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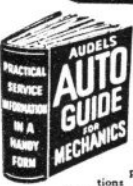


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IDEAL LOVE STORIES

November,
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ALL STORIES BRAND NEW

Vol. 18
No. 4

NOVELETTES

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There isn't much point in telling a man he doesn't understand his own daughter; but when Pop said that Wendy was "a mite unpredictable", Bill decided it was the understatement of the week!

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"You shouldn't tamper with a parson's life," Shelly told herself—when it was too late.
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He couldn't let their lives be ruined because a lovely wisp of a girl knew how to toss a stick and make good hamburgers.
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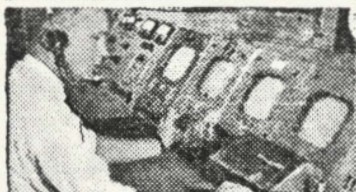
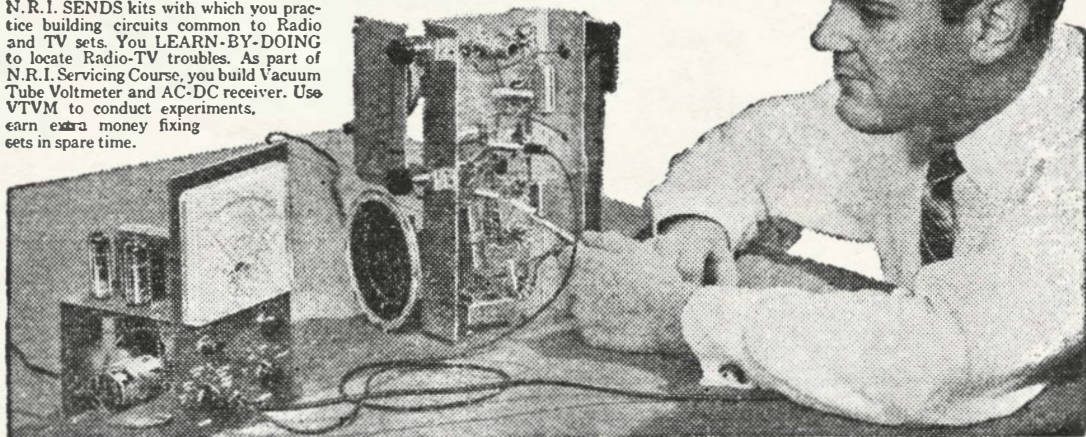
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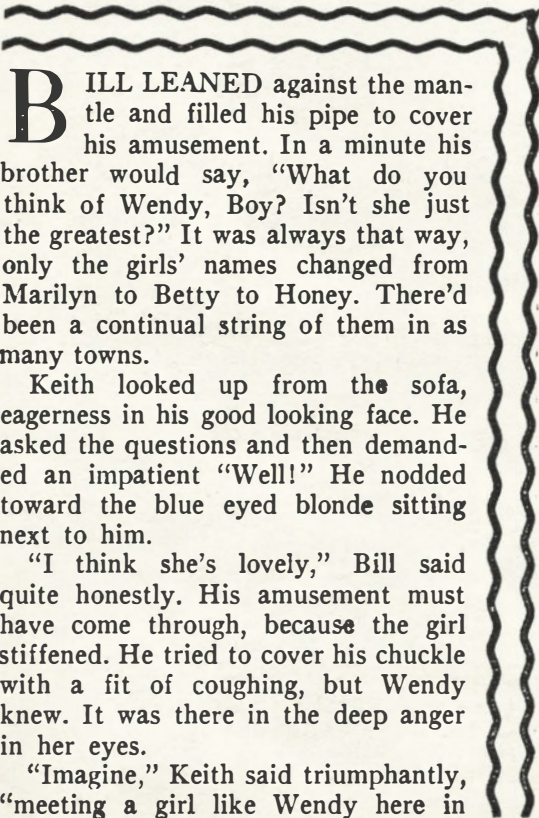
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Maybe Wendy was just one more of
Keith's girls...



THE MAN SHE REFUSED

by Kate Tempest




BILL LEANED against the mantle and filled his pipe to cover his amusement. In a minute his brother would say, "What do you think of Wendy, Boy? Isn't she just the greatest?" It was always that way, only the girls' names changed from Marilyn to Betty to Honey. There'd been a continual string of them in as many towns.

Keith looked up from the sofa, eagerness in his good looking face. He asked the questions and then demanded an impatient "Well!" He nodded toward the blue eyed blonde sitting next to him.

"I think she's lovely," Bill said quite honestly. His amusement must have come through, because the girl stiffened. He tried to cover his chuckle with a fit of coughing, but Wendy knew. It was there in the deep anger in her eyes.

"Imagine," Keith said triumphantly, "meeting a girl like Wendy here in



"I suppose you had other ideas for your brother," she commented. "Maybe you had the girl all picked out."



Colesville. I swear to you, Bill, she's the only one for me. Cross my heart!"

The girl patted Keith's hand, but she watched Bill. "I'm glad he finally brought you around to meet me," she said. "Keith thinks so much of your opinion that I hope I pass the test."

"You do. Of course." Bill kept it light. And she was really a pretty thing. There was a certain pride in her bearing, perhaps it was the way she held her buttercup head. It occurred to him he might find her steady, candid eyes disconcerting.

Wendy got up with easy grace and smiled. "I'll fix us something to drink." She walked out of the comfortably furnished livingroom with her slim shoulders back and her head high. Bill was surprised when he thought she looked fine in slacks and a sweater. Mostly he liked girls in skirts.

"I mean every word of it, Bill," Keith said fervently. "Wendy's the one for me. I've been crazy in love with her since I met her last week and I hope she feels the same way about me." He caught the skeptical look in his brother's eyes and protested indignantly. "This time it's real."

Bill said, "I wonder how many times I've heard that same thing? But this time you better watch your step. Wendy's too nice to be badly hurt."

Keith's mouth went sulky. "Oh, quit it. I swear I was never more serious. And get that smirk off your face before she comes back. What do you want to do, ruin me?" He glared at Bill. "You're making her unhappy by your attitude."

"Sorry," Bill said. "I guess I'm a little tired with your same old record. Redheads, brunettes, blondes. You've been crazy about 'em all, Keith. The last one's always *the* one." He shook his head. "I don't see how you do it time after time."

"Hush up," Keith ordered. "She's coming."

SHE CAME back and her eyes were cold when she held the tray for Bill. "I suppose you had other ideas for your brother? Probably you had the girl all picked out? Maybe a city girl?"

Bill managed to keep smiling. "All I want is to see him safely married and settled down. Nothing would please me more, believe me, Wendy." And he meant it from the bottom of his heart.

Keith reached for her hand. "I keep wondering why Wendy isn't already married." His voice was husky. "I guess she'd just been waiting for me."

Her face had a dreamy look and Bill finished his coffee fast. If he didn't get out of here some of his cynicism about this new romance of Keith's would come through and spoil that happy look on Wendy's face.

"I have to go along," he said. "It's been awfully nice, Wendy."

She faced him. "You've been laughing at us all along, haven't you?" She held herself very still. "I don't think I like you very much, Bill."

He put his arms around her shoulders. "Don't judge me too fast," he said. "I'm not really that bad. Honest."

She moved away from him and Keith howled, "You've got to like Bill. He's just trying to be funny."

"No, she doesn't have to like me." Bill looked down at her. "Only I hope you will, Wendy."

"It seems to me you make fun of love," she told him gravely.

"Not real love." Their eyes held and for some reason, Bill's breath caught in his throat. Probably because he'd just realized Wendy was more than just pretty, she was beautiful. "When I came to meet you I didn't think Keith was serious. I want him to find a girl he'll stay in love with for the rest of her life."

"I have!" Keith sounded like a wounded stag.

"We both have." Wendy turned to Keith and he put his arms around her and held her, as if he'd never let her go.

It would be much more impressive, Bill thought, if he hadn't seen the same scene played a dozen times before. Keith needed the stability that loving a girl could give him. But he'd always been the happy, love-them-and-leave-them type of man: The strange part of it was, that when he left them, the girls never seemed to hate him for it.

From the time Bill was eight and Keith six, the younger brother had had best girls. Even then, they'd flocked to Keith until making love had become an art with him. Each new girl was *the* one, each new romance the one that would last. Keith meant it every time. Bill believed it was merely the chase his brother loved and when the girl started to really care, Keith lost interest. But it was hard to admit that his brother was that kind of man.

Looking at him now with Wendy, Bill would have sworn he was madly in love with her. Until he remembered all the others who'd gone before. His hopes were lost in his distrust.

"LET'S STOP talking about us," Wendy said abruptly. The phone rang and when she came back from answering it, she seemed worried. "It was Pop. He's out at the farm." In answer to Bill's unanswered question she said, "That's right, you don't know about my father, because Keith's been keeping me to himself." She pushed at a blonde curl that got loose and fell across her forehead. "Pop has a truck farm."

Her eyes met Bill's accusingly. "That super-highway you're finishing has ruined the lot of us here in Colesville. I guess I shouldn't even *like* Keith." A smile touched her lips and was gone.

"It's not my fault, for Pete's sake," Keith protested, "that the State's new freeway cuts off this town. Be reasonable, Wendy." He glanced over at Bill for help.

"It more than just cuts off Colesville," she said bitterly. "We're a mile and a quarter off the highway. The town used to make money from motorists because we're between Central City and Dixon. We're a good day's drive from each of them and our motels, our gas stations and restaurants did awfully well with the traffic. This was an overland bus stop too, because two routes intersect here. A lot of small businesses will have to close up now."

After a minute, Bill asked sympathetically, "And what about your father?"

"He has a big produce stand on the highway just south of town and there'll be no one to buy now with the new freeway." Her eyes blazed. "What you've done is kill our town. And it's dying hard and sad." She restlessly rearranged magazines on the table and then looked out the window into the twilight.

Bill felt a little sad about Colesville himself. She was right about it being very tough to watch a town die. Then he brightened. "There's a big sign at the cut-off from the freeway and motorists can drive into Colesville if they want to."

She whirled to face him, her face white and taut. "Oh, sure, that's so easy to say. But you know it doesn't ever work that way. Every citizen in town protested to the Governor about cutting off Colesville and nothing happened. We're all going broke and it can only get worse and worse as time goes on."

There wasn't anything to say. She spoke the truth. Bill decided he should have kept out of the argument. It was Keith's place to calm her down.

"I'm glad to have met you at last, Wendy." Bill smiled. When he got only a stony response he felt his face flush. Hell, he was trying his best, why couldn't she meet him half way? All he got from her was a cool, indifferent "Good-bye."

Walking down the short brick path from the shuttered white house, Bill wondered why he was so angry. She was just one more of Keith's girls and it wouldn't be too long before she'd be in the discard along with all the rest.

He climbed into his jeep and drove down the street under the spreading elms that made an archway over his head. Riding toward the business section of town, he reflected carefully on the situation and knew he couldn't blame Wendy or anyone else for being bitter. If he lived here and had a small business, he'd be heartsick, knowing it was going out from under him.

Many towns had dried up when a freeway by-passed them. But there had to be progress and having to drive through small towns slowed up millions of motorists and cost millions of hours. People had to accept facts, even when they hurt the most. And, Bill thought, all of this wasn't any of his business or Keith's or any other engineers on this road project for that matter. They were paid to do their job and they did it to the best of their ability. It wasn't their worry if Wendy's Pop went broke, or the gas station and hotel closed...

HE KEPT thinking about Wendy and angrily hoping that Keith wouldn't hurt her when he said good-bye. Still, she was an adult and she must know men. Girls had an uncanny instinct for spotting a shy-of-marriage type man. Probably they learned it in their cradles. But he didn't think Wendy was a girl who'd take love lightly. Borrowing from her feminine

intuition, he believed her love would be real when she gave it, because it would be all of her heart. And it looked very much as though she'd given her heart to Keith—and he'd fallen in love for the first time for keeps. Bill hoped so.

Center Street that cut through the middle of the business district, was anything but bustling on this late Saturday afternoon. It was difficult to guess how much the speedway had hurt business. Transient motorists undoubtedly brought in some trade, but generally Saturday shopping was a local thing. For all Bill knew, Wendy could be imagining the speedway was hurting her father's business at his produce stand. Girls had a tendency to dramatize things and blame someone or something for disaster.

He put his car in the garage and asked the man for a grease job. As he walked out, he realized that the highway crew had brought plenty of business to Colesville's two garages. At least here was one place where there couldn't be any bitter complaints. Of course it was a temporary thing because they'd all be moving on soon to the next job.

At the hotel desk they told Bill there weren't any messages and he went on up to his room to shower and stretch out on the bed with a crime book.

Keith awakened him when he threw open the door from their adjoining bedrooms and called, "Cold beer, bub." After he opened two cans they each took a long draught. Keith grinned. "Well, come on, what do you think of my girl?" he said.

Bill groaned, set the can on the bedside table and then turned his back to his brother. "Go way," he said. When he heard Keith's deep laugh, he rolled over and sat up. "Look, sonny, some fine day some nice girl like

Wendy's going to take you dead seriously. You aren't now, are you?"

After a minute, Keith put down his empty can of beer and looked at his brother intently. "Yes," he said evenly. "I'm dead serious." There was a new sincerity in his voice. "I think she'll say yes. I want to marry the girl. I want her for keeps." He looked slightly embarrassed. "That's why I didn't let you see her right away. I wanted to be sure myself."

Bill reached out his hand and they shook. "This is great. I couldn't be happier."

"Then try to make her like you, will you?" Keith smiled. "I can't have you two glowering like bull dogs at each other." He looked worried. "Wendy thinks you don't like her and disapprove of us."

Bill lit a cigarette and inhaled slowly. "I like her," he said flatly. "But when I met her today I didn't know you were serious this time, and I guess I thought she ought to know what she's up against. That's all."

Keith looked relieved. "Well, now you know. The rest of them were just practice, getting me ready for Wendy." He laughed softly.

He laughed easily, Bill thought. Too easily, maybe. "Good luck," he said and folded his arms over his eyes. For some unexplainable reason, he didn't want to discuss Wendy right now. There wasn't any reason why, he simply didn't.

After a minute, Keith walked into his own room and telephoned. He purred so much anyone could guess it was Wendy on the other end of the wire. Then he came back to the connecting door between their rooms. "Let's the three of us have dinner tonight, Bill. You and Wendy can start getting better acquainted."

"Another time." Bill turned over and tried to go to sleep.

Chapter 2



THE ROOM was dark when Bill awakened and checked his watch. It was eight. No wonder he was hungry; he pulled on his clothes and went down to the hotel tap room.

The hostess met him at the entrance and told him Wendy Holmes was waiting for him in a booth at the rear. Bill stammered his thanks and went on back.

She wore a dark blue dress that matched her eyes and he pulled up short. Keith wasn't sitting in the booth with her. He blinked and just stopped himself from looking around like some guilty kid who was sneaking a date with his best friend's girl. He didn't know why he should feel this way.

"Hello." Wendy smiled shyly at him. "Sit down, won't you?"

"Keith?" he asked as he slid in across from her. It was stupid to blurt it out that way. There wasn't any question about it, he was flustered being here with Wendy. Bill began to wonder if his tie was straight and if his dark hair was slicked down or sticking up in back. His collar began to feel tight. He hadn't felt like this with a girl since he'd been a gangling big kid of nine and taken out the girl next door for a soda.

"The road superintendent wanted Keith to play poker tonight," she explained. "And he suggested I have dinner with you here, since he was sure you'd come in."

It was a flimsy excuse Keith had made up to force them to be alone together. Their road superintendent complained about their high stake poker games, so he never encouraged them. . . This was one of the times Bill wished

his brother would take things a little easier.

"Shall we order?" Bill asked. Wendy didn't want a cocktail, but insisted he take one. Well, he needed it all right. Steak sounded fine to her, along with french fries and he realized too late that she'd probably have liked something with a gooey sauce. Usually girls did.

"This is awfully nice, Bill," she told him and sounded as if she honestly meant it. "I'm starving."

When their food came he was glad she was so slim she didn't have to worry about a diet. He liked girls to eat as if they enjoyed it and not pick at lettuce like a rabbit.

He wanted to select a topic of conversation that didn't have to do with Keith, so he asked, "Is this pretty good farming country?"

"Oh, wonderful." She was eager. "The trouble is we have to truck to Dixon."

Bill put down his fork and stared at her. "But why not ship east right from here. Why make two operations out of it?"

She looked at him hard for a minute. "Why, we *always* truck to Dixon," she explained reasonably as if there couldn't be any disruption of an old tradition, whether it made any sense or not.

Well, it certainly wasn't any of his business so he asked casually, "What do you do with yourself all day?"

Her eyes widened in surprise. "Keith didn't give you much of a rundown on me, did he? I work for the Mayor." She sounded slightly annoyed.

"You'll have to forgive me because I didn't know." He smiled.

"I didn't mean to be cross, Bill." She looked down at her place. "You aren't a very easy man to know, are you?"

"The easiest in the world," he told her heartily. Then, under his gentle prodding, she told him the things she

did and that most of her work for Mayor Henson was at his feed company. As she talked the tension between them began to dissolve and, for the first time, Bill felt comfortable with her and relaxed.

DURING coffee she brought up the subject of Keith. "I suppose," she said and carefully made a little design on the tablecloth with her spoon, "that he's had about a million girls?"

It was an old, old question to Bill. One he'd answered more times than he could possibly remember. He made the same answer he always did. "And I suppose you've had about two million men crazy about you."

Her cheeks got pink. "You don't like me," she told him angrily. "I'm a threat to take your precious brother away from your influence. You run his life and he's scared to breathe unless you approve." Bill was so stunned he couldn't do anything for a full minute except stare at the furious resentment in her lovely eyes. "If Keith ever did anything without asking you first," she said, "the shock would kill you."

"You're completely wrong." He tried to hold down his own flash of anger. "Keith's his own man. Just as I'm mine." He caught the derision in her smile and a muscle in his jaw jumped. "Think what you please," he said curtly.

The last thing he deserved was this kind of blast... He spent a good part of his adult life helping Keith out of his countless love affairs. It was true that Keith had been scared a good many times about what the latest girl might do, especially the ones he'd practically left waiting at the church. And it had been "good old Bill" who'd gone around and tried to smooth things over. For a while he'd thought he liked Wendy better than any of the others, now he knew he'd been wrong there too.

"You look down on love and ro-

mance," she told him evenly. "Keith said so."

Bill shrugged. "It wouldn't do much good to deny it, would it?"

For a long time he'd dreamed of love and a girl all his own. One who could love him no matter what happened and who'd stand by if the going got rough. There'd be understanding between them and trust, and when they kissed the world would spin like a top around them. The moon would shine brighter just for them and the stars would wink down.

After a while Wendy said, "My job tonight was to make you like me and I've failed miserably." She sighed. "I don't want the man I love to be so desperately worried about what someone else will think, even his own brother. I want him to stand on his own feet." Her eyes were steady. "Don't you think perhaps you've babied Keith a little too much for his own good?" She was almost begging him to agree.

Bill's smile was crooked. "It could be. But I won't be around you and Keith, so don't let it worry you." He paid the check and asked politely, "Ready?" She got up instantly and he followed her out of the taproom.

In the small hotel lobby she said, "I'm meeting Keith back at the house. I have the station wagon here." Her eyes held his and he caught their deep concern. "About all I've done is make you mad. And I can't even be sorry, because I believe what I said, Bill."

He managed a smile. "Sure you mean it. It's all right." He walked out, waved when she drove away. She was quite a girl, but it rankled that she'd accuse him of running Keith's life. All he'd ever done was to help when his brother was deep in girl trouble.

Almost against his will, he had a lot of respect and admiration for Wendy's honesty. It couldn't have been easy for her to have told him what she had and, then, stick to it.

BEFORE he went back upstairs Bill stopped at the drugstore for razor blades and cigarettes. After that, he strolled up Center Street looking into store windows. Probably it was his imagination, but the places of business already had a droopy look, as if they'd given up to the new freeway.

When he returned to the hotel a small man with graying hair and a pleasant weather-beaten face jumped out of one of the leather chairs and came over to him.

"You Bill Ross?" he asked. When Bill admitted it, he said, "I'm Pop Holmes, Wendy's dad." His blue eyes crinkled with laughter. "Kind of thought we might get kind of acquainted, since my girl and your kid brother are spooning these nights."

"I think this calls for a beer," Bill said, instantly liking Pop Holmes.

They went into the bar and almost at once their talk gravitated to the new freeway. Pop was bitter, but philosophical enough about it.

"They call it progress and quote how many cars travel the roads these days." Pop shook his head. "But none of 'em tell you how to get the money you're losing by these new super-highways that bypass towns like ours. I got a truck farm and a big fine roadside stand and I won't make enough to keep a man working my stand." His mouth looked grim. "I've been trying to leave a mite of a nest egg for Wendy, now I'll be lucky if I don't lose my shirt along with my farm. But it looks like she'll be marrying and moving along with Keith anyhow. He's a fine lad, Bill. You ought to be proud of him."

Bill winced, but he finally managed to agree heartily. He felt a hard, cold knot inside him at the thought of Keith's misleading these decent people. Personally, he didn't want Wendy for a sister-in-law, at least he wouldn't have selected her. Still she seemed to be in love with Keith and that was what counted. He prayed, sitting here

with her father, that his brother really knew his own mind at last. But of course he did, he'd been in and out of love enough to recognize the real thing when he'd finally found it.

They talked then about Pop Holmes' farm and Bill found him a man of intelligence with a certain nice humor. He talked crops and the local farm problems until Bill found himself interested in them and in the town's people. Pop was trying to make the best of a seriously bad situation brought about by the thruway and he wasn't grousing.

"Well, I got to be up with the birds, son." Pop smiled and held out his hand. "I'm mighty glad to have met you and had this little talk. Wendy's a fine girl and I want her to be happy." He slid off the stool. "Come on out to the farm and look it over. Anytime."

"Thanks, I'll do that," Bill promised. He had another beer after Pop Holmes left and found himself wondering what could be done in a concerted effort to bring steady trade back to Colesville.

Keith wasn't in when he went upstairs and he was glad. He'd had enough about Wendy for tonight. But he kept thinking about her and Keith after he'd gone to bed. Her unfair accusations kept jabbing at him and he was filled with resentment against both of them. There were a couple of questions Keith had to answer!

SINCE ON Saturdays the highway crew knocked off work, Bill decided he'd get directions from the desk as to the location of the Holmes' farm and drive out. He was just finishing breakfast when Keith joined him. His brother was the picture of a healthy male specimen from his crisp crewcut to the breadth of the shoulders so many girls found attractive. His smile was teasing and could melt a frozen image when he wanted it to. The restlessness in him

showed in his dark eyes which could light with delight and fade out as quickly. With his mouth in repose there was a hint of self-indulgence.

"Pop told me he talked to you last night," Keith said and finished his orange juice. "How'd you make out with Wendy?" He half-smiled. "The lady wouldn't talk."

Bill wiped his mouth and crumpled his napkin by his plate. He wondered what had prompted Keith to tell Wendy what he had? Offhandedly he said, "How come Wendy has the idea I boss you, Keith. It's damn silly and I wish you'd straighten her out."

Keith flushed and looked sheepish. "Aw, I only said it was rough trying to live up to a big strong-willed, swell guy like you. She must have added to it." He smiled up at the waitress and started kidding her. Neither of them noticed Bill when he left the table.

He drove out of town and into the farmlands. Resolutely, he put both Keith and Wendy out of his mind. It would be best all around if he and Keith separated, each going his own way. After all, Wendy wouldn't want to marry and inherit an older brother. *Older*, that was funny. Two years seemed to make an awful difference.

Chapter 3



THE FARMS were large with fine neat barns and broad acreage planted in fall wheat and corn. It was two miles to the turnoff which led farther away from the new super-highway.

Then he saw a big, inactive roadside stand which would have held countless bushels of vegetables. Inside the fence for acres were row on row of vegetables. Bill turned inside the gate and drove up to the farm buildings, un-

certain now why he'd bothered to come to the farm.

He climbed out of his car and started looking around for Pop. He didn't seem to be around, but Bill saw a girl in a field of tomatoes and made his way to her. When Wendy saw him, she stopped picking and brushed that vagrant blonde curl off her forehead. She gave no indication whether she was glad to see him or not, and he felt self-conscious as he walked toward her. It helped a little to notice that her own smile was hesitant.

"Hi," he called.

"Hi yourself." She had the smile working now and he wished it would light up her eyes and was a little shocked at his crazy thought. "I'll find Pop for you," she said.

He reached out his hand and stopped her. "These are beautiful tomatoes," he said. Well, that was a brilliant observation. Then, because he wished he'd kept quiet, he said the next thing that jumped into his dumb mind. "You oughtn't to be out here in the sun without a hat." He was amazed at her instant reaction.

Her eyes blazed. "Don't you try to run *my* life, Bill." She picked up the half filled basket at her feet and marched off toward the barn leaving him with his mouth practically hanging open. The unreasonable little spitfire! My lord, he'd only said what anyone with a grain of sense would have. The sun *was* hot and she *did* need some protection.

It was true she was convinced he tried to run Keith, but the fact also remained that she had an illogical, flaring temper. If he hadn't been a fool he wouldn't have come out here. Only it hadn't occurred to him that Wendy would be here.

It was only sane to recognize the fact that he and Wendy ignited some combustible chemical in each other. There were some people who simply

couldn't get along. It was too bad, but there it was. He shrugged and had started back to his car when Pop Holmes came out of the barn and shouted gleefully to him.

So there wasn't anything to do but wait by his car, and Bill lit a cigarette until Pop finished some chore and joined him. It wasn't easy, for some reason, to keep his mind on what Pop was saying as he showed him around the farm. Pop talked crops and prices and the town.

Suddenly, Bill got interested as he realized Colesville was building straight for apathy. They hadn't done a thing to try to overcome the financial losses caused by the freeway. They'd taken it lying down, dismally admitting defeat.

THEY'D STOPPED by a deep irrigation ditch when Bill asked, "Pop, has anyone done anything about this? Anything to bring business into town?"

Pop took off his straw hat and scratched his gray hair. "Nope," he finally admitted. "Not a dang thing. Just talk and sing the blues."

"Well, why not do something about it?"

"What?" Pop asked hopefully. "You tell me, son. What?" He nodded. "Tell you, let's you and me go talk to Wendy. She's got a head on her shoulders and between the three of us we might come up with something. And we ain't got a thing to lose." He strode back toward the house fast, fired with sudden hope and enthusiasm.

"Pop, I don't think Wendy's going to be very interested in any ideas of mine," Bill protested. "She'll think I'm interfering in something that's none of my business."

Pop slowed and looked at him. "Shucks. She's a bright, sensible girl. She'll listen and be glad."

There wasn't much point in telling a man he didn't know his own daugh-

ter, so Bill kept quiet. He cursed himself for having deliberately gotten into this. Someday maybe he'd learn to keep his mouth shut.

They found Wendy about to get into the station wagon and Pop yelled for her to wait. His face was flushed with excitement and there was a glint of hope in his eyes.

"Bill here thinks the town ought to fight, instead of doing nothing and being wiped out," he said.

She turned to Bill and he realized how lovely her eyes were. He braced himself, waiting for her fury that now he was even trying to run her whole town. To his utter surprise, her eyes filled with tears.

"What can we do?" she asked with the directness he liked.

"To make motorists turn off the speedway and take the cutoff to Colesville, you'll have to build a better mouse-trap. You'll have to lure them here." Bill leaned against the fender of the station wagon, his forehead creased in thought. "I tell you," he said, "let me think about it. How about if I come over tonight and we can try to figure out something to do to attract people from Central City and Dixon."

Wendy's face was a study, but he couldn't figure it out. There was uncertainty and disbelief all mixed up with the old anger. Pop, though, looked as if he'd just inherited about a million dollars.

"You're sure right about one thing, son. Folks have got to be waked up." He clapped Bill's shoulder. "We'll put on our thinking caps and, by jingos, we'll come up with something." Pop smiled wryly. "And that's more than anyone else has tried to do. You got an idea, Bill. God bless you."

"I've got a date to drive to Dixon to the movies with Keith," Wendy said.

"All right," Pop told her. "Me and Bill'll wrangle with the problem."

She glared at her father and when

Bill smiled, she glared at him, too. Without a word, she got in the station wagon and flew off toward Colesville.

"A girl's a mite unpredictable," Pop said.

It was, Bill thought, the understatement of the year. They talked for a while longer, then he turned his car back to Colesville, figuring he might be able to come up with a brain storm.

ON THE WAY to town Bill kept thinking about Wendy. No matter how much he tried to focus on Colesville and its problems, his mind kept going back to Wendy. She was a bundle of temper and charm. She was lovely and challenging. A strange new wave of feeling flooded through him and he unconsciously slowed the car. His gray eyes were bleak. He knew again that this was the one girl Keith must not hurt. This time Keith had to play it square.

And then, Bill knew something else that seared through his heart. He was in love with his brother's girl!

There was a pain in his chest and a buzzing in his ears. He pulled off the side of the road and stopped. After a while, he lit a cigarette and sat staring straight ahead. Never in his life had he been as shocked, as stunned. Nothing had ever prepared him for this, because he hadn't known that love would come to him this way. It was a funny thing for a six foot man to feel like jelly.

The cigarette tasted like hay and he put it out. He had a sudden desire to drive far and fast and turned off on the road to Dixon. The miles spilling past helped, but not much.

Lunch at a big rustic roadhouse looked good, but the food was tasteless to him. He was still shaken, almost unable to believe what had happened to him without warning.

Perhaps that afternoon he drove two hundred miles or more, he didn't

know, or care. Some of the tension in him was gone when he parked in front of Colesville's hotel at around seven o'clock.

Keith had propped a note on the dresser in Bill's room saying he was taking Wendy to the movies and Bill let out a long breath. That meant he wouldn't have to see her quite so soon after his fatal discovery, he'd have a little more time to learn to handle it.

After dinner, he drove to the Holmes' house. Everything was going to be fine, he was sure of it now as he walked up the path. Then he saw Wendy sitting on the porch with Keith's arm around her. Probably for the only time in his life, Bill knew what having butterflies meant.

"Evening, Bill," Pop called cheerfully from his rocking chair near the swing where Wendy and Keith were.

"Hi," Bill answered and tried to get warmth into his voice. He was grateful that it was twilight so that his face wouldn't betray the emotions churning in him.

"I SUPPOSE you know you're spoiling my big romance tonight?" Keith told him good-naturedly enough, but Bill caught the sulky look around his mouth.

"Hey, wait a minute," Bill protested. "Don't be blaming me for any change in your plans."

"I called some Grange members," Pop said, ignoring any comments about unimportant things like romance. "Every last one of 'em's champing on the bit to cooperate in any way."

"So will the 4 H Club," Wendy reported.

"Good," Bill said. She was so pretty in a fluffy dress and her eyes seemed so bright that his throat tightened and he had to clear it. He turned his chair toward Pop so he wouldn't have to keep watching Wendy and forbidden territory.

"I thought we could advertise in Dixon and Central City papers." Bill didn't notice that he'd said *we*. "A cooperative sort of thing offering bargains in all the stores and specials in the lunch room and cafes in Colesville. Then, Pop, a lot of the farmers could join in with you and your roadside stand." Bill became more eager as he talked and planned. "We could even put up a temporary one too and have a gala opening. I bet people will come from Dixon and Central City, some tourists will turn off the speedway when they see our big sign there. There can be prizes and free lemonade and cookies."

"The 4 H girls will take care of the refreshments." Wendy sounded interested.

"We'll get the high school jazz band," Pops cried. He was letting his hope and enthusiasm build along with Wendy's and Bill's.

Only Keith was bored. He fiddled with the change in his pocket, stuck out his long legs, then pulled them in until finally he got up and pulled Wendy to her feet.

"Honey, all they want to do is talk about onions and potatoes and all I want to do is kiss you." He put his arm around her possessively. "Suppose we let Pop and Bill manage the world and we sneak out of here. There's going to be a real big moon for us that we can't waste."

Everybody laughed, even Bill as he pushed his chair out of their way. Nobody could blame Keith for wanting Wendy for himself. Any man would wish with all his heart that she'd look at him the way she did at Keith. There was a longing in Bill he'd never known before, never even known there could be. The bitter thing about it was that he had a hunch it would always be with him—and not Wendy, or anyone else could ever know—Forever, it must be locked deep in his heart.

It was a terrible thing to be this jealous of his own brother. To want so desperately the girl he had casually on his arm. But that was wrong. This love was real for Keith, just as it was for Wendy.

AFTER THEY left he and Pop discussed the Colesville situation from every angle. And before Bill left he suggested that just because Dixon had storage for vegetables, was no reason why Colesville couldn't build its own refrigerator plant and ship direct from here without trucking. It would more than pay for itself as time went on.

Pop liked it and persuaded Bill to speak at the Grange lunch on Monday, confident Bill's boss would give him an extra hour off.

"We'll have a real gala opening at the stand and the town can dress up with flags and stuff," Pop called after him as Bill went to his car.

"Sure it can," Bill answered. "And talk to the merchants about giving *real* bargains, Pop."

He felt pretty good driving back to the hotel. Maybe you always did when you tried to help other people; indirectly it might help Wendy too. It made him a little sad to realize he wouldn't be here when Colesville came alive, he'd be working miles farther down the freeway and wouldn't come back this way again. Then, too, Wendy would be married to Keith.

Keith would raise hell if he didn't come for a lot of meals with them and be one of the family. And that Bill couldn't do. There was an answer to it. A good one that would cut off all arguments. He'd been offered a fine engineering job in Central America and he decided to take it, as he undressed and climbed into bed.

After all, a man can only stand so much—and it was best if he never saw Wendy after she was married to Keith.

Chapter 4



ON SUNDAYS Bill usually took things easy, getting up late and then eating with some of the boys and going to a movie. But today he was up early and writing at the desk until the wastebasket was filled with crumpled balls of paper. At noon Keith poked his head in and said he had a big date.

For a while, Bill tried to forget who his brother had the date with and found it far from easy. Gradually, he managed to concentrate again on some promotion ideas for Colesville and finally admitted he wasn't much of an advertising copywriter. He phoned Pop and told him the trouble.

"You stay right there, son," Pop ordered. "I'm coming."

It wasn't long before there was a knock at the door and Bill just kept from gulping in surprise when he saw Wendy standing there with her father and two other men. One, a friendly man, was Syd Parker, the editor and owner of The Colesville Press, and the other was Clark Wyman, head of the Grange.

"Come in," Bill invited and didn't look at Wendy as he held the door wide.

"I'm representing the 4 H Club," she explained the reason she was here.

"Fine," he said and knew Keith would be boiling if she'd stood him up to come here.

They worked hard and, after a long general conference, Syd Parker came up with some good ads for the city newspapers, they planned in detail the big opening at Pop's extended stand, agreed they'd clear space for outdoor square dances and a box supper.

"The 4 H girls will make pies and cakes," Wendy promised and everybody agreed that all proceeds on opening day would be placed in the new Colesville Cooperative Treasury, an organization which they blocked out for presentation to the Town Council, the residents and the farmers.

Bill ordered up sandwiches and coffee, admiring Wendy's terrific enthusiasm and thinking how pretty she was in a white dress that made her honey tan seem deeper. She turned and caught his eye then, and flushed. He was embarrassed himself, because he knew she'd seen a little part of what he was feeling. And that wouldn't do. Never must his love for her show through. The sense of guilt because he'd fallen in love with his brother's girl lay over him like a pall. He'd never intended it to happen, but Keith couldn't be expected to understand and would end up hating him if he ever suspected. And it would spoil a little of the glory of Wendy's and Keith's romance.

At Bill's insistence, Clark Wyman laughingly agreed to let him off from his speech to the Grange at lunch tomorrow. After that, they discussed a cold storage unit and other plans for Colesville's improvement. Bill knew that in the next twenty-four hours, when everybody had been contacted, the town would no longer be dying. He felt deeply grateful that he'd had some small part in the awakening of Wendy's home place, even if she'd be gone with Keith.

"Guess there aren't enough words to tell you, Bill," Syd said, "what your prodding has done for us. Colesville needed someone like you right away for its life line."

Bill smiled. "Thanks, but I haven't done much. I'm an outsider who isn't actually involved with all this, so maybe I could see the picture clearer."

IT WAS LATE in the afternoon when the conference broke up and Wendy glanced at her watch.

"Oops," she cried. "I'm supposed to have met your brother at the baseball game an hour ago, Bill. Want to come along?"

"Thanks, no." He smiled and hoped she couldn't hear the pounding of his heart. "I've got to try to find my boss."

"I didn't think you would," she said. At the door she turned. "We have to make each merchant put something *really* good on sale and the restaurants must have wonderful specials."

"We'll see they do, honey," Syd assured her.

After the stimulation of their talk and the excitement of having Wendy here, the room seemed very lonely when everybody had gone. Funny too, because Bill had never been a man who'd paid much attention to loneliness. Mostly he had fun and took the days as they came.

He got his car and drove aimlessly toward Central City and when he found a roadside tavern, he pulled in and had beer and hamburgers. After that, he decided against a movie and went on back to Colesville, wanting to see his boss now about leaving for the job in Central America. The super wasn't in his room at the hotel and Bill found a crowd of the boys in the tap room.

He joined them and felt his spirits lifting as he listened to their amusing tall-tales. Along about eleven he went on up to bed.

Keith was waiting for him, his face flushed with anger. "I want you to lay off all this highfalutin' talk about good deeds for this town. Just kindly stop involving Wendy in your missionary work." A vein jumped in his forehead. "I don't have much time to be with her and you're messing up what little time there is."

For one of the few times in their lives Bill burned with indignation and anger at his brother. "You have all the rest of your life with her." His voice was hard and Keith looked startled. "Isn't it about time you started thinking of someone else besides your own selfish self? Why should you mind if she wants to do a little civic work for her home town when it's dying? And get this. I didn't knock her over the head and make her do this, you know." He took time to light a cigarette and to get better control of himself. "And what are your plans? When are you two going to get married?"

"That's what I'm squawking about," Keith shouted. "I wanted to get married right now, but she won't until after some damn opening celebration. She's got too much on her mind right now." He snorted derisively, his mouth sulky. "When she gets married she's only going to have love and a husband on her mind. This is your fault, Bill, and thanks for nothing." He went into his own bedroom and slammed the door.

BILL SAT down slowly and held his head in his hands. He'd come closer to socking Keith than he ever had before and it scared him just a little. It was hard on Keith, he guessed, that Wendy had become so absorbed, but Bill couldn't help being grateful that they weren't getting married right away. It was bad enough being in love with his brother's fiancée, but to be in love with his wife was both dishonorable and intolerable. This way he'd stay until the gala opening since he was deep in it now, then he'd be on his way.

The next day he told the super about the new job and overruled all his objections and the offer of a raise. At noon he drove back to Colesville and stopped at the Western Union office to send his acceptance of the Guatamala job to the New York office.

He felt a deep sense of relief as he went back to his car.

"Bill!" Wendy called and he stiffened before he turned to face her. Her eyes sparkled with excitement. "The Mayor gave me the day off and every merchant I've talked to is simply bursting with enthusiasm. They're falling over themselves to cooperate and they're going to give terrific bargains." Her smile was pure enchantment. "There's something I want to say, Bill. I'm sorry I said what I did about you trying to run my life. I'm truly sorry."

"Oh, forget it." He smiled down at her. "You don't owe me any apology." But, somehow, he was glad she'd said it. "Darned if he didn't feel good about it. 'Let's not be enemies,'" he said and there was a lot more feeling in his voice than he'd meant to have and he could have kicked himself around the town.

"Let's not," she agreed. Something deep in her eyes flickered and was still. "Keith phoned me a little while ago that he was driving directly to Boonton after work. I'm to meet him there and look at furnished houses for us." Bill nodded. He knew that's where Keith planned on living when the road crews moved down to the next section of speedway. "I'm to meet him at the hotel for dinner," she said. "Pop needs the station wagon and I wonder if you'd drive me. Bill?"

"You take my car," he told her quickly. The last thing he wanted was to be the third wheel tonight while they looked for their future home.

She tucked her hand under his arm. "But we need your advice about the house because Keith's planning on the three of us being together after we're married."

"The Lord forbid!" he blurted before he could catch himself. To cover his rudeness he said, "I'll pick you up at six. At your house." He glanced at his watch. "I'm late for work."

Without waiting for any answer, he jumped into his car and zoomed out of there.

Back on the job he found Keith. "Get it right out of your fat little head that I'm going to live with you and Wendy," he said gruffly. "It wouldn't be fair to either of you, or to me." He didn't mention the Guatamala job because he wanted verification from New York first.

Keith burst out laughing. "Listen to the man rave. Of course you're going to live with us. Who'd be around to referee our squabbles?" he asked jauntily and winked.

"Wendy wants me to drive her to Boonton and have dinner with you." It was odd to feel strained about his own brother. "Suppose I give her the car? Like you said, you don't have too much time with her alone."

"Yeah, suppose you do that." But when Bill walked away Keith called, "On second thought, I wish you would come along. I might want to stay overnight with Lennox and you can drive my wench home." He rejoined his men.

Lennox was one of the crew chief's whose wife preferred Boonton to Colesville and they'd rented a house. Keith surprised Bill a little, but if he'd been waiting around to marry Wendy, he'd be resiless too.

SO IT WAS late in the afternoon when Bill picked up Wendy at her house and they headed down the secondary road toward Boonton and Keith. Wendy looked festive and he liked the fluffy clothes she wore in the evening. It seemed like a nice compliment to her date. Still it was all right with Bill when she wore dungarees at the farm.

They had a lot to talk about as he drove along. She reported the fine results from the Grange luncheon and the Mayor's complete approval of all their ideas.

"I'm sorry to be leaving here," she said wistfully and he could feel a band snap around his heart.

They were silent then, but it was a nice silence, except when he was too conscious of her nearness. Something had to be done so he started to talk to keep himself from thinking how he could reach over and take her hand. He never did know what he talked about, except that he tried to tell her amusing things that happened on the jobs.

Boonton was bigger than Colesville and, not being affected by the thru-way, it bustled with late shoppers. They had a time finding a parking spot, but they needn't have worried. Keith wasn't at the hotel and they went into the cocktail lounge where he had a dry martini and Wendy a vanilla coke.

Bill found himself dreaming of what it would be like if Wendy were his date and he knew if she were, he'd never keep her waiting one second. He smiled crookedly. Married to Keith she'd get used to waiting, because his brother was never on time for anything except work.

"Honey," Keith cried. "I couldn't be sorrier. I met a chick who was desperate for a job and I had to help her." He kissed Wendy eagerly and she stiffened a little.

Bill frowned. This cocky brother of his ought to know that she wasn't a girl who'd like a public demonstration.

During dinner Keith raved about Boonton and then winked at Bill. "Leave it to Wendy and me, we'll fix you up with a cute girl because this town's chuck full of 'em. We'll find you a wife," he said gleefully.

It was then Bill realized that Wendy was being awfully quiet, but that was all right because Keith usually did most of the talking. And he was being amusing and charming.

After dinner Keith said, "Lennox and his wife want us to come over.

Cynthia, that's his wife, has a flock of hot records and we'll have a ball."

"Would you mind too much if I beg out?" Wendy asked him quietly. "We can go house hunting some other time because I'll admit I have a really bad headache."

"Oh, sure—the house," Keith said and looked as if he just remembered about it. He insisted on getting something for Wendy's headache at the drugstore and then Bill headed the car toward home. He'd thought he'd be driving back alone because he didn't think Keith really would spend the night with the Lennox'.

IT WAS WENDY who spoke first. She sounded a little puzzled when she said, "Keith's as enthusiastic as a child, isn't he? One who never quite grew up."

"He'll find himself," Bill assured her. "All he needs is a wife to make him steady down."

"I guess," Wendy said. After a while she went on, "Keith admires you enormously. Even if he did say you keep him on his toes and he's afraid of what you may think."

"Well," Bill felt a little uncomfortable. "Our parents died just as we were finishing school and we worked pretty hard at our engineering course."

"You worked hard. You paid his way the last year." She smiled. After a few miles she said, "Now that Keith plans to get married, what about you?"

"Nothing about me," he blurted. "No marriage." He pulled off the secondary road and was grateful when he stopped in front of her house.

He walked her up the path and she stopped and looked up at him. "Thanks," she said. His love for her burned through him and he knew he must get away from Colesville.

"Good night, little Wendy," he said gently.

"Aren't you going to kiss me good night?" she asked.

"No!"

"I dare you to kiss me," she said mockingly.

She was beautiful in the moonlight. He put a finger under her chin and lifted it, then he kissed her lightly on her cheek. He wheeled and strode back to his car as if demons were after him, and his blood pounded through his veins.

Probably Bill had never been as relieved as when he found a telegram at the hotel desk. It verified the Guatamala job!

THE NEXT few days Bill managed to avoid both Wendy and Keith without too much trouble. He spent all his free time helping Syd and Pop get ready for the celebration. Instead of having to bump into Wendy everywhere he went, he found she was working days and nights on some special business for the Mayor. Keith spent more and more time with Lennox and his wife.

Once or twice Bill wondered what Wendy thought about Keith's growing interest in Boonton, but he had no chance to find out. Big ads appeared in the Central City and Dixon newspapers, signs and posters appeared in all the merchants' windows in Colesville and everywhere people were talking it up with pride and determination. Whatever happened, Colesville wasn't going to die.

And then it was the gala day. Bill was up at dawn that Saturday and out at Pop Holmes' farm to help him and the neighbors fill the roadside stands with every variety of vegetable. Even the potatoes looked hand polished.

The 4 H girls, under Wendy's supervision, had their booths nearby covered with bright green crepe paper. Excitement charged the air and people, beaming pride, milled around. From time to time they drifted up to Pop's

farmhouse for coffee and doughnuts. It seemed to Bill that Wendy was everywhere at once and he felt great pride in her.

About noon he cornered Wendy. "Where's Keith?" he demanded.

"He'll be along," she smiled. "He's always late, isn't he? So stop worrying." She put her hand on his arm. "It'll be all right, Bill. I promise." Someone called her then and she ran.

The first car stopped at Pop's enormous stand which the Grange members manned, and everybody spilled out of the kitchen to watch the first sale. And that was the beginning of a steady stream of cars that stopped that day. By late afternoon the stands looked as if they'd been attacked by a storm of grasshoppers. The 4 H girls were wilted from making lemonade and refilling cookie cans.

Only Wendy still looked as fresh as she had that morning, Bill thought. He kept looking all over for Keith, but he still hadn't come by the time the high school jazz band began to play.

Pop clapped Bill on the back. "Ain't this a dandy?" he cried with glee. "And, son, we owe most of it to you for having a simple idea that would work. We're pulling together now and be-danged if we'll let the new speed-way wreck us."

The reports from Colesville made this a success far beyond the most optimistic dreams. The townspeople and the farmers *believed* now that it could be done and they'd work hand-in-hand to keep the business coming.

AS BILL watched Wendy he knew she must be hurt by Keith's neglect and he cursed to himself.

Gradually, after the box supper, folks began to drift toward home and Bill knew it was time he went along too. He detached himself from one too-grateful group, and walked to his car parked behind Pop's barn.

He opened the car door and stopped.

Wendy was curled up on the back seat fast asleep. All his love welled through him and for a minute his eyes stung. Then he shook her gently.

She opened her eyes, looked at him, then closed them again. "You took long enough," she complained.

His hand was still on her shoulder and he removed it and straightened. "About Keith," he said as he had so many times before to so many other girls. "Something must have held him up. I'm sorry."

"No, nothing held him up," she said and got out of the car to stand by Bill in the moonlight. "Keith phoned me this morning and I made him mad because I'm the first girl who ever refused to marry him."

"You what!" Bill sounded like a croaking frog and cleared his throat.

She nodded gravely, her dark eyes clinging to Bill's. "He doesn't really want to be tied down. He's already found a very cute girl in Boonton, with Cynthia Lennox' help."

Bill reached out and caught her arms. "But *you*, Wendy. You're in love."

"Yes, Bill, I'm in love. And I'm free, now that Pop and Colesville are all right, thanks to you." Her smile was shaky, but her luminous eyes kept steady. "The Western Union operator told me that you're leaving us. You know," she spoke so low he almost couldn't hear, "I always liked hot weather and I'd like Guatamala. Oh, Bill," she cried and threw her arms around him. "I want to marry a man not a sulky boy."

He held her close to his pounding heart, unable to speak. "Bill," she whispered in his ear; "I double dare you to kiss me!"

That was one thing Bill managed all right. He was still kissing Wendy when the moon slid behind a cloud and the earth grew quiet around them. They were just two people in love in a world all their own.

LIZ HAD TO FALL IN LOVE

by Kevin Dale

But Shelley decided that, after all, Britt was too good for her!

AROUND orange harvest moon floated in the sky, down the street a dog bayed at it, while in the yard the crickets chirped. Except for the kitchen light, the house was dark and Shelley's parents had long since gone to bed. That's where she should be right now, instead of sitting out here on the lawn swing waiting and wondering.

A car drove slowly past and she recognized the gray sedan as belonging to Britt Saunders. Its passing broke into her thoughts. Britt was seemingly such a nice person and a client of the law office where she worked as secretary. It was rather a shame the way he kept to himself, still it gave him an aura of mystery which had piqued the curiosity of almost everybody since he'd moved to Glendale six months ago.

"Hi," a voice said softly and there was movement on the other side of the dividing hedge.

"Ron," she said without turning.

He came through to her side. "What are you doing up this late?" He sat down beside her and took her hand.

"Thinking about you," she said quietly. "About how much I love you and how hopeless it all is for us."

He sighed. "I know, honey." Then he put his arms around her and held her close. "But think what it would do to sis if we got married now. I don't believe in having in-laws live with newlyweds and neither do you. We want our own home." When she didn't answer, he went on almost defensively. "Liz raised me and she's given up a lot of chances to marry because of her duty and devotion. Won't you see that



"But you agreed that's the wrong way to start a marriage," she protested.

she needs me right now and I can't let her down?"

"I guess," she spoke so low he had to bend his head to hear. "But it isn't fair!" A sob tore through her throat and she clung to him.

Her breath came faster under the pressure of his mouth. Their kisses grew more reckless as they tried to still

the hunger in them. The moon shone down as she lay in his arms, wanting to make only this moment real.

"Darling," he whispered against her dark curls. "I love you so!"

She pushed away from him, her breath ragged and got unsteadily to her feet. She turned and ran into the house.

IN HER bedroom she undressed hurriedly, not looking out the window down on the side yard. She knew that Ron would still be in the swing, hoping she'd return.

This wasn't any good. Wild, savage kisses in the moonlight only made her discontent and unhappiness more acute. And no one had to tell Shelly there was danger in them.

She propped up her pillow and lay staring at the ceiling, her black eyes filled with rebellion. Ron's sister had no right to keep them from marrying. The situation was the more impossible because Shelly couldn't tell him that the sister he adored was a selfish woman, who'd deliberately centered all her love and attention on him. Shelly's own love hadn't blinded her to the fact that Liz spoiled Ron beyond common sense and catered to his every mood like some brooding hen. The wonder of it was that Ron was as strong minded and sweet as he was, and that his love for Shelly had grown in spite of Liz.

Tonight had made Shelly realize more completely the seriousness of their impasse. If she ever expected to marry him, then she had to do something drastic about it. Oh, Liz *had* suggested they marry and live with her. She'd been far too clever to oppose the marriage outright. But she didn't need to, when for years she'd impressed on Ron that no house was big enough for two women.

Shelly buried her face in her hands. It was obvious that there was only one solution. Liz had to fall in love!

Hope rushed through Shelly. It was something of a shock when she realized Liz was only in her late twenties and pretty, if she'd stop being so grim about Ron. If she'd let herself forget him, she'd probably look a lot younger. Rapidly, Shelly checked the available men in town. She admitted there weren't many left around Liz' age who weren't already married and raising a family. And it was then she remem-

bered Britt Saunders and her eyes widened with excitement.

Britt was doing research of some kind, but that, too, was shrouded in mystery. He was attractive with a thin, quiet face and eyes as black as Shelly's, only his would seem withdrawn sometimes, as if he'd just gone into a world of his own. He'd been most pleasant to her the few times he'd come to the office, and she'd got the feeling he was a lonely man. No one in town really knew him, so he wasn't asked to parties. The more she thought about it, the more convinced that he'd be ideal for Liz. She could mother him if he needed it and it could turn out to be the perfect marriage.

Shelly was so thrilled about the idea she could hardly wait to start the plot rolling. One thing certain, she wouldn't tell Ron anything about it. Her job was to throw Britt Saunders and Liz together and then let things work out. Fortunately, Liz was attractive, slim and cool looking with beautiful chestnut hair. If a man didn't know what big apron strings she tied to someone she loved, he'd find her appealing. Shelly thought about that, then changed it to *interesting*. No one could deny that Liz was the possessive type, but some men loved that. In all honesty, Ron did. And if those apron strings weren't cut, he never would get married.

SINCE the next morning was Saturday and Shelly didn't have to go to work, she walked down the winding street under old oak trees, a few of whose leaves still stubbornly clung to their branches. She turned up the hill toward the house that was too large for a single man, but which Shelly's boss had arranged for Britt to rent.

Now that she was here she felt a little scared. It was only eleven and Britt might not be up and if he were, he might resent uninvited company.

Firming her chin, she rang the bell. Her heart skipped a beat when the door opened and he was standing there looking down at her.

It was obvious that he was startled, but he managed a smile. "Hello, Miss Carr. Won't you come in?"

"I was seeing someone near here, so I thought I'd drop in on you." It was a lame excuse, but she was embarrassed. Probably it was because she planned to change the whole course of this stranger's life.

"I'm glad you did," he said and held open the door.

A huge fawn colored Great Dane bounded to meet her and she threw her arms around him and forgot to be embarrassed. "He's beautiful," she said. "What's his name?"

A smile crinkled Britt's eyes. "Nothing original, I'm afraid. I call him Sergeant." The dog bounded and leaped like a young colt wanting to play. "I just made coffee," Britt said. "Will you join me?"

"I'd love to."

He took her out to the glassed side porch and saw that she was comfortable in a willow chair with cigarettes and matches on the table next to her. "I won't be but a minute. Come on, Sarg, outside with you." He looked at Shelly a little sheepishly. "I'm afraid I feed him at the table when I eat here alone and he makes a nuisance of himself around food."

She laughed. "I know I'd spoil him too." When Britt and his dog left, Shelly got up and peeked into the living room again. It was comfortable enough and spotlessly clean, but it looked un-lived in and she wondered where Britt spent his time in the house. There must be a den or study somewhere other than this room. Feeling guilty about prying, she returned to her chair.

Britt came with a tray. For some reason when she saw the thick slices of bread and butter and strawberry jam, something tugged at her heart. She

had an idea he didn't pay much attention to what he ate as long as it filled his tall frame.

It was companionable drinking coffee and eating the bread and jam. "You're not really a hermit, are you, Britt?" she asked.

He looked startled again and something in his eyes retreated back into the past. "No," he finally said. "I'm not a hermit. But I do a lot of work here nights and I guess I haven't much spare time."

It wasn't encouraging, but Shelly's project was so important to her, she plunged on. "You put yourself behind a barrier," she scolded. "Strangers, particularly attractive males, are in great demand here." She smiled. "Everybody wants to get to know you, Britt, and make you welcome."

"Well," Britt hedged.

Shelly rushed on. "I'm going to pry you out." Her dark eyes met his, after a minute it was she who looked away. She felt strange and suddenly a little shaky. "Will you come to my house tomorrow night for supper?" she asked. "Will you meet some of the folks here?"

He hesitated. Finally he leaned over and snubbed out his cigarette. "It's friendly of you, Shelly. Thanks, I'd like to come."

OVER THE second cup of coffee the newness and strain between them eased and they began to talk like old friends. She found that Britt had a quiet sense of humor and she sensed a strength in him she admired and liked. Instinctively she knew that if he were your friend you could count on him always.

Out of a clear sky he asked, "Are you engaged or anything, Shelly?"

She took a sip of coffee and carefully put down the cup. "I've loved Ron Richman from high school days, I guess. I honestly don't know when we'll get married, if ever." Even if it

was a little dishonest, she couldn't possibly tell him about Liz. If she did, all her hopes would be gone.

Gradually Britt told her a little about himself. He was almost awkward about it and she decided it was because he wasn't accustomed to talking about himself. It gave her such a nice warm feeling and she hoped he wouldn't be furious if he discovered she'd marked him for Liz.

Britt did research for an industrial plant in the city fifty miles away and his work was classified. He was an orphan and he liked Glendale because he liked all small towns. Cities, he said, were too big and impersonal.

"But you practically hide from everyone here," she cried. "You don't take the slightest advantage of the warmth and friendliness of Glendale." A shadow lay deep in his eyes and she rushed on. "But after tomorrow night you'll have loads of new friends." *And a girl to fall in love with*, she added silently.

She felt guilty about trying to match Liz up with Britt. She genuinely liked him more than she had any man in quite a long time. But all that mattered was that she and Ron could get married and live happily ever after.

"I really have to go." She stood up and felt a little strange when he got up and looked deep in her eyes.

"I'll drive you," he said quietly.

When Britt stopped in front of her house, fortunately Liz was out in the garden next door and she looked lovely as she picked late asters. She waved to Shelly and went inside. Britt stared after her.

"You'll meet her tomorrow," Shelly said gaily. "She's Liz Richman, Ron's sister."

"Oh?" he said. "Thanks for coming and inviting me to your party." Before she could say anything, he got in his car and drove off.

Shelly watched the car turn at the next corner and then she went over to tell Ron and Liz about tomorrow night.

They were in the kitchen now, where Liz was fixing the flowers she'd picked and Ron was eating pie and coffee.

"Hi, honey," he said and put his arm around her, drawing her close beside his chair. Apparently Ron hadn't noticed his sister's back stiffen because he said, "Gosh, you're pretty."

"Why thank you, sir," Shelly ruffled his hair. Then she told them about supper and Britt. "He's a darling," she said and sounded so convincing Liz turned to look at her.

"Suppose you tell us more about this new marvel." Liz smiled. As she listened, she began to look thoughtful. "I think I'm going to like meeting him," she said and Shelly's heart soared.

Ron walked back through the hedge with her. "Hey, maybe I might be jealous of this new man," he teased, but she thought she caught an edge to his voice...

ON HER SIDE of the hedge, Shelly pulled him down into the swing. "Darling, I've got the most terrific plan." Ron smiled indulgently. "Britt's simply grand and he and Liz might be made for each other. I'm giving this party so they can meet."

Ron frowned at her. "This sounds crazy," he said.

"It is not. It's our chance for our own lives. All you need to do is boost Britt's stock with Liz." She took his hand. "Don't blurt everything out, be tactful. Just think how wonderful it would be if they really loved each other and we could get married!"

From the hard lines around Ron's mouth he was far from sold on her plan. "What do you know about Britt Saunders?" he demanded. "Who is he really and where's he from? He could be a crook and pretending to be in some hush-hush research."

Shelly was exasperated. "He's my boss' client. And when you talk to Britt for five minutes you'll like and trust him. You can't help it." She looked at

Ron for a long minute before she said quietly, "Don't spoil this one chance for us."

"I still think it's crazy." He got up and looked around at the last remnants of Shelly's garden, which hadn't lasted nearly as well as Liz'. "Sis has had a dozen chances, you know." He sounded proud. "She won't get really infatuated with some new fellow." He leaned down and kissed Shelly lightly. "Don't be disappointed, honey, if it doesn't work."

He left her depressed and unhappy. To say Ron wasn't enthusiastic about her plan was the understatement of the year. Darn, she should have remembered he was never a person to spring things on. He needed time to mull over them. That helped and she was confident, given time, Ron would heartily approve and help all he could. After all, it was for *their* wedding.

Shelly went inside and told her mother the party was on and then she phoned a few friends, making sure she picked out only couples who were interested in each other. She wanted to be very sure Britt didn't get involved with the wrong girl. It seemed wise to include two married couples who were Liz' friends, so Liz wouldn't stand out in the younger crowd.

Shelly's parents were going out for supper tomorrow and she and her mother made out the grocery list. But she kept interrupting time after time to tell her mother how nice Britt was and how absolutely perfect he'd be for Liz.

SHELLY still thought so the next night when she zipped up her rose dress and took pains with her lipstick. Downstairs she heard her mother answer the front door and talk to Ron in the hall before they went to the kitchen. He was sweet to come early to see what he could do to help and she smiled fondly as she dabbed perfume behind her ears.

Her mother called up a good-bye and Shelly quickly fastened on antique gold costume jewelry and smoothed the bedspread so the girls could put their coats there.

Halfway down the stairs Shelly stopped short, her mouth gaping. It wasn't Ron who'd come early, it was Britt, who was carrying a vase filled with dahlias into the living room.

He smiled up at her. "Hello," he said. "I picked these from my yard," he indicated the flowers. "Where do you want them?"

"On the table," she decided. "And thanks, Britt, they're lovely." She'd been right, he was considerate and darling and a million times too good for Liz. But she shut that out of her mind because, for all she knew, Britt might delight in a very possessive wife.

And surely Liz would fall in love with him. It would be so easy for any girl.

Everyone seemed to arrive at the same time, but Shelly maneuvered it so Liz and Britt were together. When she went to the kitchen to get the salad out of the icebox, Ron followed her.

"Do you think Liz likes him?" Shelly asked eagerly.

"They seem to be getting along all right," Ron said shortly. "But Sis is particular and she won't fall in love quick the way you want it." His eyes blazed with anger. "You don't seem to care who Liz marries so long as she gets out of your way. She offered to have us move in with her and you turned it down."

"But you agreed that that's the wrong way to start a marriage," she cried.

"It still shows Liz' devotion." Ron turned and walked out of the kitchen.

For a minute Shelly's shoulders slumped. She felt she ought to have some help from Ron, that he ought to want this as much as she did. Because they would never have anything real

or lasting between them unless Liz fell in love.

It seemed to her that the party progressed successfully. Britt was attentive to every girl, not just Liz, who was being unusually gay.

After the rugs were rolled back and Shelly had turned on the record player, it was Britt who came over and asked her to dance. "I'm out of practice," he confessed and Shelly loved his smile.

As they danced, she began to get angry with Liz. Britt was fascinating and if a girl had *any* warm blood in her, it would positively zing over him.

Later, when she saw Liz and Britt standing in the doorway, Liz talking animatedly, her heart hurt in a confusing way. Now that Liz appeared interested, it seemed sudden. It was exactly what Shelly had wanted, yet she wasn't rejoicing. She turned into the kitchen to be alone a little while.

The party broke up late and before Shelly knew it, she was staring at the mess of dirty dishes, the filled ash trays and empty coke bottles and glasses. Ron walked home with Britt and Liz and, for about the first time, he hadn't stayed to help. For some reason, Shelly felt tired and cross.

She kicked off her slippers and sat down, staring into the dead fire. Her folks had come in a long time ago, said hello to everyone and gone on up to their room. Well, Shelly thought wearily, she couldn't leave this mess for Mom to find in the morning. . .

THERE WAS a tap on the front door and she knew Ron had come back. The gloom vanished as she went to answer. For the second time that night it was Britt.

He smiled, took off his coat and rolled up his sleeves. "Let's go." Before she could protest, he'd started picking up plates and bottles. "After all, you gave this party for me," he reminded her. "And a fine one it was."

"If I were polite I'd chase you home." She didn't feel a bit tired now. "But I'm so glad you came back." This gave her a chance to pry about Liz. Then she knew she was absurdly afraid to hear his verdict. She asked him bluntly, "Did you like Liz?"

"She's just like a girl I was in love with once upon a time," he said.

"She is?" Shelly asked dumbly. There was that strange look in his eyes again.

He caught her studying him and said, "I'm all over it, believe me, Shelly."

She dropped a dish and took quite a while picking it up. Britt would fall in love again, this time with Liz because she must be his type. Probably the other girl married someone else and he'd brooded and stayed away from girls until the hurt was healed. This seemed to assure the success of her plan and she wondered why she wasn't a lot happier about it.

They talked about the party and before Shelly knew it the place was neat and clean. They were having the last piece of cake and coffee in the living room where Britt had built up the fire, when he looked at her thoughtfully.

"Ron and his sister get along unusually well, don't they?" he asked and she nodded, "She'll miss him very badly when you marry." There wasn't anything Shelly could add to that, so she kept still. There was a curious twinkle in Britt's eyes and she began to feel uncomfortable. After a pause he said, "I asked Liz for a date."

"You did?" Shelly couldn't remember when she'd sounded any stupider.

"That was the idea, wasn't it?"

She was blushing furiously when he lifted her to her feet and drew her close for a second before he abruptly released her. "You're sweet," he said quietly. "I hope you'll find all the happiness you deserve. Thank you for the party." He touched her cheek lightly

with his finger and closed the front door quietly behind him.

Shelly took out the cups and plates they'd used, trying to sort things out in her mind, but she couldn't. It was terribly strange that she didn't feel happier about the way her plan was working, but somewhere along the line something had gone wrong and tonight she couldn't find out where.

SHELLY was still worried all the next day and that afternoon after work when she was sitting in the swing in the yard, a very grumpy looking Ron came through the hedge.

"Liz has driven to the city for dinner with Britt," he announced. "Isn't that a fine one."

"Yes," she said.

He sank down beside her and rumbled his hair. "I don't think this is right. I don't like Britt. He moves in too fast."

"Something must have clicked between them. It can, you know."

Ron got up and paced. "You don't think Liz really fell for him, do you, Shelly?" He seemed to be almost pleading with her to disagree. "I asked her about a hundred questions, but she just smiled kind of funny." He shook his head.

"Please sit down," Shelly said. "You give me the jitters pacing like a lion." After he slumped down in the swing again, she looked at him thoughtfully. "Don't you *want* Liz to fall in love?"

"Sure, sure." He kept looking like a black thunder cloud. "I guess it's that I'm used to her as she is. And you'll have to admit this Britt is too fast a worker."

"Well, he's fast," Shelly agreed. She knew she'd started a snowball and couldn't stop it from rolling on down the hill. Ron put his arm around her and she realized he was clinging to her like a frightened little boy. He needed her, she thought. And he'd need her a lot more if Liz decided to marry. It

shocked her that Ron should be so upset. But she admitted his whole life would change, once Liz wasn't around to spoil him.

He got up abruptly. "Britt's not the man for Liz."

Anger flared in Shelly. "I'm not sure *she's* the one for him." There it was! She'd said it out loud.

Ron's eyes were ugly. "What's so special about him?"

She told Ron then how fine and dear Britt was. The thing she'd started wasn't a snowball, it was a huge monstrous thing that could engulf her. Because as she talked about Britt, she knew it was she who'd fallen in love with him. Just as any girl might. Never before had Shelly found herself in this kind of an awful mess and it frightened her. *You shouldn't tamper with people's lives*, she told herself when it was too late.

"Go on home, Ron," she said and didn't recognize her own voice. He looked indignant, but he left.

There had to be a way out of this.

But there didn't seem to be, the next evening, when Britt's gray sedan stopped in front of Liz' house and she went out with him. Shelly's heart felt as if it were sobbing as she sat alone in the living room, staring in the fire. If only her father didn't have a heavy cold and her mother weren't sitting with him, they might help her.

"Shelly," Ron said and slammed the front door. He stood in front of her and blamed her for everything that was happening. They fought like two stray cats on the back fence until he turned and slammed the door again on his way out.

WEDNESDAY evening, after Britt and Liz had driven away, Shelly found Ron sitting in the swing.

"Well," he sounded unhappy. "You've got it all fixed up. I suppose we can get married soon." He sounded

as if he were so sunk he couldn't even be angry.

"I'm not going to marry you," she told him evenly. "You don't want me, and you don't want Liz to find happiness with someone else. You've been too comfortable. You want her to stay and take care of you and cater to your whims. I should have known it long ago. But I do now, and that's the way it is, Ron."

He jumped to his feet, his face white with anger. "You wouldn't let things stay peaceful, would you? I've known for a long time Liz was right, I couldn't be happy with you." He flung himself through the hedge.

The only two who'd find happiness in all this mess were Liz and Britt. There was a sharp ache in her and she wondered how long it took a heart to break?

As if she had no control of her own feet, Shelly found she was walking in Britt's neighborhood the next afternoon after work. She caught herself before she made a complete ninny of herself and turned to walk away before Britt saw her.

But Sarg did. The big fawn dog came bounding down the sidewalk, his lead trailing. He jumped up on Shelly and was taller than she. She hugged him and didn't hear Britt cut across the lawn until he said, "Hello."

She swallowed. "Hi," she said faintly.

"I was going down your way. Can I give you a lift?"

"Thanks." Since he'd caught her here, she couldn't be any more miserable so she might as well go with him.

After he started the car, with Sarg filling the back seat, he asked, "How's Ron?"

"He's furious."

"Good!" Britt looked delighted.

She turned and stared at him. "What did you say?"

"Good." Instead of heading toward her street at the intersection, he turned

up into the hill drive and she found herself actually shaking.

SOMEONE had to break the silence. "How's Liz?" she asked.

"She's mad too." Britt stopped under the old sturdy oaks and they could look down on the town. After he lit a cigarette, Britt said, "I fell in love once with a girl just like Liz. I got out from her clutches in time. Possessive, demanding, only she didn't have a brother..." His smile was gentle. "I expect Ron hates my guts because he thinks I'm trying to upset his comfortable existence. That's right, isn't it?"

"Yes," she admitted. "Liz brought him up. She sacrificed marriage for him and I think she didn't know quite how to be a mother in the beginning. When she grew up enough to know, by then Ron was her whole world." It was the first time Shelly had really understood it herself.

"And you had to find a man for Liz to fall in love with in order to free him." Britt's voice was gentle.

"You knew all along, didn't you?"

"Oh, yes, I knew. And the reason she's a fighting tigress is because I made little brother feel insecure and unhappy." He took Shelly's hands. "Ron's a king in his own house and he wouldn't make you a good husband. He's too spoiled, too accustomed to being catered to, and marriage means give-and-take."

Britt was right; Ron was romance in the moonlight—he'd never wanted the responsibility of being anything else. She knew that now.

"Why do you think I drove past your house every night when I finished work?" Britt asked and their eyes met and held.

It had been Friday night when she'd noticed his car that had made her select him for Liz. Shelly looked down at his strong hand holding hers. "Why did you drive by?" she asked.

"Because I thought you were the

sweetest, dearest girl I'd ever seen. Pretty too. My piece of research had to be finished before I could come courting." His hand tightened on hers. "It's completed now. Do you think someday I might be the man for Shelly?"

"I, I think so." Her voice trembled

with the singing in her heart.

Then she was gathered into his strong arms and his kiss was beautiful and real. There was no danger here, because there was a love that would last and grow and grow for as long as they lived.

THE END



Submission

by

L. M. Thornton

Teach me, only teach me
 What you would have me say;
 Guide me, only guide me,
 And I will walk your way.
 Tell me, only tell me,
 The kind of one you seek;
 I will think your thought, dear,
 And speak the words you speak.
 Give me, only give dear,
 Your hand upon my own;
 Bring me, only bring dear,
 The greatest pleasure known.
 Lead me, only lead dear,
 I want you for my guide,
 Love me for a day dear,
 I shall be satisfied.



YOUNG MISS TIMMONS

by Adele Hall

Virginia Timmons was a most surprising young lady!

PAUL SHERIDAN stopped his car in front of the East Linden Grammar School, a sprawling modern structure that had wide expanses of glass and classroom play yards and, at the moment, a rather startling redhead standing near the entrance. He turned to young Chip and said, "Who's that?"

"That's Richie, Dad. You know Richie."

"I mean the lady near the door."

"Oh, she's Miss Timmons. I told you about her. She's pretty."

She was indeed. She was tall and beautifully proportioned and her head, with the shining hair cut close except for a scallop of bang over her forehead, was like a sculpture study. She had on a tweed skirt and a yellow sweater and she looked the way a college homecoming queen should look.

Chip waved to her and she waved back and smiled. She had a wide, sincere smile: and her eyes, even from a distance, were a bright, odd green. Chip said, "She makes long division real easy and she reads us good stories



and she used to be Miss Wisconsin. That's why she's so pretty."

Paul would have liked to pursue the subject, but he was due in Philadelphia for an eleven o'clock business appointment. "Go right home after school," he said, "so Aunt Julia can pick you up.

Mrs. Haggerty will have your bag packed."

"For corn's sake, Dad, you already told me. So did Mrs. Haggerty. You might think I was a baby or something."

"All right, so I lost my head." He

ruffled Chip's dark curly hair which was a facsimile of his own and one of the reasons why he had been nicknamed Chip Off the Old Block. "See you Sunday night."

They shook hands, but after a quick glance to see that nobody was looking, Chip flung himself on his father and hugged him. Julia said it was perfectly all right for a nine-year-old to be demonstrative toward his father when his mother wasn't available for caresses. Julia also said it was high time Paul was providing a woman for his household, but he told her to keep out of the conspiracy, every girl he met got that idea ten minutes after the introduction, and they were quite satisfied with Mrs. Haggerty as housekeeper, thank you.

"You try to get me a model of the Liberty Bell, won't you?" Chip said. "I told Miss Timmons you might."

"For you and Miss Timmons the best," he said.

Five minutes later he was on the Turnpike heading south. The sun was blazing gold and the distant trees were beginning to don fantastic colors. He let the car settle to a comfortable speed and it seemed to hum along unaided. His long, lean frame relaxed and he dismissed Miss Timmons from his mind and did a run-down on the coming weekend. If the two new accounts were stereotype, he should have everything cleaned up by noon tomorrow and he could meet Elise for lunch. He smiled to himself and began to hum tonelessly. Now there was a female. Elise was a silver blonde with that creamy skin which always made him think of gardenias and she was curvaceous without being plump as so many curvaceous blondes are. And she had worn well. He had been seeing her off and on for six years.

They had met at a cocktail party and Elise had attached herself to him and worked at seeing to it that he had a good time. He had been young and unhappy, his wife, Ann, had died the

year before. He remembered being gauche and saying, when Elise told him she was a decorator, that she certainly didn't look as if she did anything like that.

"You mean I don't look very bright?" she had said.

"No, I didn't mean that," he had hastened to assure her. "I meant I thought you might be a—oh, a model—well, maybe an actress. Because you're so beautiful."

"You're wonderful. I adore you."

He had been embarrassed.

"I really do adore you. I'm going to hang onto you as long as you keep on making such pretty speeches."

"It wasn't a pretty speech. You *are* beautiful."



CONSIDERING he had never changed his mind about her beauty, it seemed strange at lunch the next day to find himself wondering if her eyes weren't a little dull and rather an ordinary color. She seemed a trifle overdressed too. She was wearing a black suit made of some silky stuff with a big chunky pin on one lapel and a small hat that was mostly feathers and there was a pale mink stole on the banquette cushion beside her.

She propped her elbows on the table with her coffee cup held just below her chin in both hands. Her fingers were tapered and white and tipped with long pink pearl nails. She looked at him

over the rim of her cup and said, "Darling, you're not with me."

"I'm relaxing," he said, "Getting in the mood for the weekend." He took a sip of his coffee. "Say, did you ever wear one of those sweaters that buttons down the front with the sleeves pushed up?"

"Never." She put her cup down and studied him as if she were looking into his mind. "Why do you ask?"

"Why, I—ah—I thought I might buy one for Julia. She has Chip for the weekend."

"You worry about having to farm him out, don't you?"

"Not at all. Julia and Don's place is up on the hill and big enough for them to keep a dog and assorted cats and even a horse. Chip loves it. And Julia loves him."

"He needs a mother to love him."

"You know, I'm having trouble with that statement."

She shrugged. "You certainly can't blame a girl for trying."

"I can't think of anybody I'd rather have trying." It was a remark that always mollified a woman. "But Chip and I are very happy in our bachelor establishment."

"Sometime you might invite me to see it."

"You won't like it. There's not a free form table or a wrought iron leg in the place."

"I could turn into the Chippendale and chintz type." She started pulling on her gloves. They were white with small pearls on the cuffs. "Let's go. Before we drive out to Merion for cocktails we can shop for that cardigan."

"That what?"

"A sweater that buttons down the front."

But time also to be alone. He ate too much and drank too much and had a wonderful time; and when Elise said, as they kissed good-bye on Sunday, that one of these days she was going to pop in on him when her work took her near East Linden, he became expansive and said fine, do that, just give him enough warning to get out the Napoleon brandy.

Chip had had a big time too and almost fell asleep in the car as they drove home until Paul said, "I've been thinking I should get acquainted with your teachers. Why don't we have that nice Miss Timmons to dinner?"

"For corn's sake, Dad. You can't do that!"

"Why not?"

"The kids'll think I want to be teacher's pet."

"For corn's sake, why? Aunt Julia invites the twins' teachers to dinner."

"But they're girls."

"Oh, I see."

He called his secretary the next morning and told her he'd be late and drove Chip to school again, but Miss Timmons wasn't standing near the doorway. Chip said, "There's Miss Atmore, directing traffic. She teaches us music. You can meet her."

Miss Atmore was rotund and stuffed into a plastic raincoat. The hair which escaped from her shapeless brimmed hat was a wispy gray. "Not this morning," he said. "I have to get in to New York."

"But you said you wanted to get acquainted with my teachers."

Paul got out of the car with him and the rain which had been threatening poured down. He stood with it running under his collar while Chip corraled Miss Atmore. Upon close inspection, her face was round and jolly and she looked as if she might make learning music syllables fun. He blessed her when she said, "If you want to meet all the teachers, why don't you come out to PTA? It's a get-together meeting

IT WAS A good weekend. Elise knew how to give a party and how to be a charming guest at someone else's. There were scads of interesting people,

this time with refreshments in the gym." He could see himself handing Miss Timmons a cocktail with a flourish.

"Cider and doughnuts," Miss Atmore said with a grin as if she had followed his thoughts.

When Julia heard he was planning to attend the meeting, she dropped in to return a pair of socks Chip had forgotten and wanted to know what was up.

Paul said, "Does something have to be up because I decide to go to a PTA meeting? You and Don go."

"Since the girls were in kindergarten."

"So I'm late in realizing my parental obligations."

Julia seemed skeptical, but she said, "Shall we pick you up?"

"I'll take my own car. I might want to leave before you do."

"We're only staying for the business meeting."

"I'll stay longer than that. I want to meet the teachers so I should be in the get-together, shouldn't I?"

She regarded him with a puzzled frown. "How was your weekend in Philadelphia?"

"The greatest," he said. "Do you know, my dear sister, that you sound like a busybody?"

AT THE MEETING Miss Timmons wore a soft wool dress the color of light coffee and had a tiny matching hat on the back of her beautiful head. Paul kept it in view all during the business session and followed it out of the auditorium and into the gymnasium and he was the lucky one to get her refreshments for her. He thought to walk her to the two empty chairs in the far corner beyond the board which held the basketball net but they were immediately surrounded by a dozen or more other fathers who had come to the meeting to get acquainted with Miss Timmons. Paul remarked that he

hadn't known so many men attended PTA and Miss Timmons said they had had almost fifty percent male attendance where she taught in Wisconsin. Paul said, "The year is young. I imagine we might top that record."

He went back to the refreshment table and as he helped himself to another doughnut, observed aloud that it was nice to see everybody being so friendly to the new teacher, so in short order the wives had their husbands in tow and Paul did get Miss Timmons over to the chairs in the corner. He said, "By the gathering of the fathers, it looked as if you have a child from every family in town in your class."

"I have forty-three."

He shuddered and remembered he had gone to play golf when Chip had invited twelve to his birthday party, and Mrs. Haggerty had retired with a splitting headache when it was over. "That seems like a lot."

"Too many. Something has to be done about it. The Town Council must revise the budget and adjust the salary scale in City Hall so we can have more teachers. And we want an addition to the school instead of the ball park the recreation committee advocates."

"I wouldn't have expected somebody new in town to have the situation sized up so accurately," he said with admiration in his tone. "Especially a pretty, young girl."

"Don't get the idea I'm brilliant. There was a committee appointed to study the budget and I was put on it, so—"

"Say, I can help you with that."

"You can?" Her expression was enigmatic.

"I sat in on the Mayor's advisory board last year and we made a complete survey of the old budget. I still have my copy. Why don't you come to dinner with Chip and me and we'll spend the evening going over it."

"Oh, but I—"

"Please do. I've been lax about

Chip's school life. This would be a good way for me to start acting like a parent."

"All right then. I'd like to."

"Shall we say Monday? That will give me the weekend to get the papers in order." And time to placate Chip.

Surprisingly, Chip liked the idea. As long as Miss Timmons was coming for business, the invitation implied no cajolery on his part. "Like if you get all F's or no check in Cooperation. Bert Danly's mother has Miss Timmons to dinner all the time. He's terrible." Chip even picked the last chrysanthemums for the table and helped Mrs. Haggerty ice the coconut chiffon cake.

HE WAS ALREADY playing host to Miss Timmons when Paul got home. The two of them were on the sofa watching a TV puppet show with their legs stretched out and their heads back on cushions. Something funny would happen and they would look at each other and laugh and Paul had the feeling they might be the same age. It seemed foolish to walk into the room with a tray holding ice and cocktail glasses, cherries for manhattans and olives for martinis, but only one serving of tomato juice. He tried to remember if there was some sherry in the cabinet, or perhaps some dubonnet: either of those might do for Miss Timmons.

He put the tray on the coffee table and ruffled Chip's hair. Miss Timmons sat erect and smoothed down her skirt and they shook hands. Her hand was small and smooth in his, but the grip was strong. He said, "I thought we might have a drink before dinner if you'd like one."

Chip said, "The tomato juice is for me."

"I hope so," said Miss Timmons. "I'd like a martini."

She kept surprising him that way all through dinner. She talked about going to the Mardi Gras in New Orleans

and skiing in Sun Valley and she had ridden on a float in the Rose Bowl Parade, but when Paul remarked that she must find East Linden small and dull, she said, "Not in the least. I lived on a farm in Wisconsin."

She ate the way Chip did, all the meat and potatoes first and too many hot biscuits so that they ended with vegetables left on their plates and Paul was wondering if Mrs. Haggerty would refrain from making a scene as she usually did. Then Miss Timmons looked at Chip and heaved a great sigh and, as if she had known, said, "We'd better clean our plates or I imagine we won't get dessert."

They had coffee in the living room and Paul poured brandy into huge crystals snifters. Miss Timmons held her hands around the glass to warm it and inhaled the aroma very expertly. "Just like in the movies," she said grinning. "Tell me, do I drink it or just sniff?"

"Sip," said Paul. "Slowly. To savor the bouquet."

Chip said, "Let me have a sniff first," but he didn't like it. He flopped on the floor in front of the TV set.

Miss Timmons said, "My dad always used to read the paper after dinner, but I guess people don't now with brandy and TV and things, do they?"

"I usually do," Paul said.

"Then let's. Do you like the sports and financial section first?"

He said he did.

"Good. That leaves the advertisements for me. Why don't you come over here on the sofa so we can swap later?"

Sitting close to her, he could smell her perfume. It was a spicy scent that reminded him of the pinks which grew along the flagstone walk in the garden.

Chip rolled over on his back and watched them, and after a while he said, "If the page with the funnies is loose, may I come over there too?"

She moved to make room for him between them.

Paul noticed that he leaned against her, and after he had asked the meaning of a couple of words eventually her arm went around him and they were reading together and laughing again. Paul was on the verge of putting his section of the paper aside and asking if a mere father could get into the act when Mrs. Haggerty appeared in the doorway and said, "There's a lady to see you, Mr. Sheridan."

BEFORE he could ask who, Elise had swished into the room. Never before had he noticed that Elise swished. She glanced around carefully and appraisingly and said, "It's about the way I expected it to be, darling, except for the domestic scene on the sofa."

Paul got up and made introductions. Chip went over shook hands like a little gentleman and Miss Timmons said, "How do you do" with a rather artificial smile and reached for her brandy.

Elise said, "I see I didn't have to give you any warning, you have the good Napoleon brandy out already. May I have mine with soda?"

He sent Chip to the kitchen for a tall glass and ice.

"I hope I'm not interrupting something," Elise said with a wicked glint in her eye. "What shall I do with my coat?"

"Miss Timmons and I were going over some budget reports pertaining to school improvements."

"Really? Well, go right ahead. I'll sit in a corner with my brandy until you finish."

"We don't have to do it right now." Miss Timmons rose and stood looking tall and aloof and dignified, not at all as if she would lounge on a sofa laughing at comic strips. "I can take the reports home and study them."

"But I invited you for the express purpose of studying them together." It

sounded as if he were trying to explain her, and he made himself angry. He turned to Elise. "Miss Vance is passing through on her way to New York. I imagine she's joking about staying here. Aren't you, Elise?"

"I am on my way to New York, but I thought I'd visit for a while. You invited me, you know. I said I'd like to pop in and you said, fine, you would break out the good Napoleon brandy."

"I'll take you home, Miss Timmons," he said.

"I have my car. I had to drive out to a Brownie meeting in Mountain top after school."

"A what?" Elise said.

"It's a club for little girls."

Elise smiled sweetly. "I should think you'd prefer a club for little boys."

Chip came back and said Mrs. Haggerty thought it was time he went to his room.

"You acted like a witch," Paul said as soon as he and Elise were alone.

She gave him a sidelong glance as she moved to the sofa. "I got rid of the competition, didn't I?"

"Miss Timmons is Chip's teacher. I have no romantic interest in her."

"Then have some in me." She patted the seat beside her, and after he had fixed a drink and sat down, she said, "I like it here. I go for this nice big house and all these family things. I wouldn't want to change a thing."

He didn't ask when or why.

"Okay, I'll keep it light and on the surface. Here's to fun." She clicked her glass against his. "I don't have to be in New York until ten tomorrow."

"Now see here, Elise, if you're thinking of staying here, you can't do it. This is a small town and I'm an unattached man and people snoop. The neighbors are probably peeking through their venetian blinds right now."

"They have movable shutters, darling. I noticed them right away and I'll

bet they've been there since the house was built way back when. I have a client who's been yearning for some. The modern ones—"

"If you haven't a hotel reservation, I might get Julia to put you up for the night."

"I didn't come to see Julia!" She banged her glass down on the coffee table and sprang up. She went to the chair that held her coat and her shoulders had a stiff stubborn set as she walked.

So ends a beautiful friendship, he thought.

But when Elise turned around, she had relaxed and was smiling. "Don't think I'm bowing out so easily. If pressed, I might let you take me to lunch tomorrow."

They arranged a meeting place and Paul saw her out to her car and kissed her goodnight. As he reentered the house, the mantle clock was striking and he was amazed to realize it was only nine o'clock.

HE WENT to the telephone and dialed Miss Timmon's number. He explained that Miss Vance had gone and there was still plenty of time to work on the budget.

"I'm in bed," said Miss Timmons.

"At nine o'clock?" His voice was impatient.

"I often go to bed at nine o'clock if I haven't anything to do."

"You had something to do. Why did you run off that way?"

"I felt like an interloper."

"You were invited. There was no reason for you to feel like an interloper."

"It was the way that girl looked at you."

He said goodnight and went to bed too.

His morning mail was topped by a note from his secretary saying that Miss Vance had called and she would be too busy to lunch with him. He was

so chagrined at the unpredictable manner in which everything was turning out lately that he threw himself completely into the account he was working on and forgot to have lunch at all. He finished early, a little after two, and headed home. He told himself it was quite a coincidence that he approached the East Linden Grammar School just as it was letting out. He parked in the next block and watched the children tumble into the sunshine. He saw Chip and friend Richie board the school bus. As the first faculty member emerged some time later, he started the motor; at a glimpse of a copper colored head, he tramped on the gas and was directly in line with Miss Timmons as she reached the street. He stopped and opened the door and said, "Taxi, lady?"

"Why, hello. I thought you worked over in New York."

"I got through early. May I take you home?"

"I was going to Miller's for a cup of coffee."

"Exactly where I was going."

They sat opposite each other in a booth and Miss Timmons said with a grin, "As long as you're going to pay for it, I'll have a banana split."

"I didn't know adults ate them. Aren't you on a diet?" He had never known Elise to touch a dessert and even Julia stuck to jello or plain angel food cake.

"I get enough exercise to work off the calories."

"I've seen plenty of plump school teachers."

"I play tennis too."

As if the word had summoned him, a stocky young man wearing slacks and a tee short and carrying two racquets bore down upon them. He said, "Hi, Ginny. I thought I'd find you here. I picked up your racquet so we wouldn't lose time."

The waitress took their order while Miss Timmons was presenting the

young man and he was propping the racquets against the table leg and sliding onto the seat beside her. When the confusion subsided, she turned to him and said, "Lose time for what?"

"Practice. We had a date this afternoon."

"Tommy Devans, we did not!"

"Ginny is forgetful," he said to Paul with a fond, indulgent smile. He had a boyish smile and a snub nose and a crew cut. "I'll bet she even forgot the tournament is this Saturday."

"Well, I can't play tennis today. Can't you see I have a date with Mr. Sheridan?"

"I'm sorry, sir," Tommy said. "I thought you were discussing your children."

"Child," Paul said. "He's nine." Which didn't make him eligible for the title of "sir". How old did this upstart think he was?

Tommy said, "You don't mind if I sit here and have a cup of coffee, do you?"

"Have mine," Paul said, getting up. "As a matter of fact, Miss Timmons and I do see each other to talk business and we can have our discussion some other time."

HE WENT home and up to the attic to dig out his old tennis racquet from college days. It had seven broken strings. Nevertheless, he held it and balanced it to get the feel and tried a few swings. He had had a spectacular serve at one time.

"What're you doing, Dad?" Chip asked from the doorway.

"Rummaging."

Chip walked over and sat on a trunk. "Miss Timmons plays tennis."

"I know."

"She coming to dinner tonight?"

"No, why?"

"I thought maybe you might have more business to talk about."

"No. She took the papers home with her last night."

"Oh." Chip swung his legs and drummed his heels against the trunk. "It was nice having a lady here, wasn't it?"

"We've had other ladies here."

"But Miss Timmons seemed to fit. We had fun, didn't we?"

He waited until Chip had gone to bed to call her, and the first thing she said was, "Why in the world did you run off that way this afternoon?"

"You had a date."

"Tommy just said that to get his own way. He's very masterful."

"Then let's say I felt like an interloper."

"I was with you. There was no reason for you to feel like an interloper."

"It was the way that young man looked at you."

She laughed, a delightful bubbling laugh, the kind that should be bottled and sold as perfume. "So now we're even."

"And ready to start from scratch." She liked them masterful, did she? "Get dressed up tomorrow night and I'll take you to New York for dinner and dancing."

"With the budget papers?"

"We'll take care of the budget before we go."

He didn't go to the office at all the next day. He performed various errands during the morning and after lunch was leaving to take his tennis racquet to be restrung when Julia walked in. She raised a quizzical eyebrow and said, "Have you retired?"

"I took a day off. My office runs smoothly enough for me to take a day off now and then."

Julia focused on the tennis racquet.

"I had to see Judge Myers, if you must know."

"The Judge has been in bed for a month since his heart attack."

"Prying female!" Paul cast his eyes heavenward. "This was old business. Last summer the Judge and the comptroller and I worked out a new budget."

I went to get a copy to show to one of the school committee members."

Julia shook her head from side to side. "Sometimes you amaze me, Paul. I was firmly convinced you'd reverted to being an adolescent playboy, and now you come up with this. Why don't you tell me when you're civic minded so I can be proud of you?"

"This was very hush hush. It's not to come out into the open until election time."

Her eyebrow shot up again. "Then why are you showing it to the school committee?"

"I'm showing it to one member. And swearing her to secrecy."

"Which member?" Julia took in the tennis racquet again. "As if I didn't know. Are you running after that child?"

"She's hardly a child. She must have been twenty or twenty-one when she got out of college and she's been teaching a couple of years."

"So you are running after her."

"Men don't run after women. Any unattached male has women trying to trap him from all sides. He can be ugly and vile tempered and stingy and they'll still go after him."

"Ginny Timmons has men running after her."

"Did you come here to tell me that?"

"Unh-unh. Mrs. Haggerty asked me to get some jeans for Chip. Want to see them?"

"I have letters to write." He threw the tennis racquet into the hall closet and slammed into his study.

HIS SELF-ESTEEM had returned by evening and he bounded up the steps to Miss Timmons apartment two at a time. He was bearing a cellophane florist's box and a large manilla envelope.

She looked at the flowers first, two bronze orchids, flecked with green. "They're gorgeous," she gasped, her eyes glowing with excitement.

She ran to the mirror and held them against her dress. It was a wonderful dress. It was of velvet that looked like winter moss and it had a low neckline and a nipped-in waist. "I guess they'll get crushed if I pin them on now," she said. "Shall I wear them on my wrap or put them back in the box? My coat's over there. Suppose I—Oh!" The sparkle went out of her and she laid the flowers carefully on the table. "We have to do that budget stuff first, don't we?"

She opened the envelope and took out the papers. Her head snapped up. "The new budget!" Her eyes were wide with surprise. "What about those old reports you handed me to study?" It was as if she wagged a scolding finger at him. "Imagine inviting me to dinner to see them!"

"Budgets can be changed," he said firmly, but he had an idea he looked sheepish. "There's no harm in getting fresh new opinions."

"You, Mr. Sheridan, are a schemer," she said and handed him her coat to hold for her.

In the car she was very quiet, sitting low in the seat with her head back and her eyes half closed. He said, "Are you still thinking about it?"

"About what?"

"My asking you to discuss the old budget."

"I'm simply enjoying myself. I'm glad Judge Myers let you have the report so we could get started early tonight."

"I didn't say it was Judge Myers."

"It was, wasn't it?"

"How do you know?"

"His grandson is in my class."

Paul pulled over to the side of the road and turned on the light. Miss Timmons had the grace to be blushing. "And knowing the Judge's weakness for a pretty face," he said, "I suppose he showed you the new budget too. Imagine telling me you were working with a committee—"

"I didn't." She kept her eyes averted. "I said a committee had been appointed and I was put on it and before you gave me a chance to explain that we were asked to do nothing until after election you invited me to dinner and said I had to come so you could prove you were interested in Chip's school life and—"

"And you, Miss Timmons, are a schemer."

"For goodness sake," she said, looking up through her extravagant lashes, "can't you call me Ginny?"

"It will do," he said boldly, "until you let me call you 'darling'."

THE END



Hearts Will Mend

by
Rena
Stoutenburgh
Travais

I fixed a broken goblet, with a little drop of glue;
I darned a rent so neatly, that no one ever knew;
But when my heart was broken, I thought that all was
through.

I nailed a broken, shutter, and it was firm and fine;
I saved a plant that withered, when I tied it up with twine,
But when my heart was damaged, what deep despair was
mine.

I bandaged a cut finger, the flesh together grew,
I watched the rapid healing, of a bruise, and found it true,
That in time a heart that shattered, can just as good as new.



Whispers

by

Ruth

Brandao

Ferrari

**Was Leah a silly little fool
to trust the man she loved?**



WHEN LEAH CARTWRIGHT left the ranch to seek her fortune in Dallas, Aunt Mathilda gave her a lot of advice. For one thing she said, "Don't mix business and pleasure, darling. You'll probably have the opportunity because you're a lovely blonde creature. But *never* associate with your employer socially."

Driving out to the country now beside Jay, Leah smiled, remembering. Aunt Mathilda's advice was generally good and she'd meant to take it all, but of course neither of them had guessed that Leah's first employer would be a dignified gentleman of sixty who seldom came to the office and who left most of the investment business to his nephew, Jay Donnelly, with whom Leah couldn't possibly help falling in love.

Mr. Donnelly had been in the office the other day and had invited Leah out to his country place for the week-end, "Just another guest or two perhaps, my dear. Jay will drive you out."

Leah had hesitated only briefly, "If you think it will be all right with Mrs. Donnelly—"

Mr. Donnelly had smiled, "Of course it will. She told me to invite you. My wife is a rather retiring person."

They'd left it at that. Jay had indicated that his uncle and his wife were not too congenial, and Leah was mildly curious about Mrs. Donnelly. But she was far more interested in the thought of spending a week-end in the same house with Jay. She wondered if Mr. Donnelly had noticed her interest in his nephew and were anxious to know Leah better, outside the office. Well, it didn't matter. Jay was in love with her, he'd said so. Any day now he'd propose, and she had her answer all ready.

It was an elaborate country place, not the lodge Mr. Donnelly had called it. When Jay parked in the drive, his uncle and a younger man were sitting

on the terrace having drinks. Both men rose and Mr. Donnelly presented Randy Blake to Leah and Jay. Randy Blake was a rather tall young man, whose features were more or less nondescript except for a pair of piercing black eyes. Those eyes seemed to see everything. They made Leah mildly uncomfortable, though she didn't know why.

After a maid had shown them to their rooms, they rejoined the men on the terrace for drinks. Mr. Donnelly talked pleasantly with Leah for awhile, then addressed Jay, "Randy's father was an old friend of mine. He's new in Dallas, and I'm thinking of taking him into the firm."

Jay's handsome face clouded, and his answer was almost abrupt. "I don't think we need any more help, Uncle Frank."

Why, he sounded actually rude! And that wasn't like Jay. However, what he said was true enough. The firm didn't need any more help, because Jay himself was so efficient. And so very considerate. Just last month, when his uncle was away at a health resort, Jay had insisted that the bookkeeper take a two weeks vacation and had done all that tedious work himself.

He'd told Leah, "The poor old fellow's been looking seedy. Of course he had a vacation a few months ago, and Uncle Frank would never see the sense of giving him another one, so I told him not to mention it. But I hate to have people overworked."

Dear Jay! Nobody in his employ would ever be overworked.

His uncle answered blandly, "It would take some of the strain off you, boy. I'm going to really retire before long, you know."

Randy Blake was looking at Jay with those penetrating eyes of his. Jay said lightly, "Well, we'll talk it over another time. The weekend is no time for business, you know."

ANOTHER couple whom Mr. Donnelly introduced as the Smiths arrived just about then, a gay, loud-spoken couple who demanded immediately to know where the horses were. Mr. Donnelly suggested that Jay accompany them on a ride, and Leah reluctantly stayed behind. She'd injured her back in a fall just before leaving the ranch, and though it was almost well she was obeying doctor's orders and staying off horses for awhile.

Randy Blake too declined to go, and the two remained with Mr. Donnelly on the terrace until a maid came out with word that Mrs. Donnelly wanted to see her husband. Left alone, Randy Blake suggested that he and Leah take a walk.

They strolled along a country lane and Randy told Leah about his boyhood summers in the Maine woods. She didn't mind the penetrating eyes now. They were friendly, and his smile was disarming. They talked easily and naturally together, and she felt as though Randy Blake were an old friend. She was unprepared for the abrupt change in him when they returned to the lodge. The horseback riders were back, and once again Randy became a quiet young man with penetrating black eyes, fixed for the most part on Jay.

Leah didn't meet Mrs. Donnelly until dinner time. She was a cold, withdrawn woman, who seemed to ignore everybody or to look at them disapprovingly. She made Leah feel as though she shouldn't be there. It was hard to imagine a genial soul like Mr. Donnelly marrying such a woman.

She retired immediately after dinner, and the Smiths soon went upstairs too. Mr. Donnelly said to Jay, "There's been a slip-up in management, I'm afraid I find there's practically no whiskey left in the lodge, and you know the Smiths! I'd hate to run out tomorrow. How about you driving into town—I'll give you the key to the

house—and picking up a few bottles? Take Randy along with you. It will give you two boys a chance to get acquainted.”

Jay rose, his eyes on Leah. But before he could ask her to go along, Mr. Donnelly said quickly, “I want to show Leah my trophies. It might be my only chance to be alone with her. with you young blades all over the place tomorrow.”

Leah managed a smile which she hoped wasn't too rueful. She'd have so much rather been with Jay. He left with Randy, ungraciously. These two would never be friends, it would be a mistake for Mr. Donnelly to take Randy into the office. But it seemed a pity. Randy, she'd discovered this afternoon, was a swell person, and Jay of course was perfect. It was strange there was such an instant antipathy between them—on Jay's side, at least.

DUTIFULLY she followed Mr. Donnelly into the study. He'd done some big game hunting in Africa in his youth and he told her tales about the various heads on the walls. One entire corner of the room was filled with a cabinet of guns—hunting rifles, German guns from the first World War, relics from the Civil and Spanish American wars, and German, Japanese, and American weapons from the last war.

“My young friends know my weakness,” Mr. Donnelly smiled at Leah. “Some of them brought me souvenirs. One of those Lugers was Jay's gift. He's given me several weapons, in fact.”

Then he said abruptly, “You rather like my nephew, don't you?”

Leah reddened, “Of course. He's a grand person.”

Mr. Donnelly nodded thoughtfully. “And the job—do you like that? Is the office run to suit you?”

Funny question for a man to ask his secretary! “Of course,” she told him.

“It's a wonderful place to work. Jay sees to it that everybody's happy. He does too much himself, I think.”

Mr. Donnelly nodded, and changed the subject. They chatted for perhaps an hour, and Leah found herself growing sleepy. Mr. Donnelly noticed it, “Go to bed, child. You've been kind enough to waste so much time on an old man.”

She protested that she'd had a lovely evening, but she said good-night and left him. He'd taken down one of the guns and was thoughtfully cleaning it as he said good-night.

Randy and Jay were just coming in the front door when she reached the hall. Randy smiled at her pleasantly, but Jay looked sulky. He said good-night and went to put the liquor in the kitchen. Leah hesitated a moment, then started up the stairs. Randy followed her. At the top he said softly, “Good night, Leah. I'll be looking forward to another walk tomorrow.”

There was a certain intimacy in his voice and she was surprised at the little thrill that shot through her. Why, she wasn't interested in this man—they'd never really be friends even, because Jay so obviously disliked him. And yet—

SHE TURNED into her room, and Randy went down the hall to his. A few minutes later she heard Jay's step on the stairs. And a few minutes after that she was asleep.

The sun was streaming through her window when she awakened, but it wasn't the sunshine that wakened her. It was a piercing scream, that was immediately followed by another and then another. Leah lay petrified with a nameless terror. And then she heard quick footsteps on the stairs, and came to life. She hastily donned a negligee and slippers and hurried out into the hall.

Mrs. Donnelly was starting down

the stairs, and Leah followed her. There was a little group standing at the open door of the study—Randy, Jay, the Smiths, all in bathrobes, and a sobbing maid leaning against Mrs. Smith's shoulder. It was Randy who turned and came toward Mrs. Donnelly. His eyes were infinitely kind, "Don't go any further, Mrs. Donnelly. There's—there's been an accident."

The woman's cold eyes were bright now, and her face was very pale. "One of those awful guns," she said tonelessly. "I always hated them. Is—is he—"

Randy nodded. His arm went around the woman's shoulders, and he led her back upstairs. Over his shoulder he said to Leah, "You'd better phone a doctor, and the police."

Jay said rudely, "I'm the one to attend to all that, of course."

He strode to the library, and with fascinated horror Leah went to the door of the study. Mr. Donnelly lay on the floor, his hand touching one of the guns. She couldn't tell whether it was the gun he'd been cleaning when she left him, but apparently he'd been standing in about the same place.

The maid sobbed. "He always said they weren't loaded. But people always say that."

Leah asked dazedly, "Why didn't we hear the shot?"

It was Mr. Smith who answered, "I suppose there was a muffler on the gun. Come now, girls, get dressed. There's nothing we can do."

Nothing we can do. Nothing we can do. The words went around like a broken record in Leah's mind as she changed her clothes. Last night she'd said good-night to a kind, pleasant old gentleman, and now he was dead. And there was nothing she could do for him, nothing anybody could do. Suddenly she longed for a comforting arm round her shoulders, as Randy's arm had gone around Mrs. Donnelly. Poor

Mrs. Donnelly! Leah wondered if she should go to her, but the woman might resent the intrusion of a comparative stranger.

Later they all had to answer the polite questions of two police officers. The coroner had come, and said that Mr. Donnelly apparently died from a self-inflicted wound, no doubt accidental. But the police, of course, had to make an investigation. They questioned Mrs. Donnelly in her room, the others downstairs. Jay had not stopped in to see his uncle last night, apparently Leah was the last person to see him alive. The police were satisfied with her statement that he was cleaning a gun when she left him, and tolerant of her feminine ignorance as to which gun.

When the police had gone Jay sat staring dejectedly at nothing, and it was Randy who took charge, "I think the best thing we can do for Mrs. Donnelly is to clear out, all but Jay, of course. His aunt might need him. I'll drive you back to town, Leah."

Jay looked as though he were going to protest, but thought better of it. The Smiths and Leah packed hurriedly. There were muffled goodbyes in the driveway, and then the two cars started on their way.

ALONE WITH Randy, Leah's tears came at last, "He was so nice," she sobbed. "It doesn't seem possible—"

Randy didn't seem uncomfortable, the way men usually are when women cry. It was as though crying were the normal thing to do. He said softly, "Yes, he was a very fine man. But to die quickly like that—well, maybe it saved him a lot of pain, Leah. He wasn't well, he told me that yesterday. That was why he wanted to get the business straightened out and to retire."

"Did you want to go into the business?"

His dark eyes were inscrutable, "Not particularly."

She wondered if he were unemployed, but didn't like to ask. Well, there was no chance of Jay taking him in, if he headed the business now. After today she'd never see Randy again. The thought added out of all proportion to her unhappiness.

They'd forgotten all about breakfast. They stopped at a wayside place for lunch now. It was strange to find herself hungry, strange how life went on after a tragedy.

She didn't ask Randy into her apartment when she got home. She'd have liked to, but somehow it didn't seem a good idea. He told her good-bye gently, and then he said a strange thing, "If you ever need me, Leah, this is my phone number. Memorize it."

Obediently she memorized it. But why should she need him? He held her hand for a long moment, and she felt crazily as though he'd kissed her.

She didn't see Jay or hear from him until the funeral two days later. He was with his aunt, of course, and his face was as white and drawn as hers. Leah sat with the other employers of the company. Randy was there too, inconspicuous among the many friends and acquaintances of the Donnellys. He barely nodded to Leah, and she felt foolishly hurt.

She went to the office next morning. Jay was there, accepting the condolences of the staff. He called them all together later, "The firm will continue, just as usual. My uncle's will was read last night. There was a letter attached to it, leaving me in charge of the company for life. We will go on as before our great loss. I know I can count on the loyalty you have all shown the firm."

The bookkeeper spoke for all of them, "We'll be right behind you, Mr. Donnelly."

But that evening Jay drove Leah

home, and he was tense and worried. He followed her into the apartment, and said abruptly, "Leah, I want you to get out of town for awhile. So far there's been no suspicion that Uncle Frank's death was anything but an accident, but you know how those things are. At a word to the police the investigation would be re-opened, and—well, it might be embarrassing for you."

She stared at him in amazement, "For me? What on earth are you talking about, Jay?"

He took her hand and made her sit beside him on the sofa, "Darling, I hate to say it, you're so sweet and innocent. You'd never think of such a thing. But Aunt May was almost psychopathically jealous of Uncle Frank. There was never any reason for it, it was just her morbid imagination. She doesn't even know yet, unless the police mentioned it, that you were alone with him shortly before his death. When she finds it out she's likely to get the idea that he was in love with you—the old story about the married man and his young secreary, you know. And from there on it's only a step to imagining that you two quarrelled."

"But, Jay," her voice rose hysterically, "It's so ridiculous! Did she—did she say anything?"

"NO, NOT YET. At the moment she's in a fury about the letter with the will. She didn't want me to control the business, and she's upset too because Uncle Frank didn't leave as much money as she expected. She may start an investigation of his financial affairs, and that would bring to light his private affairs too. Darling, I'm not suggesting that anybody could pin a murder rap on you, but I know how you'd hate to be questioned. If you're still in the office and she starts hanging around, she'll remember that

you were there that week-end and from then on—oh, darling, you know how deadly an imagination can be.”

“But I don’t want to go away. And where would I go? And what reason would I give for going?”

“We’ll just say you were Uncle Frank’s private secretary, not mine, and that you didn’t feel it would be the same to work for me, and that I thought an older woman would be better, so I accepted your resignation. Go to another city, darling, and wait there till I can get things straightened out. Then I’ll come, and we’ll be married.”

He kissed her long and tenderly, and her resistance crumpled. This was the proposal she’d been waiting for, but it hadn’t come as she had dreamed it would. The circumstances were all wrong, but at least Jay was asking her to marry him.

She said at last, “I’ll go back to the ranch for awhile, if you really think it’s necessary. But I don’t.”

“Don’t go to the ranch,” he said hurriedly. “Go to New Orleans, and don’t give anybody your address except me. You haven’t been here long, you haven’t made many friends. If the police should start investigating they won’t think it strange that nobody knows your whereabouts. They’ll probably forget all about you quickly enough if you’re not around. Darling, here’s a check,” he took it from his pocket. It was all written out, he’d known she’d agree to anything he suggested. “It’s for two months salary. It will carry you till you get a job or till I can come. We can be married in New Orleans and go to Havana on our honeymoon. Write me, darling, General Delivery, and I’ll come as soon as I can. Trust me, Leah, I’m doing what I think is best for you.”

She was sure of that, of course, but it seemed so furtive to run away. And from what? From a suspicion that might not even be in his aunt’s mind.

But then, Jay knew Mrs. Donnelly better than Leah did, of course.

When he had left her, she picked up the phone and started to dial Randy Blake’s number. If she ever needed him, he’d said. She needed him now—but why? She put the phone down. Out of loyalty to Jay, she couldn’t tell Randy Blake all the confused fears in her mind.

IT WAS A lonely little figure that got off the train in New Orleans. She checked in at a hotel and the next morning started apartment hunting. She’d wait to find a job until she was settled.

She found an apartment next day, two of them in fact, in the same down-trodden building in the French Quarter. They were empty only because they were small and the rent was high. Leah chose the lesser of the two evils, got settled, and went job hunting.

But before she’d found a job, Jay arrived, far sooner than she’d expected. He was nervous and jumpy. He told her briefly that he’d lined up everything at the office, but that his aunt was making trouble about the letter with the will. He was going to stay in New Orleans till he heard from the lawyer, and then if everything was okay they’d be married and sail for Havana.

She tried to rent for Jay the neighboring apartment, but the landlord told her it had been taken that day. She didn’t see any signs of life on the adjacent balcony, and wondered, her cheeks flaming, if the landlord didn’t want to rent to Jay because he suspected Jay and her of being—oh, she was getting evil-minded! It came of brooding over what Jay had told her about his aunt’s possible suspicions.

Jay stayed at a hotel. He left her late that first night, and it was after he had gone that she first heard the “thing”. She was drifting off to sleep

in her little bedroom that opened onto the balcony when the sound came, like the eerie whisper of the wind. Certainly it was no human voice. But the wind didn't speak in words, and these were surely words.

"Don't marry him," the "thing" whispered. "You're beautiful and I love you."

Leah sat bolt upright, and the noise stopped. Imagination, Jay had indicated, was a dangerous thing, but she'd never known she was overloaded with it. She lay down again, and then she heard the horrid whisper, "Don't trust him. But I'm here, ready to help you."

She covered her ears and at last went to sleep. She didn't tell Jay about the "thing" next morning when he called. It was, of course, an eerie sort of half-waking dream.

They spent the day sight-seeing, but it wasn't much fun. Jay was nervous and jumpy, unlike himself. Oh, if only they could marry now, and get away from everything! But he said nothing about marriage, and he didn't even kiss her when he left her at the apartment after dinner.

She read until late and then tried to sleep. And again the "thing" started, "Don't worry, Leah, I'm here, I'm here."

She'd see a psychiatrist! She was surely losing her mind.

They rented a horse and buggy next day and drove through the French Quarter and that should have been delightful, but again it wasn't. Leah found herself growing cross with Jay. She'd given up job-hunting, but she would start again tomorrow. There was no fun in being with him when he was like this. Disloyally she found herself remembering another man who had made a simple walk through the country a memorable experience.

When Jay had sulked all through dinner, she decided she'd have a showdown with him. If he were worried

about things in Dallas he ought to go back there and straighten them out. There was something about all this that she didn't understand. She had been vaguely uneasy ever since he'd persuaded her to go away, but now she was really afraid, though she wasn't sure of what.

She invited him into the apartment, and he followed her a bit reluctantly out onto the balcony. It was a warm still night, and the stars hung low over the ancient building—a curious, waiting night, and suddenly Leah's nerves snapped.

"JAY," SHE demanded sharply, "what's all this about? What's happened to the business, and exactly what news are you waiting for?"

His own voice was sharp. "Nothing you'd understand. Just legal matters of inheritance."

"I don't understand any of it," her voice rose. "Your making me leave town, all that stuff about your uncle's death—"

"I don't want to discuss it," he said flatly.

And then there was a tense silence. And into the silence the "thing" whispered, "You killed your uncle, Jay. Why don't you admit it?"

Jay's face went dead white. He was trembling violently, "Leah, did you hear that? What was it?"

She played a hunch then. Afterwards she wasn't sure why, because she was as shocked and mystified as Jay. But some instinct told her to do it. "What, Jay?" she asked blankly. "I didn't hear anything."

The eerie whisper came again, "You killed him because he knew you'd embezzled his clients' money. Tell the truth, Jay."

Jay rose frantically. He shouted into space, "I didn't mean to kill him. He started accusing me and I got panicky. He'd been cleaning that gun and I

grabbed it. It was one I'd given him and I knew it was loaded, but I didn't mean to shoot him. I meant to threaten him, and it went off!"

There was the sound of footsteps on the neighboring balcony, then a tall form vaulted over the rail. Leah stared dazedly at Randy Blake, but as the numbness left her she knew a wonderful relief. There was nobody in the world whom she could have been so glad to see at this dreadful moment.

Jay's face was no longer pale, it was livid. "So it was you!" he shouted. "You tricked me!"

He swung at Randy, but Randy was too quick for him. One blow stretched Jay out on the balcony. "Let me use your phone," Randy said to Leah. "He'll be out for a few minutes. The Dallas police are after him for forgery—possibly embezzlement too, by this time. The police here will hold him. The murder charge will come later, nobody but me had thought of that yet. He might not have meant to kill his uncle but he had his wits about him. He wiped off the prints and put that gun in his uncle's hand."

Leah was never quite clear afterwards about the next fifteen minutes—the police coming, Randy's terse explanation, and then a staggering Jay being escorted out of the apartment.

But at last she and Randy were alone, and she was in his arms, and strangely it was the most natural place in the world to be. His kisses were a homecoming of love which banished fear.

But she pulled away from him at last. "That whispering?" she demanded.

He laughed and vaulted over the rail. He returned with a parrot on his shoulder. He said in a low whisper. "I love you, will you marry me?"

And the parrot repeated it in a monotonous whisper. But it didn't sound so eerie now, only very beautiful.

RANDY explained, "I brought the bird back from the tropics, and the neighbors in the apartment house objected to its chattering so I taught it to whisper. I never thought of it as an asset to my work. I brought it down here with me when I was trailing Jay just because there was nobody to leave it with, and when I was over there so close to you but not able to see you yet, I conceived the idea of having the parrot talk to you. I had an idea you'd catch on, but of course nobody would dream of a whispering parrot. Then tonight when I was listening to you and Jay, I had a brainstorm. If the parrot could frighten him into a confession, everything would be okay."

Leah said faintly. "I'm still dizzy. What is your work?"

"Didn't you hear me tell the police, darling? No, you were in a trance. Well, I'm a private investigator. Mr. Donnelly called me in when he got suspicious of Jay. Some of his clients' money had disappeared, and he knew the bookkeeper was above reproach."

"Jay gave the bookkeeper a vacation," Leah put in.

"That explains it, then. He took over the books. Well, Mr. Donnelly thought he'd introduce me to Jay socially first, and then perhaps put me in the office. But the old man died before we'd discovered anything definite. I imagine that night after Jay went upstairs he went down again to talk to his uncle, probably about me. He was hellbent not to have me in the firm. The old man hadn't intended to let on to Jay that he suspected him, but perhaps he got angry and let it slip. And you know the rest, almost. I'm afraid, darling, he sent you down here with the idea of letting you take the rap should the police discover his uncle had been murdered. It would have looked bad for you, running out without saying where. You were a silly child to do it."

She nodded humbly. She'd been

worse than silly, but how could she have dreamed that Jay would do such a thing? Jay had said he loved her.

Randy went on, "About the forgery charge, Jay forged the letter found with the will. He'd probably done that some time ago, as a precaution. He knew his uncle's health was bad. He was anxious to get the business, not only because it was worth something, but to cover his tracks. I've been working for Mrs. Donnelly since the old man died, I told her all he'd told me. I suggested that she have the books examined for evidence of embezzlement, and she did, which was why Jay bolted. I don't know whether that investigation has turned up anything yet, but she wired me this morning that the handwriting expert I'd recommended said the signature on the letter was really a forgery, and the police were after Jay. I had only to wire them his address to have him picked up on that charge, but I

thought I'd sit tight and watch awhile. I was hoping somehow to trick him into making the more important confession he made tonight."

Leah said weakly, "You're—you're wonderful."

He took her hand and his eyes were tender, "Did you love him, Leah?"

"Not really, I guess. I—I don't feel anything about him now but a sort of horrified pity."

"When the parrot whispers it always tells the truth, Leah. I do love you and I want to marry you. What about you?"

She answered faintly, "If there's any sense in me tonight, if this whole thing isn't just a crazy dream—then, me too, Randy."

His kisses told her it wasn't crazy, but it was still a dream. Because surely only a dream could be so perfect.

THE END



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He started the whole business, so it was up to him to straighten it out!

BUTCH TAKES CARE OF IT ALL

by Abigail Dixon

SOMETIMES a dog can be wrong, and this time I've made a terrible mistake. It's my fault, every bit of it, that my master goes around looking as if he didn't care where his next bone was coming from.

It's about a woman, of course, or, maybe you'd call her a girl. I remember the day I met Jill: It was early morning, and the warm sun was bringing out wonderful spring smells and even a grown up Boxer like me was silly enough to run around the town square chasing butterflies.

I almost knocked her down when she accidentally got in my way. We both backed up and looked at each other warily. She was pretty, much prettier than any of the other girl creatures I'd met. Her hair was shiny and almost the color of Katie, the beautiful Irish Setter that lives in the next block. She spoke to me real friendly like and I sniffed at her, thinking that she smelled like buttercups.

My master came up then, and told me that I must behave myself and not

go around knocking people down. He said it in a grave voice and I looked up at him sadly, but I didn't mind because I knew it was all a game, having played it with him many times before.

But Jill said, "It's really my fault." She had a nice voice, sort of slow and easy, not the shrill kind that would wake a dog out of a sound sleep.

Then I looked at my master sharply. Something in the very air was different; a feeling like dew sparkling on the grass and leaves waiting to stir in the breeze. He was gazing at the Girl in a dazed way and with a look in his eyes which made me feel very close to him.

"I'm Frank Marshall," he said finally. "I hope Butch hasn't gotten dirty paw marks on your dress."

Well, I thought indignantly, I like that! But being a good natured lug I sat on the grass and grinned up at him, letting my tongue loll out the side of my mouth in a friendly, if somewhat idiotic, fashion which always seems to please him.

It was wasted. Neither of them paid the slightest attention to me. They



"Himmel," Hugo muttered mournfully, "for a grown dog, you have no brains. After he marries that girl, you'll be like me, living all alone in a *hundhaus* in the back yard!"

began to walk down the narrow path together. My master said, "Beautiful morning, isn't it?"

Oh, come now, I thought crossly, you can do better than that, Frankie. What's happened to the line, "Butch seems to have taken a shine to you. He has good taste." And then she gives you her telephone number...

Positively nothing was being said. And, positively, no attention was being paid to me. I began to get bored. I went back to chasing butterflies.

RIGHT FROM then on, the three of us began to go around together. Jill was almost as much fun for a dog to be with as Frank. She could throw a stick almost as far, and her hamburgers were even better. I was pleased with myself, because it's real important for a dog to find the right girl for his master!

I didn't have to live by myself, in a little house in the yard with my name over the door, like some of my friends. Frank lived with me in a great big house near the edge of town. It had a beautiful garden in front and lots of land in the back for a dog to tear around in and play.

We had fun that summer, the three of us. Sometimes we'd go on picnics, Jill holding a basket filled with all sorts of delicious things to eat in useless containers and Frank driving the car right up to her porch to pick her up. We'd all queue in the front seat, with her in the middle.

More often than not, I'd have to remind them when it was time to eat. They'd sit very close together by the edge of the brook and sometimes they'd talk a lot and sometimes they'd kiss a lot. They'd forget all about me until I'd pull the napkin off of the top of the lunch basket and bring it over to them, holding my sides in carefully so I'd look starved.

I didn't mind, really: As I've pointed out, I'm good-natured; and, after

all, hadn't I picked out Jill to be Frank's girl?

But little things began to bother me. I'm not overly sensitive, but it didn't seem right for Jill to be brushing Frank's tweed jacket all the time, when everybody knows that dog hairs belong on tweed. And one day all the wonderful old chairs and sofas that I had torn in exactly the right places for comfort were carried out of the house. I knew, without being told, that they were going to be upholstered!

It was Hugo, the Dachsund, who pointed out to me the way things were drifting. He's built close to the ground and people don't notice him as much as they do me, so he hears things.

He shook his ears mournfully, "*Himmel*," he muttered, "for a grown dog, you have no brains. Soon, you will be like me, living all alone in a *hundhaus* in the back yard."

Something would have to be done. I couldn't let Frank and me be taken in by a soft voice and the smell of buttermilk. I couldn't let our lives be ruined because a lovely wisp of a girl knew how to toss a stick and make good hamburgers.

Well, I'd gotten my master into this, so I'd have to get him out of it.

It wasn't easy. When I began to let Jill know that we didn't want her around she looked hurt and bewildered. She'd put her soft hand on my head and scratch behind my ears, and oh, bliss, I could hardly tear myself away. It was even harder to resist her hamburgers. But I'm a dog of determination.

Frank began to look unhappy, too. He and Jill began to argue and once he accused her of not liking me. She turned away from him and I saw tears in her eyes. I felt like a cur.

Soon, Jill stopped being around. It was just Frank and me. But something was wrong. The furniture came back, and, strangely enough, was just as com-

fortable as ever, but I missed Jill's soft laughter and the smell of buttercups around the house. And I began to worry about my master.

He just seemed to stop living. He hardly slept or ate and just kept staring out of the window or picked up the phone to call Jill. He'd put the phone down sadly and say, "She's not home, Butch. Not to us, anyway."

Well, as I've said before, *sometimes a dog can be wrong, and this time I'd made a terrible mistake.*

I STARTED out early in the morning, because it's a long trot from our house to Jill's. I sneaked out carefully through the cellar door, something I've never done before, mostly, on account of the unfriendly cat that sleeps near the apple bin. But this morning I had no time for cats, although I was hardly unaware of their presence from behind the hedges.

Two bottles of milk stood in a neat row on Jill's porch. Probably she'd soon be out to take them in. I sat down behind the glider and waited.

I heard her step and rose to a crouch, all ready to jump on her. Of course I was taking some personal risk, since she might scream and rouse some-

one with no brains and a shotgun. But I'd do it, for the sake of my master. . . . and maybe me.

As soon as I knocked her down I grinned and stuck out my tongue to show that I was friendly.

I guess I was more scared than Jill. She gave a little yelp and then threw her arms around my neck and hugged me and began to cry. It was uncomfortable, but I deserved it so I stood there quietly, glad that I was once more fit to bear the name of dog.

I was really surprised when Frank ran up on the porch. He stood there for a moment looking at us, and then he said to Jill, rather hesitantly, "I was afraid he might be here, bothering you."

He helped her to her feet and I was relieved to see her transfer her arms from my neck to his. "Bother me! Oh, Frank, you great boob," she sobbed, "I love him," she hesitated for a moment and then added firmly, "*too*. But I thought he didn't like me. I—I thought you didn't—"

Girl creatures certainly can be dumb. I'd known all along that Frank—that we—loved her.

THE END



don't miss

WITCH'S SUMMER

By Neila Garland

*it leads off the
current issue of*

TODAY'S LOVE STORIES



Your Writing Gives The Answer

Special
Feature

by
Mari
Wier



IT WAS A night that was made for love. The moon riding high had the glow of a distant and lighted crystal. The stars were so thick it seemed that the heavens were studded with tiny diamonds, in a vast blue canopy. There was a breeze that made the leaves on the old oak outside my study window move. They reminded me of babyhands, moving ceaselessly and yet doing nothing.

There were times when we all want to be alone, and tonight I wanted to dream of my friends, and think about the numberless problems they brought me with their handwritings. There was a family two blocks down, with a daughter whom they considered a problem child. When I had her handwriting I knew she was not a problem child at all. Just a girl with a great deal of musical talent which her parents had not considered worth cultivating. Maybe their daughter Mary will become a talented musician, and make a name for herself just because her parents in their desperate need for help in understanding her brought her school notes to me.

There may have been another reason why I sat by the open window without any light, just resting. All spring I had watched Janice Lee across the street and been happy in her happiness. Janice met Bill Young just before her graduation and all during the weeks I had seen Bill's car turn in at the Lee driveway, and then Janice and Bill would sit on the big swing in the Lee home. That swing needed just a mite of oil somewhere because for it squeaked and the squeaks had become an every night sound. After a little they would get in Bill's car and go down to the drive-in for drinks, but they were nearly always home early. Bill had a job where he had to get up and Jim Lee had remarked many times that Janice was no night owl.

But now I was worried. For the last week there had been no signs of

Bill's car and no squeak of the swing. Janice had kept indoors all week. Just once she had been out watering the rose garden and I had merely had a glimpse of her smooth brown legs, and shoulders, and her bright red shorts and halter. Something must be wrong. It was really none of my business, but it is always a disappointment to me, who have heard so many broken hearted confidences, to see young love move badly. Maybe Janice would come over. Maybe she would bring me Bill's writing, and I might help get things straightened out again.

Almost as if my thoughts must have carried a message, there was a moving shadow on the Lee's front yard. Someone dressed in white was in the deep shadow of the trees, and as she moved out of the shadow it was Janice. She was certainly not dressed for going out and if she had been going, she would have taken the car. She came down the drive, and stopped at the curb as if she were undecided just what to do. But her delay was only momentary. She threw back her head as she always had done since she was a little girl, and I knew she had made a decision. Straight across the street and up my own driveway. Then she hesitated.

"Miss Mari". It was little more than a whisper.

"Yes, Janice, I'm home and I'm glad to see you. Come on in."

SHE PUT out her hands to me. Her grip was firm, as I led her to a high bamboo chair on the porch. She settled herself, crossing her long and slender legs.

"I'm glad you came. It was sort of lonely over here, and I've been sitting here in the dusk just thinking."

"Thinking about me?"

It is doubtful if she saw me nod my head. It was true, I had been thinking about her.

"I've missed you the last few days, Janice," I said. "Somehow I missed the porch swing squeaking, and I've not

seen Bill's car for more than a week. Is he out of town?"

There was no use telling her that the last time Bill's car had been in the Lee driveway, he had backed it out as though he were going to a fire. Janice had come to me for help, but it was her story, not mine. My job would be to take her handwriting, and Bill's writing if she had any and help the two young folks find real happiness.

I waited. "Bill hasn't been over, not for days."

It was nothing more than a whisper. "Away?"

This time the quiet was almost stifling. Janice wanted to tell me and hurrying her would not help one bit. Finally she spoke. I moved my chair a little closer so I could hear her better.

"No, Bill just isn't coming over any more. I thought he would never leave me, Miss Mari. I thought he loved me, and—well, life just isn't much since the last time he was over at the house. Oh, Miss Mari, you can't know how much I miss him. It's awful to be all wrapped up in someone and then see they don't care."

"Are you sure?" I said, Of course she would be sure, for all through her grade school days Janice had been sure until someone showed her that she was mistaken.

The nod of Janice's head was very positive. "If he cared, he would have listened when I tried to tell him. Instead he got white, and his eyes looked all bleak, like a storm cloud, and then he was gone. Honest, Miss Mari I didn't do anything to make him act that way. I was trying to explain, to tell him I was only being nice to Jack, but Bill wouldn't listen. He just wouldn't

How many, many times I had heard the story of the boy or the girl who would not listen to the explanation, when very often there was nothing to explain. Now I knew that it would be necessary for Janice to know Bill

through my use of grapho analysis, show her what his handwriting said about him and what his reveals about her.

"Yes, dear, you tried to explain. But what did you try to explain? You haven't told me yet, and I don't understand. Maybe Bill did not understand either. And before you tell me, I'm quite sure that Bill loves you. Let's start with that. Tell me if you will what it was that Bill did not wait to hear.

For several minutes it looked as though Janice would not say anything more. Then she leaned her head on the bamboo table and deep sobs seemed as though they might tear her apart.

After a little she lifted her head, and wiped away the tears. Others had done the same. There was nothing to do until she was ready to tell her story.

Then she began, but this time her voice was a little firmer, a little clearer. "You know, Miss Mari, that I've never gone steady with any boy. Then I met Bill, and I did not expect him to ask me for even the first date. Bill is popular. He's always been popular. He has had a dozen girl friends, and he has never dated any one of them more than a few times. Of course, when I met Bill I knew that he was the man I wanted. I could dream about getting his breakfast, and having him all for my own, but I didn't dare to hope this would happen.

"Then he asked me for a date, and then another. He didn't go out with any of his old girl friends. You know how we just sat there in the swing, and then went to the drive-in, and one night Bill asked me to marry him. I told him I would. I meant it, oh, Miss Mari, I meant it with all my heart.

WE WERE not going to get married right away, and then Bill had to go out of town about a new job. He got that job. That's what he came out

to tell me, but on the way to the house somebody told him about Jack. A long time ago I had a few dates with Jack. They didn't mean anything, but while Bill was gone, Jack who has a job a long way from here and doesn't come back, not once in six months well, Jack came to town. He did not know that Bill and I were planning to be married. And he came out to the house.

Mom and dad knew him. They liked him, and Mom made some lemonade and we sat around and visited a little while. I told him that Bill and I were engaged and would be married at Christmas time. Jack's a great guy. He told me what a swell person Bill is, as if I didn't know. After a while he left and I forgot all about it. But someone told Bill the very night he came out to tell me about his new job, and when he got to the house he would not listen. He accused me of having a date with Jack."

"And, of course, you did not have." It was easy for me to understand, but I was not sure whether Bill had been jealous or not. I had to see his writing. If he was jealous, then it might be better for Janice to forget all about it, but somehow I had never thought of Bill as being unreasonably jealous.

"Do you have any of Bill's writing?" I asked. "Has he written you any notes, or even letters that you could trust me to see. His handwriting will give us the truth, and Janice, girl, the truth is the only thing that counts."

"Yes, I know. I've had one note, and I brought it with me. Oh, Miss Mari, please tell me why he wouldn't listen. I didn't do anything to make him jealous. Honest I didn't, but he would not listen."

I had turned on the light, and Bill's note answered the question. Completely, fully. But if Janice was to have help, it would be necessary for her to know herself, as well as Bill. I asked for some of her own handwriting, and

she gave me a letter she had written to Bill. It was a very simple letter, but it was certainly a good thing she had not mailed it. Because it would have hurt Bill terribly, and without cause. Janice had told him if he doubted her not to come back. Of course, she had not meant it, but it showed very clearly that my girl neighbor had to not only understand Bill but herself if they were to have a happy future.

"Bill is not jealous," I told her. "And I am glad that you did not mail your letter for you'd have been terribly unfair to him. You two young folks just don't understand one another, and if you don't you will have trouble all through life. Certainly, you are in love, but understanding is just as necessary as love. Do you mind if I call Bill's home and see if he will come out here?"

"He won't come if you tell him I'm here."

Janice had not said that Bill should not be called, and though she hesitated a moment, she gave me his number.

"Bill," I said, when he answered in a voice that was dreary as a stormy day, "this is Mari Wier, and I wonder if you will come out and talk to me a little while this evening. You'll be doing a lonely old gal a real favor if you will."

I'LL SAY one thing, Bill was surprised. He said he'd be out in ten minutes, and he was. He didn't even look across at Janice's house—not until he was half way up my drive, and then he turned, hesitated, and as if he realized that he wasn't going there, he swung on up the asphalt.

Janice had turned off the light, and he did not see her for a minute. Then he stopped and half turned as though he might leave, but Janice was not telling him then not to see her any more. Her low whispered "Bill" acted like an electric button, and in a minute they were in each others arms, and

then they were sitting side by side on the bamboo lounge, holding hands, and snuggled up to one another just as they had in the long weeks when Bill had been a regular visitor at the Lee's.

"Bill, Janice loves you. You love Janice, but you kids are not going to be happy unless you can get acquainted with the real you, that is you for each of you. Janice came to me for help. She brought me a note you wrote her, and handwriting of her own. I believe you love one another, earnestly, sincerely, and that you may someday be a proud husband and father, and Janice a wonderful wife and mother. But you won't be happy until you get to really know each other.

"Now I'm going to help you get acquainted. Janice came to me, Bill, thinking you might be jealous about a chance visitor. You were not jealous. You were emotionally hurt. You are a chap who thinks *after* he acts. You heard Janice but you did not listen. You were hurt, and so you turned and drove off like a stormy petrel. You were not listening. You are impulsive. You act as you feel, and you were hurt, so you rushed off and left her alone. Your writing that slants so far to the right shows that you would not stop to listen.

"On the other hand, Janice is a great deal more shy than many girls you have dated, but she is very calm, cool. She never jumps at conclusions. She told you the truth, not only because she is not untruthful, but because she knew it was the right thing to do.

"You did not stop to listen. You were hurt, and you stormed off, and since then you've been suffering, because highly emotional people do suffer. You have felt worse in some ways than Janice has. She will not believe this, but her writing that is straight up and down, even a little backhand shows that she can take things on the chin better than you will."

Bill held up his hand. "As far as

I'm concerned Miss Mari, you are right. I never felt so bad in all my life. I guess I was just too independent that I had made a fool..."

"No, no, Bill" I interrupted. "You did not make a fool of yourself. No one has made a fool of anyone. Janice had a visitor. You jumped to conclusions. That was natural for you to do. If Janice had known how you are made emotionally she would have not worried, and the next day she'd have called you, and you would have been happy to get back on the Lee swing, and I'd not have been lonely for its squeak. But she weighed things. She could not see how you felt—I mean just that—how you felt. She did not feel the same way. She never jumps at conclusions, but would have listened and weighed what you had to say if things had been the other way around.

“YOUR WHOLE trouble has been in not understanding one another. Now you kids run along and remember that you are emotionally much different, but you are each capable of sincere love. You can be happy if Janice will remember you go off like a fire cracker, and if you will remember Janice plays the game fair and square, but she doesn't jump to conclusions as you do. Now run along over to the swing and let it squeak. But remember what I've said, because unless you do you'll have more stormy days, and possibly hurt one another real bad. That, my dears, will be the 'fool' thing Bill talks about. Understand one another, and you will be happy.”

Bill and Janice have announced their wedding. They have both been over and have told me what that one evening did for them. They are honestly trying to understand one another. Certainly they have come back with pages of their writing since, and we have had two or three visits that have helped them get really and truly acquainted. They will be happy all

through the years because they honestly are deeply in love, but greater than that, they understand one another. Each has a better acquaintance with the other, and that after all is the basis of happiness.”

You may be in love. You may be married, and your home life is not what you had hoped it would be. There is every chance in the world that if you get acquainted—if you really understand one another, you will lose most of your heartaches, and life will be more worth living every day.

And now I must help another couple who are married. The special delivery man has just brought in a letter. The father and mother are finding life's road very rough, but in another hour they will have a clearer understanding. They have been married for eight years, and they are still trying to figure each other out, but in another hour they will have my reply in the mail, and they can start getting acquainted with one another.

I want to tell
interest you have in
enrollment in you
After much thought
it will not be possible
my financial state
in education and

Janice's writing

Janice came very near to making a fatal mistake in her romance with Bill, because she did not understand his impulsiveness. Janice writes slightly backhand, is calm, cool, and collected. When the two young people really got acquainted with one another, they gained happiness.

*And now
I remain
Sincerely
yours
Bill
Coy*

Bill's writing

The far forward slant shows a writer who is highly impulsive, who jumps to conclusions, just as Bill did in his argument with Janice. When Bill understood his own impulsiveness, it helped him gain happiness.

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THE END



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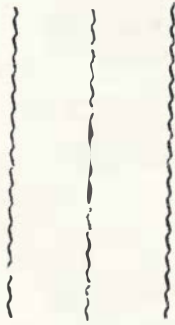
*These and others, are in the
big November issue of*

SCIENCE

FICTION

STORIES

Faith



by R. S. T.



The waves are beating against the shore;
But lover, my lover, the summer is o'er.
The moon sails nightly across the sky;
But lover, my lover, so very high.

The winds are calling, over the land;
But lover, my lover, where is your hand?
The air is sweet with a fruity charm,
But lover, my lover, where is your arm?
Summer is over, and fall is here,
Always, I'm wishing for you, my dear.

I put fresh logs on the fireplace grey,
Lover, my lover, so long away.
I touch a match to the kindling fine,
Lover, my lover, you still are mine.
And you will seek me, from far away,
And we shall meet, in the same glad way.



Love
Is
An
H - Bomb

by

Kathleen

Esmond

Cara didn't quite know where she was going—and she didn't care!



THE DAY had begun for Cara Wainwright much the same as any other day. Involuntarily the thought crossed her mind that days had acquired an annoying habit of being just alike, and she immediately suppressed the thought. It was ridiculous even to think that she might be bored when she had everything—*everything*, she told herself firmly—she could possibly want. She even had Walter now, or she would have soon.

She had come to the office—Walter's office, the Walter Langdon Advertising Agency—later than the rest of the staff. That was normal, as were their pleasant greetings as she walked through the large office back to her own. Some of them resented her, the older ones who envied the success which had come to a girl of twenty-two, but most of them, she knew comfortably, liked her and knew she was fair. Her own sound-proof, air-conditioned room was the last word in soft, indirect lighting, thick carpeting and artistic paneling. Her secretary had placed on her wide desk a bowl of flowers. She slipped out of her jacket, revealing a knitted suit of the pale green which went so well with her dark red hair, and artfully revealed the curves which were in exactly the right places on her slender, long, limbed figure.

She looked distastefully at the mail on her desk, as if she had a right to expect it to be novel and exciting and knew it would not be. Reluctantly, she leafed through it, until her eyes fell on a layout in final proof, the kind that always came back to her desk for her O.K. before going to press. As she looked at it, anger which seemed too great for such an inoffensive looking paper, swelled in her breast. She pressed the buzzer which would bring her secretary.

"This layout for Buffn's men's toilet articles—" she said more quietly

than she felt, "has been altered since I approved the rough copy. Do you know who authorized it?"

"I think it was probably Mr. Hastings," Anna replied demurely. "He did the art work."

Cara's mouth tightened only imperceptibly. "Will you ask Mr. Hastings to come here, please?"

The secretary vanished, and Cara waited, all the vague restlessness and discontent crystallizing into hot anger, not at all vague. She remembered now. It was only since Johnny Hastings had come to the agency, hired by Walter as a top-flight art man, that her pleasant, smooth world had been troubled. She watched the door as he entered, a tall, slender man with black hair, usually disarranged as it was now, steady grey eyes and a mouth that she had noticed the first time she met him, and found disturbing. It had a strength that, even now, as a smile touched it, was a little frightening.

"You wanted to see me, Cara?" he asked pleasantly.

THAT WAS another thing about him. He did not call her Miss Wainwright or accord her the same respect that the rest of the agency staff did. Rather, she thought resentfully as, uninvited he stretched his long length comfortably in a chair, he seemed to regard her with a touch of amusement.

"I understand *you altered* the Bu-fin layout which I had approved," she said, making her voice as cold as she could.

He nodded and lit a cigarette. "Your layout would never attract men. It was too soft, too feminine, too romantic."

Cara held on to her temper which was coming to a boiling point. "This is not the first time you have taken the liberty of changing a layout which I had approved. Mr. Hastings," she mentioned and waited for his reply.

When it came, it was so irrelevant

as to throw her off guard. "Why don't you call me Johnny, as everyone else around does? Afraid?" He asked it as if it was quite inconsequential, but he was curious.

"Why on earth should I be afraid?" she demanded.

He shrugged. "I don't know. You're afraid of so many things. Of strength or power—that is, in any one else. You like to pretend to yourself that you have them. As a matter of fact," his glance, now openly amused, traveled along as much of her slender figure as the desk did not hide, to the fine boned face under her mass of red curls, a face more beautiful for being flushed with anger, and the brown eyes flecked with gold now blazing. "As a matter of fact," he repeated, "you hide behind that facade of big advertising executive, because you're afraid to be a woman, to love, marry, raise a family."

Cara was trembling with fury so that for a moment she did not trust herself to speak. When she did, her voice dripped icicles. "Perhaps you have not been told that Walter and I plan to be married when he is free."

The smile disappeared from his mouth, leaving it grim. "I've been told," he said shortly. "I know Nita. She's a sweet, warm, lovable, little thing, quite unable to protect her rights, although she's trying..."

This was really too much. That he should dare talk to her that way of Nita, Walter's fiancée! Her face suddenly white, Cara stood up, Johnny stood, too. She was a tall girl but she had to look up to him.

"We were speaking of this layout," she reminded him and was not able to keep her voice from trembling with her suppressed fury. "Will you use the rough which I approved, or shall I take the whole matter to Walter?"

There was anger in his eyes, too, but he merely sounded weary as he

replied, "I take a salary from Walter. I won't give him a drawing for an ad for a man's magazine, which I know is very pretty," his mouth was touched only lightly by scorn, "but has no pulling power whatever."

Cara felt defeat but it did not show. "Then, there is nothing more to be said."

"There is just this." As he took a step which brought him very near to her, she knew what he was going to do, but was powerless to stop him. His arms went around her, holding her closely with a strength that set her body tingling, and his lips crushed hers.

It was a full instant before she could make herself move to draw away. When she did he released her instantly. His eyes had a curious expression, as if he was surprised at something he had discovered.

"If it's any satisfaction to you," he said, "that shocked me as much as it did you."

THE DOOR closed behind him before she could find the crushing, annihilating words she wanted. His last remark puzzled her, but she couldn't take time to figure it out now. She sank into her chair and covered her face with her hands, trying to cope with the tide of feeling that swept her. Her heart pounded and the blood leaped in her veins like a wild thing. She knew now why his mouth had subtly disturbed her. Devastating was the word for what it had done to her.

Gradually she got her feelings under some control and brought her mind to bear on how a man whom you hated could set up such a riot in your breast. For hate him she did. As she thought how much, her hands involuntarily clinched.

How dare he talk to her that way about Nita? Did he have the effrontery to think that she had deliberately

stolen Walter from Nita? A new thought brought her upright in her chair, her chin high. Was it possible the staff, the people in the office thought that?

She had been in love with Walter since she came here from high school, as a messenger. It was an adolescent, adoring crush on a handsome man, eight years her senior. When he became engaged to Nita, her heart nearly broke. She was amazed to realize how dim and far away that anguish seemed now. It was partially healed by work. She stayed with the agency, working with Walter, helping him build it from a small, one-horse affair to what was now one of the leading agencies in the city.

They worked closely together, as was inevitable, but she could honestly say she had never interfered between him and his fiancée. Except, she thought, to feel sympathy when she saw him worried and harassed by Nita's childish demands on his time, her failure to understand anything about his business, her constant desire for fun and parties, all the frivolity for which a busy man does not have time.

"Sweet, warm, lovable," Johnny called her. Remembering, Cara's mouth tightened, and she picked up the Buf-fin layout and marched into Walter's office.

As he raised his eyes and greeted her, it struck her suddenly that he looked tired. He and Johnny Hastings had been classmates in college, but Walter looked much older than Johnny now. Nevertheless, she amended quickly, Walter was much the handsomer of the two.

She laid the layout on his desk. "I want to talk to you about that."

He examined it. "For the men's magazines," he said. "It's O.K., isn't it?"

Cara's mouth tightened even more. "I don't think it's O.K., and, furthermore, Johnny Hastings deliberately

changed a layout which I had approved."

Walter gave a tired sigh. "You don't like Johnny, do you, Cara? I've noticed it. I hoped you two would hit it off. He's by all odds the best art and layout man in this city, a steal for the money I'm paying him."

Cara's eyebrows climbed. "If he's as good as that, why does he work for that money? And why haven't I heard of him before?"

WALTER leaned back in his swivel chair and lit a cigarette. "It's rather a long story, but you ought to know it. He had his own agency once, was making money with it, too. There was a girl, a model. Johnny painted her, glamorized her, until you could hardly pick up a magazine without seeing her picture. I don't know what happened—naturally he doesn't talk about it—but she went to Hollywood. Got a part in pictures, I suppose, I don't know. I don't think he ever said as much to anybody, but the gossip was that she threw Johnny over. Anyway, shortly afterward, he wangled a job in the Topographical Division of the Air Force. I don't know the exact title, but I know he had been rejected for other branches, and it was his talent which got him into that. Six months ago, he was out with a medical discharge, after a crash landing. They patched him up all right, but his heart showed some impairment. It's not fatal, but bad enough to keep him out of the service. He needed a job. I needed a good art man. I grabbed him. Of course," he leaned forward and crushed out his cigarette with a tired gesture, "if he can't work with you—What do you want me to do?"

Cara couldn't speak for a moment. She was trying to get used to a new picture, a very unpleasant picture. A picture of Johnny not as a man who defied her and kissed her but a man

whose life had been wrecked by a girl. Unreasoning hatred against the unknown girl swept her.

Walter rose and came around the desk to stand close to her. "You know I will do anything you want, dear. Do you want Johnny to go?"

Suddenly, quite definitely she knew she did not want Johnny to go. She even felt a slight sense of contempt for Walter that he gave in to her so easily. This she recognized immediately as unfair and disloyal and suppressed. Walter needed and craved peace, and would make almost any concession to get it.

She stood up, smiling. "No. It's all right. I was letting myself get worked up over nothing."

He sighed his relief. "That's one reason you're so indispensable to me, darling. You're so well balanced and intelligent." He took her in his arms very gently and kissed her.

Cara went out of his office faintly discontented and disturbed. Rebellion against being indispensable to Walter because she was well balanced and intelligent was strong in her and along with it a feeling of guilt. Walter's kiss aroused none of the fireworks in her breast that Johnny's had. She was being adolescent and silly, she decided. It was just because she had loved Walter so long, had become used to him. Theirs was a good love, they would have a good life together, she told herself, determining to treat Johnny Hastings as casually as any other member of the large agency staff.

SECURE in this plan, she went to her desk and O.K.'d the layout as revised, before attacking other work. It was late in the afternoon, her secretary had gone, and she was doing some last minute things when her door opened and Johnny's strong, aquiline face appeared.

"May I come in?" he asked and did

so without waiting for permission. The quick feeling of satisfaction which swept Cara would have told her that this was what she was unconsciously waiting for, if she had let it, but she promptly suppressed it.

"Look. I've got to say this fast," he said. "I'm not accustomed to apologizing for my actions, but I know I acted like a heel this morning and I'm sorry. I don't mean," he added hastily, "that I'm sorry about the layout. I was right about that. I'm sorry about—about the rest."

He was just sorry he had kissed her. The feeling of satisfaction tightened into a knot of resentment. "It was quite unimportant," she replied. "I had forgotten it."

He grinned then, and something about the grin made her uncomfortably suspicious that he didn't believe her. No disbelief was apparent in his voice, however, as he said, "That's swell. Will you prove it by having dinner with me? Or would Walter mind?" he added as an afterthought.

She shook her head. "No, Walter wouldn't mind. He's not the jealous type," she said slowly, trying to steel herself against a desire to go with him, and losing the struggle. "I'm not dressed to go anywhere very gay." She looked down at the green knitted suit.

He laughed. "You could wear a house dress and still be the girl most men would whistle at," he said.

THAT EVENING when Cara got her first glimpse of one side of Johnny Hasting, remained in her memory as one tinkling with joy bells, gay with laughter and yet carrying a depth of something serious. Everywhere they went whether the cocktail bar at first, the little French restaurant where they had a delicious dinner, or the informal place where they danced later, there were people who knew Johnny and called friendly greetings. Everywhere,

there were girls who looked at her enviously, girls who called him "darling".

"I feel as if I were with visiting royalty," she told him.

He looked puzzled for a moment, then laughed. "All these people? When you've been around a town as long as I have, you get to know a lot of people," he said lightly.

While they ate and drank they talked of everything under the sun except his work before he went into the service and glamorous models. He told stories about the service and his buddies, with a touch of nostalgia.

He danced like he apparently did everything else, easily, effortlessly and smoothly. She had an odd feeling that they had danced together before, often, and barely kept herself from telling him so.

IT WAS NOT until they were in a taxi going home that she remembered guiltily that she had not once thought of Walter the whole evening. It was something Johnny said that reminded her.

"I knew you would be like this if you let your hair down," he remarked.

"Like what?"

"Oh, young, gay, happy, not a lady boss, stiffly hiding behind business affairs."

Oddly she was not offended. "Am I like that?" she asked curiously.

"H'm, h'm. You've pushed Cara-the-woman so far under Miss Wainwright, advertising expert, that it's hard for her to come out."

She supposed he was right. At first she had used the office work to help her pain at Walter's loss, then it grew to be her life. Now that she had Walter—

"When Walter and I are married," she told Johnny, "Cara, the woman, will have her chance."

He did not reply to that, and she

remembered that he knew and liked Nita. "Sweet, warm, lovable". She had an impulse to defend herself, to say she had nothing to do with Walter's falling out of love with Nita, but anger and pride kept her silent. She was glad when the cab stopped at her home. Johnny helped her out, but he did not dismiss the cab and he made no move to kiss her, as he got back in and said good night.

All the heart-warming gayety of the evening faded, as Cara went slowly up to her own apartment, leaving her feeling cold and neglected. She had not wanted him to kiss her, she told herself fiercely, and knew it for a lie. She did want it, wanted his lips and his arms holding her close. *She was in love with Johnny Hastings*, and it was a longing, consuming kind of love which she had never before known. Beside it, even her adolescent passion for Walter was insignificant!

THE ENSUING days and weeks were like a nightmare. Cara wondered wildly sometimes if everyone did not know the feelings that fought inside her. She wrangled with Johnny over layouts, and was secretly happy when he won, as he usually did. She tried to be especially affectionate and gentle with Walter, but he seemed tired and often absent-minded. She wondered if he were regretting his break with Nita, and once tactfully suggested it.

"No," he denied almost violently. "That's a closed chapter. I want it to stay closed."

She refused two invitations from Johnny to dine and dance again, pleading that she was busy and needed rest in the evening.

"You're hiding again, lady," he told her quizzically, "hiding the woman behind the business executive," but he did not invite her again.

Each morning as she dressed, she

selected her costume for Johnny's eyes, and when she saw admiration in them as they rested on her trim figure, her heart leaped like a school girl's. She knew she was being ridiculous, that he was still carrying a torch for the glamorous model, but that did not keep every contact with him from setting her blood rioting.

"This is a temporary madness," she told herself. "I'll get over it and settle down to a happy life with Walter. After all, I have loved him a long time."

Then came an evening when she and Johnny had worked together over an ad that had to be out that night. When it was finally finished, they leaned back, exhausted, and looked at each other.

"We need and deserve a drink," he said. "Come on out and I'll buy you one."

She considered a moment, and yielded to an overpowering temptation.

"I'm too tired for any place public," she said. "Come up to my apartment, and I'll mix you one."

So they went to her apartment, and he volunteered to play bartender. She left him and changed from her trim suit to a house gown of soft, sheer velvet. It was the deep green that made her skin look transparent and brought out the flecks of gold in her brown eyes.

When she entered the living room, Johnny stopped still for a moment, the cocktail shaker in his hands.

"You should like this," he said, as he poured a drink for her. "It's a Hastings special."

They sipped their drinks without speaking. Cara was conscious of something unspoken, undefinable between them in the room. Abruptly, as he drained his glass, he stood up.

"I'll be running along. Thanks for the drink."

She stood up, too. He took a step toward her, and in an instant she was

in his arms, held tightly against him, while with his lips crushed hers.

After a while, he released her gently. "I hoped I'd get away without doing that," he said. "It makes me the lowest kind of a heel."

He was gone before she could answer, but her heart sang. He loved her, she new exultantly. He was fighting it because of Walter, but neither of them could help it, and she did not believe Walter would be hurt badly.

SHE SLEPT and woke, with warm happiness flooding through her, even before she remembered why. She sang as she showered and dressed, planning the day. She would tell Walter first, then boldly challenge Johnny to deny that he loved her. She felt strong, secure in her love.

She was a little later than usual, and Johnny was closeted with Walter when she arrived. For a wild moment, she wondered if he was telling Walter he loved her, but when he left and she went in to Walter's office, the latter was frowning thoughtfully but not otherwise disturbed.

"I need your help, Cara," he said. "Sit down. Johnny's just been here. He wants me to give some modelling work to Nancy Yarnell, the girl who ran out on him. Seems she was a flop in Hollywood, now she's back and broke."

To Cara his voice seemed to be coming from a distance, over waves of pain that pounded at her. So that was why Johnny resisted her! Not because of Walter but of the girl he was really in love with. With a wrench, she brought her attention back to Walter.

"I'm afraid of the effect on him," he was saying, "what it will do to his work to have her around. Damn women anyhow!" He got up and walked to the window, his back to Cara. "They can raise the devil with a man's life."

Suddenly Cara recognized something that made her want to laugh hysterically. With difficulty she held on to herself.

"You're thinking of yourself, too, aren't you, Walter?" she asked. "You're still in love with Nita, aren't you?"

He turned and looked at her with tired eyes. "I've certainly given you a raw deal, Cara," was all he said.

Cara rose, wondering if she could keep from screaming long enough to get out of the room.

"Don't worry about me," she said. "I've recognized for some time that our engagement was a mistake." She was at the door then and turned as she held it open. "Let Johnny have his model," she advised. "Then everybody will be happy."

Somehow, she got into her own room behind a closed door. She tried to work, but she couldn't concentrate. Finally, she pushed the whole thing aside, and slipped into her coat. She told her secretary she would be gone for the day, giving no reason. Let Walter think it was grief over him, if he wanted to. She had to get out. to go. Without thinking clearly of what she was doing, she got her convertible out of the garage and headed it out of the city. Once free of traffic, she pressed the gas pedal to the floor, savagely tense, as she watched the needle go from fifty to sixty, to seventy, to eighty. She didn't know where she was going, didn't care. She simply drove until the anguish inside her quieted from sheer exhaustion, then turned the car toward home.

It was midnight when she got in and her phone was ringing. By the time she answered, the caller had hung up. Wearily, she got into bed, and after a while fell into an exhausted slumber.

SHE WOKE in a world of pain, and knew that every fibre of her being

shrank from going into the office. Nevertheless, she dressed carefully and hurried down.

A girl was in the waiting room when she arrived, a petite blonde with a baby stare in her blue eyes; she wore a pale blue suit and hat which enhanced her attraction. Johnny was talking to her and he stopped Cara to introduce her.

"I'm awful glad to meet you," the girl said. "I think it must be wonderful to be so smart and hold such an important job."

"Thank you," Cara said briefly and walked on to her own office. So *this* was the girl that Johnny loved!

Johnny walked beside her, leaving the girl waiting. "I tried to call you last night," he said. "Your phone didn't answer."

"No, I was out," she replied in a dead voice and went into her own office, closing the door against him. She couldn't stand any more apologies from the men who preferred other women, she thought.

Work had filled her life once, it would fill it again, she determined, and forced her attention to the papers on her desk. After she found herself gazing at a simple layout for fifteen minutes, unable to make a decision, she dropped it, put her elbows on the desk and hid her face in her hands.

With her heart held in a tight grip of pain, she tried to think. She was a failure, a complete failure as a woman; both men she had loved wanted other women. Even as a career woman, Johnny proved to her she was not as good as she thought she was; now she couldn't work at all, her mind would not function. She could not stay in that office, she knew. She would have to go somewhere else, get another job.

Again, she pushed work aside and left for the day. This time she didn't get the car, she lacked the impulse and

energy. She was tired with a weariness that was not solely physical. She walked streets slowly, unconscious of her direction, wishing only for oblivion. With nothing to live for, how do you go on living? Eventually, she found herself in her own apartment—not quite sure how she got there—and her daytime maid was staring at her with frightened eyes.

"You're sick, Miss Cara. You're white as a ghost. I'm going to put you to bed and call your doctor."

Over Cara's weak protests, the woman undressed her and put her into bed. After a while the doctor came.

"I'm not sick," she protested. "I'm just tired. I don't need you."

"You scared your maid half to death," he told her. "Let's have a look at you. Have you had a shock of any kind?"

"No," she told him irritably, but submitted to his examination.

When he finished, he looked at her for a moment silently. "There's nothing wrong physically," he decided, "It looks to me like nervous exhaustion. Anyhow, I'd recommend a week or so in a good rest home."

Cara was at first inclined to refuse, then she realized it might be exactly the place where she could crawl away, where she could not see Johnny with his Nancy, would not have to pretend to anyone. . .

IT WAS A luxurious place with every comfort. But Cara forgot that her maid knew where she worked. She didn't realize that the office would be notified where she was until Walter came in with enough roses to fill several vases, and an expression of deep remorse.

"Cara, darling, what have I done to you?" he began. "I owe everything to you, I would do anything to spare you pain—"

"Walter, wait," she interrupted.

"I'm not here because of anything you have done or said. It was actually a relief to me when you decided that you still loved Nita. We made a mistake, you and I, and of the two, I was more responsible than you."

He looked at first as if he didn't believe her, and, becoming convinced, turned sulky.

"Then you're really just tired?" he asked, as if he couldn't believe it.

Her laugh had a touch of hysteria. "Just tired, Walter. Now, go away, and don't tell anyone else where I am."

He went away, and she was left with her bewilderment and her pain. Forget everything and vegetate, the doctor said. How did you forget a tearing ache inside you? She stretched out on a beach chair in a lovely patio and closed her eyes. Maybe after a while she could banish the vision of Johnny's face, his disturbing mouth.

"Well, this is a nice, de luxe hiding place," a voice intruded, and her eyes opened to rest on the face she was trying desperately to forget. Johnny was perched on the foot of her deck chair. He didn't look solicitous and sympathetic as everyone else did. He merely looked annoyed. "You're not sick, you know," he accused. "You're escaping again. You know you're in love with me and you can't face an honest emotion."

That galvanized her into action. She sat up, "Why, you—you—" she searched for a name bad enough to call him—"you conceited baboon. Get

out of here! Go back to your Nancy, the baby faced idiot."

"Nancy?" He seemed honestly puzzled, then leaned back his head and laughed. Cara's gaze went around for something to throw at him. "Why, you're jealous," he said delightedly, then made his voice gentle. "Honey, I am not and *never was* interested in Nancy except as a nice, pretty, little girl who makes a perfect model because she does as you tell her. Whatever else you've heard was just the kind of gossip this town loves."

Cara refused to credit the song that leaped into her heart. "Then, why were you so afraid and so ashamed to kiss me?" she demanded.

"Because you were Walter's girl, lame brain, and Walter's my friend," he told her inelegantly. "Now, Walter's gone back to Nita and you—come here!"

He pulled her close, and they were locked in an embrace that was heaven itself. Their kiss was fire and ice, a roaring wind and a soft summer breeze, strength and power, yet gentle tenderness. They were recalled from their elysium by a shocked voice.

"I hate to interrupt," the doctor said.

Johnny took his lips from hers long enough to grin and say, "It's all right, doctor. I'm taking your patient home."

Cara sighed happily. As far as she was concerned, she *was* home—in Johnny's arms.

THE END



The Path



By
Lalia



There's a narrow path that goes over the hill
(Meet me at moon-time if you will.)
There's a kindly cedar, that casts a shade,
(Enough to shelter a lad and maid.)
The stars have hidden their lanterns bright.
(Perfect place for a tryst tonight.)
And a stolen kiss is a lovely prize.
(Are you too cautious or too wise?)

There's a narrow path for a lover's feet.
(Who will be wiser, if we should meet?)
Only the kiss, that we both desire,
And the distant cross on a tall church spire.



You Can't Have *Everything*

by Mary Sears Sprinkle



**There's a kind of security that
has nothing to do with money. . .**

DEBBIE came out of Celeste's Shop without THE SUIT.

Her step was bouyant and she couldn't help smiling as she hurried east on Lafayette Street to meet Paul Shepard for lunch at the Topflight Grill. The temptation to overspend her trousseau budget was over—and she had won. She felt as victorious as a captain who has bought his ship out of a storm into calm waters.

Other noon shoppers, noting Debbie's smart white linen sheath, her tall-heeled red shoes, and her naturally blonde hair, might have judged her to be capricious. They would have been surprised to know that Mr. Forman, owner of Forman's Industrial Supply, had put Debbie Rogers in charge of

petty cash and all expense accounts. Through Debbie's efforts (and for the first time since the company was founded) every penny was accounted for.

Debbie had not inherited this ability to handle money wisely from her parents. In fact, their mismanagement of money and the resulting quarrels had blighted her childhood. Debbie's carefulness with money seemed to be a reflex against the weakness that had spoiled her parents' marriage.

Paul was sitting in the corner booth they considered their own.

As Debbie made her way through the crowded tables, she decided not to mention THE SUIT unless Paul asked. He had liked it, too, and wanted her to get

it. But she would not go over seventy-five dollars for a suit and there was no point in giving him another opportunity to tease her about being a miser.

When she sat down across the table from him, Paul used the big menu card for a screen and gave her a quick kiss.

He had ordered for her. A chicken sandwich on whole wheat, tossed salad and milk.

"Just what I wanted," she said, and gave him a big smile.

They had been in love since their senior year in Hillsborough High School—nearly five years. No wonder Paul knew exactly what she would like. If he had been late, she would have known to order a sizeable chunk of meat and vegetables even in this July heat.

"You're dressed up!" Debbie noticed. "Why?"

Paul grinned. He was on his own as a general contractor now, and making money at it, but he still liked to work on the job with his men. At noon it wasn't unusual for him to have a dab of cement in his dark hair or smudges of asphalt on his forearms.

Before he could answer, Debbie gave him an impish smile. "It's nice to be seen lunching with the executive type for a change."

"I really am the executive type today," he said gravely. "I've been consulting a lawyer."

His tone made her notice the concern that marked his face. "About what?" she asked quickly.

"Collecting for the extras I put in that motel on Gandy Boulevard. Jensen kept asking me to substitute expensive materials for the ones in the specs."

Debbie frowned and looked at him questioningly.

"He asked for cypress paneling instead of pine," Paul went on, "terrazo floors instead of asphalt, acoustic ceilings, louvred doors, and imported tiles—ten thousand dollars worth!

"I kept after him to sign the con-

tract changes, but he was always too busy—out of town most of the time. He seemed like a nice guy, so I trusted him and went ahead with changes he asked for."

DEBBIE'S heart began to beat unevenly and her mouth felt dry. "Did you have any luck collecting?" she asked.

He hesitated, not looking at her. "No," he said slowly, "I didn't have any luck." His face lost color and there was a tight line around his usually mobile mouth.

Something around Debbie's heart seemed to constrict. Don't look like that, Paul, she thought. Please don't look like that.

Paul looked at her and tried to smile. "The lawyer said I was paying for my education. A real bargain. It just cost me ten thousand dollars to learn that I can't collect for anything unless the agreement is in writing and signed by both parties. He did say that I was lucky to have it happen to me now, before I get too big. He told me about another contractor who lost several hundred thousand to a 'friend of the family'."

"That's—that's stealing," Debbie said firmly. "Surely there's *something* you can do!"

The grill began to seem unbearably hot; she felt perspiration coming out all over her face.

Paul shook his head. "There's not a thing I can do. Honey. Actually, I consulted three lawyers this morning."

She tried to keep her voice from trembling. "Are you bankrupt, Paul?"

"Not exactly," he said. "But I've lost all my working capital. I'll have to mortgage my equipment to start over. It takes a lot of money to pay for materials and meet the payroll every week."

She felt hot and cold at the same time. It was an effort to breathe.

It wasn't fair, she thought. Paul had worked long hours and gone to school

at night to establish his business.

He had wanted to marry her that first summer after graduation, but Debbie had insisted that they wait until his business was out of debt. Now they would have to wait again. How long? Another year? two years?

Paul put his big hands over hers. "I hate myself for messing things up, Honey."

He was good at masking his feelings, but his eyes showed a quiet anguish that made her throat hurt. He was condemning himself.

He mustn't feel this way, she thought wildly. What can I say to him?

Once he had asked her if she would be willing to get married and continue to work for awhile. She had put her foot on that idea quickly, but now...

She searched his face and felt a warm glow of compassion. Something inside of her began to melt.

"Paul," she said tenderly, "let's get married anyway. I'll keep on working. We'll watch our pennies and work it out together."

He looked incredulous. "You're sure?"

She nodded.

Gladness quickened his face into a wonderful smile. He held up the menu card for a screen and gave her a full-fledged kiss.

JUST BEFORE closing time Paul called Debbie at Forman's. "How would you like a steak tonight?" he asked.

Debbie laughed. "A h a m b u r g e r steak?"

"No, a good steak. A thick one."

"Paul, you're kidding! You know we can't afford that now."

"Sure we can. I've still got eleven dollars and sixty cents in cash. Ten dollars for steak, one-fifty for the tip, and a dime left for coffee to wake me up in the morning."

"Paul..."

"See you at seven." He hung up without letting her finish.

He couldn't be serious. But for a

minute the possibility that he was serious made her rigid with indignation. Watching pennies means watching every penny, Paul Shepard, she thought sternly.

Since Reba was working late, Debbie had the apartment to herself. She took a cold shower and changed into one of her trousseau dresses, a blue-green flowered cotton with a full skirt. She loosened her hair from a pony tail and brushed it into a soft coiffure.

She had learned a long time ago that Paul disliked pity. Her new dress would help start their evening on a gay note.

At Manuel's Debbie tried to order a shrimp basket, but Paul wouldn't let her.

"Bring us a family sirloin, medium rare," he told the waiter.

Debbie felt her whole body stiffen. "Paul, you know we're broke," she said sternly.

"Look, Honey," Paul said patiently, "tomorrow I've got to convince my creditors and the bank officials that I'm still a good risk. I need a lot of money and ten dollars in my pocket won't swing the deal either way."

Questioningly, Debbie searched his face. This was the kind of crazy thing her father might have done—or her mother. Bitter childhood memories crowded her mind.

Tears started, but she tried to stop them. "Paul, you don't make sense."

Paul reached across the table for her hand. His voice seemed far away. What was he saying?

"It's not the end, Debbie. It's a new beginning. I've made a big mistake, but I won't let it happen again. Don't you understand, Debbie? A new beginning calls for a celebration."

Suddenly she felt as if her stomach was filled with putty. When the steak came, she couldn't make herself eat.

"DON'T BE mad at me, Debbie," Paul said as they came up onto her front porch.

She didn't risk answering. Carefully she took the key out of her purse and unlocked the apartment door. On the way home she had decided that she couldn't marry Paul. Now she must tell him. Her heart was pounding—she could feel the reverberations in her temples and her wrists, in every part of her body.

She let him kiss her goodnight, then she put their engagement ring in his hand and closed his fingers over it. The tears she had held back all evening came in a rush. "We're not ever going to get married," she said jerkily.

He looked startled, then he smiled tenderly, as if he didn't believe her. He put his arms around her and held her close.

"Look, Honey," he said, "I'm sorry about the steak. I shouldn't have ordered it, but I guess—I guess I needed courage for tomorrow." He reached for her hand and tried to put the ring on her finger. "If you feel this way, I don't care if I never see another steak."

She made her hand into a fist. "It isn't the steak, Paul. You—you just don't have any sense about money!"

She pulled away from him and went into the apartment. Before he could say anything more she slammed the door.

Reba was sitting on the living room floor, doing her nails.

"What's the matter?" she asked when she saw Debbie's face.

Debbie sank down on the denim sofa and pushed off her shoes. "I broke up with Paul," she said thickly.

Reba held the nail polish brush in mid-air and registered surprise. "Debbie, you didn't!" Then she laughed in sudden relief. "It's last minute jitters, Honey, but you're a little early. You're not supposed to have them until the day before the wedding."

Debbie wiped her eyes with a wet handkerchief. "It's not jitters," she said jerkily. "I gave his ring back to him. He—he just hasn't got any sense

about money." Then she told Reba everything that had happened.

"Reba," she asked seriously, "do you think a man who would spend his last dollar on a fabulous steak is stable enough to get married?"

Reba ground a cigarette in an oversized ashtray and looked at Debbie thoughtfully. She had lived with Debbie for two years, long enough to be thoroughly familiar with her ironclad budget. She shook her head. "He's not stable enough for *you*, Honey."

The phone rang. When Debbie made no move, Reba answered it.

She held out the phone. "It's Paul. He wants to talk to you, Debbie."

Debbie shook her head stubbornly.

Reba put the phone back into its cradle. "He said to tell you that he'll come by at seven tomorrow night to get engaged all over again."

THE NEXT day Debbie had trouble thinking about anything but Paul; she did petty cash three times before it came out right.

At noon she stayed away from the *Topflight Grill*. She wasn't hungry anyway, so she just drank a coke from the vending machine in the women's lounge.

When she got home, Reba had started supper. The smell of cooking food made her feel a little sick.

"I wish you hadn't started my chop," Debbie said. "I don't think I can eat."

Reba smiled. "You'll feel better after you've seen Paul."

"I'm not going to see him," she said emphatically.

"Why?"

"I'd make up with him if I did."

At six-forty Debbie was sitting in the Palace Theater. It was an extravagant musical that she should have enjoyed. But she kept thinking about Paul. . . .

Splurging to take the sting out of disappointment wasn't a new thing with Paul. In high school he had often

YOU CAN'T HAVE EVERYTHING

bolstered their courage with fifty cent sundaes. But spending the last dollar of your allowance foolishly was decidedly different from tossing away your last ten dollars when you're a grown man, dead broke, and about to be married. . . .

Actually, their first date had been one of Paul's "celebrations". In closing assembly that afternoon, the student body of Hillsborough High had chosen a Spring Festival Queen and three maids. Originally there had been seven candidates, but two had been disqualified for low grades.

Shirley Harbin had been elected queen. Ann Peters, Bertha Fox, and Libbie Pearson were elected maids. The one loser was Debbie Rogers.

She really didn't mind losing, but being the only loser was a pretty lonely business. There was no one in the same boat to help her laugh about it.

As she came down from the stage, Paul came up beside her. "This calls for a celebration," he said. "Would you join me in a Super Special Sundae?"

Debbie looked up into his smiling face and the thickness in her throat began to disappear. "What are we celebrating?" she asked.

He steered her deftly through the crowds of students that thronged the doors. "You were the prettiest one. If you'd been elected queen, I never would have had the courage to ask you for a date."

And the time a hurricane beat his new boat to pieces. They had celebrated, what was it. . . ."

REBA WAS waiting up for her. "Paul hasn't been gone thirty minutes. I was scared to death you'd get home before he left.

Debbie sat down on the square hassock. "How do you go about forgetting a tall, sweet, irresponsible guy, Reba?"

Reba lit a cigarette and studied Debbie's face.

"Are you sure you want to forget



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Paul, Debbie? He's so—so very nice. And he's not giving you up without a fight. You should have heard him."

"I've got to forget him. My parents tried his philosophy and it doesn't work. I know." She hesitated. "As a child I had no security at all. I couldn't count on anything. Once mother had put aside thirty dollars to send me to Scout camp for two weeks. In the meantime she saw a sixty dollar hat marked down to twenty-nine fifty."

Debbie winced. "She bought it and I stayed home from camp."

Reba looked sympathetic. "You won't forget him until you've met another man, Debbie."

Date another man? Something inside Debbie recoiled. "I couldn't," she said quickly. "Not yet anyway."

"I know someone who's interested in you."

"Who?"

"Trick Jameson. You met him at the Gasparilla Dance, remember?"

"Yes, but I can't think what he looks like."

"He looks good. I wish he'd look at me."

For three days Debbie avoided Paul. Sustained by a vacuum bottle of coffee and the coke machine, she went in and out of the office by an alley door. She sat through three dismal shows and thought about Paul.

When she got home from work on the fourth evening, Reba fairly shoved her into the shower. "Trick will be here in thirty minutes," she said simply, "and I want you to look good."

There wasn't time to argue with Reba even if she had felt like it.

A WEEK LATER Debbie told Trick she couldn't see him that evening.

"We've had a date every night," she protested. "I have laundry to do and letters to write."

Reluctantly, Trick gave her a free night, then the whirl started again...

At first Debbie had been uneasy with Trick. He was so different from

Paul. He was boisterous and sunburned and everybody's friend, one of those people you couldn't help liking.

When she tried to analyze the way people reacted to Trick, she came to the conclusion that people liked him because he liked them first.

Starting out with a small loan from his father, Trick had made a near fortune in gulf-coast real estate. "I paid my Dad back in less than a year," he told Debbie proudly. Then he crossed his fingers on both hands. "I've been lucky, Debbie. I study the angles and I work hard, but luck has put a lot of big deals in my lap."

Debbie was startled when the wedding invitations arrived. She had forgotten to cancel the order. "What in the world will I do with them?" she asked Reba.

Reba gave her a wry smile. "You might run an ad in the Tribune. 'Will trade brand new wedding invitations for what have you.'"

Debbie laughed, but inside she felt sick, the way she always felt about extravagance and waste.

On Wednesday, a month from the day she had broken up with Paul, Debbie chanced going out the front door of Forman's.

Paul was leaning against a palm.

She tried to pretend she didn't see him, but he caught her hand. A little shock went through her and her heart began to beat irregularly.

"Look, Debbie," he said quickly, "you don't have to run from me. I just want a chance to talk this thing over." He had lost weight and he looked bewildered.

"To tell you the truth," he said fiercely, "I don't really know what happened to us. I was walking on clouds because you said this financial reverse wouldn't keep us from getting married—and eight hours later I had the ring in my pocket."

She tried to loose her hand from his. "We don't feel the same about money,

[Turn To Page 82]

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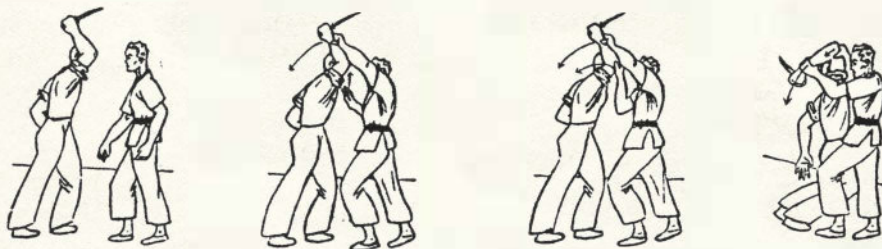


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Paul. Marriage wouldn't work for us."

He lifted her chin and forced her to look at him.

"Honey, I don't ever want to see another steak. All I want is you." His voice was husky, as if he were close to tears.

Debbie bit her lip to keep it from trembling. "It isn't the steak, Paul. It's what the steak stands for—the principle of the thing."

His eyes pleaded for him. "I can't get you out of my mind, Debbie."

Something was tugging at her heart. Desperately, she pulled her hand from his. "You need to—to go out with other girls, Paul. To forget a girl, you have to find another girl," she blurted.

He looked at her in disbelief and then the muscles in his face tightened. He turned suddenly and walked away without a word.

Debbie watched him until he was out of sight, and he didn't look back. She felt strangely like a little girl who had wilfully broken her doll.

A couple of days later she saw Paul walking down Franklin Street with a red-haired girl. The girl said something to him and they laughed together.

A hot feeling welled up in Debbie. You don't have to laugh together, she thought fiercely. Then she felt ashamed for being unfair. . .

USUALLY Trick kept Debbie entertained every minute; but Wednesday night he seemed serious and not very talkative. During slow numbers he held her close.

On the way home they stopped at the Seminole Club to catch the late floor show. Debbie was enjoying a clever magician when she sensed that Trick was watching her instead of the show.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" she asked.

"You're everything," he said solemnly.

Something caught at her heart. *Don't*
[Turn To Page 84]

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fall in love with me, Trick, she thought instantly. Oh, please don't do that...

Trick had tickets for Kevin Marlin's concert Friday night, the best seats available as usual.

Marlin, a brilliant pianist, was stopping in Tampa on his way to South America. The demand for tickets had been so great that his concert was being held in the armory instead of the city auditorium.

When Trick came for her Friday night he was plainly upset.

"What's the matter?" Debbie asked him.

Trick frowned and started the car with a jerk.

"I had to give our tickets away, Honey. Old man Blanton wanted them. He owned half the apartments in this part of Florida and I take care of his rentals. His account means a lot; I couldn't turn him down."

Debbie tried to soothe him. "We're early. Surely they'll have some tickets left."

"General admission," Trick said glumly.

It turned out that he was right. Worse, the general admission seats in the balcony were nearly all taken and they had to sit behind a post. When Kevin Marlin began to play, they could see only part of the piano keyboard.

As Marlin began his second number, Trick touched her elbow. "Let's get out of here," he said angrily. "We can't even see him."

Debbie was caught up in the exquisite music. It took her a minute to understand what Trick was saying.

She looked at him in disbelief. "But we can hear him, Trick."

"Do you want to stay?"

She nodded her head and caught her breath as Marlin began a crescendo.

Trick excused himself to out for a smoke and didn't come back until intermission. As soon as the music started, he left for another smoke and stayed through the entire performance.

[Turn To Page 86]

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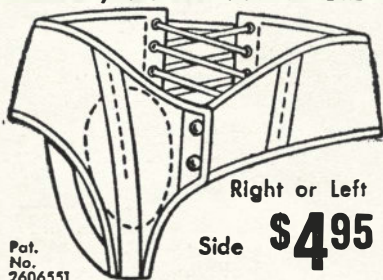
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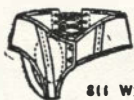
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IDEAL LOVE STORIES

He returned to the balcony during the encore.

They stopped at the Seminole Club on the way home and Trick tried to be gay, but he didn't succeed.

As soon as Debbie finished eating, Trick leaned across the little table and took her hands. "I'm sorry, Debbie," he said penitently. "This evening got off to a bad start and I guess it's too late to make anything out of it now. Shall we go home and get a fresh start tomorrow night?"

Debbie nodded in relief. She found Trick's moodiness depressing.

As she felt in her purse for the key to her front door, Trick tried again to apologize for his behavior.

"Maybe I'm not a very good sport, but half a loaf isn't enough for me, Debbie. Things have to be perfect." He seemed to hesitate. "That's why I've waited until now to marry. My girl had to be perfect too."

Debbie tried to keep her voice light. "I hope you find her."

"You're perfect, Darling."

Was that a proposal? Before he had a chance to make it more definite, Debbie slipped out of his arms and went inside.

Trick was evidently ready to propose, but she wasn't ready to answer him.

THE NEXT night Trick was himself again. He picked her up early to show her the fabulous motor court that he had bought. It was on Gulf Shore Boulevard, about thirty miles from Tampa.

When Debbie saw the court, she understood why Trick was elated. It was a luxurious, two-story affair with a private swimming pool.

"I'm thinking about increasing my responsibilities," Trick said meaningfully, "so I thought I'd better increase my income."

Debbie changed the subject quickly.

The rest of the evening she was care-

[Turn To Page 88]

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IDEAL LOVE STORIES

ful to keep the conversation away from herself. She also resolved to make up her mind about marriage to Trick. He was a nice guy and it wasn't fair to keep frustrating his attempts to propose.

Trick held her closer than usual when they danced the slow numbers and Debbie felt tremulous and extremely happy.

While they were sitting out a number at the Pirate Club, Trick teased her about being quiet.

Debbie laughed guiltily. All evening she had been weighing the things she knew about Trick. Did she love him? Would he make a good husband and father? He was considerate and the thing about buying income property to help him meet added responsibilities of marriage had pleased her. It was evident that he, too, believed a good marriage must be founded on a sound budget. Mutual fun was basic too, she thought steadily, and surely nobody was more fun than Trick.

They made their way onto the crowded dance floor again. As Trick drew her into his arms, her heart began to beat faster. Suddenly and surely she knew that Trick was right for her.

Monday was payday and Debbie had planned ahead to buy a semi-formal.

Reba gave up her lunch hour to help her find it.

The second shop they tried had a dress made for important evenings. It was fashioned of re-embroidered pink lace and it looked as fragile as a fairy wing.

When Debbie hesitated, Reba looked knowing. "Don't tell me it's a dollar over your budget?"

"No," Debbie said. "The price is okay. But it looks so delicate. Do you think it will wear all right?"

"Oh, Debbie!" Reba said impatiently. "You want everything to cost nothing and wear forever. Go ahead and get the dress."

[Turn To Page 90]

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Within five minutes Debbie was leaving the store with the box under her arm. Deep down she was glad that Reba had insisted she buy it; she had a feeling that tonight was going to be important.

IT WAS LIKE Trick to find the perfect place to propose. He turned off the causeway through an opening in the Australian pines and parked so they could see the moon shining on the bay.

"I'm in love with you, Debbie," he said simply. "Will you marry me?"

When she nodded in assent, he put an emerald cut diamond on her finger and gave her a tender kiss.

As they drove on across the causeway to keep their reservations at the Tropics, a new supper club, Trick's

spirits were high. "I'm the luckiest guy in the world," he kept saying.

Trick gave the keys to The Tropics' parking attendant. As he helped Debbie out of the car, his eyes told her that she had been right to buy the fragile pink dress. "You're a knockout, Honey," he said proudly. "I want you to hold your left hand so everybody can see that we're engaged."

There was a rack of newspapers by the entrance to The Tropics. Trick lifted a corner of one to read the headlines. His face puckered into a frown. Then he jerked the paper out and dropped a nickel in the change box.

Debbie laughed. "You aren't planning to read a newspaper in there, are you?"

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YOU CAN'T HAVE EVERYTHING

Trick wasn't listening to her. He continued to read the paper and his frown deepened.

As if waking from a dream, he folded the paper and took Debbie's hand as the doorman ushered them into the foyer.

The Tropics was unbelievably beautiful. Cypress and palmetto, live birds and fish had been skillfully used to create a lush tropical forest.

The waiter seated them at a small table beside a stream filled with tropical fish.

Trick looked strange and gaunt.

"What's the matter, Trick?" Debbie asked.

He held the headline so she could see it. **BOARD OF REPRESENTATIVES VOTES TO MAKE GULF SHORES BOULEVARD ONE WAY.**

Debbie read it carefully. "I don't understand," she said.

Large beads of perspiration stood out on Trick's forehead and his hands were shaking. "One-way northbound traffic on Gulf Shores means that incoming tourists won't come by my new motor car. It's not worth a nickel now," he said bitterly.

Debbie's face showed concern. "Won't you get any of the tourist trade at all?"

"Oh, sure, I'll get some of it. But not enough to make it pay. I stand a good chance to lose money on it."

An expectant waiter was standing by their table.

"I'm not hungry," Trick said. "What do you want, Debbie?"

Debbie looked at him questioningly. "Aren't you going to eat anything, Trick?"

He shook his head.

"Then you order for both of us," she said.

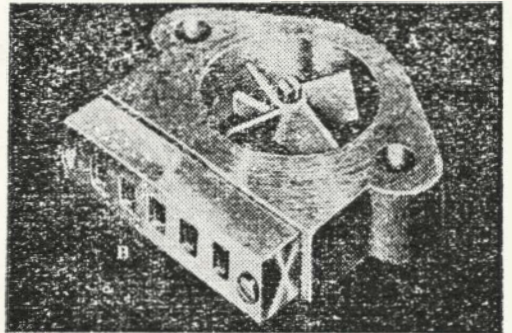
"A couple of grilled cheese sandwiches," Trick said to the waiter, "and some hot tea."

"Are you ruined?" Debbie asked sympathetically when the waiter left.

[Turn Page]



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IDEAL LOVE STORIES

TRICK was moving a water goblet in a monotonous circle on the tablecloth. "No," he said slowly, "just set back two years. If I had fished every day the last two years, I'd be just as well off as I am right now."

The sandwiches came and Trick took a couple of half-hearted bites. "This tastes like sawdust," he said.

Trick's gloom was enfolding them like a heavy fog. Debbie felt a desperate need to break through it.

She managed a smile. "I understand how you feel about losing your investment. Trick, truly I do—but you mustn't lose faith in yourself."

Trick looked at her dully, as if she were speaking another language.

Paul came into her mind. Paul had lost all his working capital, but he had forced a smile and set his shoulders to start over.

Debbie leaned toward Trick and struggled to get through to him. "Trick, this isn't the end—it's a new beginning. We ought to be celebrating."

Her heart skipped a beat. *In trying to reach Trick, she had quoted Paul.*

"My luck has changed," Trick said. He pushed his sandwich away.

Suddenly the atmosphere of The Tropics seemed to change. The chattering of the birds scraped her nerves cruelly and the air conditioning made her shiver. She pulled a stole over her shoulders and looked down at her new engagement ring thoughtfully.

"You can have something else, Debbie," Trick said. "I'll get you anything you want." His voice was thick with self-pity.

Debbie took a deep breath and tried to keep her voice from rising. "It's not what I want. Trick. It's what you need...."

He wasn't listening; he was reading the paper again.

For a minute Debbie felt as if she could see into the future.

She pictured herself sitting across

[Turn To Page 94]

Wonder Slim

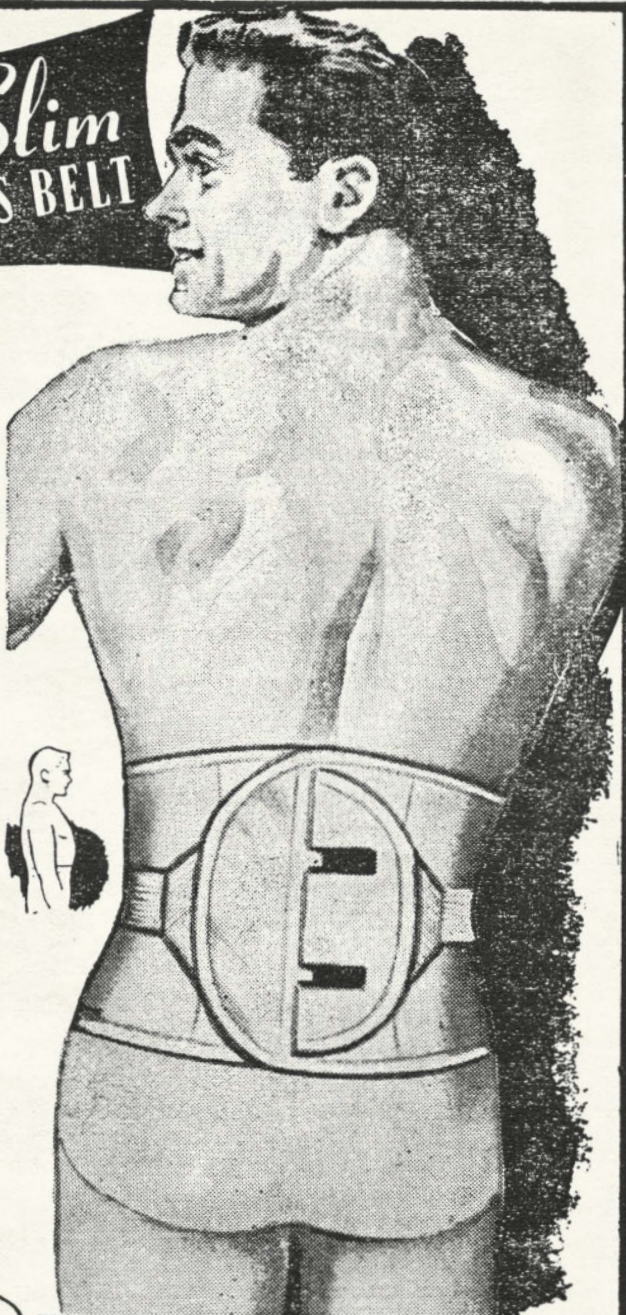
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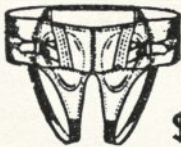
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IDEAL LOVE STORIES

the breakfast table from Trick as disappointments common to all marriages came their way. A crazy sequence of possible events tumbled through her mind:

Their first child was born—a girl instead of the boy Trick had set his heart on. . . . The heater smoked right after they redecorated their house. . . . Just as they reached the point where they could afford a cabin cruiser all five of the children needed braces on their teeth. . . . And so on through the years. . . . Trick sank from one despair to another. . . . It got so Debbie's slightest smile offended him. . . . When their oldest son announced that he was not coming into the real estate business with his father, Trick quit eating and set out to be morose for an indefinite period of time. . . . Debbie was now gray and infinitely weary of living in this bleak atmosphere. . . . She wanted a divorce!

Had Trick spoken? Debbie shook her head and tried to shed the years she had accumulated in the last few minutes.

She examined her left hand and her heart gave a leap. The engagement ring was still alone—no wedding ring.

I don't have to divorce him, she thought exultantly. *I just won't marry him.* Quickly she worked the ring off her finger. Resolutely she put it on Trick's plate. "I'm sorry, Trick."

He looked at her in disbelief. "You wouldn't throw me over just because I'm broke, Debbie?"

She stood and moved around the table to put her arm around his shoulders. "Money doesn't have anything to do with it, Trick. I—I've found out that there's a kind of security that's not concerned with money. What I mean is—you can have it even when you're dead broke. It's the kind of security I want."

Trick's eyes were wild with despair. "Now I *know* my luck has changed."

[Turn To Page 96]

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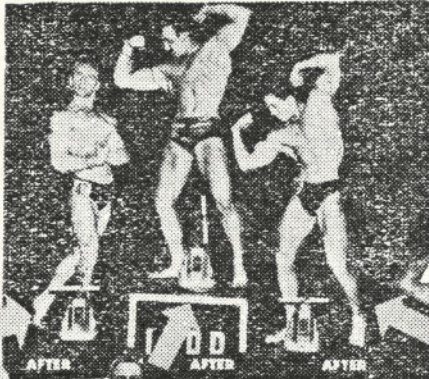
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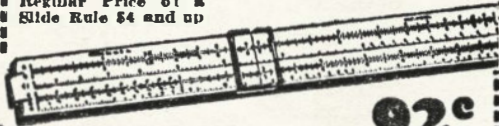
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She held back tears and brushed her lips against his forehead. Then she began to make her way between the tables to the door.

Trick came after her and offered to drive her home, but she insisted on taking a cab.

ON THE way home, she began to feel empty and cold, as if she had just waked from a bad dream.

The apartment was dark, but she didn't turn on the lights. She sat down heavily on the sofa and tried to think.

Trick would always believe she'd been after his money... Regret nibbled her heart... She really hadn't been fair with him... She had wanted to love him, and because she wanted to she had convinced herself that she did.

Unfair... she had been so terribly unfair to Paul... How could she have mistaken courage for weakness.

I need Paul, she thought. I need to spill over and tell him my troubles the way I used to do.

The desire to rest her head against Paul's shoulder, to feel his arms around her, became so strong that she went into the hall and lifted the phone from its cradle. She had dialed three of the numbers when she realized that she didn't know what she was going to say to Paul.

It was after ten when she finally made herself complete the call to Paul.

"Paul, it's Debbie. Can you come over? I want to talk to you."

"Why?" His voice made her feel cold inside.

"Don't make me tell you over the phone, Paul. Just come. *Please.*"

She washed her face in ice water to take the puffiness out of her eyes. Then she made a pot of coffee and put some of Paul's favorites on the record-player. Just one table lamp was best she thought.

Paul didn't come right away. Before he knocked she had turned on another

[Turn To Page 98]

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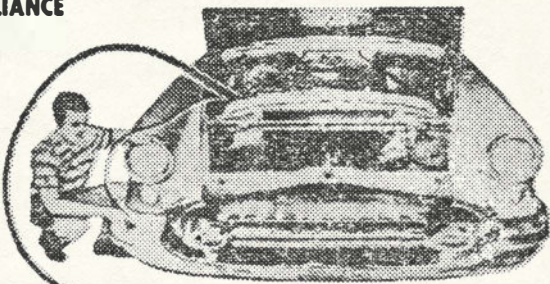
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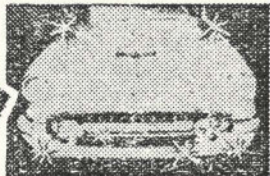
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lamp and decided against the records.

When Paul came into the living room, his eyes were the color of cold ashes, his mouth straight and tight. He walked slowly over to the mantel and turned around to face Debbie.

She had hoped he would say something, give her an opening.

But he stood there without speaking and she could see no love in his face. He had on a clean white shirt, open at the throat. It still showed laundry folds.

Deep inside Debbie felt a terrible reaching out, a desire to hide her face against his crisp shirt, to tell him everything that had happened to her.

The silence between them was as ominous as a tidal wave. It grew until she could stand it no longer. Without quite knowing it, she went to him and pressed her face against his shoulder.

"Paul, I was so wrong and I love you so much. Please take me back," she said humbly.

"I'm too impractical for you, Debbie, remember? I don't have any sense about money." There was an undercurrent of anger in his voice.

She had always been ashamed of her parents' quarrels, their inability to discipline themselves. Now she pulled Paul over to the sofa and sat down with him. Hesitantly, but surely, she began to strip away the pretenses that she had made about her parents. She told him about her mother's hat and staying home from camp. She let him hear the ugly quarrels, the oaths and accusations. She told him how it was for a child to be sent to the door to lie to a bill collector. How it was to be borrowing food from the neighbors at the end of every month.

HER FACE was hot with shame. She had never been able to tell anyone these things, but she was telling Paul because she had to make him understand.

Then she told him about her experience with Trick. How Trick had reacted to disappointment.

She had been looking away from Paul. Now she looked into his eyes. "You take disappointment in your stride, Paul. That's the most practical trait a man can have. I know that now."

Paul's arm had slipped around her. He hugged her to him and kissed her forehead. "I'll have to qualify that, Honey. I couldn't take the disappointment of losing you. I haven't eaten a decent meal since we broke up."

Debbie felt quivery inside, afraid to hope. Did he mean. . . ? She closed her eyes against tears. "Can you love me again, Paul?"

In answer he kissed her over and over until she was breathless.

"Look, Darling," he said excitedly. "My loan came through and I've still got our wedding license. Let's call Dr. Morrow and get married tonight."

Tonight? Her wedding dress was sold, but that didn't matter. It wouldn't be appropriate for a spur-of-the-moment parsonage wedding anyway. Mother would be disappointed to miss the wedding, of course. And there would be announcements instead of invitations. How did you word an announcement? Wait. . . why not wait two weeks and use the original invitations? It would save the expense of announcements.

"Paul," she said quickly—then she caught herself and put that miserly idea out of her mind. As Paul Shepard's wife she would have to learn to take things in her stride—to put important things first.

Suddenly she felt bouyant and glad and wonderfully sure. She felt something like a captain who has brought his ship out of a storm into calm waters.

"What did you start to say?" Paul asked eagerly.

"You know where the phone is, Darling," she said. "You call Dr. Morrow and I'll wake Reba."

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No Special “Talent” Needed

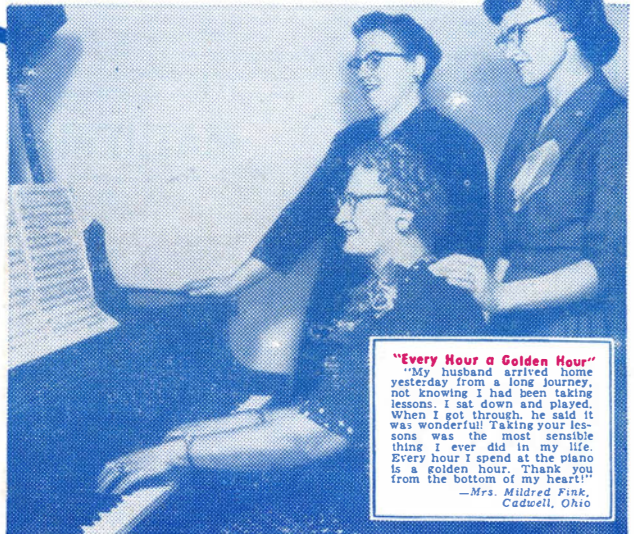
No wonder over 900,000 people (including TV star Lawrence Welk) have turned to the U. S. School of Music method to make their dreams of playing music come true! No special “talent” is needed. And you may learn right at home, in your spare time—free from the rigid schedule imposed by a teacher. Costs only a few cents per lesson, including sheet music.

Stop Cheating Yourself of These Joys!

Why not let this famous home-study method bring the many pleasures of music into YOUR life? Popularly. New friends. Gay parties. Good times. Career. Extra money entertaining or teaching others. Understand, appreciate, converse about music. Learn lives and compositions of modern and great masters. Relax. Banish worries and frustrations. Satisfy self-expression, creative urge. Gain self-confidence.

SEND FOR FREE BOOK

Let us SHOW you why our way to learn music is so EASY—and so much fun! See for yourself why our method has been so successful for 59 years. Mail the coupon for our valuable 60-page FREE BOOK—no obligation, no salesman will call on you. It can mean so much to you for the rest of your entire life—if you will mail the coupon TODAY! **U. S. SCHOOL OF MUSIC, STUDIO, A27411, PORT WASHINGTON, N. Y.** (Special low prices on instruments to our Students.)



“Every Hour a Golden Hour”
“My husband arrived home yesterday from a long journey, not knowing I had been taking lessons. I sat down and played. When I got through, he said it was wonderful! Taking your lessons was the most sensible thing I ever did in my life. Every hour I spend at the piano is a golden hour. Thank you from the bottom of my heart!”
—Mrs. Mildred Fink, Cadwell, Ohio

Thousands Now Play Who Never Thought They Could!



Now Invited Out Lots
“It’s been fun—and hasn’t cost me anywhere near as much as a private teacher. Now I’m invited to all kinds of affairs and dances. I auditioned for radio show.”
—Howard Hojnos, East Syracuse, N. Y.



Surprises Family & Friends
“I was able to play many pieces in a short time. Family and friends certainly surprised. Course opened door to popularity, wider circle of friends.”
—Peter H. Kozyra, Manitoba, Canada

U. S. SCHOOL OF MUSIC, Studio A27411, Port Washington, N. Y.

I am interested in learning to play, particularly the instrument checked below. Please send me your free illustrated booklet, “How to Learn Music at Home” NO SALESMAN IS TO CALL UPON ME.

- | | | |
|--|--|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Piano | <input type="checkbox"/> Saxophone | <input type="checkbox"/> Ukulele |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Guitar | <input type="checkbox"/> Trumpet, Cornet | <input type="checkbox"/> Clarinet |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Steel Guitar | <input type="checkbox"/> Pipe, Hammond | <input type="checkbox"/> Harmonium |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Violin | <input type="checkbox"/> Reed Organ | <input type="checkbox"/> Flute |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Piano Accordion | <input type="checkbox"/> Tenor Banjo | <input type="checkbox"/> Piccolo |

Do you have the instrument?.....

Mr. _____
Mrs. _____
Miss _____ (Please Print Carefully!)

City _____ State _____

Address _____ (Insert Zone Number, if applicable)