." She tried to be honest. "Some of the furniture is worth a lot of money, I think."

Angela shrugged one slender shoulder. "You can have it."

STEVE lifted the lid from the large iron skillet on the stove. "Fried chicken." He looked around until he saw the pie on the window ledge.

"You've never tasted anything like Susan's lemon pie."

"Darling, please. I didn't come out here to eat, I came to tear you away from the tractor, so we won't be late," Angela told him patiently. "Having a tractor for a rival is not very flattering."

"I'm doing the work all for you." Steve cut himself a sliver of pie and held it out to Angela on the edge of the knife. "Taste."

Angela ignored the pie. "Then forget the work, for my sake."

Steve gulped the pie in one bite. "In a small town law practice is not very lucrative," he reminded her. "I'd like to give you a few things besides the bare necessities."

"My shop is very lucrative," Angela snapped. She got up and left the kitchen without a glance at Susan.

Steve followed her, licking his fingers. "You're passing up a good free meal."

The big, grinning lug, Susan thought. Was he all brawn and no brains? Why couldn't he stand on his own feet? Couldn't he realize that if Angela loved him—

Susan halted her errant thoughts, bright tears stinging her eyes. Didn't she realize Steve couldn't see her for dust? He didn't care if she could bake a pie or scrub a floor, or that she had hung by her heels from the gnarled apple tree in the orchard when she was ten. Angela was his big moment.

Susan turned the bowl of vegetables upside down on the table, letting the potatoes and onions roll where they would. She was going to go away, far away. She would forget she ever knew a lean, undernourished individual named Steve, who was always hungry. She would forget that he had ever kissed her, and that she had ever—

She halted herself because she didn't believe a word of it. No matter how far she went, Steve's lean dark face, his mocking eyes laughing at her, would be keeping step right alongside her.

Left to Angela, Gran's antiques would end up in the fireplace, just for kicks at her first cocktail party in the kitchen. Susan remembered Mrs. Lundegan, a local antique dealer.

Whenever Gran had needed a little extra money to buy something she didn't want Gramps to know about, she used to take Mrs. Lundegan a piece of milk glass, or dig up an old chair from the leftovers in the tool shed.

From the filling station half a mile down the road, Susan called for a taxi. They started off, and in a short time

pulled up at their destination. According to the note on a memo pad beside Mrs. Lundegan's door, she had gone to a sale, but would be back by seven. Susan waited, but after several hours of sitting on a hard bench on the front porch, she didn't even care if Angela used the four-poster bed and cherry cupboard for stovewood.

By that time it was long past seven. A walk back home was just what she needed, Susan told herself, when she found the taxi stand closed for the night. She pretended that Steve was beside her, his stride shortening to match hers.

Together, beside an old rail fence on top of a hill, they watched the moon, like a great orange ball of papier mache, slowly coming up behind a ridge of trees across the valley. There was the scent of burning leaves in the air. Once again his arms were holding her close, and she heard his swift, smothered laugh as his lips found hers.

When she reached the stone gate of the farmhouse, and tasted the salt of her tears, she knew she was crying. The magic of the night disappeared.

The lane was long and dark and menacing as it curved into the grove of oaks. But remembering Steve, holding Angela close in his arms, Susan didn't care if there was a skulking figure with a painted face lurking behind each tree, waiting to peel her scalp with a tomahawk.

She was halfway up the lane when she saw the light shining from the living-room windows. She was relieved that, by some unexplainable miracle, she had turned on the light before she left. She was at the foot of the porch steps when the screen door swung open. There had always been noises and creakings about the house that couldn't be accounted for, but doors had never opened of their own accord.

A scream splitting from her throat, Susan fled back down the path to the lane. Heavy footsteps pounded after her.

"Susan, Susan!"

It was Steve. Susan halted so fast she would have fallen on her face if he hadn't caught her. She tried to speak, but great sobs choked in her throat.

"Where have you been?" His face was taut and strained in the moonlight, and there was no laughter in his voice. "What are you doing running around at this hour of the night alone, you little idiot?"

LITTLE idiot, was she? Sudden anger came to her rescue. "Where have I been? What have I been doing? What's that to you?"

He paid no heed to her words. "I got back about eight. The front door was open."

"So what?" Susan flared back at him. "I wanted my supper." His voice shook with his anger at her. "That's what."

Who did he think she was, his slave? "You had dinner with Angela. Remember?"

"Certainly I remember. But I want to eat again. Is there any law against that?"

She told him, "The pie is still on the window ledge. The chicken is on the back of the stove. What kept you from it?" She tried to keep her voice from trembling. Sure, he would come to her when he wanted something, a substantial meal.

"You did. The front door was wide open. It was dark. I called you. I thought maybe you had fallen into the cellar, or gotten stranded in the closet again."

Suddenly Susan laughed, because if she didn't she was going to cry. "Don't tell me that after I've spent almost two weeks out here alone, you've suddenly become concerned about my welfare? The only things here worth stealing are the antiques, and if Angela gets her hands on them they'll be firewood."

"I wasn't worried about the antiques. I was not thinking about the pie or the fried chicken. I was worried about you."

His fingers gripped her shoulders so hard she winced. "Can't you understand?"

Susan told herself she was dreaming, with her eyes wide open, and that she would awaken in a few minutes and all of this would never have happened. Moonlight madness, that's what it was. She tried to bring herself back to normal.

"I might be a good cook, but I'm not that good."

"Cook. I don't care if you never bake another pie, or fry another chicken." He caught her close, his voice muffled in her hair. "Darling, Darling! I imagined all sorts of things. I thought maybe you were lying dead in the bushes. I cursed myself because I hadn't had a phone put in, and flood lights installed along the path. Oh, darling!"

She wasn't dreaming, but maybe he was. "What about Angela?" she reminded him.

"Angela," he repeated, as though the name was so remote in the past he had difficulty seeing its importance in the present.

"Sure, Angela." Susan drew her head back so she could look up into his lean, unhappy face. "Your fiancee, the girl you love."

"You're the girl I love. I've been blind not to know it," Steve whispered, his lips on hers.

"But Angela?" Susan insisted.

He remembered then. His arms loosened about her. "When she returns from New York I'll tell her about us. She'll understand. Susan, darling, how could I have been so blind for so long?"

"It's only been a few days," she murmured.

After they had eaten, because it had grown cool, Steve lit the kindling Susan had piled under the big log in the fireplace. Susan drew up two comfortable old rockers, and they sat watching as the log caught fire and flames lit up the room.

They talked far into the night, until the log was a mass of glowing embers

casting wierd, flickering shadows over the walls, about the future. Because Susan didn't want to be here when Angela returned, Steve promised he would take her home Saturday. He wanted to see where she lived, and to meet her friends.

"Susan, have you ever loved anyone before?" he asked unexpectedly.

Had she? Susan gasped. How could she have forgotten Henry so completely? She had sent him a picture postcard that first morning she went into town for groceries, and he had come into her mind only vaguely, once or twice since then.

She knew now that she didn't love him. But now she was engaged to two men at the same time. The sudden realization frightened her.

"I thought I was in love once," she managed. "I didn't know what love was."

"Tell me about him," Steve urged, suddenly jealous.

"There isn't much to tell." Susan made a helpless gesture with her hands. "He didn't want a stay-at-home wife."

IV



NEXT afternoon, in a pair of jeans and an old white jersey, Susan was hard at work in the shade of the grape arbor, taking paint off an old bench. So engrossed was she in cleaning one of the spindles that she didn't see Henry's car come up the lane. She didn't see him go down to the barn, where Steve was working on his tractor. She didn't know Henry was within a hundred miles, until she glanced up and he was so close she could have touched him.

With Steve towering head and shoulders above him. Henry seemed suddenly short and stodgy, and no one she could ever have loved. She tried to speak, but her voice froze in her throat.

Steve told her, "Susan, this is Mr. Bramwell. He owns the farm."

Henry said stiffly, "I am also Susan's

fiance. I guess you didn't understand me down at the barn, when I said I had a fiancée around here someplace."

Susan saw the gladness drain from Steve's face. His eyes searched hers, not understanding. "I didn't know. She's been holding out on me. She just arrived and took over the house."

With an effort, he regained control of himself. Holding out his hand to Henry, his smile flashed wide to make up for the strained stiffness he could not keep out of his voice. "Congratulations."

"I should have told you," Susan whispered.

In his eyes she saw the hurt cut bone deep. He covered it with a crazy, rakish laugh. "You women!" Then he excused himself quickly. "You must have a lot to say to each other."

Henry called after him as he went down to his car parked in the barn lot, "What about the meeting in Mr. Langley's office at four? Will you be there?"

Steve halted a moment, making a pretence at considering. "You know, Mr. Bramwell, I've changed my mind about the farm. I think I'll stick to law. Sorry you came out here on a wild-goose chase."

Angela would be happy, and Steve would drive five miles out of his way to avoid ever passing this way again. His roots were buried deep within the acres he had tended with such loving affection, but she had ruined his joy in the farm.

She caught up with him at the car. Desperately, she tried to explain. "Steve, can't you understand that my engagement to Henry was a mistake? He knows it now as well as I do. I tried to think, because we had the florist shop in common, it was enough. It wasn't, and I—I just forgot about him."

Steve lost control of his emotions and his angry, tortured face scorned her. "Sure, I understand. You were engaged five times in college. After a while it gets to be a habit."

Susan begged him to reconsider. "You

can still keep the farm," she coaxed.

He didn't want the farm. He wanted to hurt her as she had hurt him. "Angela was right. I've been crazy to think about buying a farm."

Too stunned to move, Susan watched his car careening giddily down the lane. Henry joined her. "What's wrong with him? Not two minutes ago he was ready to sign the deed. Now he's off down the road like a teenager in a hot rod."

"He's hurt, Henry. He does want this farm, but he's in love with me and I've hurt him," Susan said miserably. "He didn't know I was engaged to you. He asked me to marry him. He was taking me home Saturday, and I was going to tell you then. I should have written you; I should have told Steve about you."

Henry shrugged. "There are a lot of things I could say, but it's water over the dam now. And speaking of water, I could use a drink." He took a grape leaf between his fingers and examined it for blight. "Did you know that these vines needed spraying this spring?"

While she got the ice cubes, she watched Henry through the window, examining the grapevine. She hadn't really hurt him, she knew. His work was the only thing he loved. He had just hoped she'd make a good partner in the florist shop.

She wanted to stay and make her peace with Steve, but Henry wouldn't have it. "After what you've done to him, there's nothing you can say that will get you anyplace with him."

SHE tried helping Henry in the shop again, but every moment was one of heartbreak and misery. She had been back a week when a lean young man with sun-scorched hair, who somehow reminded her of Steve, came into the shop for an orchid. Watching him leave, she realized how futile it was to think she could ever forget. She hurried back to where Henry was repotting geraniums.

"Henry, would you trade me the farm for my half of this shop?"

"Are you sick?" he asked, looking up, but without pausing in pressing the earth firmly about the geranium roots.

Susan shook her head. "I'm in love."

The idea of being sole owner of the shop appealed to Henry, but he tried to be fair. "You'll never make as much on that farm as you will from your interest in this shop. Of course, it would suit me fine."

Henry telephoned Mr. Langley to make the necessary arrangements for turning the farm over to Susan. Then he helped Susan buy herself a second-hand car. Two days later, with all her personal belongings loaded in the back of the car, she arrived at Mr. Langley's office early in the afternoon.

Before she signed the deed, Mr. Langley explained that she would have to make a separate deal with Steve about the corn crop. Susan asked him to arrange a meeting with Steve out at the farm, without mentioning her name. She explained that she knew Steve and that she wanted to surprise him.

Mr. Langley got hold of Steve by phone while she was still in his office. Steve agreed to be out at the farm around seven that evening.

On the way out, Susan stopped at the supermarket for a chicken, some fresh vegetables, and apples for a pie. The chicken was steaming on the back of the stove, and she had just taken the pie out of the oven, when Steve appeared in the kitchen doorway.

"You?" he whispered.

"Oh, Steve, I had to." Susan halted as Angela followed him into the kitchen.

"Don't tell me you go with the house?" Angela asked.

Hatless, her hair silver against the charcoal blue of her smart wool suit, she looked like something out of a fashion magazine. Never, never again, Susan promised herself, would she put on one of her little cotton shirtwaist dresses when she was trying to win a man's heart. Compared with Angela's casual elegance, it made her feel as if

she was right where she belonged—in the kitchen.

Steve said, "Mr. Langley told me the new owner wanted to see me."

"He's not here right now," Susan managed.

"Don't you believe it, Steve, darling." Angela's smile was brilliant, triumphant. "It wasn't the new owner who wanted to see you, it was Susan. Look." She swung around, pointing to the window.

"There's the pie, and I'll bet she's got a chicken or a roast someplace. She's been after you ever since you hired her, she's still working on the theory that the way to a man's heart is through his stomach."

Just the way Angela said it made Susan feel cheap and tawdry. And whatever that strange look in Steve's eyes meant, she knew it boded no good.

"Actually, I'm only here for the day to do a little cleaning," she told Angela. Let Steve think what he wanted. He knew she wasn't a cleaning woman, but he was Angela's now, and it didn't matter what he thought. "You can't blame me for trying. The new owner had to leave very unexpectedly. I didn't know how to reach you. He said he wanted to ask about your corn crop."

"When you see the new owner, tell him he can have the corn at his own price," Steve told her quietly.

But there was a gleam in his eyes that she had never seen there before. Was it a look of triumph that, with Angela's help, he was now seeing Susan in her true light as an unscrupulous man-hunter?

Angela took his arm. "Come, darling. I want you out of here before you get too many whiffs of that chicken and come dashing back the minute you leave me." She added to Susan, "Tell the new owner, when he returns, that if he wants to see Steve he can call at his law office."

TEARS blinding her eyes, Susan could not see them as they went down to Steve's car, parked in the lane. She

waited until ten o'clock, and Steve did not come dashing back. Without Steve, another hour in the house would be unbearable. Suddenly she wanted to get far, far away, as quickly as possible.

She had been so eager to see Steve again it hadn't troubled her that she had had only fifty dollars left after she bought the car. Going anyplace was out of the question, until she had some money.

She spent the night at the hotel in town, and called Mr. Langley's office first thing next morning. "I'm using a woman's prerogative and changing my mind about the farm. I want to sell it. I would take even less than Mr. Bramwell asked for it. I want to go to Florida, but I must sell the farm first—the quicker the better."

Mr. Langley was dubious about a quick sale. "I can sell it, but it may take a little time."

Susan resigned herself to doing a stretch in a hotel room, and bought a stack of mysteries at the corner drugstore. She went out earlier than she thought Steve or Angela would be going for lunch. Not for the world did she want to meet either of them accidentally on the street.

It was late afternoon when Mr. Langley called. "I did better than I expected. Your farm's sold, though it will take a couple of days to complete the deal. I didn't know about the furniture. My client would like to talk it over with you. He's in as big a rush as you are; he's getting married in a day or two. I gave him the key. He asked if you could meet him at the farm in about an hour."

Susan protested, "Make any deal you can about the furniture; it will be all right with me. The crops, of course, aren't mine. The buyer will have to see the former renter."

"I told the buyer you'd be there," Mr. Langley told her. "You want this deal rushed through, so I thought that was the best thing to tell him. You'd better go."

Susan renewed her makeup and drove out to the farm, promising herself that after today she would never pass this way again. Where she was going afterward, she did not know. She only wanted to get far, far away from the memory of Steve's arms about her, his lips on hers, his whispered words of tenderness.

She told herself that even if Steve hadn't found out about Henry, it would have made no difference. When Angela came back from New York, Steve would give up his farming. Angela knew how to manage Steve. Susan only knew how to love him. She would have counted it heaven to follow him through the Belgian Congo, if he had asked her. But her love hadn't even meant enough to him to make him listen to her explanation about Henry. He thought she was a cheap little fraud, flipping from one love to another. Didn't he realize she hadn't known the meaning of love until he held her in his arms?

Vaguely, Susan wondered if people died of a broken heart. But she knew they didn't. The agony inside her would lessen, and some day, when she could stand being alone no longer, she would settle for someone like Henry.

Susan knocked loudly on the front door, but there was no answer. The door was wide open, the screen unlatched. Everything was just exactly as she had left it, except there were fresh flowers in the large bowl on the chest of drawers in the hall.

"Anyone home?" she called as she went through the dining room.

The new occupant must be eager. In the kitchen, a log as big as a tree was catching fire from the kindling that had just been lighted. At least she and the new owners knew the purpose of a fireplace.

The table was set for two, and for a centerpiece was her crazy, silly bowl of carrots and onions and potatoes. Her heart warmed as she realized the new owner was a kindred spirit, whoever he might be. Noting two places set at the

table, she smiled ruefully. He had his own kindred spirit.

Whoever she was, she was no cook, Susan thought, noting in the wastepaper basket the containers for two frozen chicken pies, two frozen cherry pies, and frozen French fried potatoes.

SHE felt a little disappointed in the new tenants, as though they had, somehow, desecrated the kitchen with the frozen foods. Slowly she turned to look about the kitchen. Once she had had dreams in this kitchen, and now only the ghosts of those dreams remained—lonely, sad wraiths of things that never came true. She stood in the middle of the floor on the rag rug, and felt the ghosts all about her, dreams of what might have been, and she and Steve called this kitchen their own.

Two tears overflowed and rolled down her cheeks. She brushed at them quickly, not wanting the new tenant to know the heartbreak that this kitchen held for her. She shivered. It must be the house. It was still casting spells over her. The sooner she got out, the better.

She was in the dining room when she heard a step on the back porch. She turned swiftly back into the kitchen. It was Steve. Her lips formed words, but no sound came. She waited for Angela, and tried to be bright and flippant.

"Fancy meeting you here," she said.

Steve was in no mood for flippancy. He crossed the kitchen and stood before her, his face unsmiling, his eyes holding hers.

"Who did you expect to meet?"

He couldn't be thinking she had connived yet another meeting. Just the nearness of him set her heart trembling and doing strange things. Suddenly she was through playing games. She would lay her cards on the table and then go.

"No one else, Steve. I only wanted to see you here, but Mr. Langley said the new owner asked to see me."

"I'm the new owner."

She should have known Angela would get her pies out of a frozen-food carton. She thought the pain in her heart would crack wide open. "I'm happy for you. Now you won't lose your crops." She tried then to be bright and flip. "To live up to the tradition of this kitchen, Angela will have to do better than using frozen pies."

"Angela had nothing to do with those pies. I'm the cook, unless you want to take over."

She was dreaming with her eyes wide open. This kitchen was doing strange things to her again.

Steve saw her hesitating, not understanding. He said, "I mean the works. Mr. and Mrs., and all that."

"But Angela—" she whispered, not believing yet.

Steve laughed softly. "A new doctor has moved into town. Angela is going to be very busy introducing him to the proper people. She told me he doesn't like farming."

His arms caught Susan close, and she lifted her face to his, not daring to trust her voice. She didn't want to break the magic spell of the kitchen, which had made her dreams come true.



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BROTHERLY LOVE

By MIRIAM CAVANAUGH

Paula had never let her boss down . . . and she wasn't going to start now, when he was asking her to marry the man of her dreams

PAULA," Mr. Holloway said, tapping his pencil lightly against his right ear, "how old are you? I mean, if you don't mind my asking?"

Although it should have been second nature to answer her employer's questions truthfully, Paula Anderson blinked her gray eyes. "Twenty-four," she said, "but I feel it only fair to advise you, I'm going to start lying about my age when

I reach twenty-five. That will be last Wednesday."

"Twenty-five," Mr. Holloway said thoughtfully, half to himself.

"Twenty-four," Paula corrected. "Does it make any difference?"

"I'll be honest," Mr. Holloway said gloomily. "Have you seen any of these girls my son Drew has been running around—that is, going about with?"

We're taking him on here at the office next week, you know, and frankly he'll be a lot more valuable to the organization as a married man, settled down and all that sort of thing."

"If you're thinking of me," Paula said brightly, smoothing her short dark curls, "being of sound mind and body, I accept, of course. Only have we told Drew yet or anything?"

Mr. Holloway stood up and paced off a small area of broadloom between his desk and the filing cabinet, while Paula watched. As Mr. Holloway's executive secretary she'd known of course that the assistant sales manager's job had been open for a month, but the firm had an unwritten rule about the employment of relatives. She suspected that Drew was just the sort of relative they'd had in mind when the rule had been formulated.

"Don't be facetious," Mr. Holloway said. "You women have a way of getting men into a marrying mood if you want to, haven't you?"

Paula shook her head sadly. "He's not my type," she said. "Or rather, I'm not his. He likes the gay continental sort, the sleek blondes that look well in anything, especially convertibles. The kind that doesn't have to work for a living."

"You see," Mr. Holloway said admiringly, "that's just what I like about you. You've always gotten to the nub of the problem. You've been invaluable here to me, Paula, and you don't know how much I'd appreciate it—"

Paula swallowed. "This is different," she said, "really. Now, Mr. Holloway, surely you know this is different. Frankly, I'd like nothing better. But something strange, call it woman's uncanny intuition if you will, tells me—"

"You've never let me down before," Mr. Holloway said sadly. "Never."

"But you can't do it like that." Paula implored. "He hardly knows me. He's never given me a second look. Of course, every girl in the office has been drooling over him forever, but you just don't match people up like that."

"You've never let me down," Mr. Holloway repeated unhappily, sitting down and resuming tapping his ear. "The truth is, Drew is coming here strictly on trial, you understand, and I very much fear that if he isn't married and settled down with some nice, reliable girl within six months, my partners will rescind the whole arrangement."

Paula winced. There was that word reliable. "I don't know how to do it," she said stubbornly.

"You could make him jealous," Mr. Holloway said hopefully. "Madly, insanely jealous. Men will do anything when they're jealous."

"Mr. Holloway, all that was yesterday," Paula snorted. "Really, it isn't done that way any more."

"Haven't I seen you dining out with a certain young man?" Mr. Holloway persisted coyly. "That fellow from the DeBerry Agency? How about him?"

"Don't be ridiculous," Paula said politely. "Not Gil Moreland? Not good old Gil?"

Paula took her shorthand notebook back to her own office and got to work on the letters Mr. Holloway had dictated, somewhat frigidly, after the close of their discussion. Ever since she'd come to work for Holloway, Spencer and Steele, machine tool manufacturers, she'd seen handsome Drew Holloway in and out of his father's office. Like most of the girls, she'd cast him a hopeful glance or two, knowing the futility thereof. He'd held five jobs that she could count in the past two years, but none of them had seemed to stick.

But to have him dangled before her as a marriage possibility—well, that was something else altogether. Having been orphaned at fifteen, she was well aware of the undeniable advantages of entrenched wealth. She now considered Mr. Holloway's words of wisdom regarding jealousy, and Gil Moreland suspended himself in mid-air in her mind.

He'd worked his way through business college and was now forging ahead nicely at the DeBerry Agency, and he was

really quite good-looking in a rangy, brown-eyed sort of way. Unfortunately, Gil had been in and out of her past since junior high school without earth-shaking results.

It was true, however, that from time to time he'd been known to be moderately attentive.

He was waiting for her at the elevator at five minutes after one, and they were swept along with the crowd pushing its way into the street.

"This is unexpected, to say the least," Gil said, "your calling me like this. Although I must say you're every bit as charming at mid-day as you are by dusk. Where shall we eat?"

"Someplace where we can talk," Paula said. "It was wonderful of you to meet me on such short notice. I hope you weren't busy or anything."

"Not at all," Gil said, leading her to a nearby restaurant where they found a booth in a quiet spot in back. "All I had to do was break an appointment with the president of the company—you know, the one who hands out the promotions. But, for you, anything—"

"I may as well come to the point," Paula interrupted, toying with the sandwich that had been placed before her. "How good are you at making other men jealous?"

Gil halted with a match halfway down from his cigarette, and narrowed his brown eyes at her. "Who, me?"

Paula smiled winningly and blew out the match. "You," she said. "I told you I wanted to ask a favor. I always think of you as a sort of, well, big brother type, and after all, whom else could I ask?"

"Well," Gil observed, "that was neatly put. Is this to be a duel, something involving your honor? Will my life be endangered or anything?"

"Gil, dear," she said, "you've heard of Drew Holloway? What would you say if I told you there is a very good chance, a better than even chance, that I could, with a little encouragement, consider becoming Mrs. Drew Holloway?"

THEIR coffee arrived and Gil measured sugar carefully and stirred with maddening deliberation before answering. "I've never actually thought of myself as your big brother," he said. "Isn't it funny how confused people can get? All the time I thought I was pursuing you with modest, yet steady, success myself?"

Paula laughed gayly. "We've known each other forever," she said, "you and I. You carried my books the day they took the braces off my teeth. We've been through everything."

"I'm only just beginning to see you, however," Gil said, glancing toward the exit, "for the scheming, conniving, plotting female you really are. I couldn't be more disillusioned if my own mother—"

"I knew you'd do it, you darling," Paula said. "The moment Mr. Holloway suggested it, I thought of you first thing."

Gil eased himself toward the edge of the booth, trying to look a little less reliable. "Mr. Holloway suggested this?" he said. "How many people are in on this job? And now that I think of it, what do you want with this playboy type, anyway?"

Since the hour was drawing close to two, Paula resolved to be honest. "It isn't just that he's the best-looking thing I've ever met," she said. She paused, but at Gil's look of wrapt interest she plunged ahead. "There's all that money, all that social position, and all that money, et cetera." She smiled winningly. "This is your chance," she said, "to really do something for somebody."

"You make it sound irresistible," Gil said, "like paying my income tax or something. Look, I must get back to the office, and I might say I'd have been a happier, better person to know if I'd eaten my lunch at the public library. Just give big brother a capsule digest of what he has to do, little sister."

"Make him jealous," Paula said, sighing the sigh of a woman with victory behind her and greener fields ahead. "We'll take care of the rest, Mr. Hollo-

way and I. Just leave it to us."

"Okay," Gil said sadly, "only I hope you know what you're taking on, so don't say I didn't warn you. I can't understand why you want to marry this nit-wit, but if that's the way you see it, who is big brother to complain?"

Paula smiled. "I knew you'd help me," she said. "You're a real duck."

She didn't see Gil for three days, during which time she had ample opportunity to consider the whole situation. When a girl living alone got to be twenty-five, no matter how trim and eye-catching she might still be, the available stock of wealthy sons of first-class families was beginning to run low. You could learn to love those that were left, no doubt, when they were tall and good-looking, without letting their money stand in the way. At least you could try.

Mr. Holloway scheduled a cocktail party Friday afternoon at his suburban residence, and he gladly gave her the afternoon off for preparation. She rushed home to her apartment and whipped out her best low-cut cocktail dress, the one with the sequins down the back, and spent a leisurely hour on her hair.

"Do I hover over you wordlessly, or would it be better if I offered to fight?" Gil asked, as they drove through town on their way to the Holloway estate, where Drew and his father lived alone. "Besides, what makes you so sure you're going to fascinate him at first sight, anyway?"

"A girl can never be *sure*," Paula said. "About all you can do is set it up the best you know how and let Nature take care of the rest. Now, in this case, Mr. Holloway has obligingly invited no other single women under thirty-five, and that condition, together with your obvious adoration—"

"Good heavens," Gil groaned, "I can see that the trap is well baited. Well, happy hunting. I only hope you don't fall flat on your darling little face."

"Do not fear," Paula replied smugly. "I never have."

When they arrived the cocktail party

was in progress, the elder Mr. Holloway having chosen wisely among maiden ladies on the fading side, and well-fed business acquaintances with little or nothing to lose. At six o'clock sharp Paula shed Gil with a brisk dismissal, and by six-fifteen she had allowed herself to be discovered by Drew Holloway. He was just as handsome and curly haired as she remembered him, with all the boyish charm of a well-tanned thirty-year-old playboy. In a matter of minutes he had successfully manipulated her out onto the terrace.

"What are you doing here, you ravishing little thing?" Drew inquired, crinkling his blue eyes at her and plying her with a martini. "Haven't we met somewhere before, under livelier circumstances?"

"You seem familiar," Paula said. "You really do. Have you ever been in Bangkok?"

"As a matter of fact I never have," Drew said, appraising her with a glistening smile. "But that hardly matters. Time and place lose significance in the presence of loveliness like yours. Let's sit somewhere where we can get to know each other, really *know* each other."

She allowed herself to be backed into a compromising corner of the terrace, with only a fleeting glance in the direction of the study, where the cocktail party was plodding bleakly ahead. Gil was nowhere in sight.

"There's something about you," Drew went on, his face inches from hers in the twilight, "that's hauntingly familiar. Nostalgic." He crinkled the corners of his eyes at her again and brushed a kiss against her bangs. She leaned backward, hoping to sway tantalizingly out of reach, but there was no back to the stone garden bench on which he had deposited her.

"Don't resist me like this," he said, practically breathing on her sequins. "Don't you feel that this is bigger than both of us? Stop fighting it, my dear."

There was no place to set down her cocktail glass, no place further to lean,

and she was obviously in over her head. This was too soon to be plied with Holloway kisses. But, right on schedule, Gil appeared in the doorway. She could just see him over Drew's left shoulder, and she signalled frantically for aid.

"I beg your pardon," Gil said politely, approaching and tapping Drew on the arm. "I'm looking for somebody, and I wondered— Ah, Paula, *there you are!*"

Drew turned around. "Who the devil do you think you are?"

"Come along, darling," Gil said, taking her by the arm. "How many times have I told you not to get involved like this, hmmm?"

Holloway stepped between them. "Now, see here," he began, but that's as far as he got. A small group was beginning to collect in the doorway and Gil raised his voice just enough to be heard all over the house.

"Didn't I warn you about this?" he said to Paula. "Didn't I tell you if it ever happened again I'd knock your crazy block off?" They had the place to themselves after that. The watchers in the doorway parted neatly and let them pass, Gil towing her firmly by the arm.

In the car, Gil turned to her proudly. "There you go, chick," he said. "How was that?"

"You oaf," Paula choked. "You absolute loathsome oaf. How could you?"

"Did I do something wrong?" Gil said, buzzing the motor and pulling out of the Holloway drive. "It looked swell to me."

"You've just about ruined it, that's all," Paula wailed. "I thought you knew what I meant."

"Never summon a man to do a boy's job," Gil said, his face conveniently unreadable in the darkness. "Besides, that clown is even more offensive than I remembered him."

"He's rich," Paula said in a strangled voice. "Remember, rich as in money? And his poor dear father—"

"Never mind his father," Gil went on, warming to his subject. "I don't like this guy's looks. He breathes too heavy."

"He'll probably inherit a whole third

of Holloway, Spencer and Steele, that's all. Who cares about his respiration, I'd like to know?"

Gil raised an eyebrow. "I can't stand men with lopsided smiles," he said. "I should have told you that. But if you need me again, just let me know. Just once more, shall we say, for the old school tie?"

"IT'S going fine," Paula said, "just fine. No thanks to you, though." It was a Saturday morning a week later, and she had been modeling a fetching new blue bathing suit before her mirror when Gil phoned. "As a matter of fact, he's taking me swimming at the Surf Club this very afternoon."

"It figures," Gil said. "You always were the undiscourageable type. Do you need any help? I could come along. I'm a member, you know. As a matter of fact, I could bring a friend or two."

"Now there's an idea," Paula said warmly, suddenly seeing herself in her mind's eye surrounded by three or four men all admiring her petite figure in the blue bathing suit. "You just might have something there, if this time you'll really promise to behave."

Shortly after lunch Paula and Drew Holloway, resplendent in tan and swimming trunks, were sharing a cool drink at a table at the pool's edge when Gil Moreland approached with what was obviously a very good friend. So good, in fact, that Gil held her chummily by the arm. She was tall, she wore a strapless pink linen dress, she was blond, she was ravishing. "Good afternoon, friends," Gil said. "Mind if we sit down?"

"But—" Paula began, remembering just in time not to stand up.

If there was anything that did not become a five-foot-four brunette by comparison, it was a five-foot-eight blonde. They sat down. Conversation stopped at at least four adjoining tables while the men there stared, open-mouthed.

"Miss Crystal Aldrich," Gil said. "My friends, Miss Anderson and Mr. Holloway." He reached around Drew to wave

fondly at Paula.

"How do you do?" Drew said, breathing heavily. "Haven't we met somewhere before, Miss Aldrich, under other circumstances?"

Miss Crystal Aldrich smiled slowly, displaying pearly white teeth and a dimple. "I've have remembered," she said huskily, "wouldn't you?"

"You dog," Paula mouthed at Gil silently. "You absolute dog."

"Beautiful day," Gil said, swiveling around to have a look at the sky. "Wouldn't you say so, Crystal? *Crystal!*" Crystal was dimpling at Drew Holloway, who was responding with the well-known lopsided Holloway smile. He seemed to have forgotten Paula's existence.

"That's a darling bathing suit, Miss Anderson," Crystal said exuberantly, not being beyond knowing that the subject needed changing. "It looks just darling on you."

"Thanks," Paula said. "That's a jolly little outfit you're wearing yourself. Don't you think so, Gil?"

Gil folded his arms thoughtfully and placed them on the round metal table, nearly colliding with Drew, who was continuing to stare moodily at Crystal Aldrich. "Don't let us keep you out of the water, you two," he said heartily. "Crystal doesn't like swimming, do you, Crystal?"

"It's so athletic!" Crystal cried distastefully. "Don't you think swimming is awfully *athletic*, Miss Anderson?"

"I've got it—Florida!" Drew said suddenly. "Were you in Florida last winter, Miss Aldrich? February, at Miami Beach?"

"Oh, I just love Florida!" Crystal Aldrich said enthusiastically. She fairly sparkled with fervor. "It's so continental. Miss Anderson, don't you think Florida is awfully continental?"

And then they were all looking at Paula, all three of them. Her blue bathing suit seemed suddenly inadequate, and, in the presence of Crystal Aldrich's pink-linen-type-delicacy, it was inescap-

ably athletic. It was a little like being caught in the parlor in your gym suit. They were waiting for her to say something. Paula decided to quit.

"I quit," Paula said loudly. "I've had it, dears. Furthermore, I've never been to Florida, but I'm just sure it's absolutely darling." She stood up, almost five foot four and a half in her sandals. "And now, if you'll excuse me—"

It was doubtful whether Drew even knew she was leaving, and if Miss Aldrich was aware it was purely academic. Paula was halfway to the clubhouse when Gil caught up with her. "They didn't even know I left," he said sympathetically, catching her by the hand. "I'm not the continental type either."

"I'll never forgive you," Paula said, wrenching her hand free. "Never, never, never."

"When you unravel enough to remember your locker key," Gil said, falling into step beside her, "I've got it right here in my hot little palm. You left it on the table. Also your purse, which I just happen to have along with me too." She stopped then, trying not to think of how awful it would be if she'd had to go back to that drooling scene at the pool-side table. "You can have them both," Gil went on, "if you'll let me take you home. Meet you by the terrace in fifteen minutes?"

He didn't drive directly back to town. He took her around the long way instead. "Big brother warned you," he said soberly. "But you wouldn't listen, would you?"

"I'm just beginning to realize that the only mistake I really made was confiding in you."

For a moment he didn't speak, and when he did his tone had changed. "Go ahead, ask me," Gil said, "why I'm doing my best to louse up your future."

Paula glanced at him, but she could see only his half-turned profile. "I hoped we'd get to that," she said coldly.

"I want to be first in line myself, that's why. I've wanted to ever since they took the braces off your teeth, as a

matter of fact."

She was incredulous. "You?" she said.

He looked at her then, and she saw that he meant it. "Corny, isn't it?" Gil said. "I don't have half a million dollars and probably never will, and I don't even have curly hair." He paused. "But I do love you."

"Take me home," Paula said in a small voice. "Absolutely immediately. Home."

THE following three days went from bad to worse. Paula took to staying home and letting the telephone ring. She'd never been so confused in her life, and there was no sense talking to anybody until she'd figured it out. Even when Drew Holloway called twice she morosely refused to talk, and she began taking long solitary walks after dark.

On Tuesday evening she relented to social pressure and consented to spend the evening in town for dinner with her best girl friend, Betty Collins. Betty seemed bent on eating in a gay spot usually frequented only on dates, but Paula was beyond caring. She was looking into a bleak future with little to comfort her but meager annuities.

"Paula, dear," Betty said over the consume, "isn't that someone you know over there? The one with the delicious blonde? Doesn't it look like Gil Moreland?"

It not only did, it was. Paula stared. Crystal Aldrich of the darling exclamations was with him, and Gil was smiling sickeningly across the table at her. Crystal wore black-and-gold lace cut low, and had her hair tied back in a devastating bun.

"They deserve each other," Paula said between her teeth, but feeling unexpectedly weak. "Don't speak to them."

But Betty was already waving. "Hello there, Gil. Paula, dear, Gil sees us."

"I feel ill," Paula said. "Do you mind if I crawl under the table awhile?"

"They're coming over, Paula, so you just sit up. I wonder who that ravishing creature with him is? Did you ever see anyone so—"

"Absolutely darling?" Paula said. "No, I never did. Look, I've been through this bit once, so do you mind playing it solo?"

But it was too late. "Hello there, girls," Gil said heartily, escorting Crystal to their table. "You two look lonesome. What's the matter—running short of men at your age?"

"Don't be poisonous," Paula said. "We just want to be alone. How do you do, Miss Aldrich. That's a perfectly darling—"

"I didn't know you," Crystal Aldrich cut in, "without your bathing suit."

Touché," Paula said. That's one on me, isn't it?" She gathered her gloves and bag. "I just remembered a previous engagement," she said. "Are you coming, Betty, or would you rather I never spoke to you again?"

"Goodbye, you all," Gil said. "So nice running into you like this. I do admire girlhood friendships that stand up over the years. Don't you, Crystal?"

Crystal Aldrich's scintillating reply was lost in the wake of their departure.

It didn't take much more than the next two weeks for the elder Mr. Holloway to make it abundantly clear to his son just what he had in mind. With retirement only a few years away for him, the Holloway fortune stood in jeopardy without a settled-down heir to take over its care. Mr. Holloway did not have in mind any brainless blondes as custodian.

It was pretty much arranged, finally, over a threesome dinner at the Holloway home. If Paula felt like the third party to an extortion plot, it hardly mattered. She'd been on her own so long that she figured one might as well arrange a marriage on a businesslike basis as any other. Weren't the divorce courts jammed with true love matches that had somehow curdled?

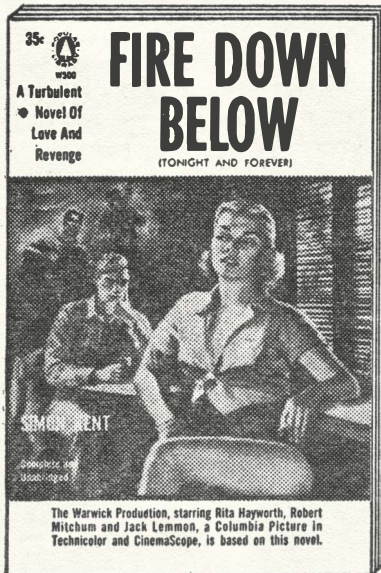
"I certainly do envy you," Betty Collins said heartily as they shopped for linens and the like on their lunch hour. "Having the fortitude to make such a brave choice."

(Continued on page 74)

" FIRE DOWN BELOW "

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Paula said waspishly, "What brave choice?"

"Oh, between love and—well, position."

It was a dismal day, the kind when all remarks made by well-meaning friends seem unfortunate. "Would it help any if I told you I haven't the faintest idea what you're talking about?" Paula inquired coldly.

"Don't be coy with me, Paula Anderson," Betty said sharply. "You've been in love with Gil Moreland since you were fourteen, only you've been pretending not to know it."

Paula opened her mouth to cry stern denial, but it didn't quite come. And then she remembered Crystal Aldrich, and the unreliability of men who declaim undying devotion and the very next week are seen in gay night spots with blondes of questionable intentions.

"I refuse," she said stubbornly, "to let Mr. Holloway down."

"All right," Betty said. "So be it. Hallelujah and Amen."

The engagement party was scheduled at the Holloway home, on a Sunday evening two weeks later. Early that morning the telephone woke Paula from a fitful slumber. It was Gil Moreland. "Can you meet me downtown," he said, "for a conference? This is important to your future. I have news."

"Ha!" Paula snorted. "The dark, older menace my astrologer has been warning me about. No, thanks all the same."

"Honey, you can't afford to be without this information," Gil said. "How about that little spot where you first revealed your daring plan to me? Twoish?"

All the way downtown Paula scolded herself for keeping the appointment at all. The realization of her hopes, the security of her future, were only hours away, and here she was heading by cab for a dubious engagement in a dim little bar on a Sunday afternoon. It didn't make sense.

"This doesn't make sense," she said, as she came up to their booth. Gil was waiting in the semi-darkness, smiling

expectantly, but she thought he looked a little wan. It served him right.

"Sit down," Gil said. "You're looking mighty fair this p.m. for a lass who's just turned twenty-five."

"We'll skip all that," Paula said, perching opposite him in a tentative position. "Let's get down to business. Why am I here?"

Gil said abruptly, "I've just been made a full partner in the DeBerry Agency. It means an extra two thousand a year to start." He paused, all the humor going out of his face. "Doesn't that influence you at all, Miss Gotrocks? I'm hardly as sodden rich as Drew Holloway, but I'm on the bottom rung and struggling up." He tried to smile, and something wrenched at her heart.

IT WAS almost more than she could stand, seeing him look at her hopefully like that. She thought of Mr. Holloway and Drew, and third interests in corporations, and the large estate in the suburbs. The enormity of the Sunday evening spectacle ahead of her suddenly loomed in her mind. What had she gotten herself into? Why had she ever called in Gil Moreland anyway? Why hadn't she handled it her own shrewd self, the way any wise orphan should?

Marriages were not made in heaven, no matter what the story books said, and neither perhaps was love. And then she looked at Gil again, and a kind of dawning realization of why she had come here, and how she had come to call upon his aid in the first place, began to infiltrate her mind.

I won't have it that way, she thought desperately, and without a word she got up and began to walk away. Outside the little restaurant, she began to run as fast as she could, and then she began to walk again, more slowly. A long time later she was a little shocked to see her reflection in a department-store window. Her face was streaked and dirty where tears had smudged it.

She thought of what Betty Collins had said about having loved Gil for ten years,

and she began to cry again. She walked for two hours through the quiet city streets, careful to keep from heading for home. She could close her eyes and hear the telephone ringing in the empty apartment, but she knew now she wasn't going to the Holloways at all. It was late afternoon before she finally came back to the little restaurant and made her way through the darkness toward the back. Gil was still there.

"I almost gave you up," he said. In another four hours I would have left."

"I'm sorry," Paula said contritely. "But I had to come back to tell you I have no intention of being bartered. After all, I do have my pride."

"Well, thank heaven for that," Gil said. "Sit down and have a meat loaf sandwich. That's all they serve in this dismal spot. Meat loaf, meat loaf, meat loaf."

"I simply want you to know it isn't the money, not any more. That is, *your* money, I mean."

"Of course not," he said. "You came back because of my sterling character, my good looks, and my obvious determination not to let you go through with marrying Holloway."

Paula nodded her head weakly and sat

down. "Something like that, I think. Or perhaps I just can't remember anybody's ever really wanting me before," she said lamely, "since I was fifteen. I guess I had to get used to figuring everybody's angles, but somehow I overlooked yours." She twisted her handkerchief. "Gil, I just thought of something. Do you suppose that it's possible I've been in love with you all along—say for ten years?"

He was smiling at her. "Absolutely," he said. "No doubt about it. How could you help it?"

Paula began to cry then, dabbling again at her tear-streaked face. "But Crystal Aldrich?" she said. "What about her?"

He reached across the table to take her cold hands, and enclosed them in his.

"You mean my cousin Mabel Hooper from Peoria, Illinois?" He smiled. "I imported her," he said, "as a final desperate all-out last-ditch measure, a sort of tactical strategy that could not fail. What do you say," he concluded, "if, just to be fair, we give Mabel a chance at changing Mr. Holloway, senior's, mind about her. That Mabel, she's absolutely loaded with brains."



There was a wild longing in Susan's heart for something . . . but she didn't really know what she wanted till she found her

LOVE IN A STORM

A Gay, Romantic Novelette

By **CHRISTINE YOUNG**

Coming in the next issue

RED-HEADED

By MILDRED DAHLGREN

Marilyn was shocked by what she learned about being an artist's model . . . and even more shocked to know she was enjoying it

IT WASN'T the kiss that shocked Marilyn, but the fact that she enjoyed it. She had no right to enjoy it, any more than Charles had a right to kiss her. She was practically engaged to Alvin Noyes.

In fact, she had come to Chicago two weeks before to view her romance with him from a clear perspective, uncluttered by proximity, childhood associations, and the urgings of her friends. She wanted to be absolutely certain that a lifetime with Alvin was what she wanted.

She had not intended to become entangled with a disturbingly handsome artist, who at the moment was kissing her with a technique he'd never learned in art school. Somehow she managed to pull her lips away. Charles smiled down at her, a challenge in his blue eyes. "Now maybe you'll relax," he said.

"I'm quitting," she gasped, avoiding his gaze.

Something strange happened whenever their eyes met. A mysterious thread seemed to spin out from her heart to his, drawing them close.

"Might as well," he agreed, still holding her. "You've done enough posing for one day. We'll go on tomorrow."

Somehow she managed to get out of his arms. She tried to control the fluttering of her heart, but it kept jumping around like a butterfly in a capturing hand.

"I won't be back tomorrow, Mr. Trenet." Deliberately she hung icicles on each word. "You'll have to get yourself

another model."

With a flourish, she removed the enveloping emerald velvet cape she wore over her clothes while she posed. It's rich color brought out the whiteness of her skin, deepened the purple of her eyes, and intensified the flame of her titian hair.

"The name is Charles," he corrected. "And why won't you be back?"

Pushing aside some tubes of paint on a small table, he perched on one edge, idly swinging his foot while he watched her.

"Because I don't believe a man should make passes at a girl he's hired to work for him." She slipped into her beaver coat.

"I wasn't making passes," he said. "I was merely doing what you wanted me to."

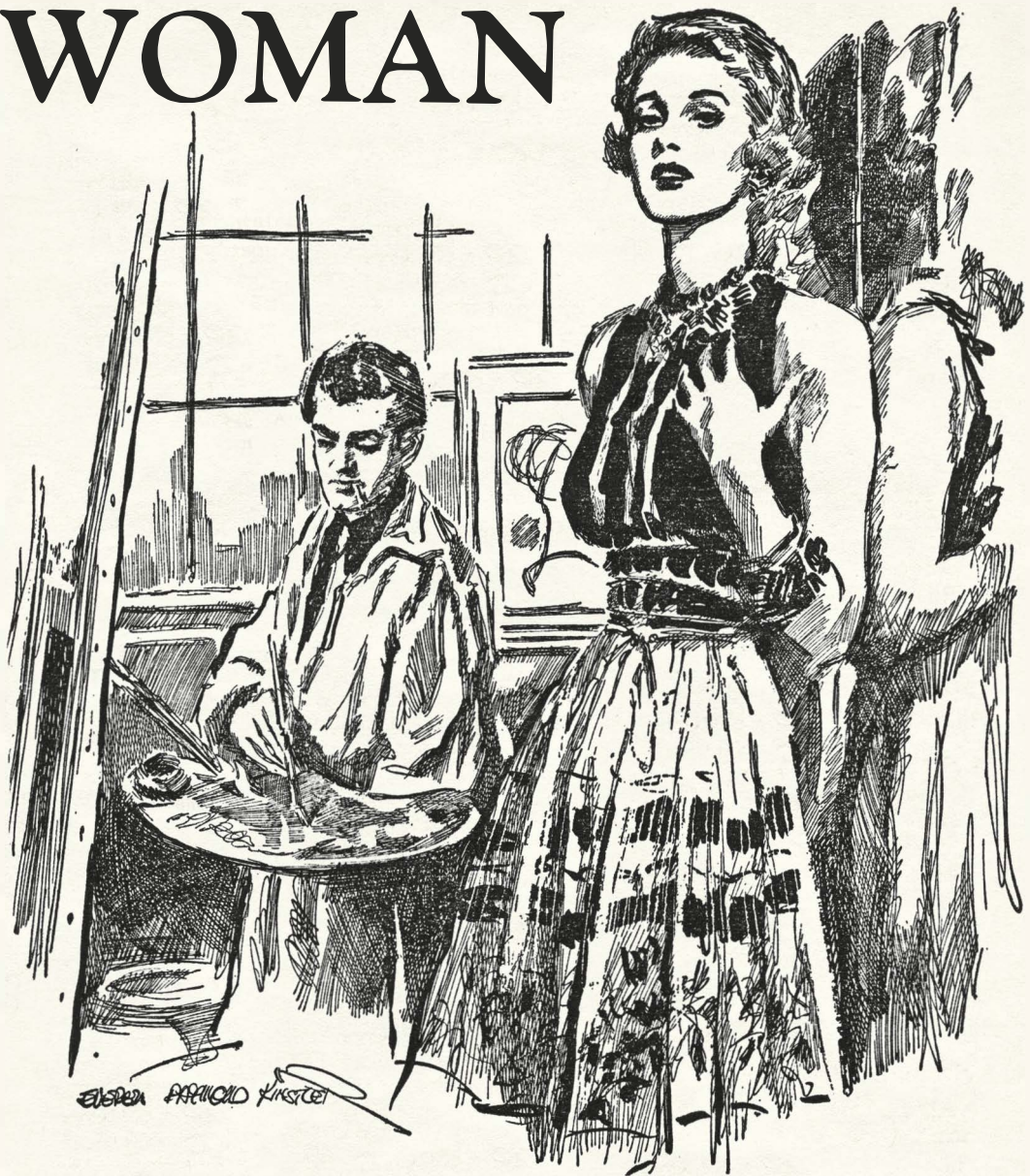
"What I wanted you to!" His words gave her such a jolt she shoved her beaver halo hat over one eye. "Well, of all the nerve!"

"And what I wanted to do, too," he added softly, coming to her and straightening the halo.

His nearness set her heart fluttering again. She tried to think about Alvin, but for some reason trying to recall his image was like peering at a dim object in the bottom of a well.

"I didn't know girls like you existed any more," Charles went on. "You're so fresh and untouched. And you seemed to be harboring the popular notions about the behavior of artists. Every time I came near you I could sense

WOMAN



that you were taking judo position, ready for anything I might try to do."

At his words, she flushed slightly. It was true. Whenever he fluffed her hair from the nape of her neck, as she sat posing, or turned her shoulders with his sensitive hands, she became tense—on guard against him and herself.

He pushed back a lock of dark hair that fell over his forehead. "It annoyed

me at first, then it amused me. I thought I'd behave the way you expected me to. That's why I kissed you. I was only having fun."

"Having fun!" The words cut her. Perhaps he considered her a country bumpkin with whom he could amuse himself. "That settles it." She reached for the door. "Get yourself a model who can appreciate your sense of humor."

Catching hold of her arm, he pulled her back. "Look, Marilyn, you've got me all wrong. I'm just a farm boy from Michigan, whose parents noticed Junior could draw and scrimped to help him develop his talent. Sure I studied in Paris, but that's what I did there—studied. Well, mostly," he amended, under her skeptical stare.

"Anyway, I support my parents, do magazine illustrations for a living, and paint portraits for love. Oh, I have my faults—kissing red-headed girls, for instance. But I don't like them to be mad at me."

She fought the floaty feeling his genial white smile gave her. With an effort, she managed to get both feet on the ground. Then she forced herself to remember that her heartstrings were already tangled with the uncertainty of her feelings toward Alvin. She couldn't snarl them further with the strange emotion aroused in her by Charles.

"I'm not mad at you," she managed to say.

"Good. Then I'll see you tomorrow."

"If you'll remember I was hired to pose for a portrait only."

He held up his hand as if swearing an oath. "Understood."

"And there'll be no more kisses." She was amazed to hear herself utter the words.

Again he raised his hand. The challenge returned to his blue eyes. "No kisses unless you want me to."

Deliberately she gave him a smile without sugar, but somehow, as their eyes met, it sweetened by itself. She heard him chuckle as she slammed the door behind her.

On her way back to her room in a small hotel, she managed to collect her thoughts. She would be glad when this business of posing was over. Not until she was rid of the disturbing influence of Charles Trenet could she concentrate on her answer to Alvin.

SHE remembered the evening, more than two weeks before, when she

told Alvin of her decision to go away for a while before giving him a definite answer to his proposal of marriage.

"I want to be sure I love you, Alvin," she'd said. "I don't want to marry you because our mothers were bridesmaids at each other's weddings and thought it would be cute if their children grew up to marry each other."

"Of course you love me." Alvin had pulled impatiently at the knot in his tie. "I don't know where you got this ridiculous idea of going away. Who'll do the color work while you're gone?"

Alvin was Midtown's only photographer. Marilyn made the appointments and did the photo tinting. If she did say so herself, she was responsible for much of Alvin's success. It was she who had suggested that babies could be photographed otherwise than lying on a bearskin rug, and that brides could be photographed showing some of their happiness, instead of staring grimly into the camera.

"I've already talked with Luella Carr," she told him. "She was very good at art work when we were in high school together. I'll give her some pointers about the job, and she can take over for a while."

Alvin smoothed his sleek blond hair and frowned. "I still say this is all very odd, Marilyn. Are you sure you're not keeping something from me? I hope you haven't any foolish ideas about having a last fling before you marry me?"

"Are you jealous of me, Alvin? That's a good sign. You know I like you more than anyone I know. But can't we wait a few weeks to decide a lifetime?"

And she did care a lot for him. She had a motherly feeling toward him, a sort of protective affection. But was it the kind of love that made for a lifetime marriage? That was what she had to find out.

"I think a good tonic would help you get rid of those silly ideas," Alvin said. "Besides, what will you do in Chicago. The money your parents left you won't go very far."

"I hear there's a shortage of gun molls," she teased, but Alvin did not smile. "Don't worry," she reassured him. "I'll find a temporary job."

And she had, only it wasn't what she'd expected. When she read the advertisement saying that the well-known artist Charles Trenet needed a girl with genuine red hair to pose for a series of illustrations, she had thought it would be a lark to have someone paint *her* features for a change.

She'd expected to find a bearded codger with a beret, not a tall, dark-haired young man with eyes that teased, and strong arms made to hold a girl against his broad shoulder.

Someone already had been chosen for the advertised job, but Charles had asked Marilyn to pose for a portrait. And here she was, after two weeks, with no definite decision made about Alvin, and Charles kindling a strange warmth in her veins.

Alvin's letters showed that he was becoming impatient about her absence. What would he think if he really knew what kind of "art work" she was doing, she wondered. She'd let him assume it was the same work she'd done in Midtown, because she knew his ideas about artists were those she'd held—until today.

When Marilyn arrived at the studio the next afternoon—she posed from two to four—Charles opened the door wearing the oversized, paint-smearred shirt he used over his clothes instead of a smock.

As she took her usual pose, seated on the small gilt chair, he heaved a mock sigh of relief.

"I had my fingers crossed all day," he said, taking up his brushes. "I was afraid you might not come back."

She returned his smile, wondering why she was so drawn to him. Did he hold such overwhelming charm for all women, or was she falling in love with him?

The thought glimmered like a bright drop of dew on the tip of a blade of

grass. What could she be thinking of? In love with a man she'd known less than two weeks, a man who probably looked upon her as an amusing, naive small-town girl?

Her eyes studied the strong tendons of his wrists, the sturdy column of his throat above the open collar of his shirt. Her heart raced as she wondered if his cheek would be warm or cool against her own.

All at once, panic possessed her. Was she losing her head completely? There was Alvin to consider. Charles could never mean anything to her. She had to get away from him, she thought. The sooner the better as far as her heart was concerned.

She became aware that he was watching her. "What's the matter, Marilyn?"

"Nothing," she replied with effort. "Charles, how long does it take to finish a portrait?"

"It depends on the artist," he replied. "Some could do it in hours; some in days. Others would take even longer. I'm going to take quite a while to do this one."

Quickly she glanced at him, wondering if there was anything significant in his words. But his expression was bland.

"It can't take too long," she insisted. "I may have to leave Chicago soon."

He laid down his brush. "What for?"

"To be married. I told you I'm engaged to a boy back home. He's impatient to set the wedding date. Of course I intend to fulfill my obligation to you as far as the portrait is concerned, but I want to get away as soon as possible."

AS SHE spoke, she felt she was building a wall of security around herself against him. Perhaps it was her indecision that had left her so vulnerable before. She was going to marry Alvin, she told herself firmly. That was that.

"Do you love him?" Charles asked gently.

For some reason, she hesitated to answer.

"If you have to stop and think about it, the answer must be no."

There was a hint of mockery in his voice that put her on the defensive. "Of course I love Alvin," she said deliberately. "I always have."

Did she imagine it, or were his eyes disturbed?

"He doesn't deserve you," Charles said firmly.

"Why, you don't even know him."

"No man who really loved you would let you get this far away from him."

Rising, he came to her and slipped his hand along the nape of her neck, gently lifting her hair. Then he bent over her, one hand on the back of the chair, the other on her hands, which were folded in her lap.

Looking up at him, she felt fire course through her veins. His face was so near she could see her image reflected in his eyes. His lips sought hers in a brief, gentle kiss. She was glad she was seated in the chair, for her body suddenly felt boneless.

"Not mad this time?" he murmured, almost against her lips.

She shook her head, not daring to speak. A tender, half-pleading expression came over his face. His lips parted. But before he could say a word, there was a light knock on the door and someone thrust it open.

A tall brunette with short hair that shone like ebony, and dark eyes that were carefully mascaraed, stepped into the room.

"Nina! I didn't expect you so soon." Marilyn noted the pleasure in Charles's voice as he went to the girl and seized both her hands.

"You know I don't like to keep you waiting, darling." The girl's voice was as cool and smooth as butterscotch sauce over ice cream, as she looked up at him archly.

Even as Charles made introductions, Marilyn recognized her. Anyone who read the newspapers knew of Nina Fox, society girl, patron of the arts, herself a talented amateur painter. The

smart gabardine suit she wore under her mink coat bespoke exclusive design. And the way she linked her arm in Charles's spoke of an exclusive design too.

Marilyn felt a twinge of resentment. But why? What right had she to be jealous of any woman in Charles's life? The sooner she accepted the fact that she belonged to Alvin now, the better off she would be.

"Wait until you hear my wonderful news," Nina was drawling to Charles. "I have a surprise for you about the art student scholarships. Let's go somewhere and have a bite to eat while I tell you. How about Vincenti's." Her cool glance took note of Marilyn, who was slowly drawing on her coat. "Perhaps Miss Davidson would like to come along."

Marilyn did not miss the lack of enthusiasm in the invitation.

"Of course she will," Charles said heartily.

But Marilyn shook her head. "No, thank you. I have to write a letter to my finance." Quickly she left the studio.

Her first impulse was to write at once to Alvin and inform him she was coming home to marry him. But she could not put the words on paper.

She reread his last letter, in which he curtly asked her to come home, and complained at length about Luella Carr. She had committed the cardinal sins of moving his trays about, and opening the darkroom door while he was working.

He added that he expected to be in Chicago shortly to purchase camera supplies. If Marilyn hadn't come to her senses and returned to Midtown by then, he would stop by to see her. That decided her. She would wait and tell Alvin in person of her decision to marry him.

It was late when she prepared for bed. Where were Charles and Nina, she wondered? In some secluded nook? Was Charles giving Nina a gentle kiss, like the one he'd given her? The thought made her want to cry.

The next afternoon Charles was unusually cheerful. While he talked on about some art scholarships he hoped to secure for several talented protegees of his, Marilyn thought dismally that soon these portrait sessions would end and she would never see him again.

All at once he laid aside his brush. Folding his arms, he stood looking at her. His action startled her.

"Why did you stop painting?"

"I'm waiting for you."

She was confused. "For me?"

"Yes, to come back from wherever you are."

She looked down at her hands. What would he say if she told him she was thinking of him? He came to her and lifted her hair from her neck with the familiar gesture that always made her feel weak all over.

"You look pale," he said. "I think you need exercise. A night of dancing, perhaps. How about it? Will you have dinner with me tonight? We can dance somewhere, afterward."

She drew in a deep breath. Why not have one gala night to remember before she settled down for good with Alvin?

"All right," she agreed, rising. "But I'll have to do some shopping. I don't have any dancing shoes."

He gave her a brief hug that left her breathless, not because of the pressure of his arms, but because of his nearness. "Get yourself two pairs," he said. "You may need them."

SHE made a quick trip to a smart shop, where the smiling saleslady removed a particular gown from the window. Then she went to a shoe store, where she felt like Cinderella, when a lovely pair of silver sandals fitted her small foot. There was time afterward to relax in clouds of perfumed pink bubbles. Then came the final ritual of make-up and grooming.

The results were worthwhile, she knew, when she opened the door for Charles, handsome in his white dinner jacket. She saw the swift admiration

in his eyes as they traveled over the filmy black chiffon gown, worn over a satin slip with a heart-shaped bodice. Her white shoulders gleamed through the filmy top. The rest of the gown needed only the drama of her shapely figure, and the startling contrast of her titian hair.

"If I'm late, blame your eyes," Charles said, advancing into the room and offering her a small florist's box. "I hunted everywhere until I found their double in color."

Puzzled, she opened the box, then gave a cry of delight. In it were violets, deep purple ones mingled with blues. Violets, at this time of year! She'd never had anything so beautiful.

Once Alvin had given her a corsage—what kind of flowers she couldn't remember—tied with great quantities of silver ribbon. But it had been nothing like this. Lightly she brushed the velvet petals across her lips.

"Shouldn't that kiss be for me?" Charles asked, his voice full of meaning. "Here, let me pin the flowers on you. Where do you want them, at your waist?"

When she nodded, he seated himself on the edge of the sofa and drew her toward him. As he fastened the corsage to her gown, she looked down at his smooth dark hair, at the line of his brows and lashes, his fine straight nose. She longed to draw his head nearer to her heart.

"There we are."

With one hand on either side of her slim waist, he smiled up at her. She looked at his mouth, remembering his kisses. Her own lips trembled eagerly. Hastily she turned to pick up her wrap.

They dined at Raoul's, an expensive French restaurant. Marilyn listened with amused admiration while Charles ordered a formidable sounding dish from the menu. It turned out to be a delicious breast of chicken, sliced and set into a mold of jellied consomme.

She couldn't help contrasting the ease of Charles's manner, and the pleas-

ure he took in his food, with Alvin's fussiness about what he ate. Alvin had what he called a particular stomach, and he was forever following some new diet fad.

What a pleasure it would be to cook for Charles, she thought. He would approve the art and effort his wife put into the preparation of a meal.

His wife! The words chimed in her heart with the beauty of distant church bells. An idea began to stir within her.

Suppose her answer to Alvin was "no." She hadn't committed herself yet, anyway. Could she win Charles for herself? For the first time she faced the reason for his disturbing influence on her. She was in love with him.

There was a wide difference between how she felt about him and how she felt about Alvin. Her feeling for Alvin was the deep affection a mother has for a child; but she loved Charles in the way a woman wants to love the man she'll marry.

There was only one obstacle. Was Charles in love with someone else? She'd assumed he loved Nina, but she did not know if it were actually so. If she could find out for certain, if she could be sure he was not in love with Nina, then she would have a right to try for his heart. She started as Charles spoke to her.

"You have a glow about you tonight, Marilyn—the glow of a girl in love."

"I am in love," she answered simply. If only she dared to add—with you, Charles.

"Your Alvin is a lucky fellow."

Was there a wistful note in his words, she wondered? Then she caught herself. She had to be careful not to read the meanings she wanted into the things he said.

"Alvin is sweet," she said aloud.

"Love is a wonderful thing," Charles said pensively, covering her hand with both his own. "It can be the most exquisite joy and the most torturing hell a person ever knows."

"Are you speaking from experience?"

she asked, thinking of Nina.

He smiled gently. "Perhaps."

Marilyn decided to take the plunge. She had to know if Charles was in love with Nina. "Miss Fox is a beautiful girl."

"Miss Fox?" he looked puzzled. "Oh, Nina. Yes, she is, and she's a very brilliant girl, too." Marilyn did not miss the enthusiasm that warmed his voice. "She's pretty wonderful, Marilyn. As you know, she and I share the same hobby—securing art scholarships for worthy students."

As he talked on about Nina, the hope in Marilyn's heart died. She had been right the first time; Charles was in love with Nina. The manner in which he spoke of her left no doubt in Marilyn's mind.

"But what about you?" Charles was asking. "What do you hear from your fiance?"

"I expect him in Chicago soon." Marilyn forced a smile. "He's coming to buy some camera equipment. I'll return to Midtown with him then, and we'll be married."

Silence hung heavy between them. Charles made no comment on her words. Why should he, she thought unhappily? He wasn't interested.

When they paused outside her door late that evening, Marilyn felt weak, as if she'd undergone a terrific struggle. And it had been that, pretending to be gay, chattering about Alvin and their future together. For Alvin was her future now; there was no doubt of it. The brief wild dream she'd held of winning Charles's heart was over.

IN THE course of the evening, Charles had become moody and introspective. His usual smile and easy repartee were missing. She wondered if he regretted the impulse that had made him ask her to go out with him. She looked up at him, then turned her eyes away. She had to hold back on the line that drew them together, even if it cut her heart in two.

He's going to kiss me, as he'd kiss any girl at the end of a date, she thought, as she sensed him draw nearer. But she did not resent it. She wanted him to kiss her. She knew this kiss would be a final good-bye. She accepted the fact completely.

The next day, as the time drew near for her to go to the studio, she made no move to leave. She couldn't bear to see Charles again. Of course she ought to call him, tell him of her decision not to come to the studio again. But what excuse could she give? Obviously she couldn't say, "I can't work with you, Charles, because I love you too much."

The shrill of the doorbell cut into her tortured thoughts. Slowly she went to the door. Alvin stood on the threshold. He kissed her, a brief touch of the lips. She couldn't help but remember the fire that coursed through her when Charles took her into his arms.

"How did you get here, Alvin?" she stammered, unable to think of anything else to say.

"I wrote you that I was coming to Chicago for camera supplies. I thought I'd do it today. I've already done my buying. Now I have four hours to kill before train time. Are you coming back with me?"

For a moment, words refused to pass her lips. Then she said, "Perhaps I am."

"Good," he replied. "I need you. You should see the mess Luella Carr has made of the color work. She makes the brides look like painted women."

Oh Alvin, Marilyn wanted to cry, why don't you tell me you need me because you love me. Charles would have.

Alvin's eyes were surveying the room. "Why didn't you stay at a women's club?" he demanded. "These places aren't safe for an unchaperoned girl."

In spite of herself, she laughed. "Why, Alvin you make me feel as if I've been smuggling a man in here."

"I don't think that's funny," he said frowning.

"Have you had dinner?" she asked, feeling as if she were dealing with a

child. "If not, there's a good restaurant near here where we can eat."

"If you're sure it's clean," he agreed. "I'm rather hungry."

As she slipped into her wraps, Marilyn thought of Charles. She was due at the studio now. What would he think when she didn't arrive? For some reason she was reluctant to call him in Alvin's presence. Was she afraid she might betray her feelings toward Charles in front of Alvin.

At the restaurant, Alvin surveyed the menu and ordered a dish of carrots, some dry toast, and tea. "I hope these are canned," he confided as he buttered the carrots. "I don't trust these city restaurants."

Marilyn picked at her salad. She couldn't help contrasting this dinner with the one she'd shared the night before with Charles. She faced the fact that in marrying Alvin she would be acquiring a husband who would also be like a child to her, a child she would have to coddle and pamper.

Afterward they went to a movie. Alvin fell asleep. He never could stay awake at a movie, Marilyn remembered. At five o'clock they reentered the hotel.

"You've had a half-dozen calls from a Mr. Trenet," the man at the desk informed her.

Marilyn's heart gave a painful lurch. Charles must be wondering why she hadn't arrived. She should have called him; it would have given her one last chance to hear his voice.

"If he calls again," she told the man at the desk, "tell him I've checked out. I'm returning to Midtown with my fiance."

Back in her room, she began slowly to pack, while Alvin waited. Once she paused in her reluctant movements to study him. She noticed how stiffly he sat. His body seemed to square off in the angles of the chair. Charles, she remembered, was always relaxed in his movements.

But she mustn't think of him—no, not even when she gently folded the lovely

gown she'd worn especially for him the night before. The soft silky stuff slid from her fingers as someone knocked on the door, then rang the bell. Alvin got up to answer.

"Where's Marilyn?" she heard Charles's voice demand. "Who are you, a doctor?"

Not giving Alvin a chance to reply, he thrust past and came to Marilyn, who was too stunned to move. "Are you all right?" he asked, grasping her by both arms. "When you didn't come to the studio, I tried to locate you, but that fool at the desk didn't know what had become of you."

Was it possible he was concerned about what happened to her, Marilyn wondered unbelievably. Then her quick pulse slowed. Naturally he was upset by her failure to show up. She was the model for the portrait he was painting. She had disrupted his work.

"I'm sorry, Charles," she said. "I was having lunch with Alvin."

"As long as you're all right, you're forgiven." He smiled down at her cheerfully. Then her words seemed to register. "Your fiance?" He turned to look at Alvin.

Alvin was staring at Charles with undisguised hostility. "Who, may I ask, are you?" he demanded.

"My name is Trenet." Charles held out his hand. "I'm the artist Marilyn's been posing for."

Alvin made no move to shake hands. His eyes flashed from Charles to Marilyn. "Artist? Posing? You didn't tell me you were posing?"

Marilyn could see the gaudy images that were forming in Alvin's mind. "Don't worry, Alvin, it was respectable. I've been posing for a portrait."

"If it was so respectable, why didn't you write to me about it?"

She knew he was suspecting the worst. "Because I knew you'd misunderstand, as you're doing now."

"Perhaps I'm just beginning to *understand*," Alvin corrected emphatically, his eyes measuring first her, then

Charles. "I know about artists." He spoke the word as if it weren't quite decent. "Did he make love to you?"

Marilyn was silent.

"Of course I made love to her," Charles spoke up unexpectedly. "More than once. How could I resist her?"

Swiftly she glanced at him. How could he speak so lightly of the kisses he'd given her? But then, they'd never meant to him what they meant to her.

"I suspected something was going on," Alvin said coldly. "That decision of yours to come to Chicago seemed very strange, Marilyn. I understand it now. You wanted to live this bohemian life with an—artist. I won't be able to forgive you for this."

Marilyn's red-head temper had begun to simmer. Now it burst forth. "Then don't forgive me, Alvin. Go back to Midtown alone. Marriage between us would be a terrible mistake. Of course I let Charles make love to me. Why shouldn't I? I love him more than anyone else in the world."

Alvin drew himself up. "In that case, Marilyn, I'll say good-bye." With a final outraged glance, he stalked out.

Marilyn did not dare to look at Charles. What was he thinking? She gave a little gasp as his hands turned her face to him.

"Did you mean what you said, Marilyn? Are you in love with me?"

She couldn't deny it. "Please don't laugh at me," she faltered. "You know what it means to be in love. You love Nina."

"Nina? Where did you get that idea? The only love we share is a mutual love of art. Oh, Marilyn, I've been in love with you since that first kiss I gave you. But I didn't have the right to tell you, when you were planning to marry someone else. I can tell you now, though."

He slipped his hand along the nape of her neck and gently lifted her hair. "I love you, Marilyn," he murmured.

"And I love you," she whispered.

The mysterious thread between them drew their hearts together.

TEST YOURSELF!



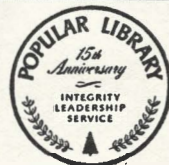
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Party Lines



LET'S GIVE a party! The fall brings a wonderful season of brisk, invigorating weather, gay colors, and many holidays—all in all, it's a fun time to give parties. Whether you decide to have a casual get together of the girls, or a formal dinner party, put your best foot forward. You can have everyone talking about the wonderful time they had at your affair—if you plan it right.

Simplicity is the key word in entertaining today. The difference between a successful and an unsuccessful party is the fun your guests have, not the splurge you've made. The atmosphere must be casual and free, not stiff and formal. Make your guests feel at home, in a comfortable and easy manner. Keep in mind that entertaining is simply a way of showing your friends hospitality. Remain within your budget, and don't try to outdo your more affluent friends. You will be more at ease if you're not busy trying to show off.

Parties are usually spoken of as being "tossed, given, or thrown." Using these casual words implies that parties are gay accidents which happen every so often and are always fun—without fail.

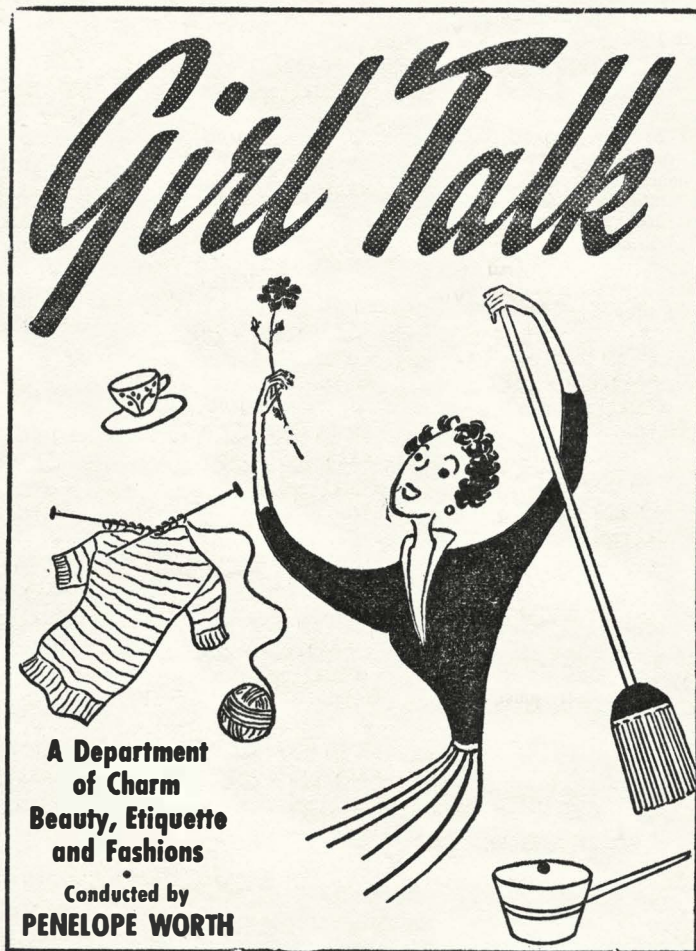
Nothing could be further from the fact, as anyone who has given parties well knows. Successful affairs are almost always planned down to the last detail. The catch is that you have to put a meticulous plan into motion and then let it work it itself out while you keep a relaxed, carefree attitude.

All parties start with guests. Spend time and thought on your guest list, for the congeniality of the people you invite will have a great deal to do with the success or failure of your party. If you're having a sit-down affair, place your guests in a manner con-

ducive to good fellowship. For example, loyal supporters of one political group should not be seated next to advocates of another group, or your evening may become a political debate.

Food is a must at all parties. A formal dinner usually leaves the hostess lost between the kitchen and the dining room, missing most of the interesting conversation at the table. The buffet dinner, if you have more than two guests, is a work saver and a social blessing. You will find food suggestions for different kinds of parties mentioned later on in the column.

Last but not least, beverages set the tone for the evening. If cocktails are to be served, check to be certain that all ingredients, glasses, and the necessary embellishments—



such as olives, cherries and lemon peel—are on hand. For larger groups, punch is favored. This makes for a saving in motion (you'll only have to refill the punch bowl a few times during the evening) as well as in the pocketbook region.

Here is a good check list for party planning, which will help you avoid the more obvious pitfalls.

1. Choose a date well enough in advance so the people you really want can come. You don't want to be stuck with guests called in as "last minute" fillers.

2. Decide on whether the meal is to be formal or buffet style, what drinks are to be served, and what you'll need in the way of glassware, dishes, and other accessories to enjoyment.

3. Establish a budget that is within your means, and try to stick to it as faithfully as you stick to your guest list.

4. Set up an intelligent timetable which, while not set to the minute, will, nonetheless, avoid your having to serve dinner an hour late, or your not being ready to receive your guests.

5. Make your choice of food, music, and other embellishments of the evening on the basis of your knowledge of your guests' taste.

6. An after-dinner-party hostess should be ready when the guests arrive. Punctual guests should not have to "kill time" because their hostess is guilty of bad schedule planning.

7. Remember that a cup of good, hot coffee is an excellent finale to an enjoyable, well-spent evening.

The rest is up to you, your guests, and the spirit of the evening.

—And Be Merry



THE FOLLOWING may help you decide what type of party to have, what to serve, what to wear, and what to do.

Most people adore "little" cocktail parties, and they are almost no work for the hostess. If you're having one, prepare a few tasty spreads and put them in small dishes or bowls set out on a table. Crackers, potato chips, popcorn and salted nuts should also be handy. Have either small individual trays or cocktail plates (bread-and-butter size) cocktail napkins, and bread-and-butter

spreaders, on the table with the spreads.

This will enable your guests to help themselves to everything, and have as much or as little as they wish. Canapés or hors d'oeuvres may be served, if the hostess wants to prepare them, but they are not required. Cocktails—and soft drinks and fruit juices for non-drinking guests—may be passed by the hostess. Or ingredients may be placed on the table, so guests can mix their own.

When only a small number of guests have been invited, it is customary for them to stay for the entire length of the party—usually from five o'clock to seven. At a small gathering you probably won't have to worry much about your guests mixing, as they will most likely know one another. Dress for little cocktail parties is optional—afternoon dresses or casual clothes.

The large cocktail party is usually given between the hours of six and nine. Your guests may remain anywhere from half an hour to an hour and a half, and they'll usually congregate in small groups to talk. As the hostess, it's up to you to see that guests mingle, so no one feels left out.

A good selection of drinks should be available, and a cocktail napkin should be given to each guest with his glass. Fancy hors d'oeuvres and canapés should be passed around frequently by the hostess. This chore gives you the opportunity to circulate and see that your guests are meeting one another, and everyone is happy.

You can really go all out in your dress for this type of party. A sleek and sophisticated cocktail dress or a fancy party dress is perfect. Use all the make-up tricks you know, and have your hair done in that ultra fashion you've been wanting to try.

Hen Party



IF YOU'RE entertaining the gals from your bridge club or church group, a buffet is wonderful. The preparations can be made in advance, and then you'll be free to join the gossip session. Your only responsibility as a hostess will be to see that your guest help themselves to enough to eat.

Cold salads and cold sliced meat, and perhaps one or two hot casseroles, will be fine. Let the gals know you will consider it a compliment if they go back for "seconds." As hostess, you'll be expected to pour the coffee

or tea, and preside over serving the dessert.

Dress will vary according to the time of day. If it's an afternoon affair, casual clothes and suits are fine; if it's a supper, dressier dresses are in order.

An informal but charming way to entertain is having people over for Sunday brunch. You'll serve it between eleven and one. A breakfast-type menu, but a hearty one, is just the thing, as your guests will probably be famished.

A tea is a good way to introduce an out-of-town friend, or a new girl in the neighborhood, to the gang. I don't mean a formal tea, but the kind where you just phone some friends and invite them to drop over at such and such a time. You can serve tea and coffee, small sandwiches, fancy cookies, and petit fours.

One of the best ways to get your crowd together after summer vacation is an open house—which means just that. You open the doors for everyone. This informal entertaining is wonderful fun. It involves lots of chatter and plenty of refreshments. A brimming punch bowl is best for the liquid refreshment. Then your guests can help themselves, if you're busy greeting new arrivals. Sandwiches, cakes, and cookies should be plentiful, for an open house always draws plenty of people.

Fiesta!



AND THEN there are just plain parties! Never feel you need an excuse to entertain—you don't. Parties are a way of doing your friends a favor, and showing them you appreciate their friendship. They are a way of getting everyone together and having fun.

The most interesting parties are not necessarily those that are the most formal, those that cost the most to give, nor those where the most imposing accessories, such as fine china and silver, are used. The best parties are the ones that put guests in a happy frame of mind and give them the most fun. The best hostesses are those who have imagination enough to do unusual things.

Spend time on the theme and decorations for your party. Decorations need not run into great expense. The do-it-yourself trend is definitely still in full swing, when it comes to this! And you don't have to be an artist, either.

For example, if you're giving a party some time around Halloween, add appropriate decorations. It's not kid stuff; seasonal decorations make good conversation pieces.

Start with some black-and-orange construction paper. Design your own black cat. It doesn't have to look like a photograph; your own design may be more amusing. Make some orange pumpkins, cut out your cat and pumpkins, and, using thin sticks and string to hold them together, fashion your own mobiles to hang around the room.

Buy safety matches, cover the boxes with black paper, and put orange pumpkins on them. For a table centerpiece, make a big cone-shaped witch's hat with a large circular brim. Arrange orange, brown, and red autumn leaves (that you've gathered beforehand) around the brim of the hat.

With these few simple steps you've created a Halloween atmosphere, and have given your guests a good conversational ice breaker.

If you'd really like to be an imaginative hostess, give your guests a treat and borrow some ideas from our South American friends. Call it what you will—Pināta, Fiesta, South American Fling—there will be a gay evening in store for all your guests.

Beg, borrow or buy plenty of rumba, cha cha, and tango records. This gives the party a South American air, and the rhythm and tempo will break the ice in no time.

One of the highlights of a pināta party will be the pināta itself. Don't get worried—it's simple to make. A pināta is a painted clay jar, usually in the shape of a fish or a bird. Inside it are many small gifts. The pināta is fastened to the ceiling, and everyone tries to break it with a stick as they walk around blindfolded.

For our fiesta we'll make a mock pināta in the shape of a bird, out of a shopping bag. First cut 4" strips of bright red crepe paper, then cut in the opposite direction, halfway up, to make a fringe. Cover the entire bag, in a circular motion, in this fringed crepe paper.

Make a pattern for wings, and cut two out of black construction paper or lightweight cardboard. Put a row of the red fringed crepe paper around the edge of the wings, and then attach them to each side of the bag with staples or tape. Make a bird's beak out of yellow paper and attach it in front. Cut out two round yellow eyes, put black centers in

them, and attach them just above the beak.

Next cut a long tapering shape out of the black paper you used for the wings, to be used as tail feathers. Cover this with rows of the red fringe crepe paper, and attach to the lower back of our bird. And there you have your North American-style pināta. Fill it with amusing, inexpensive gifts, and hang it from the middle of the ceiling. Your guests will have great fun trying to break it to see what it contains. Naturally, each person will keep the trinkets he has knocked down.

Punch of the Party



AS A THIRST quencher, and to keep the party as authentic as possible, serve Limeade Batida. Here's how it's made.

- 1 can (6 oz.) frozen Limeade concentrate, thawed
- 3 cups water
- 1 package (12 oz.) frozen melon balls, thawed
- 1 pear, diced
- 2 cups cracked ice
- Few drops of green food coloring

Place half the ingredients in an electric blender, cover and blend until smooth. This will yield about six and a half cups, so double and triple to suit your needs.

Not only is this punch delicious, but the mixed fruit gives it a very unusual flavor. Better mix plenty; your guests will no doubt be back for it again and again.

To go along with you Limeade Batida, the perfect thing is *Alfajores*. Translated, that

means "butter cookies." Here's the recipe.

- $\frac{2}{3}$ cup butter or margarine
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 egg
- 2 egg yolks
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2 teaspoons grated lemon peel
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups cornstarch
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
- 1 can (14 oz.) sweetened condensed milk
- 1 cup flaked coconut

Lightly beat together butter and sugar, and egg, egg yolks, vanilla, and lemon peel, and beat until light. Sift cornstarch, flour, baking powder and salt together, and add to butter mixture, mixing well. Work this on a floured board a few times. Start oven pre-heating to 325°F. Roll out dough one-fourth inch thick on board, handling lightly. Cut into one and one-half inch rounds and place on baking sheet. Bake twenty minutes, or until lightly browned, and then set aside to cool.

To make the filling, place condensed milk in the top of a double boiler and cover tightly. Cook over gently boiling water about two and one-half hours, making sure water does not boil out of lower part of boiler. Fill each pair of cookies with condensed milk mixture, and squeeze to make a rim of the filling on the outside. Roll in coconut, and your *alfajores* are ready to serve.

This recipe will make about three dozen cookies.

Bashful Beau

Open wide your arms so strong,

To hold me tight will not be wrong.

Murmur words of love to me,

Make the night grow bright for me.

Let me know, please; don't hold back

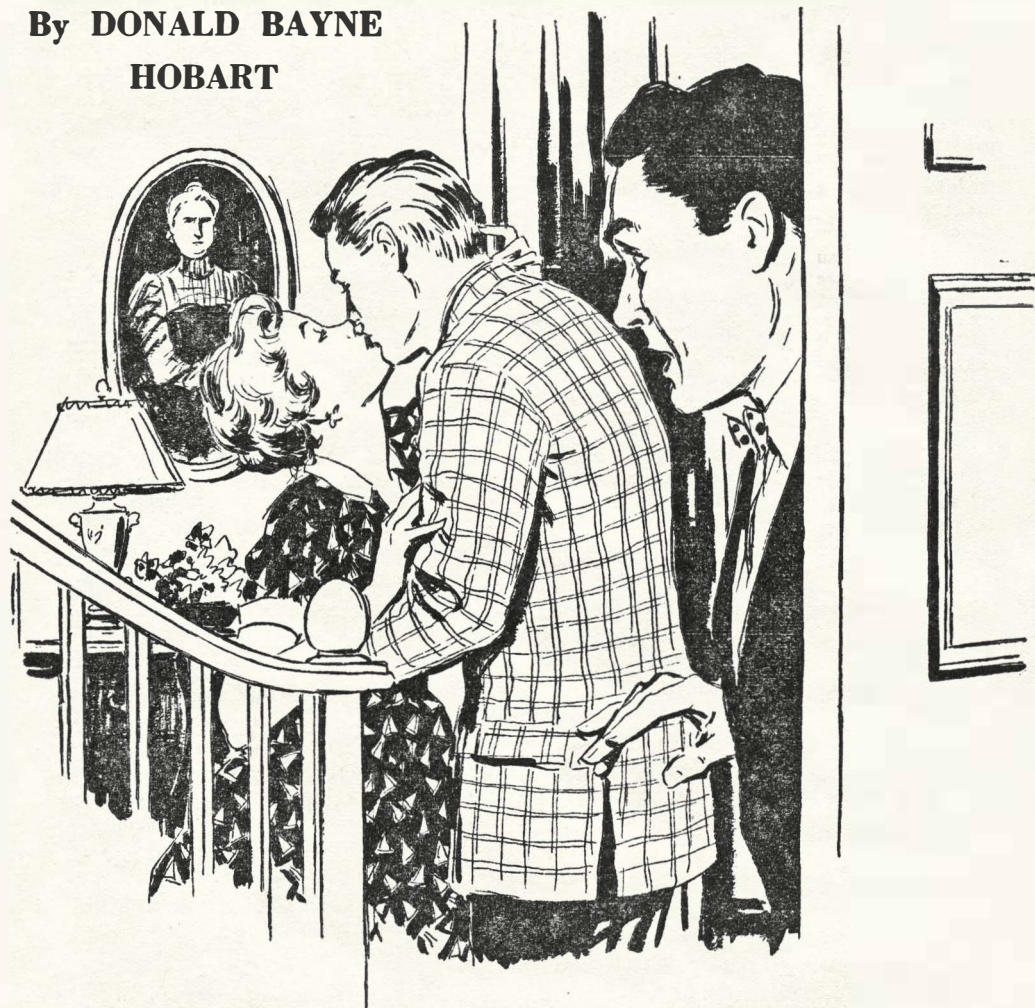
And keep me on this torture rack.

If you love me, tell me so.

Don't, in shyness, let me go.

.....*Florance Williams*

By DONALD BAYNE
HOBART



The MAN for SALLY ANN

SHE sat in the porch swing staring at the deep blue of the summer sky above the Maryland hills, and wishing she were dead. When you are eighteen, reasonably attractive, and haven't had a single date in three weeks, life can be absolutely gruesome. Sally Ann Bradford thought of herself as a forgotten woman.

The family weren't much of a comfort in her deep and baffling sorrow, either. She dreaded dinner at home, when the first question her father always asked was, "Who's the big date tonight, Sally Ann?"

"I haven't a date tonight," Sally Ann would answer. "I didn't make any."

Then her lawyer father would glance



Blake's "secret engagement" was the most public gossip in town!

at her mother with raised eyebrows, as he sometimes did while questioning a witness in court. Her mother would give Sally Ann a worried look, say she seemed a bit washed out, and wonder if she should take a tonic or vitamins. Her brother Hugh always made the meal completely dismal, with the brutal frankness of a fourteen-year-old.

"Sis hasn't a date because no one asked her for one," Hugh would say. "She doesn't rate with the boys any more."

The last time he'd said that, which had been at dinner last night, it had been just too much. Sally Ann nearly started crying, and left the table in a hurry, without waiting for dessert.

Sally Ann glanced up as her mother came out on the porch. Sarah Bradford was a pretty woman, who always dressed well and believed in looking her best at all times. Sally Ann thought her mother was just about perfect. They understood each other to such an extent it sometimes baffled John Bradford and Hugh. Still, men weren't always bright about such things.

"I finally found out what's wrong," Sarah said, sitting down in the other end of the porch swing. "I've just been talking to Nancy North over the phone. You know how she babbles along about her children. Though Nancy didn't come right out and say so, apparently Larry has been spreading rumors about you, Sally Ann."

"What sort of rumors, Mother?"

"That you're secretly engaged to a man you met in Baltimore last winter, before you graduated from finishing school. That's why the other boys have stopped asking you for dates."

"What good does that do Larry?" Sally Ann asked thoughtfully.

She had never liked Larry North much. He was lean, dark and good-looking, and quite conscious of it. He had a way of trying to convince a girl that being with him was the high point in her life.

"You've refused Larry every time he's

asked you for a date recently, haven't you, Sally Ann?" Sarah asked.

"I have. I just don't like him, Mother. I'm not crazy about his sister Lillian, either."

"We'll leave Lil out of this for now," said Sarah. "Larry has to find some excuse for not being popular with a girl. He'd never believe she just didn't like him; his ego couldn't stand it. That's why he's spread the rumor of your being secretly engaged."

"I'm going to deny it," said Sally Ann angrily, "and tell Larry just what I think of him."

"No, you're not," said her mother quietly. "I won't let you, honey. That would be practically begging the men you know for dates. We Bradford women have too much pride for that."

"I guess you're right, Mother. But what can I do?"

"Don't worry." Sarah smiled. "We'll think of something." She suddenly grew thoughtful. "Of course if you really had met a man in Baltimore last winter and could invite him to Cumberland for a visit—"

"But I did!" Sally Ann interrupted excitedly. "Blake Wilton. He gave me quite a rush in Baltimore. I've told you about him. He's awfully nice. He still writes to me, and is always asking when he can see me again. He'll play up, too—about the secret engagement stuff, I mean."

She found her heart beating a little faster as she thought of Blake Wilton. The dates they'd had together in Baltimore still left a bright golden afterglow in her memory. It would be so wonderful to see him again.

"I'll see if Blake will visit us soon," Sally Ann said dreamily. "Really very soon."

"Good," said Sarah, rising from the swing. "It's time I started getting dinner ready. I'll leave the whole thing about Blake Wilton up to you, Sally Ann." She gave her daughter a confident smile. "I'm sure you can handle it."

"I hope so," said Sally Ann, still re-

membering Blake and finding seeing him again something to dream about. "Shall I set the table, Mother?"

"Yes, please."

DINNER was a peaceful meal. John Bradford had a case in the county court, and was too busy talking about it to say anything regarding Sally Ann's dates. Hugh was lost in a world of his own, which didn't interfere with his eating enough for three growing boys.

Afterward the family went to the movies. Sally Ann stayed home, pleading a headache, and called Blake Wilton Long Distance in Baltimore. From his delighted gurgles at the sound of her voice, she felt it was something she should have done more often.

It wasn't hard to talk him into coming to Cumberland for a visit. That this was Friday evening and he was starting his vacation next week was a great help to the whole idea. Sally Ann found her heart singing a gay little song when he made it sound as if visiting the Bradfords was his notion of really living.

Gosh, thought Sally Ann blissfully when she finally hung up, he acts as if I'm still in the big moment in his life. Then she frowned. When he hears there's been talk of our being secretly engaged, what will he do then?

A few minutes later the front doorbell rang and Sally Ann answered it. Lillian North stood there on the porch, tall, dark, pretty, and five years older than Sally Ann.

"Why, Lil," Sally Ann said. "This is a pleasant surprise."

Sally Ann doubted the pleasant part of it, there was no question about its being a surprise. While she and Lil got along all right, they had never been close friends. Lil ran around with an older crowd and was quite popular with the men, both married and single.

"I just had to see you," Lil said, as the two girls went into the living room. "I'm simply dying of curiosity."

"About what?" asked Sally Ann serenely, as they settled down in chairs.

"Why, your engagement. When Larry started looking like a lost sheep, I just had to find out what was wrong. I had to pry it out of him, I mean I actually did. He finally broke down and told me you were secretly engaged to a man in Baltimore."

"Told you with tears in his eyes and quivering lip, of course," said Sally Ann. "If the engagement is so secret, how did Larry learn about it?"

"I wondered about that, too. He said you told him in strict confidence, the last time he talked to you."

"He told you," said Sally Ann sadly. "And I thought I could trust him, that of all the boys I know Larry was the only one who wouldn't betray a confidence."

"Of course he wouldn't," Lil said weakly. "He didn't tell anyone, but me, Sally Ann."

"Then how did the rumor get all over town?" Sally Ann's blue eyes widened. "You didn't say anything, did you, Lil?"

"Certainly not." Lil stared at her. "I don't believe you're really engaged at all. You made up the whole thing. If it's true, I dare you to tell me the name of the man."

"Blake Wilton," said Sally Ann, before she thought.

"Did you say Blake Wilton?" Lil looked as if she didn't feel very well. "Blake Wilton from Baltimore?"

"That's right," said Sally Ann. "Why?"

"It just can't be! Two years ago I met Blake Wilton, and thought he was the nicest man I'd ever known. Of course I was engaged to Carson Rand at the time but—" Lil broke off with a sigh.

"But you thought Blake would be nice to keep around for a rainy day?"

"Well, yes, something like that."

"We haven't had much rain lately," Sally Ann said, dreamily, as she watched Lil get to her feet. "Too bad. Oh, are you leaving so soon?"

"I must run along," Lil said. "I just dropped in for a moment." Brown eyes stared into blue. "When do you expect to see Blake again?"

"Soon," said Sally Ann, as she walked the older girl to the door. "Quite soon."

"Ask him if he remembers me," said Lil, going down the porch steps.

"Of course," said Sally Ann. "If I don't, you will, I'm sure. Nice to see you. Good night, Lil."

"Night, Sally Ann."

Sally Ann watched Lil get into her car and drive away. It was a delightful summer night, with bright stars and the new moon a slender lady in the sky. But Sally Ann didn't spend much time admiring the evening. She realized she had just talked herself into a lot of trouble, if Blake Wilton wasn't willing to pretend they were secretly engaged. Even if he would play along, then what? The more she thought of him, the less Sally liked the thought of just pretending to be engaged to Blake.

MONDAY morning Sally Ann drove to the railroad station in the family car to meet Blake Wilton's train. She parked the car along the platform and sat waiting at the wheel. There was still a little time before the train was due to arrive.

Then she saw Larry North heading toward her, and wished she were somewhere else. Spending the next few minutes in idle chatter with Larry wasn't her idea of a good time.

"Morning, Sally Ann," said Larry, coming over and standing beside the car. "So we're both meeting relatives this morning. I'm meeting my aunt. She's eighty-six, and a spry old girl for her age."

"I didn't say I was meeting a relative," said Sally Ann. "Not even a fourth cousin."

"Are you still trying to keep up that secret engagement stuff?"

"That *you* started. But what I can't understand is how you guessed, Larry. I didn't tell you a thing about it."

"You sure have Lil believing it. She told me about the talk she had with you Friday night. She wouldn't tell me the name of your mythical fiance, though,

Sally Ann."

"That's strange. It's Blake Wilton. I'm meeting him now. He's coming to visit us."

"Oh, sure," said Larry with a grin. "I'll believe that when I see it."

"Then take a good look," called Sally Ann, as Larry moved away.

She got out of the car and stood waiting as the train rolled in and came to a grinding stop. She had picked the right spot, for the car Blake was in halted right in front of her. He stepped off the train, tall, blond, and nice.

Sally Ann looked at him as he hurried toward her, then blinked and looked again. She thought she had forgotten very little about him, but she hadn't remembered Blake's being quite this good-looking.

"Sally Ann!" Blake put down his bag, grabbed her hand, and acted as if he wanted to kiss her, only he never did such things in public places.

"Hello, Blake," said Sally Ann, finding that the way he kept looking at her certainly boosted a girl's morale. "It's mighty nice to see you again."

"I hoped you'd realize what you've been missing." Blake smiled and released her hand. "I have, with just one look at you."

He picked up his bag and they headed for the car, chattering like a couple of magpies. Sally Ann hadn't failed to notice that Larry had been a wilting witness to the whole thing. He was so perturbed he let his aunt get off the train alone and go hunting him along the platform.

"I've never been in Cumberland before," Blake said as they started down the hill at the upper end of Baltimore Street. "It sure looks quaint and pretty."

"We like it here," said Sally Ann.

It was strange, but everything did seem at its best this morning. The church, on what had been the site of an old fort on the hill beyond the town's main street, brooded in the bright summer sunlight. A little patch of fleecy cloud's hung above the hills of the town

and the mountains beyond.

Sally Ann didn't hurry in driving the length of Baltimore Street. She saw too many people she knew, and she wanted them to see her with Blake. They would know he was a stranger, and that Sally Ann Bradford seemed to be doing all right for herself. When they passed Lil North on the Center Street corner, and she got a good look at Blake, Sally Ann thought the morning was perfect.

When they reached the Bradford home, which was one of the older houses at the top of Washington Street, Sarah Bradford was waiting on the porch. To Sally Ann's relief, Hugh wasn't anywhere around. She felt he had reached the age when he should dawn on visitors slowly and gradually.

"No, it can't be," Blake said, when Sally Ann introduced him to Sarah. "You're much too young to be Sally Ann's mother. Why you look like her older sister, Mrs. Bradford."

"You probably say that to the mothers of all the girls you know, Mr. Wilton," said Sarah. "Or may I call you Blake?"

"Of course. Please do." Blake smiled at Sarah. "Would Mr. Bradford object if I called you by your first name?"

"He wouldn't even notice. And it's Sarah."

Sally Ann gave an inward sigh of content. With Blake and her mother getting along so well, she had a feeling everything was going to be just wonderful.

"Take Blake up to the guest room, Sally Ann," said Sarah. "I'm sure he'd like to unpack and get settled."

Sally Ann led Blake upstairs, showed him where the bath was located, then hurried down again. She found her mother still on the porch.

"How do you like him, Mother?" Sally Ann asked.

"Enough to wish I really were your older sister," said Sarah, looking so dreamy Sally Ann was startled. "What does Blake do for a living?"

"He's an attorney."

"Your father will love that. They'll

have so much in common." Sarah looked thoughtfully at her daughter. "Do you realize Blake is crazy about you?"

"You're just guessing, Mother."

"I don't have to guess. How do you feel, now that you've seen him again, honey?"

"Sort of walking on clouds and afraid I'll fall off. And, well, just scared."

"That's bad." Sarah shook her head and smiled. "Sounds like you could be in love, and are afraid of the idea. Might even be thinking you don't want to be tied down to any one man just yet."

"I guess you're right. How did you know, Mother?"

"I was eighteen once. That was the year I met your father. Three months later we were sure about each other."

"Oh," said Sally Ann. "Maybe it runs in the family."

"Could be. Just like our both being blondes. Have you told Blake about the secret engagement routine?"

"No, and I'm afraid he won't like the idea. What had I better do about it?"

"You decide, Sally Ann." Sarah got to her feet. "Your father will be at the office until evening. I'm going to take the car and go over to town to do some shopping. I have a feeling I need a couple of new dresses." Sarah's smile was startlingly young. "I want to look my best while Blake is here."

"You always do, Mother."

WHEN her mother drove away, Sally found she was worried. Sarah Bradford wasn't usually so interested in the men in her daughter's life. She wasn't the type who believed her daughter was a smudged carbon copy of her own good looks. Sarah once said she'd caught her man twenty years ago and hadn't gone fishing since. But now she acted as if she were tempted to give Sally Ann some competition.

Sally Ann was still sitting on the porch when Blake joined her. He had changed into sports clothes and Sally Ann found he was even better looking than when he'd gone upstairs. She had

a hunch you had to be in love to feel that way about a man.

"Where's your mother?" Blake asked, dropping into a chair.

"Gone to do some shopping. Why, Blake?"

"I just like to be surrounded by beauty. She's a charming woman."

"Dad thinks so, too," said Sally Ann, shaking hands with a little green-eyed monster she'd never met in her life. "And I'm sure Mother adores *him*. You'll meet Dad and my brother Hugh later."

"I'm looking forward to it," said Blake.

Sally Ann stared at him anxiously, feeling that the sooner she got it over with the better.

"There's something I'd better tell you, Blake. I hope you'll understand."

"Try me and see."

"All right." Sally Ann watched a car coming up the Washington Street hill. It was one of those new two-color jobs that seemed familiar. "One of the boys in town has been spreading rumors about me, claiming I'm secretly engaged to a man from Baltimore."

"What does he hope to gain by that?"

"The idea was to keep other men I know from asking me for dates. He probably thought it would leave him a clear field. It didn't. I wouldn't have any dates with him, because I don't like him."

"Where do I come in, Sally Ann?"

"Now that you're visiting us, people will think you're the man."

"I see. Because that's the way you planned it?"

"In a way, yes." Sally Ann found it much harder going than she'd thought it would be. "I thought you'd be amused and willing to go along with a gag."

"I would, if you were just any girl I know, Sally Ann. Visiting fireman gives local boys something to think about. Only—"

Sally Ann stopped listening. he was staring in horror at the two-color car that had pulled up in front of the house.

It was Lil North's car, and Lil was at the wheel.

"We'd better discuss it some other time," Blake said, also staring at the car. "We seem to have a visitor." Then, as Lil got out and started toward the porch, he rose quickly to his feet. "Good heavens—Lil North. What's she doing in Cumberland?"

"She lives here," said Sally Ann. "She told me she met you some time ago."

"That's right," said Blake. "Hello, Lil."

"Blake—Blake Wilton!" said Lil as she came up on the porch, sounding as if he was just what she'd always wanted for Christmas. "I thought I saw you in the car with Sally Ann over on Baltimore Street, but I just couldn't believe my eyes. I had to stop by for a moment and make sure."

"Nice to see you again, Lil," said Blake. "How is Carson Rand?"

"It just didn't work out," said Lil, sitting down in the swing. "Carson married another girl, six months ago. Hope your engagement to Sally Ann will turn out much happier, Blake."

"Then she's told you about us?" said Blake, with a quick glance at Sally Ann.

"Told me!" exclaimed Lil. "Sally Ann told everybody she knows about it."

"Not all about it," said Sally Ann quietly. "It's all over. You see, I just broke our engagement a little while ago."

An expression of relief and delight dawned on Lil North's face. "Oh," she said lilyingly, "I see."

Sally Ann was conscious of the way Blake was staring at her. Her heart sank at the remote and lonely expression in his eyes.

"Is that still the way you want it, Sally Ann?" Blake asked, and she was grateful for that little word *still*, making it sound like something that had happened before Lil arrived. "You're sure?"

"I'm sure," Sally Ann said.

"Larry will be delighted. I can't wait to tell him." Lil got swiftly to her feet. "I must run along; I just stopped

by for a moment. Come and see me while you're in town, Blake. It'll be fun to talk about old times."

"I'll try to make it, Lil," said Blake. "Nice seeing you again."

They stood watching Lil get into her car and drive away. Sally Ann grew conscious and a little frightened of Blake's stillness as he stood beside her. It seemed too early in the morning to be the end of a perfect day. It was only a moment they remained there, but Sally Ann found it the longest one she had ever known. She had to say something, anything, to break the silence.

"Satisfied?" Sally Ann demanded. "You don't have to do any pretending now, Blake."

"I'm completely satisfied." Blake's smile made her realize it was still a bright summer morning. "This is the first time I ever liked being jilted."

"I was afraid of that," Sally Ann said. "How many times have you really been engaged?"

"I lost count years ago," said Blake, and then he frowned. "But if we ever get engaged it will be for real, young lady."

"I hope so," said Sally Ann softly.

SUDDENLY he took her in his arms and kissed her on the lips. It left her startled and breathless. "Best kiss I ever saw her get," said a voice behind them that Sally Ann recognized all too well.

Blake quickly released her, and they both turned to see Hugh standing in the doorway leading into the house.

"My brother Hugh," said Sally Ann. "Hugh, this is Mr. Wilton."

"I guessed that," said Hugh. "Hi, Mr. Wilton."

"Hi, Hugh," said Blake with a grin. "Where've you been?"

"Around." Hugh stepped out on the porch and looked at Blake intently. "Do you like rabbits?"

"Of course," said Blake. "You mean you have some, Hugh?"

"Ten of 'em," said Hugh proudly. "In-

cluding four baby ones just a week old."

"Where are they?"

"Out in back of the house." Hugh looked anxiously at Sally Ann. "Is it all right if I show Blake—I mean Mr. Wilton—my rabbits, Sis?"

"It's quite all right, Hugh." Sally Ann watched her mother drive up in the family car and park in front of the house. "Go ahead."

"Let's go, Hugh," said Blake. "See you later, Sally Ann."

They headed toward the rear of the house. When Sarah came up on the porch, carrying boxes obviously containing dresses, Sally Ann was sitting in the swing.

"Anything happen while I've been away?" Sarah asked, putting down the boxes and sinking into a chair.

"Practically everything," said Sally Ann. "I'll tell you about it, Mother."

She swiftly related all that had happened, from the time Lil arrived until Blake and Hugh left to see the rabbits, but she left out the fact that Blake had kissed her. Sarah frowned when Sally Ann finished.

"I suppose telling Lil you'd broken off your engagement to Blake seemed a good idea at the time," said Sarah. "But wasn't he rather hurt by it?"

"He took it quite nicely," said Sally Ann. "He didn't seem in the least broken-hearted."

"Naturally he would take it well," said Sarah. "He's a fine man. I'm sure he'd try to spare you the realization of the anguish and sorrow you've brought him. He'd keep smiling no matter how bitter the blow."

"It's not that serious, Mother," Sally Ann said, feeling that her mother was talking strangely. It didn't seem natural. "Blake approved of my calling off all the pretense about a secret engagement."

"Of course he'd try to make you feel that way." Sarah smiled mysteriously. "It takes an older woman really to understand a man as complex and fascinating as Blake Wilton, at a time like this."

She rose and picked up her bundles. "Of course I'll do everything in my power to make Blake's visit with us a happy one. The dear boy!"

"I'll help, in my quaint way," said Sally Ann dryly.

"Naturally," said Sarah, as she started into the house. "But you're too young to do a good job of it." She glanced at her wrist watch. "I didn't realize it was so late. I'd better hurry and get lunch ready. I do hope Blake likes cold cuts and potato salad."

"If he doesn't, he'd better learn," said Sally Ann.

Her mother just smiled and disappeared through the front door.

Sally Ann was beginning to feel like an outcast among the Bradfords. Hugh and Blake were pals at first meeting, her mother appeared to be in a positive dither over the man, and was sure John Bradford and Blake would have much in common, while Sally Ann had tossed him to the winds of the Norths. At the moment, Sally Ann wasn't popular with anyone, including herself.

She rose from the swing. Maybe if she went upstairs and washed her face and refreshed her make-up she'd feel better. Besides, she really should help her mother prepare luncheon for their guest.

By the time lunch was on the table, Sally Ann felt a little more at peace with the world. Her mother had been too busy getting the meal to do any more talking about Blake. Apparently Blake found the rabbits as fascinating as did Hugh, for Sally Ann had to go out and tell them lunch was ready.

"I'm glad you're back, Sarah," Blake said, as they all settled down at the dining-room table. "This house just isn't complete without you around."

"Blake helped me name the new baby rabbits, Mother," said Hugh. "The two male ones are Joe and Blake."

"I'm very proud of that," interrupted Blake. "This is the first time in my life I ever had a rabbit named after me."

"Tell me more about you, Blake," said

Sarah. "I know you're an attorney. So is Mr. Bradford."

"That's swell," said Blake. "I didn't realize Mr. Bradford was a lawyer. If Sally Ann told me, I guess it slipped my mind."

I must have slipped your mind too, thought Sally Ann. Too much of this is enough. I refuse to be a forgotten woman all over again. Blake seemed interested in me, but that was before he met Mother. Now I suppose I'm just Sarah's daughter. Just give me one good chance and I'll show them Sally Ann is still a girl to remember.

The phone rang in the living room. "I'll answer it," said Sally Ann, rising from the table.

"Go ahead," said Sarah calmly. "You haven't told me about yourself yet, Blake, and I'm very much interested."

Sally Ann went into the living room and picked up the phone. "Hello?" she said.

"Sally Ann?" said a masculine voice. "This is Larry North."

"Oh, hello, Larry. What's on your mind?"

"Lil just told me the good news."

"What good news?"

"You're breaking off your engagement to that Wilton man. I just knew it wouldn't work out. As soon as I saw you together at the station I realized he wasn't the right type for you, Sally Ann. He's much too stuffy and old."

"I know," said Sally Ann sadly. "There are other things wrong with him, too, such as being tall and handsome, a successful lawyer, and quite rich." She didn't know about the last statement, but it sounded good. "Shall I tell you more, Larry?"

"Never mind," said Larry hastily. "As long as we agree—that's the important thing. Hold the wire just a second. Someone's at the door, and no one else is home."

AS SALLY ANN waited, she heard Hugh's voice from the dining room. "Then it's all right if Blake and I go fish-

ing along the river this afternoon, Mother?"

"Of course," said Sarah, "if Blake really wants to go."

"I'd love it," said Blake.

While Sally Ann sits home and twiddles her thumbs, Sally Ann thought. Hugh knows I don't like fishing, though I doubt he has the slightest idea of taking me along. I'll show them I have something else to do.

"Sorry to keep you waiting," came Larry's voice in the receiver she still held in her right ear. "Listen, Sally Ann, I've got to see you as soon as possible. But I realize it's difficult while you have Wilton as a house guest."

"Not too difficult," said Sally Ann, giving way to a mad impulse. "Blake and Hugh are going fishing this afternoon, so if you'd like to drop around for awhile, that would be all right, Larry."

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Larry. "But I have a better idea. Suppose I pick you up in my car and we go for a ride?"

"All right." Sally Ann glanced at the clock on the mantel. "Make it about three o'clock, Larry."

"Good! See you then."

Sally Ann hung up and went back to the table. Sarah, Blake and Hugh were talking animatedly.

"Blake and Hugh are going fishing this afternoon, Sally Ann," Sarah said. "Isn't that nice?"

"Want to come along?" Blake asked.

"No thanks," said Sally Ann. "I heard you talking about it while I was on the phone, and I made other plans."

"Who called?" Sarah asked.

"Larry North," said Sally Ann. "I told him I'd go for a ride with him this afternoon in his car."

Hugh stared at her in disgust. "You're completely and definitely crazy," he said firmly.

From the way Blake and her mother were looking at her, Sally Ann hadn't the slightest doubt they agreed with her brother. Now that she'd stopped to think, she wondered if they were right. She was suddenly frightened. Under the

circumstances, making a date with Larry North, of all people, was giving way to a completely wild impulse. After what Larry had done to her, being so nice to him just didn't make sense.

She could see that her mother was very much annoyed. When Sarah Bradford got that look in her blue eyes, it was a storm warning. But it was the way Blake looked at her that seemed hardest to bear. She had the weird impression he was sitting there at the table and yet drifting farther and farther away from her every instant.

"Maybe my visiting the Bradfords now has made life a bit too complicated for Sally Ann," Blake said finally. "I'm sorry."

"There's nothing to be sorry about, Blake," Sarah said. "I wouldn't have missed knowing you and having you with us for the world. I'm sure John will feel the same way when he gets home."

"I'll bet on that," said Hugh. "Don't mind Sis, Blake. Sometimes she isn't quite bright."

Sally Ann gazed at the faces around her through a mist of tears. They were right. She had been a fool, and she had to admit it now to her mother, to Blake, and to Hugh.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I know I made a mistake. Telling Larry I'd have a date with him was a foolish thing to do. But—" She broke off, and tried not to cry.

"But what, honey?" Sarah asked gently.

"You all made me feel I didn't matter, that since I told Lil I'd broken that darn pretended engagement none of you liked me any more. You've been ignoring me—" Sally Ann's lip trembled—"as if I didn't matter to anyone."

"Ignoring you?" Blake smiled. "And all the time I've been talking to your mother and Hugh, I've been thinking how beautiful you are, Sally Ann."

"Beautiful?" Sally Ann stared at him dazedly. "Do you really mean it, Blake?"

"Of course. I guess that was one of

the reasons I fell in love with you when we first met in Baltimore."

Sally Ann looked anxiously at her mother, fully expecting her to be wilting at what Blake had just said, but Sarah's expression was serene.

"You and Hugh were going fishing, and leaving me alone," said Sally Ann.

"I took it as matter of course you'd come along."

Sally Ann saw that everyone had finished eating except Hugh, but then he really never did. She rose from her chair. "Will you please excuse us, mother?" she said. "I'd like to talk to Blake alone."

"Of course," said Sarah with a smile. "Run along. Hugh, you stay here and help me clear the table."

"Sure, Mother," said Hugh.

Sally Ann led the way into the living room, with Blake following. She motioned to a comfortable chair, and sat down in another close by.

"Is there something important on your mind?" Blake asked.

"Very. I'd better come right out with it. Will you marry me, Blake?"

"That depends?"

"On what?"

"On whether you love me or not."

"I do," said Sally Ann firmly, and knew there was no longer the slightest doubt in her mind and heart about it. "I love you very much. I guess I have ever since the Baltimore days, but I didn't realize it until now."

Blake rose and walked over to the divan. "Come here, Sally Ann."

"Yes, sir." Sally Ann came over and sat primly beside him.

"It's time you know why I came here," said Blake, reaching into a side pocket of his sport coat. "I wanted to ask you to marry me."

Sally Ann stared at him in amazement. "Do you mean that?"

"Of course." Blake handed her a little box. "I brought this along just in case I was lucky."

"Let me see." Sally Ann opened the box and stared at the most beautiful

diamond-and-sapphire engagement ring she had ever seen. "Oh, Blake. Blake, darling!"

Blake kissed her. Then, as he released her, she let out a wild yell that brought Sarah and Hugh rushing out from the kitchen.

"Look, Mother! Look, Hugh!" Sally Ann waved the ring at them. "Blake and I are engaged now—for real!"

"Is that all?" said Sarah in a tone of relief. "You sounded as if you'd been murdered, Sally Ann. You scared me half to death."

Hugh grinned and headed for the door. "I guess we won't go fishing today. That's all right with me. See you later."

"I'm happy for you both," said Sarah, as Hugh disappeared. "And what a relief. I've even been pretending I was romantically interested in you, Blake, hoping it would make Sally Ann wake up." She smiled at him. "And you young enough to be my son-in-law!"

She left in a moment, murmuring something about having left the water running in the kitchen.

"I've the strangest feeling I'm going to be kissed again," said Sally Ann, when she was alone with Blake. "Wonder if I'm right?"

"Stop wondering," said Blake, as he took her in his arms.

He was still kissing her a moment later when Larry North stepped into the room, then halted and gazed at them in horror.

"Sally Ann!" said Larry. "What does this mean? I thought you told me that Mr. Wilton was going fishing."

"He did," said Sally Ann, as Blake released her. She flashed her engagement ring at Larry. "And look what he caught."

It was fun to see Larry's eyes pop open in amazement. But right now Sally Ann was having all the fun she wanted, just being in Blake's arms. She turned back to him and forgot Larry even before he shrugged and left, slamming the door behind him. ♥ ♥ ♥

"We'll get married as soon as the trees are watered," Lizzie murmured happily.



LOVE IS WHERE YOU FIND IT

By SEVEN ANDERTON

Dave was wonderful about fixing pots and pans . . . almost as good as he was at breaking things . . . hearts, for instance

LIBBY GILMORE, youngest daughter of James Coulter Gilmore, wealthy broker and investment counselor, was upset. A more than usually heated after-breakfast installment of

a futile three-year-old argument with her mother was the cause of Libby's inner turmoil. She had fled to her room, leaving the issue as undecided as ever.

On such occasions it was Libby's cus-

tom to regain tranquillity by taking herself and her sketch pad to some quiet and restful spot. She had considerable artistic ability—mostly self-developed. Now she decided to climb Laurel Ridge and sketch various vistas of the valley. Quickly she arrayed her small, sturdy, but quite feminine figure in worn, shabby knockabout tweed and scuffed, comfortable walking shoes.

Libby was not beautiful. Comely was the better word. Her face, squarish but not boyish, definitely had a chin. Freckles spattered the bridge of her pert nose. Her thick brows were unplucked. Her soft and abundant almost-black hair was bobbed to the nape of her neck. She gave it a few swipes with a comb and picked up her thick sketch pad with attached pencil box. Then she thrust a small alligator wallet into a pocket of her jacket. She would take no lunch with her now, but might go down to the village for a sandwich later in the afternoon.

It was shortly past nine when Libby emerged from the impressive mansion that was the Gilmore country place. The May morning was soft and bright. She crossed the landscaped front lawn to the blacktop county road and turned west. New York was only forty miles distant, but here the countryside was green, quiet and peaceful. Traffic was seldom heavy on the county road, but Libby took the shoulder. Her dark eyes were clouded by somber thoughts as she walked briskly along.

SHE had gone only a little way when she was overtaken by a rust-brown Model T Ford with a small home-made house trailer attached. Brakes squealed and as the rig came to a stop Libby read bold black lettering on the side of the white-painted trailer:

I FIX ANYTHING

The driver leaned across, opened the car door and thrust out his head. Beneath a tousled shock of red-brown hair, his features looked as if they had been hastily assembled and had not yet de-

ecided just what sort of countenance they would become. The blue eyes were merry and bright. The undecided young face suddenly produced a surprisingly contagious grin.

"Want a lift?" The voice issuing from the wide mouth was pleasant and friendly.

"Do you really?" Libby asked.

He looked puzzled. "Do I really what?"

Libby pointed to the sign. "Fix anything."

His grin returned. "Lady, when I find anything I don't know how to fix—that's where I stay until I learn."

Something about this wayfarer had inspired her confidence. Libby smiled and got into the seat beside the corduroy-clad driver.

"Do you earn a living by fixing things?" she asked as he started the car.

"Do I look starved?" he countered.

"No-o," Libby said, scanning him. "You are lean, but on you it looks—healthy. What do you fix, mostly?"

"Pots, pans, tubs, hinges, lawnmowers, bicycles—anything that gets out of whack. Why?"

"I'm interested," she replied, "in how people earn a living. I don't do it very well, myself. How do you find things that are—out of whack?"

He grinned again. "Most folks have something around that needs fixing. I just stop at every likely place I come to and ask. Want me to show you?"

Libby nodded. "I wish you would."

"All right," he agreed. "I'll stop at the first little house we come to. There should be one this side of Glenwood. Where are you going?"

"Glenwood," Libby said. The village was about two miles further on. "But I have plenty of time. Why must it be a little house?"

"Rich folks," he explained, "don't have things fixed. They throw them away and buy new. There's a place ahead that looks likely."

Moments later he turned the outfit into a drive and parked it near a kitchen door stoop. A woman in a faded house

dress answered his knock.

"Good morning, lady," Libby heard the fixer say, "I sharpen knives and scissors, mend pots and pans and repair anything that needs it."

"How much to sharpen knives?" the woman asked.

"A nickel, six for a quarter."

"I'll bring you two knives," she said. Returning with them, she had to kick the bottom of the screen door to open it. "That door," she complained. "It sticks—and unless I pull it tight the flies get in."

"I can fix it," the fixer said.

"How much?"

"A quarter."

"Fix it. My husband keeps putting it off."

The fixer winked at Libby as he moved toward the trailer. Three minutes later he carried the sharpened knives and a kit of tools back to the stoop. Libby watched while he removed the door, planed it and replaced it, all without apparent haste, but with no waste motion. The woman tried the door, said it was fine and paid him.

As the fixer drove back onto the county road he looked at his wrist-watch, then grinned at Libby. "Twenty-five minutes and I made thirty-five cents. Good business."

"How did you get into it?" she asked.

"I like to move around—see people and things," he explained. "So when I got out of the army I figured out this way to work and wander at the same time."

"It must be fun," Libby said.

"It is," he agreed. "Educational and profitable, too, if you're handy and like to fix things. I bought this old car and fixed it up. Then I built the trailer and bought some more tools and supplies. I've been all over the country in the last three years. There's work everywhere. Some days I make seven or eight dollars—mostly clear, because I haul my own hotel."

"You haven't a—family?" she asked quickly.

HE SHOOK his head. "Only an uncle. A lumberjack, somewhere in Oregon. I'm alone, but I do all right. The only way I could do better would be if there was two of me."

Libby smiled. "Would you like a helper?"

He looked startled. "You?"

"I have to do *something*," she said lightly. "I haven't been much good at anything I've tried yet. And I'd like to move around, too. Perhaps I could learn to fix things."

He slowed the rig to a crawl and eyed her sharply. "Maybe you could at that," he said. "And maybe I could use you—if you're not kidding. How old are you?"

"Twenty."

"What about your folks?"

Libby was not a girl to toy with ideas. Either she discarded them promptly or embraced them with gusto. She embraced this one—and called upon her lively imagination for its best. At least there would be satisfaction in proving she could obtain a job by her own effort. That could be plenty satisfying—even if she could prove it only to herself!

WHILE the man who might possibly become Libby Gilmore's employer listened with sympathetic interest, she transformed herself into an orphan. The death of an aunt, three years since, had left her without kin, Libby lied glibly. Since then she had worked at various jobs, but had held none of them long. So she was leaving the city hoping to fare better in a smaller place. She meant to try Glenwood and perhaps other towns beyond. She was hitch hiking to save money. She accounted for the sketch pad by explaining that she had studied art in a night school and liked to sketch when she got a chance. Considering its impromptu nature, Libby spun quite a tale.

"And I need a job badly," she concluded. "I wouldn't expect much money—at first—and I would do my best if you . . . But of course you wouldn't—"

"What's your name?" he cut in.

The abrupt question caught Libby slightly off base. She started to say "Libby," but managed to turn it into "Lizzie," then fell over the first syllable of Gilmore and came up with Gilhooley, and was furious with herself.

But the fixer took Lizzie Gilhooley in stride. "Okay, Lizzie," he said, "I'll put you to work. Dollar a day and your board and bed. More when you're worth it. That suit you?"

Libby had asked for it, now she had to do something with it. She said, "I had started to say you wouldn't have any room—" Her dark eyes searched his. "You—you don't think I'm a—not a nice girl?"

"I think you're a darn nice girl," he declared. "Do I look like a wolf?"

Libby shook her head. "If you did, I wouldn't—wouldn't have—"

"Thanks," he stopped her. "You can sleep in the trailer. Before I built it, I fixed the car to sleep in. I'll sleep in it. It's comfortable. And I won't make any passes at you. Still want to learn this business?"

"I'd love to—if you think I can."

"What's to stop you? You have hands. Where are your clothes?"

Libby's wits were back on the job. "I left them in New York, until I found work. I'll go back and get them, then meet you tomorrow, wherever you say. Will that be all right?"

"Good idea," he approved. "I'll have time to get the trailer ready for you, and you'll have time to change your mind."

"I won't change my mind," she declared. "Where shall I meet you, and—"

"Allentown," he cut in. "I'll work that way today and stay there at the Sunset trailer camp over tomorrow. A taxi will take you there from the station. Do you need any money?"

Libby shook her head. "I have thirty dollars. And you *will* be there? It would be terrible if you weren't."

"I'll be there," he promised, "until sundown tomorrow. Then he grinned. "In case you might need to know my

name, it's Dave Bartlett . . . Here's Glenwood. I'll take you to the station."

Sudden fear clutched Libby. Suppose an acquaintance met her in Glenwood and spoke to her! She silently begged Providence to prevent that. Her plea was granted. Her new boss let her out at the station, said, "See you in Allentown." and drove off.

Twenty minutes later, aboard a train for New York, Libby had a qualm. She dealt with it firmly. You started this, Libby Gilmore, she admonished herself. Now you are going to finish it. Beginning right now you are Lizzie Gilhooley. Suddenly she chuckled. What a name! But it serves you right. One thing, there's no danger you'll forget it." Then she began to plan what she meant to do in New York.

IN THE city, she went directly to a bank and cashed a check. Next she found a booth and got her mother on the telephone.

"Listen, Mother," she said, "and don't interrupt me. We are not going to quarrel any more about my going to work. I've got a job. I'll write to you, but you can't write to me until I give you the address. Now don't get into a dither and start raising Cain. I'll be all right, unless you and the family start interfering. If you do, I promise you there will really be a scandal. I'll see to that. I'll write in a few days. 'By." She cradled the receiver quickly and firmly.

In stores where she was not known, Libby bought a large, cheap suitcase and proceeded to fill it with the cheapest clothing and toilet articles she had ever possessed.

By then it was nearly five o'clock and Libby was hungry. In the Lexington Avenue hotel where she registered, ate and went to her room to pack the belongings of Lizzie Gilhooley properly. She left a call that would give her ample time to have breakfast and catch an early train for Allentown.

It was Lizzie Gilhooley, full-fledged, who disembarked from a taxi at the

Sunset trailer camp at eleven o'clock the following morning. Dave Bartlett rose from a bench beside the camp office and came to greet her.

"Well, you're here," he said with a grin.

"Didn't you know I would be?" she asked.

"Guess I did," he replied as he led her to where the rig stood in a nearby stall, "Look at the sign."

Lizzie Gilhooley looked—and gasped. The lettering on the side of the trailer now read:

WE FIX ANYTHING

"Thanks for the confidence," she said. The next moment she was enthusing over the interior of the trailer. Fresh sheets and new blue blankets were on the bunk across the front end. Dave displayed the table folded against the wall, the dishes and cooking utensils in wall cupboards and the compact workbench, with tools disposed above and below, and the two-burner Coleman stove.

"Radio and lights," he told her, "run from the car battery."

"It's perfect!" Lizzie cried. "I hope I can earn my way."

"I'll see to that," he assured her. "Can you cook?"

"Not too well," Lizzie admitted. Then her chin came out. "But I learn quickly."

Dave chuckled. "Good time to begin now. I'll coach. After we eat we'll drive down the road to a dump ground."

"Dump ground?" The neophyte's brows went up.

Dave grinned. "That's where you learn to fix holes in pots and pans."

The lady fixer smiled. "Show me what to cook," she said, "and stand by to call the first aid squad."

So began the career of Lizzie Gilhooley. Lessons at the dump ground took up most of the afternoon. Dave finally gave her an A for aptitude, though, and they drove westward a few miles to find a camping spot beside a country road and near a small stream.

"I always try to camp where I can

have a swim," Dave explained. "We quit early on Saturdays and pull into a good camp where there is hot water and showers. We do our washing there and put our laundry away on Sunday when it gets dry."

"I see," Lizzie said. Libby Gilmore had heard of the Great Unwashed. Lizzie Gilhooley was glad to learn that she was not to become completely a part of it.

Three weeks later, in western Pennsylvania, Dave handed Lizzie seven dollars, as had become their Sunday night custom.

Putting the money in her wallet, Lizzie said truthfully, "This is more than I ever had left after working a week any place else. Am I earning it?"

"The answer is," Dave replied, "that we took in thirteen dollars more this week than I ever did alone. I'll soon have to give you a raise. You sharpen a mean knife and save me a lot of time by running after tools and stuff and doing the cooking and washing. And it's worth a dollar a day just to have you around."

Lizzie frowned. "I didn't hire out as a companion."

Dave chuckled. "So I got something for nothing."

IN HER BUNK that night, Lizzie scolded herself for being so snappish with Dave. As a wolf, he had certainly turned out to be a woolly lamb. There was really no reason why he should keep their relations *quite* so platonic. It was certainly not flattering to a girl. Lizzie decided that perhaps something should be done—then went to sleep.

On Sunday morning, Lizzie blossomed out in the most becoming garments in her simple wardrobe. She did things to her hair and dug from the depths of her suitcase a tiny bottle of perfume which had cost more than she now earned in a month. If Dave noticed, he did not betray the fact.

Monday found Lizzie back in shirt and jeans—but there were still subtle touches. She applied herself vigorously

to perfecting her ability as a universal fixer. Whenever there was other work for Dave, she took care of any pots, pans and knives.

Weeks passed and it was the last Tuesday in June—a stiflingly warm day. At four in the afternoon, Dave drove the rig into an inviting wayside park in southern Ohio. It lay between the highway and a small stream that flowed under a bridge.

“Nice shade,” Dave commented, “a pump and a camp stove. We’ve done enough for today. Six-forty in cash, two dozen eggs, a quart of milk and a nice fat young rooster. Here’s where we eat fried chicken.”

Fresh eggs, butter, vegetables and milk, taken in exchange for service to farm wives, kept their larder full. Lizzie wondered if she was getting fat.

“You bring water from the pump,” Dave instructed, “while I start a fire in the stove. Then I’ll kill and clean the bird.”

Lizzie got her sketch pad and sat on the trailer steps to sketch Dave picking the chicken. He came over, carrying the naked yellow fowl, and looked at her sketch.

“If I could do that,” he said, “I wouldn’t fix anything for anybody. That’s a swell picture.”

Lizzie gave him a wry little smile. “Try to sell it,” she said. “Give me that chicken and go away. This one I cut up and fry without any bossing.”

After supper, Dave suggested un-hitching the car and finding a movie.

“It’s so nice here,” Lizzie objected. “Let’s just loaf and enjoy it.”

So they sat on a bench beside the trailer while crimson faded from the western sky and dusk gathered. Crickets and katydids chirped. The air was rich with the scent of ripening wheat and summer bloom.

“Recite a poem, Dave,” Lizzie said. She had learned that Dave’s memory was stored with poems which he recited beautifully.

Dave knocked the ashes from his pipe,

leaned back against the side of the trailer and began to recite the Rubaiyat. While his pliant voice caressed quatrain after quatrain, Lizzie’s small hand crept half-way along the two feet of bench between them. There she stopped it. Half-way was enough. What was the matter with the darned man? His hands remained clasped about an updrawn knee. Lizzie studied his rough-hewn profile. She liked what happened to that hodge-podge face when Dave recited poetry.

Dave finished presently, “—turn down an empty glass.”

“That was beautiful, Dave.” Lizzie sighed—and moved her hand a little way past the half-way point.

Dave chuckled. “Try to sell it,” he said, and stood up. Lizzie brought her straying hand back to join its mate in her lap.

“Time to turn in,” Dave went on. “May be a lot of things to fix tomorrow.” He went to the car to make down his bed.

In the trailer, Lizzie drew the shades, snapped on the light and undressed. Then she gyrated before the small mirror fastened to the wall with screws, scrutinizing as much of herself as possible. “Darn it,” she muttered, “I am *not* a scarecrow.”

THE next morning Dave stopped the rig before a farmstead and strode to the house in search of business. Lizzie stayed in the car, to drive in if Dave signaled or called.

He returned after a few minutes and said, “Nothing here for you to do. Just some rickety cellar steps to fix. Half an hour.” He got a box of nails and tools and went jobward, whistling.

Lizzie looked at the little house, snuggled under huge elms with a hip-roofed barn and twin silos in the background. A pretty picture. She got her sketch pad and went to work. She had a talent for indicating bulk with a few lines, then catching small, homely details such as a broken fan in a windmill, a missing fence

picket or a slight sag of an open barn door. Her pencil moved rapidly, but her work was sharp and clear, unmarred by double line or smudges. She had just finished when Dave returned.

"Isn't it a darling home?" she asked, displaying the sketch.

Dave took the pad from her and Lizzie followed him into the trailer. He produced grooved and enameled sticks from under the bunk and a sheet of glass from a drawer. In fifteen minutes the sketch was neatly framed. Lizzie's eyes searched the trailer walls.

"Where will we put it?" she asked.

Dave grinned. "I'll put it. You've done your part. Just wait in the car." He tucked the picture under his arm and moved off toward the house. Lizzie was sitting in the car when he returned and handed her four dollars.

"Dave! You sold it!"

He chuckled. "You're through fixing tubs and sharpening knives. From now on you draw while I fix. You'll get rich. Let's get moving and see if you can do it again at the next place."

That evening they parked in a trailer camp at the edge of a small town. During the day Lizzie had sketched three more homes and Dave had sold all of them. But Lizzie was strangely quiet, her dark eyes clouded.

After supper Dave said, "We've got to fix up a new deal, Lizzie. You made fifteen dollars today—while I was making five-sixty."

"But you framed the sketches," Lizzie protested, "and sold them—and gave me all the money. I didn't fix—"

"All right," Dave stopped her. "I charge a dollar for framing a picture. That still leaves you eleven dollars to my nine-sixty. Look, Lizzie, you've got something. This is a big country, full of homes that folks are proud of. And your sketches are so much prettier than a photograph. You can—" The tragic expression on her face stopped him. "What's the matter, kid?"

"I liked my job the way it was," she almost wailed. "I don't want to sketch

if it's going—going to spoil everything!"

Dave regarded her soberly, then smiled. "Would it suit you better," he asked, "if we made it partners? Fifty-fifty on everything?"

"Oh, yes!" Her face lighted up. "That's it! We'll go everywhere, fixing and sketching. Maybe my sketches will hang in homes all over the country."

He grinned. "And some day connoisseurs will be hunting hither and yon for early Gilhooleys."

She made a nose. "And some day tubs will hang in museums above plaques reading, 'Dave Bartlett fixed this.'"

They laughed, and Dave patted her hand that was clutching his arm. Lizzie thrilled. It was the nearest to a caress he had ever offered. She turned her hand over too late. His was gone.

"Dayton tomorrow," Dave said. "We need more glass and framing material."

"And sketch pads," Lizzie added.

Busy days passed. The weather remained clear and hot over the entire Middle West. Dave fixed and Lizzie sketched. Rarely did Dave fail to sell the sketches.

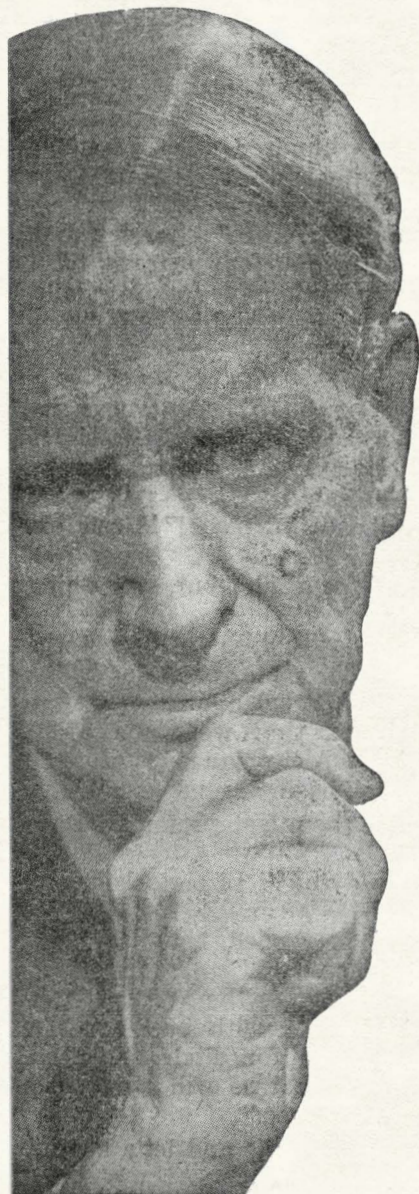
RELIEVED of fixing, Lizzie blossomed out into more decorative and feminine array. She gave more time to adorning and anointing herself. This was calculated to produce an effect. It did—upon truck drivers, filling station attendants and male patrons of roadside restaurants, but not upon Dave Bartlett. Dave remained a good partner and companion. He continued to treat Lizzie exactly as she would have wanted him to if he had behaved otherwise at the beginning. This annoyed Lizzie.

This isn't the beginning, she told herself in the privacy of the trailer. Does the big lug expect me to make passes?

But she knew that Dave expected nothing of the sort. This also annoyed Lizzie. Without effort, Dave Bartlett was becoming a most annoying young man. It irked Lizzie to realize that she was carrying a torch for a totally indif-

(Continued on page 108)

To The Man With HERNIA Who Can Not Submit to Surgery



THE MAN condemned to live with rupture, all too often faces a grim future.

There is only one known cure . . . and that is surgical correction. Yet, for many, this relief must be denied or delayed for any one of a variety of reasons. It is to this group of unfortunate persons that this message is directed.

There are two choices — to wear a truss, or not to wear one. But, since hernia never heals itself, and generally tends to become more severe, the second choice is eventually eliminated. That leaves only one question in the mind of the hernia sufferer: "What kind of a truss should I wear?" Until recently there was little choice. Most trusses all looked alike. They consisted of a leather covered steel spring which snapped around the hips, firmly pressing an unyielding pad against the hernia opening. Many hernia victims chose to be semi-invalids and risk danger of strangulation, rather than wear a truss.

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pair of trousers—and just as easy to slip on or off.

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City.....State.....

ferent male and because of her upbringing, seemed unable to do anything to dispel that indifference.

Mid-July found the prospering firm of Bartlett and Gilhooley in southern Illinois. The Mid-west was in the grip of a devastating heat wave. On the evening of a sizzling day, Dave parked the rig near a bridge over a small stream. After supper, he and Lizzie walked down to the bridge and leaned over the wooden railing. During the past week Dave had listened to nearly all the radio weather reports and had grown steadily less talkative, more preoccupied. Sensitive to his mood, Lizzie, as they looked down upon the trickle of summer-low water, asked what was troubling him.

"I've got forty acres of land over in Missouri," he said. "I bought it soon after I got out of the army."

Lizzie had a sudden vision of a snug little farm home—and hope stirred. Perhaps Dave did feel toward her as she did toward him. Perhaps this was his way of working up to a proposal.

"I planted four hundred black walnut trees," he went on. "When they are twenty years old they should sell for a hundred dollars each—maybe more."

Lizzie gasped. "You planted a—a forest that you have to wait twenty years to sell?"

A faint smile twitched Dave's lips. "I'm farsighted," he said.

Hope wavered and Lizzie wondered if farsightedness could account for stone blindness at close range.

"I planted young fruit trees, too," he continued, "and some grapevines and rose and lilac bushes."

LIZZIE'S hopes revived. Surely Dave was telling her of a place he had prepared to become a home—when he found a wife.

"Why are you worried about that, Dave?" she asked softly.

"Because it has been dry and hot so long," he replied, "and there is no indication that the drouth will break soon."

Lizzie was now just plain bewildered.

If this *was* to be a proposal, it was coming a long way around Robin Hood's barn.

"The trees are still young—not deep-rooted," he went on. "I must go look at them and water them if they need it and the creek isn't dry. It never has been. But it isn't your problem. I thought maybe you wouldn't mind waiting in St. Louis while—"

"You think again," she cut him off. Why couldn't he see that any problem of his concerned her? "I want to see that tree farm, and I'm not going to be left all alone in St. Louis. How far is your place from here?"

"About two hundred miles," he told her, "by crossing the Mississippi at Cape Girardeau. You're sure—"

"Certainly I'm sure," she declared. "We could drive that far yet tonight."

There was relief in Dave's smile. "We'll sleep awhile first," he said, "then get an early start. . . ."

They reached Dave's property early the next afternoon. The thermometer registered 106. Dave halted the rig in a parched clearing near a small stream. This is it," he said.

"What a beautiful place!" Lizzie exclaimed.

"I like it," he said, "but everything looks mighty dry."

Lizzie went with him to inspect the young trees. They needed water badly. Covering about twenty acres in a strip along the creek, they were now about three feet tall. A circular ridge of earth formed a small basin around each one.

"I watered them last summer," Dave explained.

"Are they dying?" Lizzie asked anxiously.

"Not yet," he replied, "but we didn't get here any too soon."

"How do you water them?"

"From the creek with buckets. The land is too rough for ditch irrigation. Two buckets to a tree will hold them until it rains—I hope."

"Then get the pails and let's begin," she urged.

"You don't need to—" Dave began.

"Don't argue," she snapped, "I'm going to help. Where are the pails?"

Dave scanned her determined face and shrugged. "There are only the two in the trailer," he said, "and I need them both for balance. But the weeds must be cut from close to the trees and some of the dykes will need fixing with the hoe. I'll show you how and you can do that while I carry water."

They began on the trees farthest from the creek. Lizzie wore her overalls and cotton work gloves that were too big. The afternoon grew hotter. There was no breeze. The weeds were tough and the baked earth was hard. Lizzie fought them stubbornly to keep ahead of the water carrier. Sweat ran into her eyes and her bandanna grew soggy.

Dave went to the trailer and brought her a towel which she thrust under her belt. Lizzie's sweat-drenched garments stuck to her body. Dust raised by her hoe hung about her. When she looked up the landscape seemed to swim in the shimmering heat. Dave filled a jug from a spring and brought it to her.

"Go easy on this," he warned. "Don't drink too much while you are hot."

Lizzie drank two swallows and set the jug aside. "Does this have to be done every year?" she asked.

Dave grinned. "This should be the last time. By next year the tap roots should be down to water and there will be more foliage to shade the ground." He picked up his pails and moved toward the creek.

Lizzie mopped her face with the towel and picked up the hoe. It was nearing sundown when Dave called a halt. They had watered a hundred and thirty trees.

It was still sultry as they sank onto the parched grass under a huge oak, not far from the trailer. Dave could have gotten no wetter by falling into the creek. Sweat had turned dust into muddy streaks on Lizzie's face. Her clothing was soggy, her hair stringy, and her nose sunburned.

[Turn page]

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DAVE said, "We'll drive into town and eat whopping steaks as soon as we clean up. But we better rest here awhile and cool off. Then, after I carry water to the trailer for you, I'm going to take a dip in the creek."

"I can swim," Lizzie flared, "and if you think I'm going to bathe in the little old trailer tub while you—"

Dave laughed at her sudden indignation. "Okay," he soothed, "you can use the pool down there by the big flat rock. I'll go on down around the bend. I'll bet you're tired."

"I am," she admitted. "I feel like there are gobs of mud in my hair." Then she sighed. "Golly, this is a lovely spot."

Dave had stretched his long body on the dry and matted grass. "You should see it when it's fresh and green," he said, "Some day I'm going to build a house here—to rest in when I get tired of the road, and to use while I harvest the grapes and other fruit after the vines and orchard mature. Be a great place to raise a family."

Lizzie's heart skipped. She tried to make her voice behave as she asked, "You're going to get married?"

"Yep," he said.

"When?"

He turned his head slightly and grinned at her. "As soon as I can get you in the notion and—"

Lizzie made a strangling sound, her face began to work and she flung herself face down on the grass, sobbing wildly.

"Lizzie!" Dave rolled nearer and fumbled her quaking shoulder, "Don't, Lizzie! What—"

She suddenly rolled away from him and sat up, glaring at him with eyes still leaking tears. "I hate you, Dave Bartlett!" she raged. "For weeks and weeks I worked up glamour and—and allure and all—all for you to notice. And you wouldn't even try to hold my hand. Now you propose to me when I look like—when I'm not fit to be kissed."

Dave scrambled after her. "Who said you—"

"You let me alone, Dave Bar—" That was as far as Lizzie got.

Later, as Dave sat with his back against the sturdy trunk of the oak and Lizzie snuggled in his arms it was still muggy hot, but they didn't seem to mind.

"We'll get married as soon as the trees are watered," Lizzie murmured happily.

"Whoa," Dave said. "You didn't let me finish what I was saying when you threw that conniption fit."

She laughed. "Wasn't that silly? What were you going to say?"

"I was saying that I was going to get married as soon as I got you in the notion and straightened out. You'll have to use your right name on the marriage license, you know."

Lizzie jerked back. Her startled eyes searched his dirty face. "You—you know?"

Dave chuckled. "Sure. You're a lousy deceiver, Libby Gilmore. I saw the palace you came out of that morning—and the gold monogram on that little wallet. After I took you to the station, I checked up a bit. Everybody in Glenwood knew you. But when you showed up at Allentown with that brand new suitcase full of cheap clothes that had never been worn I decided that if you wanted to have a lark with a poor wandering kettle mender I wouldn't interfere with your fun."

"Dave," she wailed, "I didn't—"

"I know that," he stopped her, "but I've been puzzled ever since I learned that you were serious about it. Want to tell me why you left that Taj Mahal to turn yourself into Lizzie Gilhooley and help me fix wash tubs?"

"Dave," she said soberly, "for years I had been wanting to—to get a job and prove that I could make my own living and manage my own life—not just be a parasite. But my family wouldn't let me. Just before I left the house that morning I had a quarrel with Mother about it. I was so angry! Then you came along and—and—"

Dave nodded. "That's one reason I

didn't think of," he said, "but it suits me fine. Those letters you have been sneaking into rural mail-boxes—I suppose were to your family?"

"I had to write, Dave. Otherwise there would have been hue and cry and detectives. But I mailed the letters far apart and never gave an address."

He smiled. "You're sort of scrambled, but I love you. Would you have gone ahead and married me thinking I believed you were Lizzie Gilhooley?"

"What's in a name?" Lizzie defended. "Is it so important?"

Dave drew her close. "Not half so important," he said, "as what's in a Gilhooley." He tipped up her face. "And knowing that you would have married me just the same makes me sure you have no fool notion of taking me back to live on your family's—"

"Dave," she cut in, "that's what I've been frightened about. My family is awful. They are stinking rich. Snobs. They push people around. If they—got hold of you, they'd ruin you. They'd make you priggish and stuffy, like my two brothers-in-law. They think only money and the Social Register is important. Don't you see?"

"Not just your way," he said. "In the first place, a family that produced you can't be too bad. I wouldn't be surprised if they are pretty fond of you. In the second place, nobody is going to make me into anything I don't want to be, so don't worry about that."

"It would have been so simple," she mourned, "if you hadn't had to be so smart and find out. Then we could just have gone on like we were."

"We still can," Dave interrupted. "What's going to stop us?"

Lizzie's begrimed face lighted up. "Then," she cried joyfully, "we'll build a little house here to live in when we don't want to be out fixing and sketching. Oh, Dave! It isn't all going to be spoiled, is it?"

"Not by a damned sight," he assured

[Turn page]

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her. "But I've still got to marry Libby Gilmore. What will happen then?"

Lizzie grew thoughtful for moments, then suddenly pointed to the lettering on the trailer. "We can fix anything!" she cried. "We'll get married and then go back to my—my family's home, with the rig and wearing our work clothes. We won't tell them about this place or about my sketches, or that we are earning lots of money. I'll just introduce you and tell them you are my husband and that we make a living fixing pots and pans and sharpening scissors. Then we can live happily ever after, because my family will disown me and—"

Dave's laughter stopped her. When he had sobered somewhat he produced a scowl and said in a villainous voice, "Never darken my door!" Then, grinning, "Lizzie Gilhooley, you are priceless, and as batty as an old barn. You really don't deserve to have a family."

"Then what *shall* we do?" she asked.

"You've already answered that," he

said. "We'll keep right on as we were. We're doing all right. We'll remain as independent as a hog on ice. Just two tubs standing on our own bottoms."

Lizzie smiled impishly through the dirt. "And we'll mend the bottoms ourselves."

"Right," Dave agreed. "We'll do it this way. We'll get married, then notify your family of the accomplished fact. We'll send them a picture of ourselves and the rig, then go on about our business. Okay?"

"Okay," Lizzie said. "Now let's clean up and go eat those steaks. Can we finish the trees tomorrow?"

Dave rose and helped her up. "The rest of the watering," he declared, "can wait one more day. We'll take the trailer to town, because we are getting married tomorrow."

It rained four inches on Libby Gilmore's wedding day—and Lizzie Gilhooley was very happy about it. It was just what she wanted as a wedding gift.

PLEASE FORWARD

(Continued from page 6)

FARM HAND

Dear Mrs. Simpson:

I'm 40 years old and divorced. I have three children, but only one child lives with me. I work on a farm during the day, and take care of my son in the evening. I like music, hunting, and fishing. Will welcome many letters.

FRANK #1168

NEEDS FRIENDS

Dear Mrs. Simpson:

I'm a lonesome widow, 43 years old, 5'4" tall, weighing 140 lbs., with brown hair and blue eyes. I live with my eight-year-old son. I like to go to church, and to dances. Would enjoy hearing from both men and women around my age.

VERNA #1169

THE ATHLETIC TYPE

Dear Mrs. Simpson:

I'm 28 years old, 5'11" tall, and have sandy hair and blue eyes. I'm a truck driver and foreman at the place where I work. I like auto racing and dancing, and also go in for baseball, football, and fishing. I love all kinds of music, too. Would sure like to hear from girls and boys around my age.

RICHARD #1170

SAILOR LAD

Dear Mrs. Simpson:

I read your magazine, EXCITING LOVE, quite a bit, and enjoy it very much. I'm in the U. S. Navy. I'm 20 years old, 5'11" tall, weigh 160 lbs., and have brown hair. I'm especially interested in hearing from young ladies between the ages of 17 and 21. I promise to answer all letters promptly.

GLENN #1171

CALLING YOUNG MOTHERS

Dear Mrs. Simpson:

Is there room in your column for a young mother who would like to correspond with other young mothers? I'm 23 years old, 5'3½" tall, weigh 120 lbs., and have brown hair and eyes. I have a boy four years old. My interests are many. They include reading, sewing, dancing, traveling, and writing letters.

ANNE #1172

NO AGE LIMIT

Dear Mrs. Simpson:

I enjoy making new friends, and their age makes no difference to me. I'm 5'8" tall, weigh 170 lbs., and am in my sixties, but I'm young at heart. Hope that I'll receive many letters from all over the world.

C. J. #1173

WANTS TO JOIN

Dear Mrs. Simpson:

Could I please join your pen pal column? I get very lonesome, and would like to make some new friends. I'm a widower, 42 years old, 6'1" tall, weighing 200 lbs., with brown hair and blue eyes. I promise to answer all letters, and will exchange snapshots.

BILL #1174

YOUNG MAID

Dear Mrs. Simpson:

I live in a small town, and there doesn't seem to be much to do here. I'm 22 years old, but my sister keeps saying that I'm an old maid, and this depresses me very much. I'm 5'3" tall and have red hair and blue eyes. Would like to hear from anyone who would care to correspond with me.

ALICE #1175

LAST ONE LEFT

Dear Mrs. Simpson:

I'd like to have some pen pals very much, as I get extremely lonely. I come from a very large family, but now I'm the only one left who is single. I'm 34 years old and have brown hair and gray eyes. I like hillbilly music, and all outdoor sports. Would like to hear from some nice ladies.

SHORTY #1176

OUTDOOR MAN

Dear Mrs. Simpson:

Living in a small town, life can be very lonely at times. So I would like very much to make some pen pals with this letter. I'm 28 years old, 5'6" tall, weigh 170 lbs., and have light brown hair and eyes. My main interest is sports, but I like almost anything that takes me outdoors.

HAROLD #1177

MISERY IN HER LIFE

Dear Mrs. Simpson:

It seems that, all my life, misfortune has come my way. I'm 30 years old, married, and have two children, six and four years old. My husband and I have been separated for three years now and I am living again with my parents. So I find myself alone and blue most of the time. It would be nice if I could have some nice pen pals to correspond with. I'm 5'6" tall, weigh 120 lbs., and have reddish-brown hair and blue eyes. Am especially fond of hillbilly music. Will be very grateful to anyone who sends a line my way.

PAT #1178

LIKES TO COOK

Dear Mrs. Simpson:

I have so few relatives and friends that I really enjoy hearing from pen pals. I'm 30 years old, 5'8" tall, and weigh 142 lbs. I like cooking, movies, picnics, and shopping. I also like to go horseback riding. Will gladly write to anyone who writes to me.

BABY CRUNCH #1179

FROM THE COUNTRY

Dear Mrs. Simpson:

I'm 16 years old, stand 5'8" tall, weigh 130 lbs., and have blonde hair and dark eyes. I live in the country, and like all outdoor sports. Also like music very much, especially hillbilly.

CETT #1180

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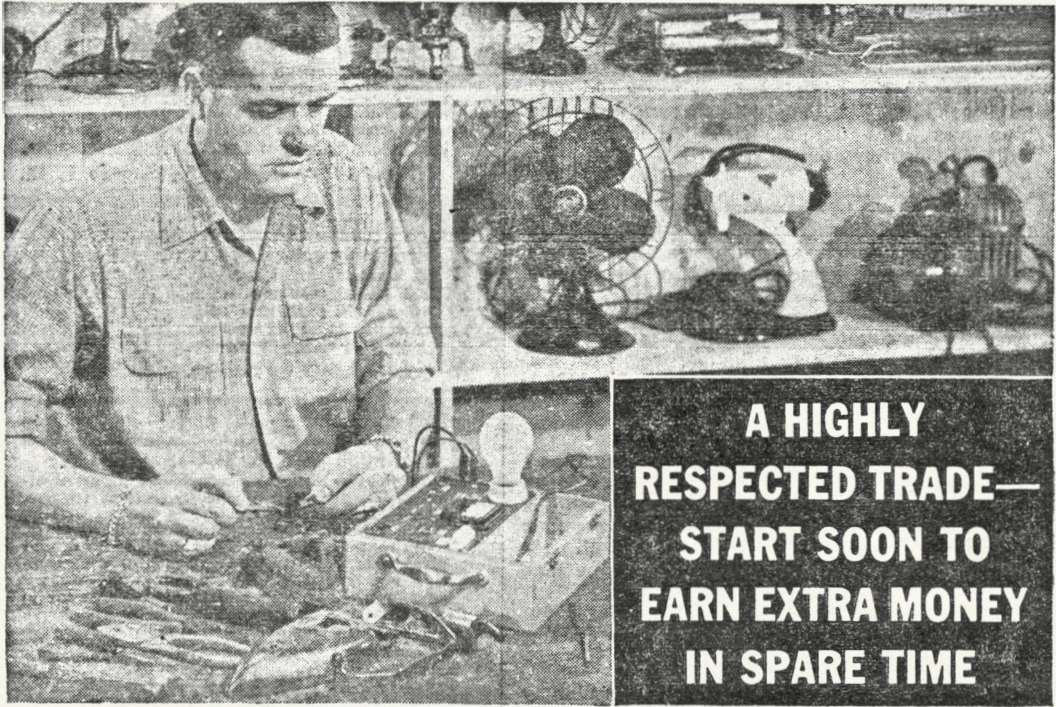
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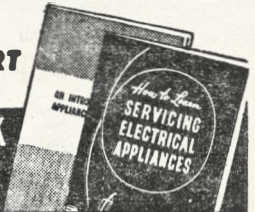
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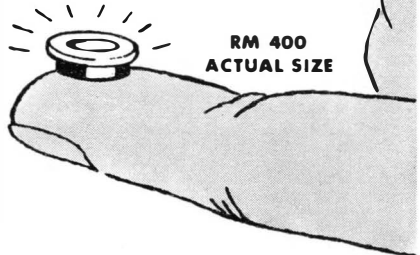
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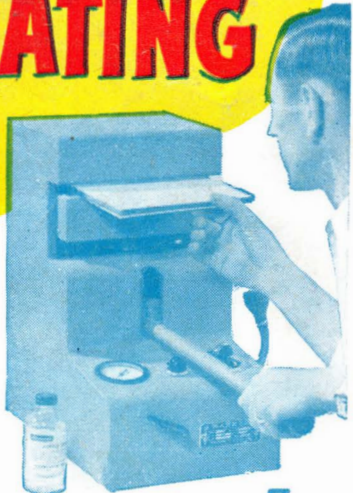
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