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## **The Lady Meets a Champ**

by FRANCES YOULIN McHUGH

## **Engagement For Three**

by LUCINDA BAKER



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CLUE No. 1: THE "HOOSIER" STATE.



You will see there are a SINK, a DIAL, the SOLE of a shoe and various letters of the alphabet. There are two plus and two minus signs. It is necessary to add and subtract the names and letters as shown by the plus and minus signs. First, write down SINK. Then, add DIAL to it. Next, add ONEA. All this equals SINKDIALONEA. Now, you must subtract the letters in SOLE and K. When this is done you are left with INDIANA. Indiana is the Hoosier State, so the result checks with Clue No. 1.

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# How I foxed the Navy

by Arthur Godfrey

The Navy almost scuttled me. I shudder to think of it. My crazy career could have ended right there.

To be scuttled by the Navy you've either got to do something wrong or neglect to do something right. They've got you both ways. For my part, I neglected to finish high school.

Ordinarily, a man can get along without a high school diploma. Plenty of men have. But not in the Navy. At least not in the U. S. Navy Materiel School at Bellevue, D. C., back in 1929. In those days a bluejacket had to have a mind like Einstein's. And I didn't.

"Godfrey," said the lieutenant a few days after I'd checked in, "either you learn mathematics and learn it *fast* or out you go. I'll give you six weeks." This, I figured, was it. For a guy who had to take off his shoes to count



above ten, it was an impossible assignment.

I was ready to turn in my bell-bottoms. But an ad in a magazine stopped me. Here, it said, is your chance to get special training in almost any subject—mathematics included. I hopped on it. Within a week I was enrolled with the International Correspondence Schools studying algebra, geometry and trig for all I was worth.

Came week-end liberty, I studied. Came a holiday, I studied. Came the end of the six weeks, I was top man in the class. Within six weeks I had mastered two years of high school math, thanks to the training I'd gotten.

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VOL. 22, NO. 3. SUMMER ISSUE

## TWO COMPLETE NOVELETS

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**I**F YOU ARE INTERESTED in making new friends and having pen pals, please write to Mrs. Faith Simpson, care of EXCITING LOVE, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. Introduce yourself by writing an interesting letter that will make others eager to know more about you. Be sure to sign your full name and state your address, age and sex. Please provide at least one reference. We will use only your first name or a nickname when your letter is printed. We will forward all mail received for you.

### HAZEL EYES

Dear Mrs. Simpson: I am a woman 35 years of age. I am single, stand 5 feet 3 inches tall, and have blond hair and hazel eyes. I enjoy all sports and especially like dancing. I would like to write letters to young men and women all over the country and will answer promptly.

WIN #956

### LONELY VET

Dear Mrs. Simpson: I do hope you can find room for my plea for pen pals. I am a vet, 45 years old. I stand 5 feet 9 inches tall, have brown hair, blue eyes and weigh 185 pounds. I love all sports and have lots of time to write. Would like to hear from men and women around my own age and exchange snapshots.

BILL #957

### FOND OF BASEBALL

Dear Mrs. Simpson: I am a girl 15 years of age, and a freshman in high school. I have dark brown hair and brown eyes, measure 5 feet and one-half inches in height and weigh about 140 pounds. I am very fond of baseball, but like all sports and enjoy dancing. I would very much like to have some girls and boys write to me.

EVELYN #958

### REDHEAD

Dear Mrs. Simpson: Would it be possible for a lonely girl to get into your column? I am 19 years old and stand 5 feet 3 inches tall. I weigh 128 pounds, have blue eyes and red hair. I have kept house for my father and small brother since my mother died 3 years ago. I enjoy reading, writing and all outdoor sports. I would like to hear from both men and women between 20 and 35 years of age and especially veterans in hospitals.

EILEEN #959

### SERVICEMAN

Dear Mrs. Simpson: Being a serviceman away from home, I get pretty lonely and would like to hear from some gals between the ages of 16 and 19. I am 20 years old, stand 5 feet

8 inches tall, weigh 150 pounds and have brown hair and eyes. Don't disappoint me—write.

SONNY #960

### LIKES TV

Dear Mrs. Simpson: I am a lonely girl 22 years of age. I stand 5 feet and weigh 98 pounds. I have brown hair and brown eyes. I love hillbilly music and my hobby is collecting hillbilly records. I also like to dance and watch TV. I enjoy the company of boys and would like to have boys as well as girls for pen pals.

PAT #961

### HELP WANTED

Dear Mrs. Simpson: I am a divorced man of 35. I have blue eyes, brown hair, stand 5 feet 9 inches tall and weigh 140 pounds. I do not drink but occasionally smoke cigars. I love band music and movies. I am interested in writing songs and stories and need someone to help me and to share my thoughts.

TOMMY #962

### HOMEBOY

Dear Mrs. Simpson: I am 32 years old. I have dark brown wavy hair, hazel eyes and I am 5 feet 2 inches tall. I weigh 132 pounds and I am single. I do not drink or smoke. I love to sew, cook and do housework. I enjoy going to the movies, dancing, picnicing, outdoor sports and TV. I am very lonely and would like to hear from pen pals between 35 and 40.

CAROL #963

### JAMAICAN

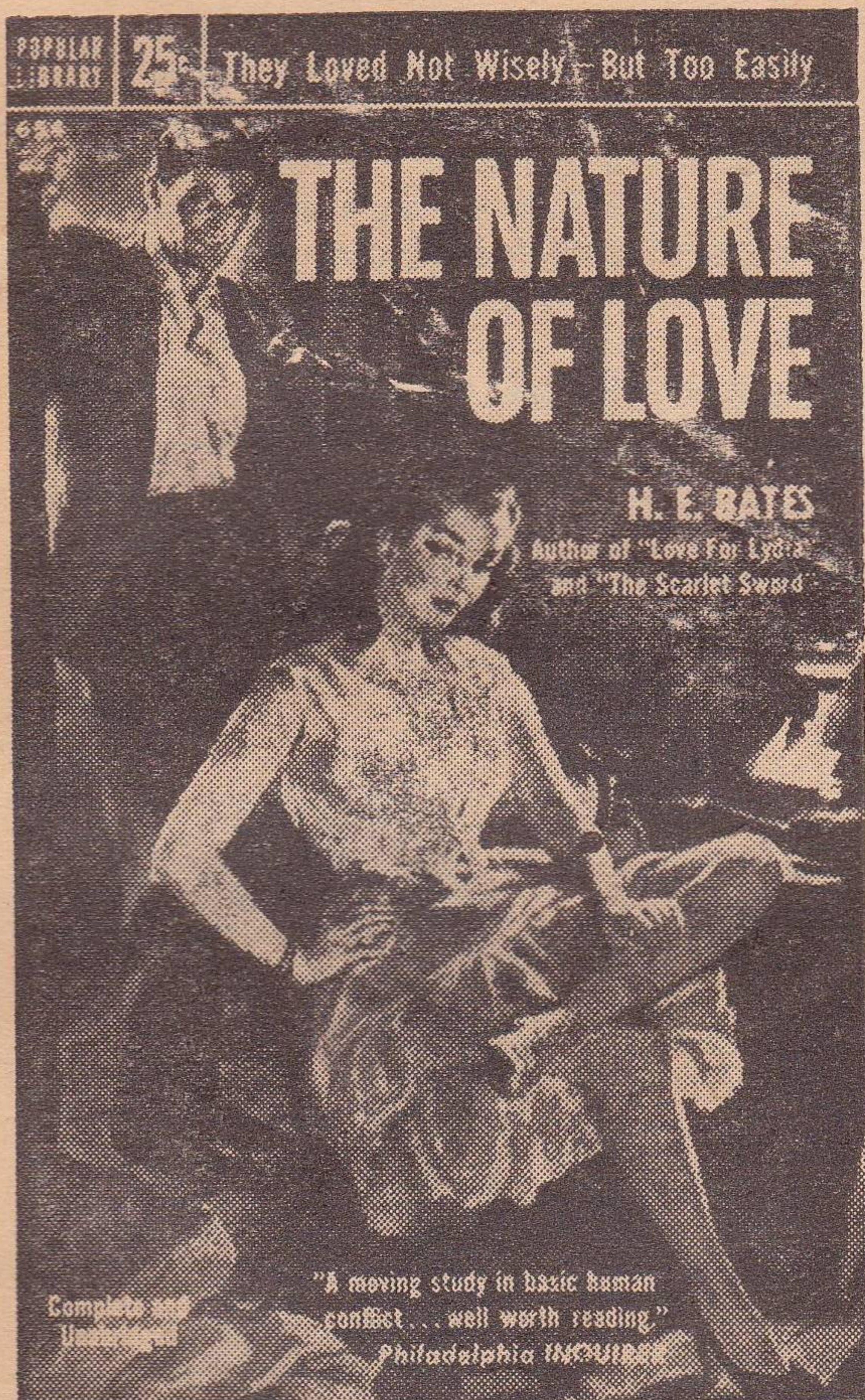
Dear Mrs. Simpson: I would like to correspond with some pen pals from the United States and learn about your country as well as tell you of mine. I am 20 years old, love dancing, singing, boxing and cricket. I know many Americans would like to know of Jamaica, the land of wood and water, and I will try to make my letters as interesting as possible. Come on, guys and gals, and drop me a line.

LES #964

(Continued on page 114)



# JEALOUSY DESTROYED THE ONLY MAN SHE EVER LOVED!



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# The Lady Meets

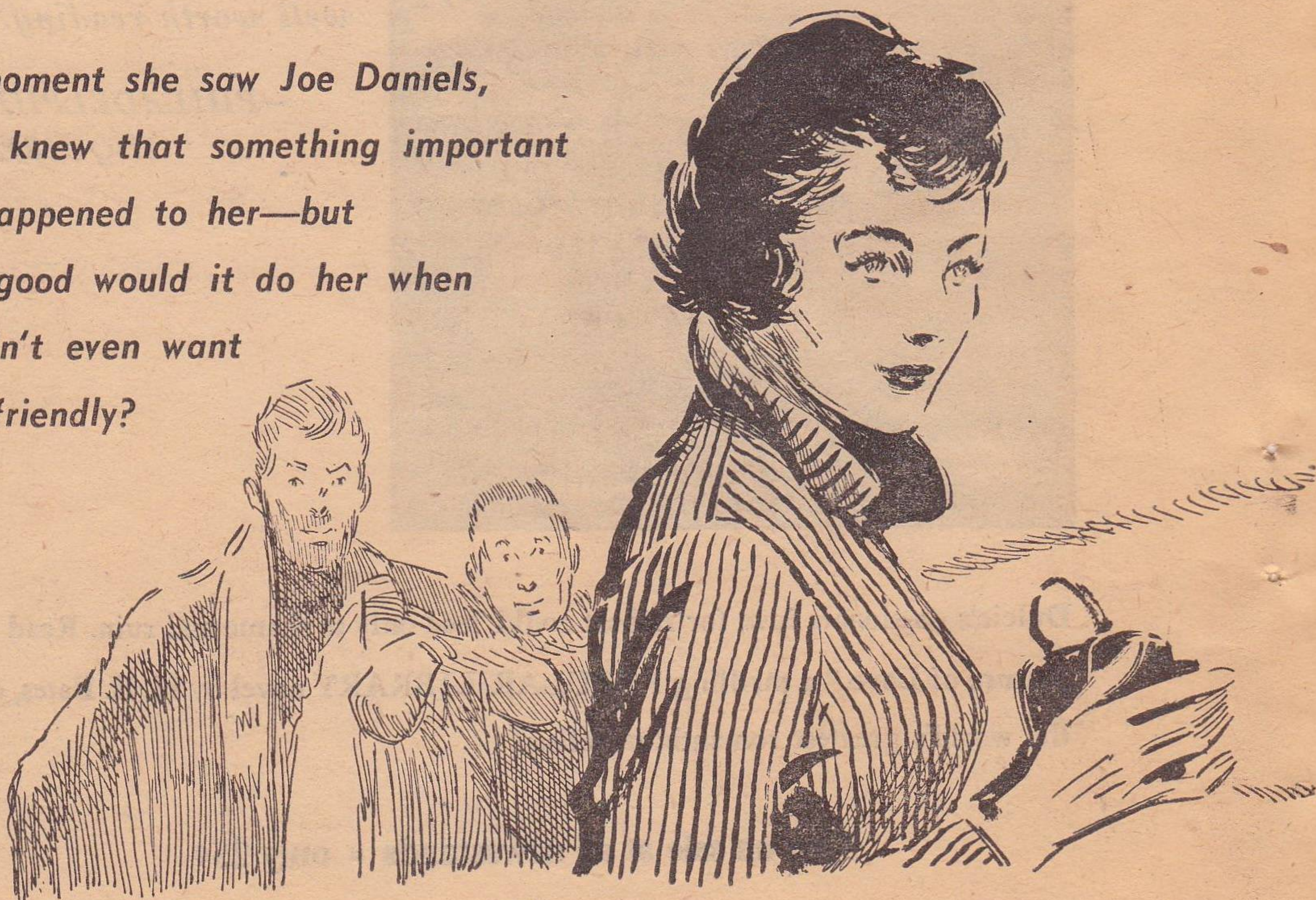
**D**IANE COURTNEY parked her red-lined white convertible in front of Lisa Nicols' big house because there was another car in the driveway. Gathering up rolls of wall-paper samples and drapery-swatch books, she hurried up the flower-bordered walk to the house.

Before she reached the porch a young man came out, hurried past her without even a glance, got into the not too new black coupé in the driveway, and drove off.

She hadn't had too good a look at him, but she had a feeling that something important had happened to her.

She was funny that way. She had a knack, or maybe it was a gift as she often called it, of getting advance notices of important things that were going

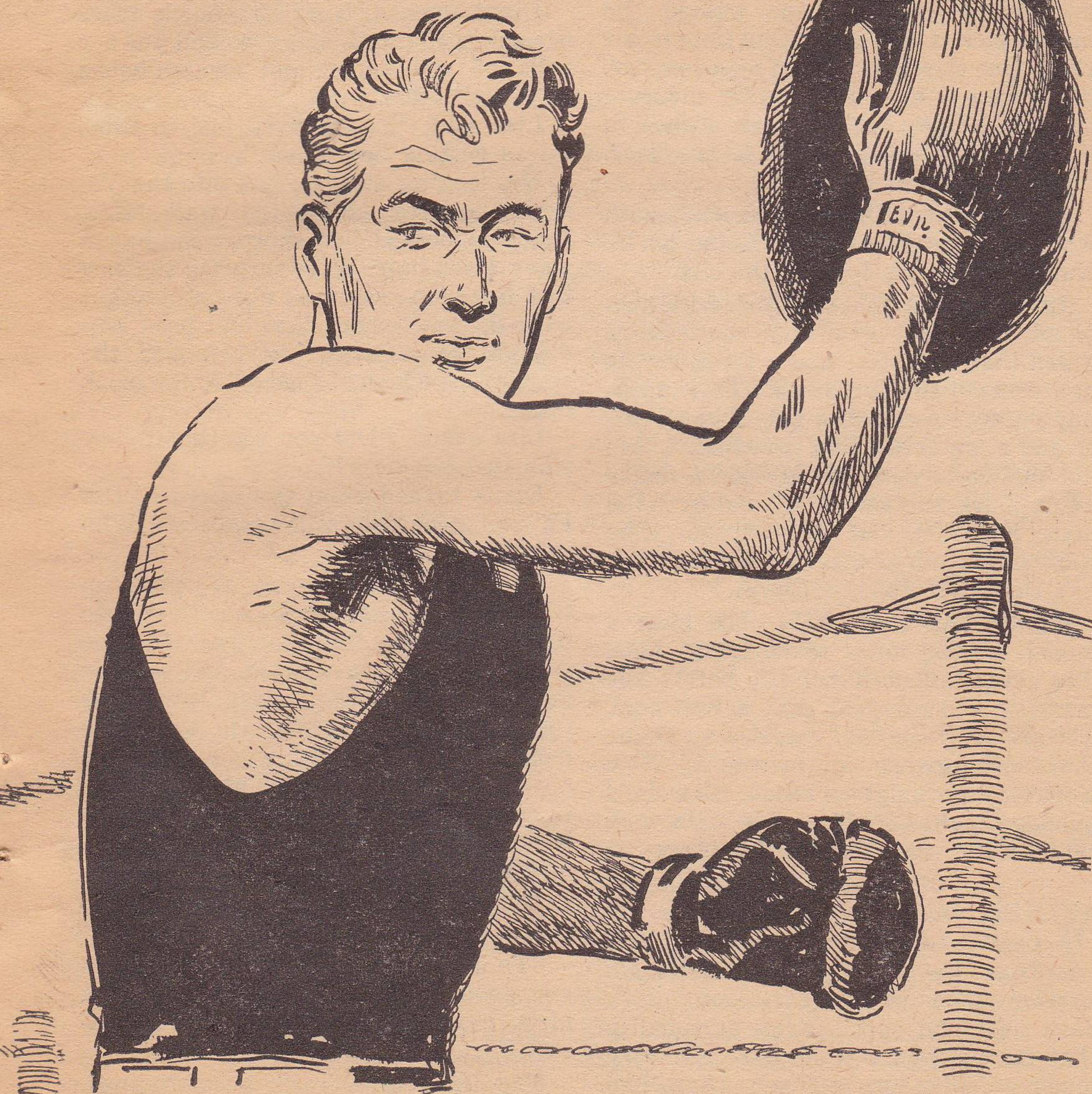
*The moment she saw Joe Daniels,  
Diane knew that something important  
had happened to her—but  
what good would it do her when  
he didn't even want  
to be friendly?*





# A Champ

A Novelet by FRANCES YOULIN McHUGH





to happen to her. Some people called it intuition, others called it a hunch. Whatever it was, she'd just experienced it.

As she went up the porch steps she could hear Lisa and Kurt, Lisa's husband, arguing. Kurt's voice was raised to a sharp pitch of anger.

"Don't give me that!" Diane heard him say, "How did he know where to find you, if you haven't seen or heard from him in five years?"

Having been in on the Nicols' marital arguments before, Diane wished she hadn't picked this particular time to arrive. But they'd probably seen her car. She'd have to stay. Reluctantly she rang the bell. There was a quick silence in the house, then Lisa came to the door. She had tears in her eyes.

"Oh, it's you, Diane," she said, with what sounded like relief. "Come on in. Kurt's just going down to the city."

Lisa was a tall slender girl, with ash-blond hair, and eyes that were more green than blue. She had a lovely figure and dressed to show it off. This morning she was wearing a pale blue sweater and a matching blue tweed skirt. She did justice to both. She'd been a model when Kurt, the son of a wealthy hotel man, had met and married her. She could make anything she put on look like the latest Paris creation.

Other than that she'd once been a model, no one knew much about Lisa. She never talked of her life before she married Kurt a year and a half ago. Though once she had confided to Diane that she'd grown up in one of New York's tough neighborhoods. But she'd quickly laughed it off, saying, "Oh well, that's water over the dam."

WHEN Diane stepped into the big center hall Kurt was taking his hat from the closet. He was a tall, slender man of twenty-seven, with dark hair and eyes, and a personality that made people either like him very much or dislike him intensely. Diane had always liked him, although she thought

that sometimes he acted like a spoiled brat.

"Hello, Diane," he said. "Are we seeing you and Nevin tonight?"

Diane said, "Yes, as far as I know. Nevin wants to get in a little dancing to that good band over at the Lodge. He told me to tell you he'd pick you and Lisa up in his car on the way over for me."

"Swell," Kurt said. "Be seeing you." He went out, and slammed the door without even saying good-by to Lisa.

Diane turned from the quick tears she saw well into Lisa's eyes and put her rolls of wall-paper and swatch-books on a wall table.

Lisa said, "You arrived just in time. I was getting balled out."

Not looking at Lisa, but into the Venetian mirror above the wall table, Diane smoothed her short, wind-blown wavy black hair. With surprise she saw that her blue-gray eyes were still alight with the excitement that had been kindled in them when she'd passed the young man who had sped off in the black coupé.

Lisa asked, "Did you see that fellow who just left here?"

Diane turned from the mirror. "Did I?" she said. "I'm still breathless. Who is he?"

"An old friend of mine. We grew up in the same neighborhood. Went to school together. But that was all there was to it. He's a fighter, and is over at that training camp getting into shape for a fight next week. He knew I'd moved up here when I was married—I always send his mother and father a Christmas card. He just thought it would be fun to look in and say hello. And Kurt blew his top after he left."

"Any chance of an introduction?" Diane asked.

"To Joe? Sure—but it won't do you any good. He never plays around with girls. Besides, you've got Nevin Townsend."

The light in Diane's eyes dimmed. "Yes, so I have," she said, and picked



up a roll of wall-paper. "I've brought over some samples for you to choose from for the living room," she said. "Let's try them and see how they go."

She strolled into a lavishly furnished big room off the hall and Lisa, picking up one of the swatch books followed her.

"I wish I was like you, Diane," Lisa said. "You're always so serene and sure of yourself."

Diane walked over to the wall beside the fireplace and held up a paper sample. "Sometimes I'm not as serene as I look outside," she said.

Lisa flipped through the book of chintz swatches. "I don't believe it," she said. "But then, why shouldn't you be serene? With a father as rich as Rockefeller, I'd be serene, too."

Diane laughed. "Oh, Dad isn't that rich. But I guess I am lucky."

"And you've got guts, too," Lisa said admiringly. "You don't have to do a thing, if you don't want to, but you work like a dog at your interior decorating business."

"I enjoy it," Diane said. "I couldn't just sit around doing nothing all day. If I was married and had my own home to take care of, like you and some of the other girls, it would be different."

"When are you going to marry Nevin?" Lisa asked.

Diane stood with her back to Lisa as she held up the sample of wall-paper with outstretched arms. "Maybe never," she said.

"But I thought—"

"Yes, I used to think so, too. And so did Nevin, and Nevin's folks, and my folks. But somehow I just can't seem to say the final 'yes.' I don't know why. I just can't."

LISA suggested, "That sounds as if you didn't love him."

"I don't know," Diane said. "I like him. I've liked him ever since we were kids. But—well, marrying is something else again."

"Yes, it is," Lisa agreed. "It can be

heaven—or hell."

Diane laughed. "Well, let's get down to this business of decorating. Come over here and hold this paper so I can have a look at it from far away."

They worked away for awhile, and a little later Diane had lunch with Lisa, during which they talked of little except color schemes and fabrics, instead of chattering about things that usually interest girls more. And even after lunch they were so deeply engrossed that it was after three when, suddenly hearing the rumble of distant thunder, Diane came to herself with a start. Quickly gathering up her things, she said:

"I'd better be getting home fast, Lisa!"

Lisa went with her to the door, her mind now back on what they had been talking about previously. "Don't marry Nevin if you don't love him," she cautioned. "Being married is tricky enough when you're really in love." With a short laugh which held no humor, she added, "I ought to know."

Diane kissed her on the cheek. "I'll remember that, Lisa, darling," she said. "See you and Kurt tonight. And don't forget my cocktail party Sunday afternoon . . . Oh, I must hurry!"

The storm broke just as she was driving along the High Ridge Road. Thunder, lightning, and hail-stones as big as ice cubes, made her shiver and wish she'd stayed at Lisa's, or else had left a half-hour or so earlier.

She pressed a button on the dashboard and the top came slowly up and met the windshield, giving her protection from the storm, but giving her a lonely feeling of being isolated, too. It was amazing how quickly cars and people had disappeared, leaving her car the lone one on the road.

A sudden clap of thunder that was more like an explosion shattered the air, and the extra vicious flash of lightning that accompanied it stopped the motor of her car. She coasted to the side of the road and decided she'd be better off staying there instead of driving on



through the storm, even if it were possible to get the car started again.

Then, in the rear-view mirror, she saw a man in shorts and a T-shirt running out of a side road, holding his arms over his face to protect it from the hail-stones. And when he'd almost reached her car she recognized him. The man she'd seen leaving Lisa's house that morning! And instantly the heady excitement she'd felt then, swept all through her again.

She opened the car door and called to him, "Hello, there! Could you use some shelter?"

He stopped, and this time she did get a good look at him, and she liked what she saw. His blond hair was cut close to his head, and his clear blue eyes gave the impression that here was a man who could dream dreams, as well as face realities. His lips had a humorous, devil-may-care upward quirk at the corners that was belied by the squareness of his jaw. He had none of the usual scars a fighter carried, as she'd been told—no cauliflower ears, no broken nose. But he still had time.

She figured him to be no more than twenty-five.

"Some storm," he said, and smiled, as he approached. His teeth were even and white.

"Yes, it is," she agreed. "Hadn't you better get in the car here with me, until it's over?"

He said, "Thanks," and walked around to get in beside her. Then he hesitated. "I guess I'd better not," he said. "I'm soaking wet. And it's a mighty nice car."

She reached over and pulled a steamer rug from the back seat and spread it over the seat beside her. "There you are," she said.

"Thank you," he murmured, and slid into the seat beside her then.

Now she could better gauge the size of him. He was a big man, muscular, exuding a physical power she could fairly feel, although at the moment he was completely relaxed.

SHE wondered, Was that what affected me when he passed me at Lisa's? No, she decided. It was more than that—something that went deeper than the merely physical.

"You a fighter?" she asked just to make conversation.

"Yes, I am," he said. "Aren't you the girl I saw over at Lisa Nichols' this morning?"

"Yes, but you were in such a hurry I didn't think you'd noticed me."

Color crept up into his cheeks. "I recognized the car," he said.

She laughed. Then she asked, "Should I know who you are—as a fighter, I mean?"

His blue eyes began to twinkle as they flicked over her expensive black linen dress. "I wouldn't pick you for the kind who would know even the champions in the fight game, which I'm not—yet," he said.

"I'm afraid you're right," she admitted. "Dad watches the fights on television, but it hurts me to see someone get hurt."

"If a guy knows his business, he doesn't get hurt—much," he said. His arms, neck and legs were red from the beating he'd taken from the hail-stones, and he was beginning to shiver. That did not escape Diane. Quickly she reached to the back seat and took a white cashmere sweater from a package and put it around his wet shoulders.

"You'll catch your death of cold," she scolded.

He grinned. "You sound like my manager. But thanks. You're kind. Only I'll ruin your nice sweater as well as your car."

"No, you won't. A little water won't hurt either of them."

He pulled the soft wool about him gratefully. It was a brand-new sweater and still had the price tags on it. "I'll have it dry-cleaned for you," he said.

"That won't be necessary. What's your name—other than Joe?"

"Daniels. Joe Daniels."

"Mine is Diane Courtney."



"I know. I've seen your pictures in the papers, 'Miss Diane Courtney, at the Stork Club, with Mr. Nevin Townsend, the debutante's millionaire play-boy.'"

Diane turned so she could see his profile. It would have looked good on a coin, she thought. Or even carved on the side of a mountain.

"Do I detect a note of bitterness in that last remark?" she asked.

He shrugged. "No. I haven't any right to be bitter because one guy got born into a rich family."

"And you didn't?"

"My folks are swell!" he quickly defended. "Maybe they never had much money, but they're swell people. My old man was a fighter, in his day, and he taught me how to fight clean."

"And your mother?"

"She was in burlesque, but she deserved something better. She can still sing, but she's too fat for dancing any more."

The last word was still on his lips when a sharp streak of lightning seemed to come down almost on the hood of the car. Instinctively they jumped, and clutched each other.

"Scared?" Joe asked.

"Not usually," Diane said, "but this storm is particularly bad."

Still, trembling, she waited tensely, holding her breath.

## II



FOR awhile, Diane and Joe sat there, their arms around each other, then abruptly Joe pushed her away from him.

"That last did it," he said gruffly. "The hail seems to have stopped. You'd better get going to wherever you are going."

He had opened the car door beside him when she put a detaining hand on his arm. It was like touching a piece of

steel, yet it was warm now, and the very touch of her fingers on that arm was sending electric shocks up her own arm as violent as any lightning bolt that had shot from the purple clouds overhead.

"Wait!" she said. "It's still raining too hard for you to finish your road work. I'll drive you back to camp." She had forgotten all about that bolt which had stopped her motor.

"No, thanks," Joe said. "I can make it. Besides, my manager wouldn't like it if a dame drove me back. He'd think I'd been goofing off."

She kept hold of his arm and smiled. She knew how effective that smile of hers could be. It released a dimple at the left corner of her mouth, it crinkled her small nose provocatively, and it lit dancing fires in her blue-gray eyes.

"You mean you let your manager boss you around, just the way they do in the movies?" she asked.

He turned and looked at her, and she could see her smile was having the desired effect. He caught his breath, and she felt his arm tremble ever so slightly. Then he grinned.

"Okay, you win," he said. "But won't it be out of your way? That is, if you're going down to your shop." Then he flushed, as if he hadn't meant to say that.

"So you know about my shop?" she asked, her heart thumping until it seemed to her almost as loud as the thunder had sounded, minutes before.

"I've noticed the place in the village," he said, almost belligerently.

She smiled again. "Well, my name is on the window, isn't it?" she said.

"You also stand in the window sometimes," he said, as she put her foot on the starter.

Luckily the motor caught—it hadn't been put out of commission, after all!—and she was able to keep her promise to take him back to camp.

"Then you'd seen me before this morning?" she asked, as she turned into the road.



"That's right." He spoke frankly enough, but noncommittally.

She didn't know what to say to that. So she decided to change the subject.

"Well, anyway, I'm not going back to the shop now. And I know where your camp is—only a mile off this road a little further down."

They drove along in silence for a few minutes, then she said, "I'm giving a little cocktail party Sunday afternoon. Would you come to it?"

He said, "No, thanks."

"Why?" She sounded rebuffed.

"I'm not allowed to drink when I'm in training."

"You can have tomato juice, or ginger ale."

He smiled. "Thanks. But no."

"I wish you would."

"You're very kind."

"Is it because of—Nevin Townsend?"

He shook his head slowly. "Not exactly. But I don't know any of your friends."

"You know Lisa. She and Kurt are coming."

"It's still, no."

"Don't you like me?" she asked plaintively.

"Yes."

"Well, I like you too."

"You don't even know me."

"I can feel you're a nice boy. And if you're a friend of Lisa's it will be perfectly proper. I'll tell Lisa you're coming."

"Please don't." When she didn't answer he added, "Please don't misunderstand me. You're a sweet kid and all that, but you'd better stick to your own crowd."

SHE exclaimed resentfully, "Oh, so that is it?"

"It makes sense." He shrugged.

"No, it doesn't."

"Sure it does. I'm just a punk fighter, getting started."

"You're a nice boy, someone I'd like to know better."

He sighed. "Please, Miss Courtney,

forget it, will you?"

"The name is Diane. And you'll make me feel you just don't like me."

"That isn't it—Diane. But . . . Well, Bill, he's my manager, Bill wouldn't let me come to your party."

"Do you have to tell him?"

He chuckled. "You don't know Bill, or you wouldn't ask that. Bill knows all, sees all, hears all."

"Bring him along. I'd like to meet him."

"Unh-unh. He wouldn't come."

"Will he be around when we get to the camp?"

"He'll probably be waiting for me."

"Will you introduce me to him?"

"Not if I can help it."

"Does he know Lisa?" Diane persisted.

"He knew her when she was a kid. He's an old friend of my dad's."

She turned the car into the side road that led to the training camp. Reaching it in a few minutes, she drove into the grounds of the camp, and stopped in front of the main building.

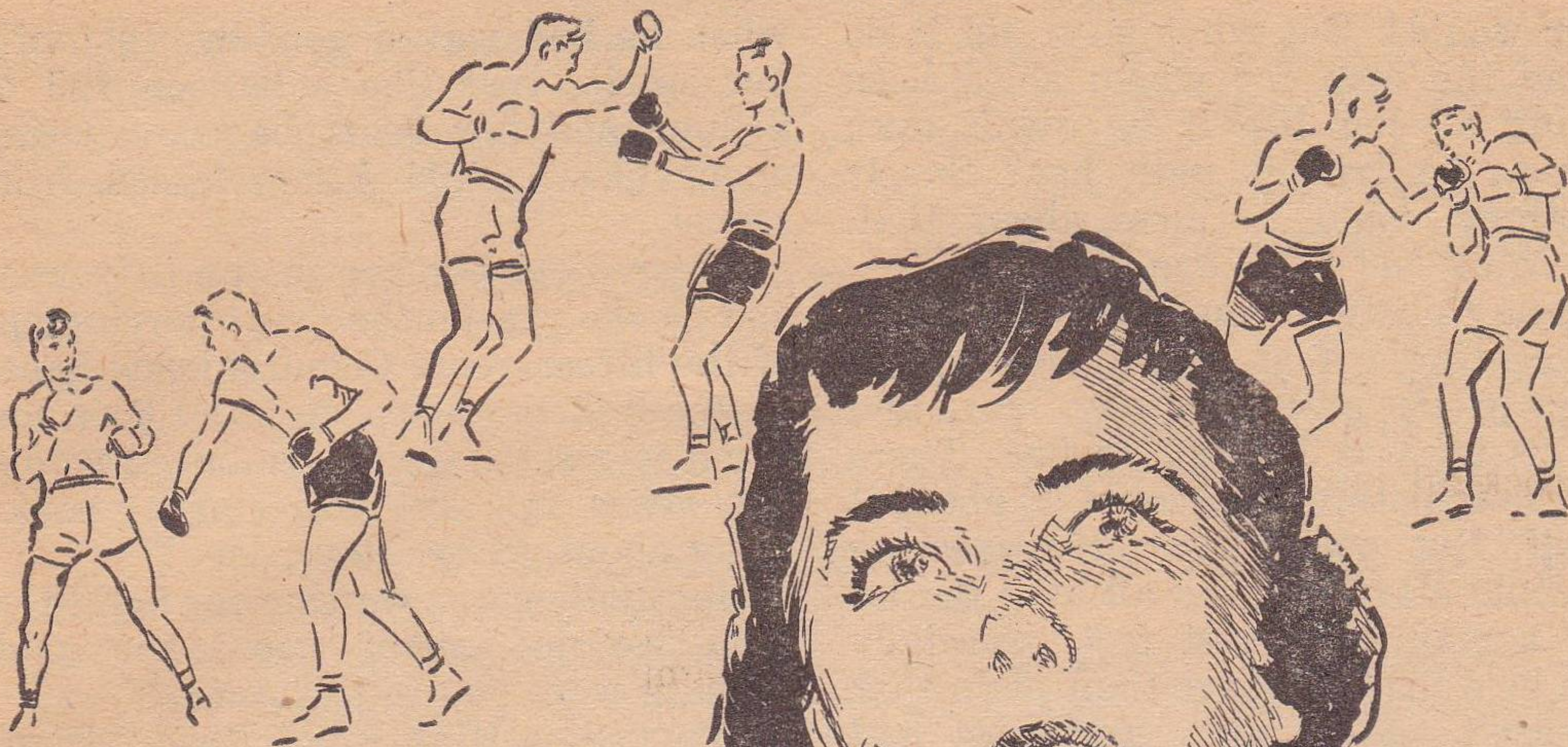
Joe opened the door beside him and got out. Then he turned, his face serious. "You've been very kind," he said. "And it's been nice, meeting you."

Diane actually gasped. Never in her life . . . She'd *never* been brushed off so unceremoniously before. In fact, she'd never been brushed off. Men didn't brush off Diane Courtney. But she realized Joe Daniels wasn't in the least like any other man she'd ever met. Which, however, didn't prevent her from being more hurt than the occasion warranted. She tried to smile, but felt more like crying. Which, of course, was silly. But that was how it was.

A short, fat, red-faced man of about fifty came rushing out of the frame house and down the steps. His forehead, beneath his balding head, was furrowed with worry.

"I was just coming out in the car to look for you, Joe!" he shouted. "You should of come back before the storm broke!"





She tried to visualize  
herself as the wife  
of a prize fighter

"This lady let me sit in her car," Joe told him, but did not introduce him to Diane.

So this was Bill, she thought. And Bill kept frowning and looking at Joe the way a mother would look at a small child she was worried about.

"You all right?" he asked anxiously. "Them hail-stones were like rocks. This rain feels like feathers after them."

It was still raining, but not heavily.

Diane asked, "Aren't you going to introduce me to your friend, Joe?"

Joe flushed, but there wasn't any way out of the introduction now, so he said, "Miss Courtney, Bill Monahan." He added to Bill, "She's a friend of Lisa's."

Bill glanced at Diane as if she were completely unimportant and mumbled, "Pleased to meet you," running the words all together. Then he put an arm around

Joe. "Come inside, boy," he said, almost tenderly. "You need a good rub-down."

Joe grinned at Diane. "So long," he said. "And thanks again."

She smiled ruefully. "I wish you'd come to my party Sunday."

He shook his head. "Unh-unh," he said.

Bill turned and glared at her. "No, lady," he said. "He's a fighter. And dames are poison to a fighter."

Joe's eyes were twinkling as he waved good-by.

**D**RIVING back to the main road, Diane's heart began to sink. Without ever being vaguely conscious of it before—and she *knew* now!—she had been waiting for Joe Daniels all her life. She knew now, too, why she had never been able to say yes to Nevin Townsend—and



never would! But what good did it do to find the man for whom she'd been waiting all her life if he didn't even want to be friends with her? Surely something could be done about that. Something *had* to be done!

Diane Courtney was not in the habit of accepting defeat. She'd always had things pretty much her own way, and this set-up was baffling to her. There must be something she could do about it herself. But what? No self-respecting girl could start running all over the lot after a man she'd just met, especially when he'd made it more than plain that he wasn't having any. And Lisa had warned her that Joe did not go in for girls. But that only intrigued her all the more.

At last the rain had stopped completely, and the sun was beginning to come out, filtering through the purple clouds and casting a golden light over the landscape. An occasional bird took courage and began to chirp from the dripping trees. The gold and red of the autumn-touched foliage flickered wetly, and small gusts of wind brushed the moisture from the leaves onto the already sodden earth.

But Diane saw none of it. As she drove along all she saw was Joe Daniels' face and cropped blond head. She was comparing Joe with Nevin Peter Townsend, and Nevin was losing, point by point.

Maybe it was silly and foolishly romantic to fall head-over-heels in love with a man the minute you saw him. But that was what had happened to her, and what could be done about it? Even if you wanted something done, which she didn't.

Well, songs were written about it happening that way. So were stories. Many a poet had written his verses about it, too. And there was always Romeo and Juliet. So why couldn't it happen in real life? Anyway—it had.

Diane had almost reached home before she remembered that Joe had still had her sweater around his shoulders

when he had waved good-by. Instantly her spirits rose like a balloon full of helium, and her heart began capering about like a child just released from school.

She parked her car in the driveway, and as she ran up the front porch steps of the fifteen-room Colonial brick house on the hill, the place that had been her home ever since she'd been born twenty-two years ago, she was singing something about, "Love, love, love!"

Her mother was waiting for her. "I've been worried about you," she said. "Where were you in the storm?"

"Parked on High Ridge Road." Diane laughed gaily and, throwing her arms around her mother, hugged her and swung her around in a giddy circle.

"Oh, mercy!" her mother cried. "Stop it!"

Diane let her go and grinned at her, wondering if she dared tell about having found the love of her life.

"You mean you were parked on High Ridge Road right out in the storm?" Mom asked, aghast.

She was a short, rather plump woman, with small, regular features, big brown eyes and soft, graying brown hair which she was now patting back into place after her wild whirl.

"I couldn't help it," Diane said, deciding she'd better not mention her meeting with Joe. "When I left Lisa's it wasn't raining. Then, as I was driving along High Ridge Road, the lightning stopped the motor of my car. So I waited where I was for awhile."

"How awful!" Mom cried. "You might have been killed!"

Diane smiled. "But I wasn't. And I found something wonderful!"

"Wonderful? What?"

**C**OULD her mother understand? Surely she must, for she'd fallen in love herself when she was twenty-two. She had married her love, and was still in love with her husband. But Diane, even at twenty-two, had lived long enough to know that people can forget what



love was like in the beginning—the excitement, the exhilarating, hurting, jubilant ecstasy that surges through you until you feel you're going to burst like an atom.

Mrs. Courtney gave up waiting for her daughter to answer her previous questions, and followed them by asking, "How's Lisa?"

Diane started for the stairs. "Still having trouble with Kurt," she said.

"What on earth is the matter now?" Mrs. Courtney asked a little impatiently.

"Oh," Diane said, "he gets jealous if she's even civil to any other man."

"That's silly!"

"Sure it is. But Kurt hasn't discovered it yet." Diane started up the stairs. "Is there time before dinner for me to have a shower?" she asked.

"If you hurry. Are you seeing Nevin tonight?"

"Later. But I'll eat at home."

As Diane showered and dressed, she tried to visualize herself as the wife of a prizefighter. What would it be like? Did you suffer with every blow when your beloved was in the ring? Did you die a thousand deaths if he lost a fight, or got hurt?

Why couldn't she be sensible and fall in love with Nevin and marry him? He was a man any girl could be proud of—prosperous, tall, well-built, with light brown hair and eyes, and a personality that made him many friends.

Nevin's family and her own had lived in the aristocratic town of Pleasantview on the Hudson before she and Nevin were born, and were on a par socially and economically. It was well-known that both families had always thought it would be nice to combine the two fortunes.

Nevin's father, with whom he had been in business ever since he had graduated from Harvard and served his time in the Navy, had interests in steel, oil, real estate, and several other things that made cutting coupons part of their quarterly routine.

Diane's father was senior partner in

a Wall Street investment company, a trustee of a bank, held a controlling interest in a large and busy steamship company, and considered money a paramount necessity to existence—which of course it was.

But along with it all, Diane had always found her father as rich in the love of and for his family, as he was in stocks and bonds. *Could* it be possible that he would understand—about Joe?

### III



**S**LIDING into a smoke-gray nylon halter dress she'd bought to go with her silver blue mink cape, Diane decided to tell her father about Joe. After dinner would be a good time. Then Mom settled

herself in the living room to knit and listen to a symphony on the radio, and her father went into the library next door to hear the news on television.

Soon after dinner, Diane joined her father there, glad it was necessary to keep the doors closed between the two rooms. Dropping into a chair near her dad she asked, as casually as she could:

"Dad, did you ever hear of a fighter named Joe Daniels?"

He looked a little surprised. "Why, sure. Good kid. He'll be middleweight champion some day. His father used to fight too. But he never got to be champ."

A thoughtful moment, then Diane asked, "Ever see young Joe fight?"

"Just on television. Believe he's fighting Kid Salvatore next week. If he wins he'll probably get a crack at the crown."

"What night next week?" Diane was more eager now.

"Wednesday, at Madison Square Garden," her father said.

"Will it be televised?"

Mr. Courtney switched off the news commentator and gave his daughter his full attention. He was a big man, weigh-



ing about two hundred, but always kept himself in trim at a gym. His hair was as black and wavy as Diane's, scarcely touched with gray except at the temples. And both of them had blue-gray eyes. Two of a kind who should understand one another.

"What makes you so interested in fights all of a sudden?" he asked abruptly.

She'd always been able to tell her father things her mother didn't understand. So now she told him without hesitation, "I met Joe Daniels this afternoon, Dad."

He raised his dark brows and drew down the corners of his wide mouth—characteristic of him when surprised. But he didn't even have to question Diane for the next moment she was telling him the whole story.

She finished with a sigh, "He's the first boy I ever met, Dad, who really interested me the minute I saw him. And—" she smiled a little—"the first I couldn't get right off the bat."

Her father mirrored her smile. "Sounds like a level-headed kid. But I wouldn't get too interested, if I were you. You know how your mother would feel about it."

"Yes, I know. Do you know anything else about him, besides his fighting?"

She could ask Lisa about Joe but she was curious to know about him from someone who wasn't a friend, didn't even know him personally.

Mr. Courtney said, "Well, I believe he worked his way through Northwestern by fighting summers. Graduated *cum laude* in something or other before the Army grabbed him. Now he's fighting his way up with his eyes on the middle-weight crown. Wouldn't be surprised if he got a chance to fight Slugger Benson, the present champ, after this next bout. If he wins."

"Think he'll make it? The crown, I mean."

"He's got a good chance. He's a clean fighter, boxes nicely, takes a punch well, hits hard. He's got class. There's never

been any scandal about him. The crowds like him. The fighters like him. And the sports writers like him."

Diane smiled dreamily. "And I like him."

Her father's smile was a bit sad as he said, "But I'd bet my best golf club your mother wouldn't like him."

"Mom is inclined to be something of a snob. She doesn't mean to be. She just can't help it."

"Your mother comes from a fine New England family, my dear. She thrives on blue blood. And she has her heart set on Nevin Townsend for a son-in-law."

"And you?"

MR. COURTNEY shrugged. "Most men feel differently about such things. But you're my only daughter, you know. . . . But say! I thought you were pretty fond of Nevin."

"I am. But after I met Joe this afternoon, I knew right away I never have felt toward Nevin what I should feel about a man I intend to marry. A girl doesn't realize that, Dad—until she does meet the right man."

Watching the light play on her mobile face, the sparkle and dreams in her eyes, he said, "I'd kind of like to see that fight."

Diane's heart leaped with excitement. "Dad! *Could* we? What would we tell Mom?"

"The truth, of course. Your mother is old enough to face facts. And so are you, Diane. And I want it distinctly understood that if I take you to see that fight, it is not an endorsement of that boy for my only daughter."

Diane jumped up and hugged him. "You're a darling!" she cried, and hurried to the front door to meet Nevin who had just driven up to the house in his yellow convertible, with Lisa and Kurt in the back seat.

Picking up her silver blue mink cape and small evening bag Diane called, "'By, Mom! Don't wait up for me."

Nevin looked smart in tan slacks and a brown jacket—he always did. His eyes



lit up when she appeared at the door, for he never could guess she was wishing she could greet him with as much enthusiasm as he greeted her.

"You look lovely!" he said, with a boyish smile.

She joined him on the porch and he hugged her enthusiastically. But when he tried to kiss her, and she gave him only her cheek he let her go instantly and they went down the steps to the car.

Diane said, "Hello again, Lisa. Hello, Kurt."

Lisa said, "Hello," in rather a gloomy voice. And Kurt gave her a sickly smile. It was quite apparent they'd quarrelled again. Neither one had a word to say throughout the drive.

At the Lodge, high over the Hudson, it was Nevin who got a table on the terrace, Nevin who gave their order. Kurt and Lisa sat there like statues. When Nevin took Diane out on the dance floor he asked her:

"What's the matter with those two tonight?"

"Same old thing," Diane told him.

Nevin gave her a squeeze. "We wouldn't be like they are, if we were married," he said.

"We might, Nevin. Marriage is—difficult sometimes, I guess. It's something you have to be sure about. Love, I mean. Love is like money in the bank, against whatever depressions occur in a marriage."

He held her away from him so he could look down into her face. "Well, for heaven's sakes," he said, and laughed, "listen to the little philosopher! Where did you get all that profound knowledge?"

"I guess I've been thinking too much. My error. Excuse it, please."

"Well, I'll try," he chuckled. "If you promise never to do it again."

When they went back to the table, Kurt and Lisa were still statues. They hadn't spoken a word while Diane and Nevin had been dancing. Nevin watched them thoughtfully for a moment or two,

then with the frankness of an old friend, he asked:

"What's the matter with you two tonight?"

Lisa shrugged. "The usual. A childhood friend of mine is staying in the neighborhood and he stopped in to say hello this morning. Naturally I had to be civil to him. And Kurt got mad."

Kurt's highball glass was empty and he motioned a passing waiter for a refill. "You're too civil to too many," he said sullenly.

LISA'S hands clenched around her own glass, which was only half empty, and the knuckles of her hands turned white. Her lips were drawn tightly over her teeth.

"Some day," she said with an ominous calm, "I'm going to haul off and swat you one when you talk to me like that."

Kurt gave her a dirty look. "That's right," he said. "Show your First Avenue bringing up."

Quicker than the lightning had flashed that afternoon, Lisa flung her glass and the drink remaining in it directly into her husband's face.

With equal swiftness, Kurt's hand slashed across Lisa's cheek.

She jumped up and ran for the powder room. For moments no one spoke. Then Diane got up and followed Lisa.

Lisa was alone in the powder room, sobbing her heart out, with her head down on one of the dressing tables. Diane sat down on a bench beside her and slid a comforting arm around her. She said nothing, for she sensed it was no time for any words she could speak. Best to let Lisa struggle it out for herself.

After a long while Lisa lifted her head. "If I wasn't fool enough to love him like crazy, I'd leave him," she said raggedly.

"Maybe you just don't understand each other?" Diane suggested. "Why don't you go to a psychiatrist and talk things over?"

"He wouldn't go."



"But if he didn't love you," Diane argued, "he wouldn't be so jealous."

Lisa looked at her questioningly with tear-wet eyes. "Do you really think so?" she asked piteously.

"It's logical," Diane said. "You don't get upset about someone you don't care anything about."

Lisa took a facial tissue from a box on the dressing table and dried her eyes.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I shouldn't have acted that way in a public place. It was embarrassing to you and Nevin."

"Don't worry about us," Diane told her.

Lisa drew in a sighing breath and her shoulders sagged. "I'm always doing the wrong thing," she said. "I just don't belong up here with all you society folks. I should have stayed down in the city, far down on the East Side, where I belong."

Diane opened her bag and offered Lisa powder and lipstick.

"That's silly, darling," she said matter-of-factly. "If you didn't belong right where you are, you just wouldn't be there."

Lisa gave her a sad smile. "You're always so practical," she said.

"I'm afraid my mother wouldn't agree with you. Come on now, let's go back." It certainly wasn't the time now to tell Lisa of her meeting with Joe.

Nevin and Kurt were waiting for them in the lobby.

"We're going home," Kurt announced authoritatively and wordlessly Lisa let him take her arm and lead her out to the parking lot.

Nevin held Diane back, suggesting, "Let's have a quick one at the bar, Di. I need another, after that."

Feeling a bit frayed herself, Diane followed him.

When they finally went out to the car, Lisa and Kurt were necking in the back seat!

"Money in the bank of matrimony?" Nevin whispered to Diane.

"Looks like it, doesn't it," she whispered back. . . .

A COUPLE of days later Diane received two boxes by special messenger, just after she had finished lunch with her mother. A maid brought the boxes into the dining room.

One of them unquestionably was a flower box. The other was from a dry cleaner's.

"What's that?" Mrs. Courtney asked.

Diane opened the cleaner's box. In it, in a froth of pale blue tissue paper, was her white cashmere sweater, carefully folded and spotless.

"My new white sweater," she said. "I lent it to someone who had it cleaned for me."

"Oh? Who? Lisa?"

"No."

Diane opened the florist's box. A dozen red roses lay dewey-wet, soft and beautiful. The card read:

MANY THANKS FOR THE USE OF  
THE SWEATER. JOE.

"Who are the roses from?" her mother asked.

"From a—a friend. Excuse me please."

Diane quickly left the table and took the roses and the sweater up to her room.

#### IV



A FEW minutes later, when Mrs. Courtney came up to Diane's room with a vase for the flowers, Diane was sitting by the window looking out at the garden, the roses in her lap, the card in her hand. In her eyes were dreams.

Her mother said, "Hadn't you better get those flowers in water?"

Diane sighed and took the vase. She filled it in her bathroom and arranged the flowers, then brought them back and put them on her dresser.

Mrs. Courtney said, "Something tells me those aren't from Nevin."

"No, they aren't."



"Is it none of my business?"

Diane loved her mother but sometimes she wished she wouldn't ask so many questions. Sitting down on the side of her bed she said,

"You aren't going to like this Mom, but the roses are from a—a prize-fighter."

Mrs. Courtney jumped as if someone had stuck her with a pin. "A prizefighter?" she cried.

"Yes. His name is Joe Daniels. Lisa knows him. He's a middleweight, and Dad says he may be champion some day. Maybe soon."

"Oh, your father says so, does he?"

"Yes. I told Dad because—well, I thought he'd understand."

"And did he?" the girl's mother asked shortly.

"In a way. He's going to take me to see Joe fight next Wednesday night."

Her mother walked over to the window, but not quickly enough to hide the tear that ran down her cheek.

"Oh, Mother, *please!*" Diane said. "Anyway, you don't have to worry. He won't have anything to do with me."

"Then he's got more sense than you have," Mrs. Courtney said and left the room. . . .

Diane didn't have too much to do in the shop that afternoon, so as soon as she could, she left her assistant, June Dawson, to answer the phone, got into her car and drove out to High Ridge Road. The sun was shining today and there was quite a lot of traffic, but after awhile she saw Joe coming, running along with a nice easy stride.

She stopped the car at the side of the road and got out. When he was even with her she said, "Hello, Joe."

He nodded. "Hi," he said, not stopping.

She ran along beside him. "Joe, I got the sweater, and the roses. Thanks. But you needn't have had the sweater cleaned."

"Had to," Joe said. "It fell on the floor and got dirty."

She was beginning to get breathless

trying to keep up with him. "Joe, Dad's going to take me to see you fight Wednesday night."

He slowed his pace almost imperceptibly. Then he speeded up again. "Is he?" he asked.

"Yes. Doesn't it interest you to know that I'll be there to see you fight?"

"I'd rather you weren't." He didn't even glance at her. "You'll make me nervous."

"But you won't see me!" she protested.

"Not unless you're up front. But I'll know you're there, somewhere."

"Will it really bother you, Joe?"

"I won't let it," he said, firmness showing in the set of his mouth.

"Are you going to tell Bill Monahan I'll be there?"

"No."

"Joe, have you got a girl?"

"No. Haven't time for one."

He was getting ahead of her now in his steady jogging pace, and she was so breathless she had to give up.

"See you later!" she called after him, but he didn't pay any attention.

She trudged back to her car, climbed in and sat there feeling rejected for the first time in her life. What *did* a girl do when a man didn't want her around? It was a question the wealthy, beautiful and much-sought-after Diane Courtney had never had to answer. She lit a cigarette and tried to find the answer in the upward curls of the smoke. But it wasn't there.

THEN in the rear view mirror, she saw that Joe had turned around and was on his way back. Her heart began to quicken and she threw away her cigarette, waiting, wondering what she could say to him as he ran past.

But he didn't run past. He must have thought she was sitting waiting for him. Coming to the side of the car, panting a little, he said:

"Look, Miss Courtney, why don't you go home? Or go do your decorating?"

"Why don't you mind your own busi-



ness?" she cried, as surprised at her outburst as he was. "I am just sitting here smoking a cigarette—that is I was—and you come along and tell me to go home. Well, I won't go home, if I don't want to!"

He looked at her in surprise. "Oh," he said. "I'm sorry." He turned away.

Instantly ashamed of her outburst, she cried, "No, wait, Joe! Please!"

He turned back to her once more, and for a moment they looked into each other's eyes.

Then she said, "Joe, we do like each other. Why can't we be friends?"

"You're right," he said. "I do like you. I could go head-over-heels for you. But it wouldn't work."

"Why not?"

"Because we're from different worlds."

"That's ridiculous. It's just one big world these days."

"That's what they say." He lifted his shoulders, and the laugh sound he made was dry, not humorous. "But it isn't so."

"I don't think money is so important," Diane persisted.

"That's because you've always had plenty of it."

"It seems to me," she said, "that that's reducing human relations down to a rather low level."

He smiled faintly. "On the contrary, it's raising them to an exalted level. The level where money talks. And if you don't think it does, you have a lot to learn."

"Please come to my party Sunday, Joe," she pleaded. "I'll make you the guest of honor."

He didn't answer for a long time. Finally he said, "All right. So I'll come to your party Sunday. What time?"

"About four."

"Expect me at four," he said. "'By now. I have to get back to camp."

"I'll drive you back."

"No, thanks. I have to finish my road work."

He waved a parting salute and trot-

ted off down the road, and she knew it was better to let him go. At least she could now look forward to Sunday, and that was only two days away.

But instantly she was wondering. Hadn't she better tell Lisa that Joe was coming to the cocktail party? Maybe it wasn't too smart inviting Joe and Kurt and Lisa to the same party. But she hadn't stopped to think of any such complications when she'd invited Joe. She had wanted him to come, and that had been all there was to it. She'd been thinking of him, only.

She did call Lisa as soon as she got home, though, and told her.

Lisa said, "Don't worry about it. I can't shut myself up in a glass case, just to suit Kurt."

"But I wouldn't want to cause you any trouble," Diane said. "I hadn't thought about it that way at all, and then it just seemed to work out the way it did."

"You aren't falling for Joe, are you?" Lisa suddenly asked anxiously, as if the thought had just occurred to her. "Because you mustn't, Diane—you mustn't! Right now he's married to a pair of boxing gloves. If he ever does get married to any woman it won't be until he's a lot older."

Diane didn't answer for a moment. Then she said, "I'll remember that. See you Sunday. 'By now."

She expected an explosion when she told her mother Joe was coming Sunday, but Mrs. Courtney merely said, "Oh?" and let it go at that. Diane had a feeling that her father had been talking to Mom.

Mr. Courtney said, "Be glad to meet the boy. But remember what I told you. . . ."

SUNDAY afternoon, as Diane dressed in a soft white nylon sports dress sprinkled with gold chrysanthemums, she was thinking of Joe. She hoped everybody would like him.

Nevin was the first guest to arrive. Diane had just come downstairs. Her



father and mother were in their upstairs sitting room which connected with their bedroom.

To avoid Nevin's kiss when he came in, she pretended to have to fix some flowers on the hall table. But he wasn't fooled.

"What's the matter, Diane?" he asked. "You act as if I were poison lately. Every time I try to kiss you—"

"You're imagining it," she told him, as kindly as she could.

"No, I'm not. If it wasn't so why don't we announce our engagement at the party this afternoon?"

Her heart seemed to drop several inches. "Oh no!" she cried. "We're not engaged—not really—and I don't want to be just now. I—I don't want to—to give up my shop—yet Nevin."

"You won't have to. Not until we start having a family."

He smiled at her so tenderly, the love in his eyes was so plain that she felt her face flush hotly. Whether with regret or remorse she could not tell. Still, why *should* she be remorseful? Could she help it if she couldn't give Nevin the love he wanted?

She reached up a soft hand and patted his cheek. "You're sweet, Nevin," she murmured. "But—well, the truth is I don't love you, not the way you want me to. I'm sorry. But that's the way it is. You might as well know."

"Is there someone else?" he asked.

She was wondering what she could possibly say when the grandfather clock in the big square hall began to strike four—and Joe's black coupé stopped in the driveway.

She said, "Oh, here comes the first guest!" and hurried to the door.

When Joe came in he gave her a box of flowers. "Thought you might like these," he said shyly.

She couldn't cover her enthusiasm. "Oh, Joe! How sweet of you! Thanks."

She took the lovely orchid corsage from the cellophane box and pinned it on her shoulder. The orchids, in tones of gold and brown, went beautifully

with her dress.

The expression on Nevin's face was a combination of incredulity and hurt. Diane, reading it aright, felt like a criminal. She introduced the two men and they shook hands, each taking the other's measure openly.

Fortunately more guests arrived in time to save her from having to answer Nevin's inevitable questions. When Lisa and Kurt arrived, though, Diane had some misgivings.

Lisa said, "Hello, Joe. Nice to see you again so soon." Then she turned to her husband. "Kurt, you remember Joe Daniels, don't you?"

Joe held out his hand, naturally knowing nothing of the trouble he had innocently caused by his visit to Lisa for old times' sake, the other day. But Kurt pretended he didn't see Joe's extended hand. He merely nodded, and walked away.

Lisa's eyes filled with tears. "I'm sorry, Joe," she said huskily. "He didn't mean anything."

Joe said, "It's all right, Lisa."

Right then Diane decided instantly she'd better do something, and quickly. She said, "Joe, you haven't met Mom and Dad yet. Want to come upstairs to their sitting room and meet them?"

Joe hesitated for only the briefest moment. Then he said, "Sure."

Lisa said, "I'll go over and talk to June Dawson about that wall paper, Diane."

Diane's mother and father greeted Joe cordially. Mr. Courtney got to his feet and held out his hand.

"How do you do, Joe?" he said, even before Diane could introduce them. "This is indeed a pleasure."

Mrs. Courtney put down her knitting and held out her hand. "I'm very glad to meet you, Joe," she said politely. "Won't you sit down?"

TO SAVE Joe the embarrassment of having to make conversation with her parents, even for a few minutes, Diane said, "We have to get back down—"



stairs, Mom. I just wanted you to meet Joe."

When they got downstairs, Diane turned Joe over to a group of people she knew would be nice to him, and began circulating among some late arrivals, greeting them, seeing that everyone was being served promptly. For awhile she was too busy to keep an eye on Joe, and the next thing she knew he and Lisa and Kurt were over in a corner, and Kurt was talking much too loudly.

"That's what you said the other day!" Diane heard Kurt say. "But I don't believe you!"

He'd undoubtedly had too much to drink. But Diane knew he couldn't have got it here at her party. Not so soon. He must have had plenty before he arrived.

Joe said something to him quietly, which Diane could not hear, but Kurt gave him a scowl-laden look.

Diane hurried over to them then, and somehow managed to drag up a smile. "Joe," she asked brightly, "have you seen our garden?"

Joe said, "Just from the windows here."

She held out her hand. "Come, I'll show you."

She led him out onto a terrace overlooking the deep garden with its view of the Hudson. And she took a deep breath of relief at leaving Kurt Nichols and his overload of belligerence behind.

## V



DIANE led Joe down the terrace steps to the garden path. When they were safely away from everyone, she asked: "What was all that about back inside there!"

Joe shrugged. "Lisa's husband seems to object to the fact that I used to know Lisa, years ago."

Diane said, "I know. But it isn't only

you, Joe. He's that same way about every man who ever says more than three words to Lisa."

Joe looked serious. "Is that so?" he said. "I'm sorry to hear it. Tough on Lisa."

"She told me once, that she'd grown up in a bad section of the city," Diane said. "But she doesn't seem to want to talk about it."

"I know," Joe said. "She's ashamed of it. But that's silly."

"Of course it is," Diane agreed.

"We both grew up on First Avenue," Joe said. "You seem to be her friend, so I guess it's all right for me to talk about it. She was called Liz then. Well, there never was anything between us except the friendship you feel for the boys and girls you've known all your life. Liz and I were just a couple of kids who wanted to do better for ourselves. She always used to say she was going to get something out of life if it killed her. She wanted nice clothes, nice cars, a nice home, nice friends. All the things she's got now."

"And you?" Diane prompted.

"Well, I always said some day I was going to be a fighter. A champ. And I was going to get Mom and Pop away from First Avenue and show them what it was like really to live."

"And have you done that, Joe?"

He flushed. "Well, yes, some of it. The folks have a nice house down on Long Island. Pop has a flower garden and also raises a few vegetables."

"And where do you live, Joe?"

He shrugged. "I stay with them as much as I can. When I'm training I live at the camp. When we're on the road, Bill and Mike—Mike's my trainer—and I stay in hotels."

"Is that the way you like it?" Diane asked softly.

He touched a late rose gently with his big hand. "Oh, sure. Some day I suppose I'll get married and have kids and a house and all that goes with it. Most men have that idea, don't they?"

"But not yet?"



He gave her a steady look for a moment, then he said, "Not yet. I'm not ready for it yet. First I have to get to the top."

"And after that?"

They walked slowly along the path, further away from the house.

"Well, after that," he said after a moment, "I suppose I'll go into business. I own an orange grove in Florida and I have a couple of race horses. I'd like to breed race horses. And on the side, I'd like to have a free school for sports where underprivileged kids could learn all kinds of sports without having to pay for it. I was lucky, I had my father to **teach** me how to fight. But the other kids, they never learned the right way. I have an idea that's one big reason for all the juvenile delinquency. If a kid's interested in some sport, he doesn't go out and kill people. Of course there's PAL and the YMCA, but I mean something bigger and more comprehensive than either of those. The kids outgrow PAL pretty fast."

Diane put her hand on his arm. "I'd like to be part of that, Joe," she said. "Would you let me? I have some money I'd like to invest."

He put his hand over hers and they stopped walking. Looking down into her eyes he said, "Honey, I'd like you to be a part of everything I am, or ever hope to be. But I'm not going to let you."

"But why?"

"Because it just wouldn't work."

Her heart felt heavy and the loud sounds that reached them from the party suddenly made it all seem silly and futile.

"Maybe we'd better get back?" she said.

THEY strolled toward the house and as they neared it she said, "I hope you've enjoyed yourself, Joe."

"I have. Very much. It was nice of you to ask me. You have nice friends, and wonderful parents."

"I hope you'll come again some time."

[Turn page]

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He shook his head. "I'd rather not."

She stopped and faced him. "You're not very considerate of my feelings," she told him, her voice trembling.

"I am *very* considerate of them," he said. "That's why I don't want to see you any more."

"That's a stupid remark!" she snapped, her eyes flashing danger signals.

He took her arms in a grip that hurt. But she didn't flinch. "Look, honey," he said. "The least little spark would send you and me sailing over the clouds like a skyrocket. You're smart enough to know that."

"So?" She was fighting back tears now.

"So it's no good. For either of us."

"What about after you get to be the world's middleweight champion, and have that school started, and the race horses, and the orange groves?"

He smiled and let go of her arms. "By that time you'll be married to Townsend. Or someone like him."

Without answering, she turned and ran up the terrace steps, across the flagstones, and into the house.

In the living room, someone was playing the piano; real *Basin Street Blues*. It was Lisa, and she was singing in a low husky voice about how her man had gone and left her. Diane had never known before that Lisa could either sing or play. She went over and stood beside her.

Kurt was on the other side of the room talking to a little redhead. He had a drink in each hand and was drinking from the glasses impartially. Nevin was talking to June Dawson. June would be perfect for Nevin, Diane decided. Joe was still out in the garden, strolling around looking at the flowers.

Lisa stopped singing, but kept on playing. She asked, "You do like Joe, don't you?"

"Yes, very much," Diane admitted.

Lisa said, "Joe's a swell kid. But he's proud."

Diane said, "I know."

"There was never anything between Joe and me," Lisa said, her hands playing heartbreaking blues on the black and white keys. "But Kurt always believes the worst about me, because I came from First Avenue."

Diane put an arm around Lisa's shoulders. "Do you know where Kurt came from, before he moved up here?"

Lisa looked up at her. "Why, no," she said. "I thought he and his folks had always lived up here. The way you and Nevin have."

"No, they haven't," Diane said. "They bought that house down in the valley when Kurt was fifteen. His father had money then, but now I'm wondering—did he always have it?"

Lisa's eyes dilated. "You think maybe he didn't?"

I think maybe that's what he's fighting," Diane suggested. "And not you at all."

Lisa stared at her as if she'd just been shown the end of the rainbow.

"Diane!" she whispered huskily. "Oh, Diane!"

Diane couldn't keep her glance from wandering out to Joe. She saw him coming back toward the house, and at the same moment she saw Kurt suddenly finish his drinks and, leaving the little redhead, go out to meet Joe! He grabbed hold of Joe's coat as Joe was heading for the terrace, and apparently said something that made Joe pretty mad. He tried to get away, but Kurt held on.

LISA, whose back was toward the window, saw nothing of what was going on, but Diane saw it all, and decided she'd better get out there fast and stop whatever it was.

She said, "See you later, Lisa—keep on playing," and hurried out the French window.

But before she could make it down to the garden, Joe had pushed Kurt away from him, and his right fist had come up and contacted with Kurt's jaw. She could hear the crack it made. The punch was so unexpected and so explosive it



knocked Kurt back into a clump of rose bushes where he collapsed in a heap, like a rag doll.

Nevin must have seen it all through the window, for then he came rushing out of the house and tried to get Kurt to his feet. But Kurt was out cold.

Nevin swung around and glared at Joe. His eyes were dark with fury.

"I think you'd better leave!" he said angrily. "This isn't Madison Square Garden!"

Diane's legs were shaking so she could hardly get them to work, but she managed to get down to where the men stood glaring at each other.

"No, Nevin!" she cried. "No! It wasn't Joe's fault! I know it wasn't!"

She clutched Joe's arm, and though she knew he must feel how her hand was shaking, he brushed her away.

He said grimly, "Townsend's right. I'd better go. I don't belong here!"

"No—please!" Diane cried, her voice rising. "It's all a terrible mistake!"

But Joe pushed her aside and strode around the side of the house, and in another moment she heard a car rush out of the driveway.

She swung around to Nevin, tears blinding her vision of him.

"Now see what you've done!" she cried. "I hate you! Hate you, do you hear me?"

Nevin's face paled and his jaw tightened. The darkness of his eyes lightened as his anger faded.

"Yes, I hear you," he said quietly. "And I understand now why you didn't want to announce our engagement this afternoon."

Lisa had come running out, for by now everyone had had a glimpse of the scene in the garden. Lisa was trying to get Kurt on his feet when George, the butler, came dashing from his pantry to help her.

Then there was so much excitement that Diane wasn't quite sure what was happening. Guests began crowding around. Her father came downstairs and he and George and Nevin managed

to get Kurt on his feet and into the house and upstairs, with Lisa trailing miserably behind.

Naturally after that the guests began to say their good-bys. Diane apologized for the disturbance, and everyone was nice about it, insisting they'd had a lovely time anyway, but that it really was time to leave.

After they'd all gone, Diane sank down on a sofa in the living room. Her mother came downstairs looking even more disturbed than Diane herself felt.

"Oh, there you are, Diane," she said. "I want to talk to you."

"Oh, please, Mother, not now!" Diane pleaded.

"There's no time like the present," Mrs. Courtney said sternly. "But I guess you must realize yourself that asking that prizefighter here was a dreadful mistake. He'd probably had too much to drink."

"That prizefighter, as you call him, had exactly one glass of ginger ale," Diane told her.

Lisa and Kurt came downstairs then. Lisa said, "I'm so sorry, Diane. I'm afraid we spoiled your party."

Kurt, looking a bit dazed, but somewhat sobered from black coffee, said, "Sorry. Guess I had one too many."

He looked glad to get away, not even waiting for his distressed wife.

Diane went to the door with Lisa. "It wasn't your fault," she assured her. "Just one of those things."

Lisa smiled sadly. "You're sweet," she said. "And don't blame Joe. Kurt wouldn't tell me what he said to him. He probably doesn't remember himself. But I can imagine. And Joe only knows one way to fight back—with his fists."

"I understand," Diane said. . . .

ALL the next morning Diane waited for Joe to call her. Then she decided maybe it was up to her to apologize to him because he had been insulted by one of her guests. She called the camp, but they told her he wasn't there. She didn't believe that, but what could she



do? Well, she couldn't leave things the way they were. Not after she'd insisted on Joe's coming to her party against his better judgment.

So that afternoon, she drove over to the camp. A man in the main building told her: "Joe's over at the gym, lady. But you'd better not go over there."

"I have to," Diane said.

"He don't want to see nobody," the man said.

"But I have to see him! Can't you just tell him I'm here. I'm Diane Courtney."

Up to this moment, that magic name had opened doors to her wherever she went. But this time it didn't work.

The man only repeated, "He wouldn't see nobody. Them's his orders."

In desperation she asked, "Is Bill Monahan around?"

"No. He went down to the city."

She took a bill from her purse, folded it and offered it to him. "Please," she said and smiled.

That did it. The man said, "Okay. It ain't no skin off my nose. The gym's that long building at the back."

When she reached the place and entered the barnlike room, she had to hold her breath. The place was reeking with the combined odors of tobacco smoke, sweat, and liniment. Over at one side were a couple of boxing rings, and men occupied all the chairs in the rows surrounding them. There were no women present. Two men were in each ring, boxing. At one end of the room three or four men were prancing about, punching at the air. A couple of men were jumping rope.

In a far corner a man was working with a punching bag. Joe!

All of a sudden there was a dead silence and to a man they were all looking at the woman who had dared to enter their sanctum. She felt her face flame, and wanted only to turn and run. But Diane Courtney didn't run away from things.

Then Joe said, "Okay, you mugs. Didn't you ever see a girl before?"

## VI



THE men in the gymnasium grinned and returned to whatever they'd been doing when Diane had come in. She waited for Joe to come over to her, but he didn't. So she had to go to him. When

she reached him she said:

"I had to come, Joe. I owe you an apology for what happened in my home yesterday."

"No, you don't," he said. "I shouldn't have socked him."

"You must have had good cause," she said defensively.

Joe shrugged. "I shouldn't have gone to your party in the first place."

"Please don't say that, Joe!" Her voice was trembling even more than her knees.

He shrugged again and punched his two big leather gloves together. "Let's forget it, shall we?" he asked.

"I can't, Joe!" Diane said pitifully. "I wanted so much for you to enjoy yourself at my party, wanted you to know my friends. And then Kurt had to spoil it all!"

"I shouldn't have hit him," Joe said once more, looking down at his gloves.

"You wouldn't have done it if he hadn't provoked you," she said. Then she asked, "Joe, do you know anything about Kurt? I mean when he was a little boy?"

Joe looked up at her, rather surprised. "Why do you ask that?"

"Because—well, I was wondering. He's giving Lisa a hard time, and I'm sure it's more just because she used to live on First Avenue than anything else. I was just wondering."

Joe began punching his gloves together again. "Yeah," he said. "I do know something about the guy. Nothing against him, but—well, when Lisa married him, my father looked him up.



Lisa's folks never paid much attention to her, and my folks kind of felt sorry for her. So Dad asked around about the Nicolses, and it seems Kurt's father started in as a bus boy when he first came over from Europe, then he got to be a waiter. Then he got his own restaurant. He went down to Texas one time and struck it rich in oil. Then he began building up the chain of hotels he has now. Their name isn't Nicols—it's a long Polish name. And Kurt's first name is whatever they call John in Polish. But none of that is anything against him."

Diane said, "I know. But maybe it's because Kurt didn't always have things the way he has them now that he can't bear to think that Lisa also was poor when she was a kid."

"That ought to bring them closer together," Joe said thoughtfully.

"Yes, it should," Diane agreed. "But everyone reacts differently to the same things."

Joe didn't answer, and she could tell by his uneasiness that he wanted her to go. She said, "Dad and I will be rooting for you Wednesday night."

"I wish you wouldn't come to the fight," Joe said.

"Why?"

He shrugged. "I just wish you wouldn't."

"But I want to."

He looked her directly in the eyes. "You always get what you want, don't you?"

She flushed. "Mostly," she admitted. "I suppose you'd call me a spoiled brat?"

He smiled a little. "Something like that." Then he added quickly, "No, not exactly. You've just had it easy, that's all. It isn't your fault."

His face was close to hers now. And how she wanted to stand on tiptoe and kiss him! But she just said, "I won't come to the fight if you don't want me to, Joe."

He backed away from her as if he could read her thoughts. "I can't stop you," he said. "If you buy a seat, you have a right to sit in it."

"But you don't want me there?"

His eyes met hers again. "No," he said.

She knew there was no use arguing with him so she sighed, "Okay, Joe. I wish things hadn't turned out—the way they have for us."

He swung around and began hitting the punching bag with a rhythmic punch that gave off the staccato sound of a machine-gun, and she hurried across the gym, accompanied by wolf whistles and wise cracks, until Joe yelled:

"Shut up! The bunch of you!"

Mr. Courtney had managed to get two ringside seats to the fight, and Diane didn't like to refuse to go with him. But almost up to the minute before she was to take the train to meet him in the city she was undecided whether or not to go. When she'd told her father Joe didn't want her there he'd said, "Well, it's up to you. I'm going anyway. If you want the extra ticket you're welcome to it."

Then, at the last minute she just had to go, whether Joe wanted her to go or not. She had to be there to see him win! Because of course he would win.

But by the time she and her father had finished dinner at Jack Dempsey's, she was so nervous she said, "Dad, I can't go. I just can't! I'll go to a movie, or go home."

She had dressed inconspicuously for the fight, in a plain black suit and white blouse. A two-skin baum marten scarf lay over her shoulders. Her wavy hair was shiny black beneath the small black velvet beret perched on the side of her head.

Her father took out his wallet and gave her one of the tickets. "Just in case you change your mind later," he said. "But I think I'll go on now. I want to see the preliminaries, too."

When he left her, she went to a movie on Broadway, but she couldn't keep her mind on the screen. She stood it until ten-fifteen, then left. She walked across Broadway until she came to a cocktail lounge where a television set was tuned



to the fights. Diane took a table in one corner from which she could see the screen. She ordered a highball, but didn't touch it when it was served.

Everybody in the place was watching the screen and commenting on the fight. Joe, she was shocked to see, wasn't doing too well. The Kid seemed to be pummeling him groggy. With each blow, Diane felt as if it were her heart taking it.

She heard one of the bartenders say, shaking his head, "Something's wrong with Joe tonight. Never saw him take a licking like this before."

Once when the television camera was panned around the crowd Diane caught sight of her father. His seat was near the ring, and the empty one beside him seemed to be the only one in the place unoccupied. A couple of times she saw Joe glance in the direction of that empty seat, then look quickly away. Could it be that he was upset because she *wasn't* there, even though he'd told her he didn't want her to come?

Suddenly Diane knew she had to sit in that empty seat. Quickly she paid her tab and hurried out to the street. Hailing a passing taxi she said:

"Madison Square Garden, please. And make it as fast as you can, without killing us or getting us arrested."

The driver grinned. "Okay, lady." He started off, taking her instructions so literally she had to hang on to the window strap to keep on the seat. The driver asked, "Interested in the fight?" His radio was tuned in to the fight.

"Oh, yes!" she said.

"Looks bad for Joe tonight," he said. "Wonder if he's throwing the fight? I wouldn't have believed he'd do it. But you never can tell about them guys."

"Don't say that about Joe Daniels!" she cried. "He wouldn't ever do such a thing. Maybe he's sick?"

"Maybe," the taxi man agreed reluctantly.

"Maybe he's got something on his mind that's worrying him," she suggested tentatively.

"Maybe," the driver repeated. "But if he's sick or worried he should have stayed home. I got money on him and I don't want to lose it."

When they stopped in front of the Garden, Diane got out and paid double what the meter registered. "You won't lose your money," she told the man. "If you do, I'll make good. Here's my card." She gave him one of her business cards and hurried into the building.

When she slid into the seat beside her father, the bell had rung for the finish of a round. Joe looked terrible, but there wasn't a scratch on the Kid who lumbered over to his corner of the ring and sank down on the stool. He looked like Jack the Giant Killer to Diane.

Joe let Bill wash his face with a big sponge and nodded to something Bill was saying to him, but he didn't seem to be particularly interested.

Diane's father said, "Maybe you shouldn't have come, after all. Joe is taking rather a beating."

Unable to speak because of a big lump in her throat, she sat there tense, waiting for Joe to glance her way. But it wasn't until the bell rang to start the next round that he did. Just as he got to his feet he glanced toward what had been an empty seat. When he saw it wasn't empty any more, he walked to the center of the ring to meet the Kid. And maybe she was imagining it, Diane thought, but he seemed suddenly to have regained his old assurance. He squared his broad, muscular shoulders, then crouched to meet his opponent.

Before the Kid got his bearings, for he was lulled into the belief that Joe was going to be an easy mark tonight, Joe threw a fine right that got home with such force the Kid was half stunned. Joe followed with a left hook, then with a right to the head, a hooked left again. He backed the Kid over the ropes and let him have it.

The crowd went wild! Diane screamed herself hoarse. Her father was as excited as she was. And when the Kid eventually slid to the floor and lay there



on his side, while the referee counted to ten the Garden was a madhouse.

Diane stopped screaming then and began to cry, as the referee held up Joe's arm and yelled:

"The winner! Joe Daniels!"

When at last Diane and her father got out to the street she asked, "Can't we go around to see him?"

He said, "I doubt if they'll let anyone see him. But we can try."

They went around the side entrance and pushed their way through massed newspaper men and photographers. When they knocked on the door to Joe's dressing room, it opened a crack and Bill's face appeared. It was wearing a happy grin. But when he saw Diane the grin disappeared.

He said, "He can't see anyone," and slammed the door.

Diane pounded on it and Bill opened it again just enough to slide out, closing it behind him.

"Look!" he said. "He doesn't want to see nobody." He glared at Diane. "Particularly *you*! So get out of here and leave him alone. He almost lost the fight, and if he had, it would have been *your* fault."

"But he didn't lose!" Diane reminded him, with what voice she had left. "And he began to get better when he saw I was there."

Bill grunted. "Stop kidding yourself, girlie," he said. "He *couldn't* lose a fight, if he *tried*." He went in and slammed the door in their faces.

Her father put an arm around her and guided her through the crowd. Luckily none of the reporters recognized her. . . .

THE morning papers weren't too kind to Joe, and the fight experts suggested he needed more training before he met the slugger, even though he'd won the fight last night. Diane wondered how Joe would take that.

She thought maybe he'd call her. But he didn't. She called the camp to congratulate him, but of course they said

he wasn't there any more, and they didn't know where he was.

Finally she called Lisa and asked her if she knew where Joe and his folks lived on the Island.

Lisa said, "Yes, I do. But he'd be mad at me if I told."

"Please, Lisa!" Diane pleaded. "I've just got to see him. Maybe I haven't any pride, but I can't help it."

Instantly sympathetic, Lisa said, "Gee, honey, you've really got it bad, haven't you?"

Diane said mournfully, "I'm afraid I have."

"That's a shame," Lisa said. "Because Joe's such a funny kid. Even if he liked you he'd run away because he'd figure you were too good for him."

"That's what I'm afraid of," Diane said. "And that's silly!"

"Maybe not," Lisa said. "I wish I'd had sense enough to run away from Kurt."

"No, you don't," Diane told her flatly.

"Yes, I do!" Lisa insisted and began to cry. "He's leaving me, Diane," she said, her voice shaky with suppressed sobs. "He's upstairs packing right now."

"Oh, Lisa!" Diane cried. "That's terrible!"

"I'll just die!" Lisa sobbed.

Diane didn't know what to say. If she could only help! Then she remembered what Joe had told her about the Nicols family. Maybe if Kurt knew the secret was out, he might come down off his high horse.

She said, "Hold everything. I'm coming right over."

When she stopped her car before the house, Kurt was just coming out the front door with two suitcases in his hands. She jumped from her car and ran to meet him. "Kurt," she said breathlessly. "I have to talk to you."

He tried to push past her. "I haven't time now, Diane—sorry," he said.

She grabbed his arm and held on to him. "Kurt, please put the bags down and come back into the house with me."

"Oh, no!" he said. "Lisa and I have



had our last fight. I'm through! I'll never set foot in that house again."

"Look, Kurt," Diane pleaded. "If you hadn't tangled with Joe Daniels at my party, I wouldn't feel this was any of my business. But now I do."

"What's the party got to do with it?" Kurt asked sullenly.

"Just this! Whatever it was you said to Joe to make him hit you, it wasn't true. I don't know what it was, but I can imagine. And it's probably at the bottom of all this difference between you and Lisa."

"You're a nice girl, Diane," Kurt said. "But you've been taken in by Lisa and that Joe Daniels. They're social climbers, both of them! Lisa married me because she knew I had money. And Joe would like to better himself, too. If you're smart you'll keep away from him."

Diane controlled her rising anger outwardly, but inwardly she was seething. Holding Kurt's gaze she said, "Lisa married you because she loved you, Kurt. She still does. Only you're so full of that inferiority complex of yours you can't see past it. And Joe won't have anything to do with me because he thinks I'm out of his class, both socially and financially."

Kurt shrugged. "Then he's got more sense than you have."

"That's what my mother told me, but I don't feel that way. I can't see what difference it makes where any of us grew up. We're all grown up now and it's no sin for anyone to try to better himself, or herself. Lisa has been a good wife to you, Kurt, and she's a nice girl, even if she did grow up on First Avenue. That's nothing against her. Nor against Joe. Some sections of the East Bronx aren't so good, either."

She saw him flinch as if she'd struck him. "What's the East Bronx got to do with it?" he demanded.

"I'll let you figure that one out," she told him. "But if you walk out of here and leave Lisa, you're going to be sorry. You ought to grow up, Kurt, and face

facts. It isn't what we used to be, it's what we are now, and what we make of ourselves in the future that counts."

He looked at her for a long time and gradually she saw a change come over his face. His belligerence seemed to disappear and in its place came humility.

"Thanks, Diane," he finally said, with a long sigh. "I guess I've been needing that for a long while."

He picked up his bags and went back into the house. Diane went back to her car and drove home.

## VII



NEXT morning when Diane hadn't heard from Lisa she called her.

"What did you say to Kurt yesterday?" Lisa asked, the moment she heard Diane's voice.

"Didn't he tell you?"

"No. But he's sure a changed man. He can't do enough for me. It's wonderful!"

"I'm glad," Diane told her. "But if he didn't tell you what I said, then I'd rather not tell you. Just let's leave it that things will be all right from now on. And maybe some day he'll tell you himself. Kurt's like Joe—proud."

Lisa said, "Well, thanks anyway. And I've been thinking, Diane. Maybe Joe wouldn't mind too much if I gave you his address down on the Island."

"Oh?" Diane held her breath.

"It's Freeport." Lisa gave the street address, and added, "The phone is a private number, though. I don't know that."

Diane said, "Thanks a lot, Lisa."

"If you go down, say hello to Mr. and Mrs. Daniels for me," Lisa said. "They're both darlings. Mrs. Daniels taught me how to play the piano, and how to put over a song. And she used to let me practice on her piano."

Diane drove down to Freeport Sun-



day morning. She found the Daniels' house easily enough, a remodeled white clapboard farmhouse. The garden was bright with late fall flowers banked along a white picket fence. She rang the bell and in a moment a big woman with short, curly bleached hair came to the door.

"Yes?" she asked.

It was easy to see she'd been a pretty girl. And it was also easy to see her resemblance to Joe—the same blue eyes, the same pleasant mouth.

Diane said, "I'm Diane Courtney. You don't know me, but I know Joe. Could I talk to you for a few minutes?"

Mrs. Daniels looked her over carefully, hesitated, then said, "Yes, I know who you are. Joe told me. But he isn't here. He went away the day after the fight."

Diane felt the strength leaving her knees. "Oh," she said. "I—I don't suppose you'd let me know where I can find him?"

"I'm afraid I couldn't do that," Mrs. Daniels said. "He's gone away for a rest."

"Did Bill go with him?"

"I believe he did."

"Will he fight again soon?" Diane asked.

"That I wouldn't know," Mrs. Daniels told her. Then she asked, "Won't you come in?"

Diane said, "Thank you, I'd like to."

Mrs. Daniels ushered her into a tastefully furnished living room. In it was a baby grand piano and a large television set. The furniture was covered with a bright chintz and there were good prints on the walls. A silver-framed picture of Joe was on the piano.

They sat on the sofa, Mrs. Daniels sitting on the edge of it as if she didn't intend to stay long.

She said, "Joe felt pretty bad about that fuss up at your house Sunday, Miss Courtney. He told us about it."

"I felt badly about it, too," Diane said. "But it wasn't Joe's fault."

"He wouldn't tell me why he punched

the feller," Mrs. Daniels said. "But he must have had a good reason. Joe's a good boy. He doesn't ever fight, outside of the ring."

"Is there anything I can do?" Diane asked. "I don't want Joe to hate me."

Mrs. Daniels smiled faintly. "Oh, he don't hate you," she said. "But he never goes around with girls. He's only interested in his fighting."

A tall white-haired man came downstairs and paused in the doorway. Mrs. Daniels smiled at him as if she thought he was pretty wonderful.

"We got company, Dad," she said. "This is Miss Courtney. She's the one Joe went to see Sunday." Then she said, "Miss Courtney, this is Joe's father."

As Diane stood up and took a step forward to hold out her hand to the man, for a moment she thought he was going to demand that she leave! "Oh?" was all he said though, taking her hand reluctantly.

He might have been a good-looking man years ago, she thought, but now his face was badly scarred, and his nose had been broken. His ears had been pretty well battered too.

Diane said, "I hope you'll forgive me for bothering you, but I just had to come. My father and I tried to see Joe after the fight Wednesday night but Bill said Joe didn't want to see us. So—well, I wanted him to know I'm glad he won."

Mr. and Mrs. Daniels looked at each other, and Mr. Daniels said, "That doublecrossing, ring-tailed baboon of a Bill Monahan!"

Diane looked from Mr. Daniels to Mrs. Daniels. Mrs. Daniels was nodding.

"Yeah. Joe said he thought Miss Courtney and her father would be around after the fight but Bill told him nobody came but the reporters."

"We better not tell him," Mr. Daniels said. "He'd skin Bill alive."

"Bill's too bossy, anyway," Mrs. Daniels said. "He thinks he owns Joe."



"Well, he don't mean no harm," Mr. Daniels said. "He's just interested in Joe's welfare. His fighting, that is."

Diane wondered if they could hear her heart thumping. How glad she was she'd come down here!

She said, "Will you please tell Joe how glad Dad and I were he won Wednesday night? We're hoping to see him fight Slugger Benson soon."

Mr. Daniels let go of her hand, which he'd been absently holding all this time.

"He don't seem to want the championship no more," he said sadly.

"Oh, but he *must* want it!" Diane cried. "It's what he's spent his life building up to! He just can't let it go now!"

Mr. and Mrs. Daniels looked at each other again, and Diane saw Mr. Daniel's right eyebrow go up questioningly. Then he said, "Yes, he must. He's got to meet Slugger Benson—and lick him!"

There didn't seem to be anything more Diane could say, so she decided she'd better leave.

"Well," she said, "it's been nice meeting you both. You've been kind. And Lisa told me to say hello to both of you for her."

Mrs. Daniels' face brightened. "Oh, you know Lisa? Why, that's right; Joe did say she was at the party."

"You have a right to be proud of your son, Mr. Daniels," Diane told him. "And even if I never see him again, I'm glad I had an opportunity to meet him and know him for a little while." Then, fearing she was going to burst into tears, she hurried from the house. . . .

NEVIN phoned her that evening. "I just want to say good-by," he said. "I'm flying down to Lima tomorrow. I'll be gone two years."

"Lima? For two years? Why?" Diane was shocked at that sudden news.

"Well, Dad has an office down there and he's letting me go down, as a special favor."

"But isn't it rather sudden?"

"Well, yes it is. As sudden as the appearance of that prizefighter was Sunday afternoon."

She said, "Oh."

"I saw the way you two looked at each other," Nevin said. "You never looked at me that way."

She didn't know what to say for the moment, so after a long silence Nevin asked, "I don't suppose you'd come down to Lima with me?"

"I couldn't, Nevin."

"I still love you, Diane," Nevin said. "And I'd be willing to wait."

"You're sweet, Nevin," she told him. "And I hope you have lots of luck—and good times, down in Lima. But don't wait for me, because . . . Well—"

"Okay, Diane," he said. "I understand. Then I guess this is good-by."

"Good-by Nevin," she said.

After she'd cradled the phone she cried a little, but the tears were for the loss of an old friend, not for the loss of a sweetheart.

For days, weeks, even months, she watched the sports pages for news of Joe, but the only mention ever made of him was the fact that he had disappeared and no one knew where he was. Or if they did, they wouldn't tell. There were speculations as to whether he'd gone into seclusion to train for a possible meeting with Slugger Benson, or whether he'd given up the ring altogether.

Fall faded into winter and still no one could find Joe. Diane worked night and day at her decorating business to keep from remembering Joe's blue eyes, Joe's smile, the feel of Joe's strong arm beneath her fingers, the way Joe had looked in the ring, the night he had fought the Kid.

She saw Joe's face in every piece of drapery material. She saw Joe's face in all her dreams. She took to watching the fights on television with her father, hoping that some night she'd see Joe.

But she never did.



Neither her mother nor her father ever mentioned him to her, but sometimes when she'd been sitting with them without saying a word for a long time, she'd notice them exchanging glances.

The only one she could talk to about Joe was Lisa. Lisa understood. She said, "Honey, I do wish you and Joe could get together. You'd be so good for him."

But Diane would sigh whenever his name was mentioned and say, "Well, you can't force yourself to love somebody. I know. I tried to force myself to love Nevin."

She didn't go out socially until after the holidays. Then Lisa and Kurt invited her to the Stork Club one Saturday evening. It was sort of a birthday celebration for Lisa, Kurt said. And he had a friend he wanted Diane to meet.

They'd drive to the city.

**A**T FIRST Diane didn't want to go, but they insisted. And her mother said, "I think you should go. You're working too hard. There's no use your mooning around all the rest of your life just because—"

So she went. She even bought something new to wear—a black velvet dinner suit with an ermine collar. She tied her hair back with a narrow black velvet ribbon.

At the Stork she was seated with her back toward the door, so she didn't see the man when he came in, didn't know he was standing behind her, until Kurt smiled and said:

"Diane, I'd like you to meet a very good friend of mine and Lisa's."

He was looking over her head at someone and she turned and looked up.

Then she was afraid she'd faint. The man standing behind her was Joe! Joe, deeply tanned and looking wonderful in a tux.

He smiled and said, "Hi."

She drew in a breath and it took her several moments before she could

say, "Joe!" Then the word was practically a whisper.

She held out her hand to him and he came around beside her and took it. Which was a good thing, because her hand and arm were shaking so she looked as if she were waving to somebody.

His clasp was firm, warm and thrilling, and sent a wave of vibrations shooting up her arm to her heart.

She looked over at Kurt. "How did you find him?" she asked.

Kurt smiled. "Boys who grew up in the East Bronx have ways of finding out about things," he said. "It's sort of a grapevine."

He and Lisa exchanged a loving, smiling glance, and clasped hands beneath the table.

Diane looked up at Joe again. "Oh Joe!" she said tremulously. "I was afraid I'd never see you again. But I don't understand. You've been away so long. Why did you come tonight?"

He grinned. "I wanted to see how you looked when you were all dressed up," he said, leaned over and kissed her. Then he sat down beside her. "Also, Bill thought it would be a good idea for me to be seen around town tonight, because tomorrow it's going to leak out that I'm going to fight Slugger Benson in March."

**D**IANE disregarded the happy tears that were running down her cheeks. "And after that?" she asked.

He reached for her hand again. "Not, *after* that," he said. "*Before* it. I'm going to need you every step of the way, from now on, honey. I found out that nothing was any good without you."

"Oh Joe!" she said again, but this time with a contented sigh. "Does Bill know?"

He chuckled. "Yeah. He said I might as well be married as the way I've been lately."

All of them laughed, and Kurt ordered vintage champagne. ♥ ♥ ♥



# STRICTLY PERSONAL

By HELEN HIBBARD DAU

*They made a lovely couple,  
and both of them were engaged—  
but not to each other!*

**A** GATHA sat in exactly the same spot where she had been sitting two months before. And Miss Hopkins, of the employment agency, sat at her desk wearing the same beige shirt-waist dress, or one almost exactly like it, and she was warning her again.

"It is only fair to tell you, Miss Dalton," she was saying, "that Mr. Barrow is most exacting. He wants an expert secretary, and is particular about everything being



"You can't do this to me!" he said indignantly



done on the dot. That's why he is willing to pay such a high salary." She sighed.

"And that's exactly what I'm looking for," Agatha said firmly. "Great gobs of dull, on-the-dot routine. My nerves are screeching for it after Mr. Hartley."

"Mr. Hartley—" Miss Hopkins sighed again—"and Mr. Barrow are my biggest problems."

The warning, however, had been different in Jeff Hartley's case. "He's a publicity agent," Miss Hopkins had said then. "I'm afraid the job is a little hectic. No system at all. That's why he is willing to pay such a high salary."

And Agatha had said then, "Just what I want. Good money and a little excitement. I'm so fed up on dull routine I could scream."

But the moment Jeff Hartley's receptionist had shown her into his office and asked her to wait, Agatha realized that things were a lot more hectic than she had bargained for. The cords of the four telephones on Mr. Hartley's desk were hopelessly tangled. She doubted if any phone was in the right cradle. A mess of mail on the desk looked as if it had been stirred up with a spoon. The filing cabinets were so stuffed they wouldn't close. The typewriter on a smaller desk to one side of the room was a battered wreck.

In that one swift glance she decided the job was not for her. It would take six secretaries a week to straighten things out.

But it was only fair to wait and tell Mr. Hartley so.

She had to remove a stack of magazines from a chair before she could sit down, and had to hunt for an ashtray under the letters on the desk before she dared light a cigarette.

Her appointment with Jeff Hartley had been for ten, and at eleven she was still waiting. No longer to say politely that she didn't want the job, but to tell him what she thought of having to wait an hour.

JUST before noon, her mouth set grimly, she had risen, put out her last cigarette, and started to draw on her gloves.

At that moment Jeff had burst into the room as if he had been shot out of something. He slammed the door behind him, then came to an abrupt halt and stared at her.

Agatha stared back, and had a little difficulty in getting her breath. It hit her just like that. And it must have hit her on the head because obviously she had suddenly gone mad. It couldn't happen like that! It just wasn't possible to have a wiry, not overly handsome redhead with keen gray eyes and a humorous twist to his wide mouth burst in, and just like that suddenly be in love with him.

Agatha had sat down again. She'd had to. Her knees had not been behaving the way knees well-regulated should. And she had begun to pull off her gloves.

"Where is she?" he had demanded. "The secretary?"

"I am the secretary," she had said calmly.

"Now see here," he'd said irritably, "I am a busy man and I haven't any time to waste. I am up to my neck, and I can't take on any more publicity. I don't care how beautiful you are, and whether you can recite Shakespeare backwards while walking on the ceiling."

"I am the secretary," Agatha had repeated, and considering the turmoil inside of her it had been a miracle that her voice hadn't been a nervous squeak.

"No kidding!" His astonished eyes, accepting the truth, had taken in her slim, gently rounded figure in the smart black suit, her black velvet beret draped to one side on the back of her short dark hair, her wide dark eyes, her soft flexible mouth. "You're photogenic," he'd announced. "That jaw line—it's a honey. That little tilt to your nose—perfect. But you're a secretary." He'd said that almost grudgingly.



"Take a letter."

"But you haven't interviewed me," she'd pointed out. "And I haven't said I'd take the job."

"Oh? Well—" He had strode over to his desk and sat down. "Will you?"

"Yes."

"Then take a letter, please."

"Don't you want to see my credentials?"

"No!" He'd slapped the desk with his hand. "You're wasting my time! Will you take a letter, or won't you?"

"I will. If that typewriter will hold up under a light touch."

"Buy a new one." He had plunged straight in, "Dear Mr. Sanders, I am not going to mince words in telling you exactly what I think—"

She had been supposed to keep all this in her head while she'd hunted for a shorthand pad and pencil.

That had been the beginning. And the continuation. Working for Jeff Hartley had not been just hectic. It had been wild. There hadn't been anything about it that faintly resembled order or routine or regular working hours. Noon was the earliest Jeff ever got to the office, no matter how many early appointments he had made, and theatre time was about the earliest he ever left.

He had given her unexpected days off, but frequently insisted on working Sundays. He would call her at one or two in the morning, wanting her to look up some information for him because he'd had a sudden inspiration. And when she'd arrived at the office, by taxi, she would find the contents of the files over which she had slaved for hours spilled all over the floor.

She hadn't been fooled by his first appraisal of her charms. They had been strictly professional. Not a hint of anything personal in them. And perversely that had made her set about pulling every trick in the books to attract his attention—in a personal way.

All the authorities agreed a girl should listen to a man. This had been the hardest of all for Agatha. Because

when Jeff had wanted anyone to listen to him he'd wanted to talk about Sylvia Garth. Sylvia was a singer. She was a lusciously beautiful blonde! She had a husky, sexy singing voice and she was temperamental. Jeff was in love with her.

AT THE end of two months, Agatha had been a wreck. No girl could have stuck out the job unless she were in love with him and, in Agatha's case, being in love with him with no response whatsoever had only added to the strain. She had given up hope the day he'd told her he was flying to Hollywood. Sylvia had been in Hollywood.

"This time she is going to marry me!" he'd said emphatically.

"When are you leaving?" Agatha had asked, her heart 'way down in her shoes.

"Next week."

"Good. That will give you time to find a new secretary."

"A new secretary?" He had stared at her, outraged.

"I'm leaving."

"You can't do this to me! Why, you're the only secretary I ever had who—who—"

"I'm leaving."

He had begged her. He had pleaded brokenly. He had hugged her. He had kissed her. He had said his life wouldn't be worth living.

It had all been impersonal.

But Agatha had been firm. She hadn't been happy about it because she was in love with him. But it was crazy to be in love with him. A few days of normal peace and quiet and she would come to her senses—and forget him.

She'd attempted to break in a new secretary for him, a job at which she had no hopes of success, and then she'd left. After two days of what had been supposed to be rest and had not been because of her misery over Jeff, she had gone to see Miss Hopkins. Now she had an appointment for an interview with Mr. Barrow.



John Barrow's office, she found, was so neat and orderly it looked like a handsome stage set before the prop man had mussed it up to make it look used. It didn't look used at all. It was hard to believe anyone had ever done a day's work in it.

John Barrow was a young man, dark and handsome, and immaculately pressed and tailored. His manner was businesslike and pleasantly polite. He went over her credentials thoroughly, and found them satisfactory.

"These are quite promising, Miss Dalton," was the way he put it. "It seems you are an especially competent secretary. I am also firm about promptness. It is most important in an advertising office, such as this, where artists and copywriters are inclined to think that any sort of routine is incompatible with inspiration. Pure nonsense, of course. I insist that work be turned in at the time it is promised. My clients can always count on my word. When can you begin work?"

"Any time at all, Mr. Barrow."

"Let's make it nine in the morning. That will give me this afternoon to look up your references. Just routine, of course." He sat back in his chair and looked at her. "We have a well-knit schedule, Miss Dalton. At nine, we will take care of any mail that needs my attention. At ten, I have conferences with artists. At eleven, copywriters. At twelve, you will go to lunch. At one, when I leave, you will take care of any mail that does not need my attention. Between four and five, we take care of any unexpected business that turns up during the day. That will give you a rough idea."

"Yes, Mr. Barrow."

He rose and smiled, and shook hands with her. "I am sure we will get along nicely. You seem to be exactly the type of girl for whom I have been looking."

Agatha went home and did a little work around her small, neat apartment. Then she flopped on the living room sofa.

It shouldn't be hard, getting onto Mr. Barrow's schedule. And what a relief, after working for Jeff! No more working until all hours and never getting home until after nine. No more hectic phone calls in the middle of the night. Regular sleep and regular meals. She could make dates for dinner and the theatre and week-ends. She could be normal again. She could forget all about Jeff.

SHE wondered how his marriage to Sylvia would turn out. It couldn't last, of course. Sylvia's warmth and excitement were all for show. Underneath, she was cold and selfish and calculating, while Jeff was warm, decent, straight-thinking and generous to a fault. But any girl would have to be hard and fast in love with him to put up with his disregard for the accepted time and shape of a day.

Well, by the time he had married Sylvia and got over her, Agatha wouldn't want him anyway. And he would have forgotten he ever had a secretary named Agatha.

She began to feel restless. She got up, dressed, and went out to do some shopping. She stayed out for dinner and a movie. The movie bored her. It was hard to settle down after having lived in such excitement for two months.

When she let herself into her apartment the phone was ringing furiously. She dropped her things on a chair and rushed to answer it.

Jeff's voice exploded at her. "Where the heck have you been?"

"I've been out," she informed him.

Her pulses were jumping crazily. It was maddening. In two days she should have calmed down about him—at least, a little.

"Where's the stuff on Jimmy Clapp?" he wanted to know. "I need it. I've got an idea."

"Just look in the files under C."

"I did. I've looked *every* place. You had no business to leave my office in



this condition!"

Agatha gasped. "I left your office in perfect condition!" she said coldly. "I suggest you call your new secretary."

"She doesn't answer. She's no good, anyway. She's in love and a girl in love is no darned good in any office."

Unless she's in love with you, thought Agatha bitterly.

"Now look, Agatha," he said, and his tone was pleading. "Be a good kid and hop a cab and come down here. This is important."

"My sleep is important, too. I'm beginning a new job tomorrow."

There was silence, then Jeff groaned, "You would get one right away. Look—I'll double what he's paying you. I'll buy you sables. You'd look swell in sables."

"I know it," she said calmly. "But no, thank you."

"Please come down!" he begged. "Just this once?"

"Just this *once* is right," she said firmly. "I'll be there in ten minutes."

All the way down in the cab she kept telling herself she was a dope, an imbecile, a moron.

When she walked into his office he greeted her with a big hug. Strictly impersonal.

"Gosh!" he said, grinning at her. "Just seeing you walk in that door, everything eases up inside of me."

That was not the effect it had on her. Just seeing him, and everything went crazy inside her. She remembered to ask him a question she had forgotten on the phone.

"How come you're not in Hollywood?"

"How could I leave my affairs in this condition?" He waved around the room. "Suppose I had to call in for information? Who'd get it for me?"

Agatha didn't answer. She looked toward the files. About one-fourth of what should have been in them was on the floor. She went to work and in about ten minutes she had everything back, and she handed him the file on Jimmy Clapp.

"Agatha, you're wonderful!" he said.

"I think so, too. Good night."

"Hey, you're not leaving! Sit down and have a cigarette. Tell me about your new job."

"It won't last long enough to be worth talking about, unless I get some sleep. Besides, when you get an idea you usually want to get right at it. So I'll leave you to Jimmy Clapp."

She went out, leaving Jeff staring after her, bewildered and annoyed. . . .

THE first day with Mr. Barrow went smoothly. Agatha was just about as competent a secretary as anyone could want, and although she had never worked before with her eye on a clock as much as she had to now, it was better than having no regard for a clock at all.

John Barrow was pleasant and considerate. What's more, she had a strong hunch that he liked her—and it wasn't strictly impersonal. A girl can sense a thing like that.

When she left promptly at five the evening stretched dully before her. She realized she was going to have to call her old friends and let them know she was free to accept social engagements again. There were some married couples who gave parties occasionally. There was Harry who liked to dance, and took her to night clubs. Bart, who wasn't much on dancing, but who loved to discover new restaurants. And Don, who was a good conversationalist, if you were in the mood to sit around and talk.

Somehow though, the thought of them failed to arouse any enthusiasm. She knew why all right. She wanted to be with Jeff. Nothing else was any good to her and it was all wrong. She had to get over him.

When she got home she didn't call anyone. She decided it would be a good idea to get plenty of rest until she had the new job down pat. She fixed herself something to eat, read a little and watched television a little, but all the



time she was half listening for the telephone. It would be just like Jeff to be hunting for something in the files again.

But he didn't call. Perhaps the new secretary was working out. Or perhaps he had gone to Hollywood—and Sylvia. The thought was a sharp pain in Agatha's heart.

It wouldn't do, she told herself. It wouldn't do at all. It probably took as much time to get over being in love as it took to fall in love with someone else. So the wise thing to do would be to fall in love—quick.

Over a week later she still hadn't heard from Jeff. There was no reason to expect him to call. She had been his secretary and the relationship was over. Period. She was beginning to feel a little numb about the whole thing. Lost and empty and numb. She was glad to be working for John Barrow. When the clock had to be watched every minute it wouldn't do to let the mind wander.

One morning John Barrow said to her, "Miss Dalton, I know it is short notice, but I have two tickets for a benefit performance tomorrow night and I was wondering if you would have dinner with me and go to the benefit?" Before she could answer he cleared his throat and hurried on, "As a rule I don't approve of people who work in the same office having social contacts outside, but in your case it is different."

"In my case?" Agatha asked carefully.

John Barrow was a forthright young man. He met her eyes levelly. "I—have never before met a girl I so much wanted to take out. It seems to outweigh other things."

"Oh." Agatha looked at him a moment, then she smiled. "I'd be glad to go, Mr. Barrow."

"Good. I'll call for you at seven."

He was on the dot of seven the next evening. Agatha wore a black taffeta dinner dress that was a sheath, a small black velvet hat with a veil, and a fur jacket.

John Barrow told her she looked

lovely. He wasn't as formal as he was in the office. He was relaxed and friendly.

He had reserved a table at a small restaurant near the theatre. When he ordered cocktails, he also ordered dinner and told the waiter they had to be out of there by eight-fifteen—sharp.

The dinner was excellent. Their conversation wandered easily from business to books and plays, and what they had studied in college.

AGATHA enjoyed the benefit. It was an all star cast and they had good seats. When he took her home she asked him up for a nightcap.

"I make a habit of getting to bed at one on week nights," he said. "But I guess I can take half an hour and still make it."

Agatha mixed highballs and carried them into the living room. John was just standing there, looking around.

"I like your apartment," he said. "It suits you. Attractive. Neat and orderly."

It had been cleaning day and Agatha had a good cleaning woman, who never so much as left a book or magazine out of place. Usually Agatha rearranged things after her to make the place look more friendly and lived in, but today she hadn't had time.

They discussed the benefit for a few minutes, then John said, "Agatha—" during dinner they had decided upon first names for outside of the office—"I want you to think about marrying me."

Agatha just gasped and stared at him.

"I know it is sudden," he said. "I am rushing the question, so as not to have to rush the plans. I am going abroad in about three months and it would be a perfect trip for a honeymoon. And the next three months would give us plenty of time to find an apartment and furnish it—and make all the other necessary arrangements."

Agatha was annoyed. She lit a cigarette and said, "For heaven's sake,



John! It sounds like a business deal. You haven't even said you loved me. You haven't—"

"Of course I love you. I would hardly have proposed if I didn't, would I?"

"I suppose not. Just the same—"

"I don't expect you to decide this minute. But I'd like your answer as soon as possible. There's an apartment I'd like you to see. I think it's just what we'd want, and they won't hold it more than a week. You think it over." He smiled at her. "And please say yes. I'm not the demonstrative type, but I do love you, Agatha. I must be going now."

They got up. John said, "I haven't kissed you, either."

She let him take her into his arms and kiss her. It wasn't bad, being kissed by John Barrow. She felt no particular thrill, but his kiss was warm and eager and at least it proved that he had normal masculine emotions. It made her feel more inclined to think over his proposal.

When he had gone she snapped on the radio for music. She lit a cigarette and moved restlessly around the room. The whole thing had left her feeling inadequate and unsatisfied mentally and emotionally.

Yet wouldn't it be the sensible thing, to marry John? He was nice. She liked him. She could depend on him. These days everybody harped about security being the main thing in life. Certainly no one could be more secure than John. Perhaps he would get over some of his stiffness and some of his obsession for clock-watching. A person had to give a little in marriage.

A voice suddenly penetrated Agatha's thoughts. She drew in her breath sharply and stared at the radio. The disc jockey was saying:

"Well, what'd you know? Sylvia Garth has come right out at last and said she is going to marry Jeff Hartley. About time she made up her mind. Jeff's a good guy, and one of our top publicity men. He sure did a good job

for Sylvia. Two years ago she was just another pretty girl singing in a little—"

Agatha strode across the room and snapped off the radio. Her face was white. Well, there it was—definite at last. Funny, when she had *known* it was going to be like that, that she should suddenly feel so helplessly all to pieces.

There was only one way to pick up those pieces, to have something to hang on to, to go on with. In that instant she made up her mind to marry John Barrow. It was an abrupt decision, but there was no use going on stewing. John would make a good husband. . . .

WHEN she got to the office in the morning she gave him her answer. He took her in his arms and told her she had made him the happiest man in the world. He even forgot the morning mail for ten minutes, which showed he was already giving a little.

John took her to dinner that night and afterward they went back to her apartment and made plans. John's plans weren't any happy, crazy dreams. They were neat and practical and could be listed in a little notebook.

He left at eleven, and he had scarcely gone when the phone was ringing. Her heart jumped and she began to shake. No one but Jeff ever called her at that hour.

When she lifted the phone, his voice demanded crossly, "What kind of a human being are you? All we went through for two whole months, and you wouldn't even come near me when I was on my death bed in the hospital."

"The hospital!" she gasped.

"I had my appendix out. Don't you read the columns? They all sank so low as to mention it. And no flowers from you. No messages. Not even so much as a get-well-quick greeting card from a drug store."

"Jeff, I didn't know! Are you all right now? Are you home?"

"Yes, I'm home. And I am a lonely, desolate man. Come on over and cheer



me up?"

"At this hour? I have to go to work tomorrow. Besides—" She hesitated and then went on firmly, "I heard about you and Sylvia. Congratulations."

"Thanks. But what's that got to do with your coming over? It doesn't change anything between you and me. I'm not going to suddenly start chasing you around the furniture. Besides I'm starving. Bring me in some food."

"If you're strong enough to dial my number, you're strong enough to order food."

"All right, *don't* come over. I'll come over there. I'm just about strong enough to make it and then I'll collapse on your floor and you'll have to keep me overnight."

"You're a fraud," she told him. "I'll bring you some food, ridiculous as I know it is, and I'll stay just long enough to give you a piece of my mind."

She slammed up the phone. You are insane, she told herself. He's just bored and he can't think of anyone else to call, so you go running like a little ninny. What are you trying to do to yourself? And please remember that he is engaged and that you are, too. What would John think of this?

She arrived at his apartment with a big bag from the delicatessen. She had been there once before with some papers for him to sign.

When he opened the door she noted that he looked fine, and told him so.

"I'm weak inside," he said, taking the bag from her. "It's these modern methods of getting you up and around in a hurry. All wrong. I should be flat on my back."

She eyed him suspiciously. "Are you sure you've been sick at all?"

He looked hurt. "Do I have to show you my—"

"Never mind!" she interrupted sharply.

There were two highballs ready on the coffee table.

"I thought we'd have a drink," he said. "Have to work up an appetite.

You know after being in the hospital—"

"After a big dinner you mean! "You're not fooling me for one minute!"

"Don't be mad, Agatha. I wanted to see you."

They sat down on the couch and she picked up one of the highballs.

"What did you want to see me about?" she asked.

"I didn't want to see you *about* anything. I just wanted to see you. I didn't bother to figure out why."

"Where's Sylvia?"

"In Hollywood. I haven't seen her. She called me at the hospital to tell me she'd made up her mind. How's the new job? I wish you'd come back to me. Maybe that's why I wanted to see you. Will you?"

SHE shook her head. "No. The new job is wonderful, and my new boss is wonderful. By the way—" she turned to smile at him—"we might drink to this occasion. I got engaged to him today. So I'm engaged, too."

Jeff stared at her. His face was suddenly a little strained. "You're not kidding, Agatha?"

She shook her head. "Aren't you glad, Jeff?"

He considered for a moment. "No," he decided. "I can't seem to work up the least bit of enthusiasm for the idea. What's he like?"

"Well, his name is John Barrow—"

Jeff frowned. "Not the advertising man?"

"Do you know him?"

"Sure. Had some business with him once. He's smart. Hasn't any more imagination than a plate of pea soup but he's shrewd about the kind of people he gets to work for him. And he pays them about twice as much as anyone in the business. So he gets top artists and top copywriters and top idea men." Jeff paused and his eyes searched her face. "And it seems he's picked himself a top girl. I couldn't do business with him. We didn't get along. But fundamentally he's a nice guy, Agatha.



He'll be good to you. And of course you love him."

It wasn't a question. It was a statement of accepted fact. Agatha didn't say anything. She looked at him and he suddenly seemed tired. Perhaps he hadn't been fooling about not feeling too strong.

"I'd better go, Jeff," she said quietly. "You're tired, and so am I."

He drank part of his drink, put the glass down and got up. "Just as you say, Agatha."

He helped her on with her fur jacket and handed her her gloves and bag. She held out her hand.

"Good-by, Jeff" There was a sick heaviness inside of her.

"Not like that," he said. His mouth twisted into a smile but his eyes were grave. "I won't be at your wedding, so I'll kiss the bride now."

He took her in his arms and held her close and kissed her. It was strictly personal. Not like he had ever kissed her before. Not like anyone had ever kissed her before. Because no one else in the world was Jeff.

When he let her go she was completely shaken. She kept her head turned so that he couldn't see her face, and she mumbled something about having to run. She jerked open the door and hurried into the hall.

Jeff called something after her. She didn't hear what it was. . . .

The next day she knew she had to keep moving hard and fast. She couldn't give herself a minute to think. It was Friday and John suggested they skip having dinner together and get some rest. Saturday they were going to pick out the ring and decide about the apartment and look at furniture.

"I want you to have dinner with me," Agatha said. "I want to cook for you."

He seemed to sense the urgency in her voice. "All right," he agreed slowly. "What time shall I be there?"

"Come straight home with me," she said. She didn't want to be alone. "You can help market and maybe help with

the dinner. We'll be real homey."

John was a reluctant marketer. He was self-conscious in the stores. He seemed relieved when they got to the apartment. Agatha gave up any ideas of having him help with the dinner. She settled him down with a drink and the evening paper.

She was just getting the things ready for dinner when the door bell rang.

"It's probably the laundry," she said. "I'll get it."

**I**T WASN'T the laundry. It was Jeff. The sight of him left her speechless. She just stood there staring at him.

"Hi!" he said cheerfully. "I came to tell you that I lied to you last night. I *will* be at your wedding." He suddenly saw John and he stopped short. "Hello, Barrow," he said at last. "I didn't expect you to be here."

John got to his feet. "Miss Dalton and I are engaged," he said. "It is a perfectly proper place for me to be. I didn't know you were acquainted."

"Agatha worked for me. Didn't she give me as a reference?"

"No, I didn't," Agatha said quickly.

Jeff turned to her. "I also came to tell you that I broke my engagement to Sylvia today and that—" He broke off. "This is a heck of a way to do things," he said. "It wasn't what I planned. I expected to find you alone."

Agatha sat down quickly. There was a dead silence in the room. She was conscious of John's eyes on her.

"Agatha," he demanded sternly, "do you know what this is all about?"

"No," she said faintly. "Not—exactly."

"It's about my being in love with Agatha," Jeff said. "And I don't know whether she knows it or not, but she's in love with me." His voice faltered a little. "I hope and pray she is."

"This is outrageous!" John said angrily.

"Yes," said Jeff. "It shouldn't have happened this way. I meant to tell Agatha alone."



John's eyes were on Agatha. "Is there any truth at all in this? What do you want me to do?"

She met his eyes steadily. "Will you go, please, John? I'm sorry. But I know that's not much good to you. I think I've known all day I couldn't ever marry you. I shouldn't have said I would in the first place."

"May I ask why you suddenly knew this today?"

"Jeff—kissed me last night." Her voice was a whisper. "Before that I thought I could go through with it. Make you happy."

"You were with *me* last night," he reminded her.

"I went to his apartment after you left."

John's face was livid. He strode toward the foyer where his hat and coat were on a chair.

Jeff caught his arm. "If you're thinking what I think you're thinking, I'm going to poke you one!"

John shook off his hand. "I have no intention of giving any of this one more thought for the rest of my life. Needless to say, Agatha—"

She nodded. "I'm fired."

John snatched up his coat and hat and was out the door. Jeff took a step after him.

"Let him go, Jeff," Agatha said. "Don't make matters worse."

He turned to her. "If you're worrying about your job, you're hired." His grin died and he went to her and pulled her to her feet. "I knew, too, when I kissed you last night," he said. "When you left the office I went nuts. I didn't want to go to Hollywood. I didn't want *anything*. But I didn't know why. When I went to the hospital I thought it was because I'd been sick and didn't know it. That that was what was wrong with me. Then Sylvia called and said

she'd marry me and I told her fine and dandy. It was what I wanted, wasn't it? Only it didn't seem to be. I was still restless and miserable. Then last night when I kissed you I knew for sure what was wrong with me. I love *you*, Agatha."

SHE smiled and touched his face. "I knew from the first. But you were in love with Sylvia. And I thought I could marry someone else. I thought I could get something out of life that way. But last night when you kissed me I knew I couldn't do it. I tried all day to get away from making a quick decision. But I knew there wasn't anything in marriage for me to anyone else. Oh, Jeff!"

She put her face against his shoulder and tears slid down her cheeks.

"Don't cry, honey," he pleaded huskily. "Remember, we're together. We're going to be happy."

"That's why I'm crying!" She smiled through the tears.

"Women are nuts," he said gently. His arms tightened around her. "But I'm glad you're one, so I can marry you. We won't have to wait long, Agatha, will we? After all, we've known each other for two months."

"No," she said. "And I'm going right on being your secretary. I like the idea of our working together. And I *know* nobody else could keep you straight in that office!"

"Nobody else could keep me straight any place! It will be swell. I won't have to go off to the office and leave you behind. I can keep you with me always. Oh, Agatha!"

It was too much for words. He held her close, close, and he kissed her very hard.

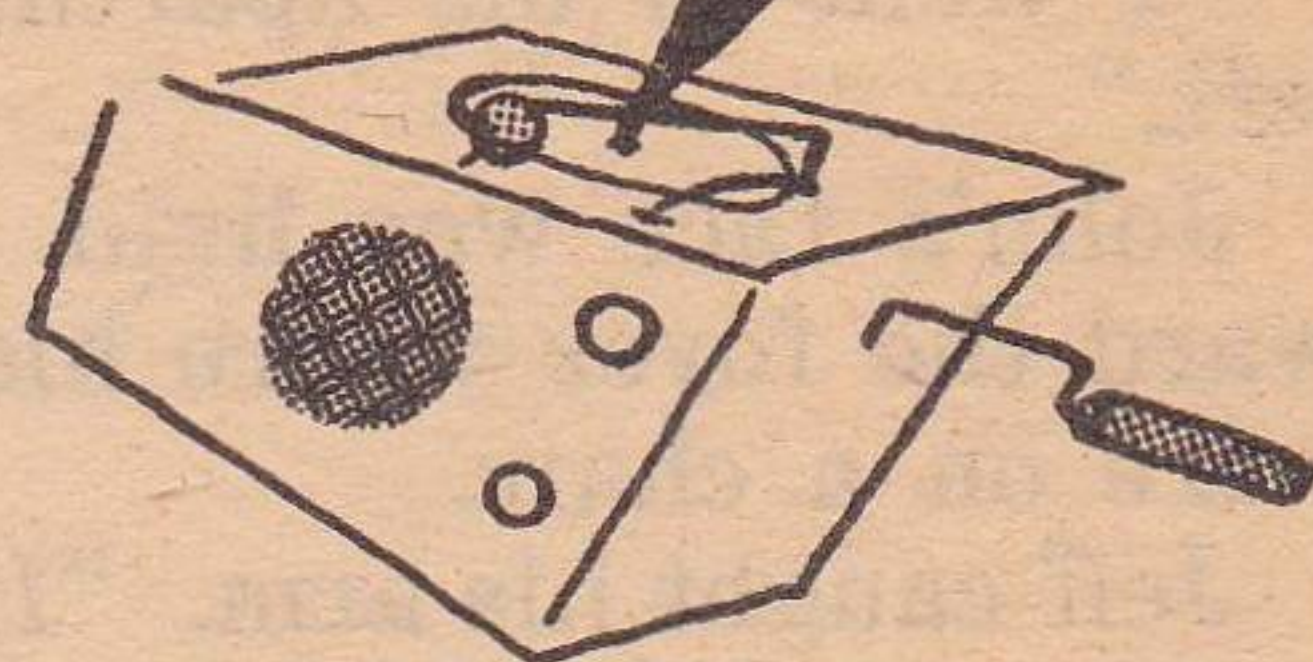
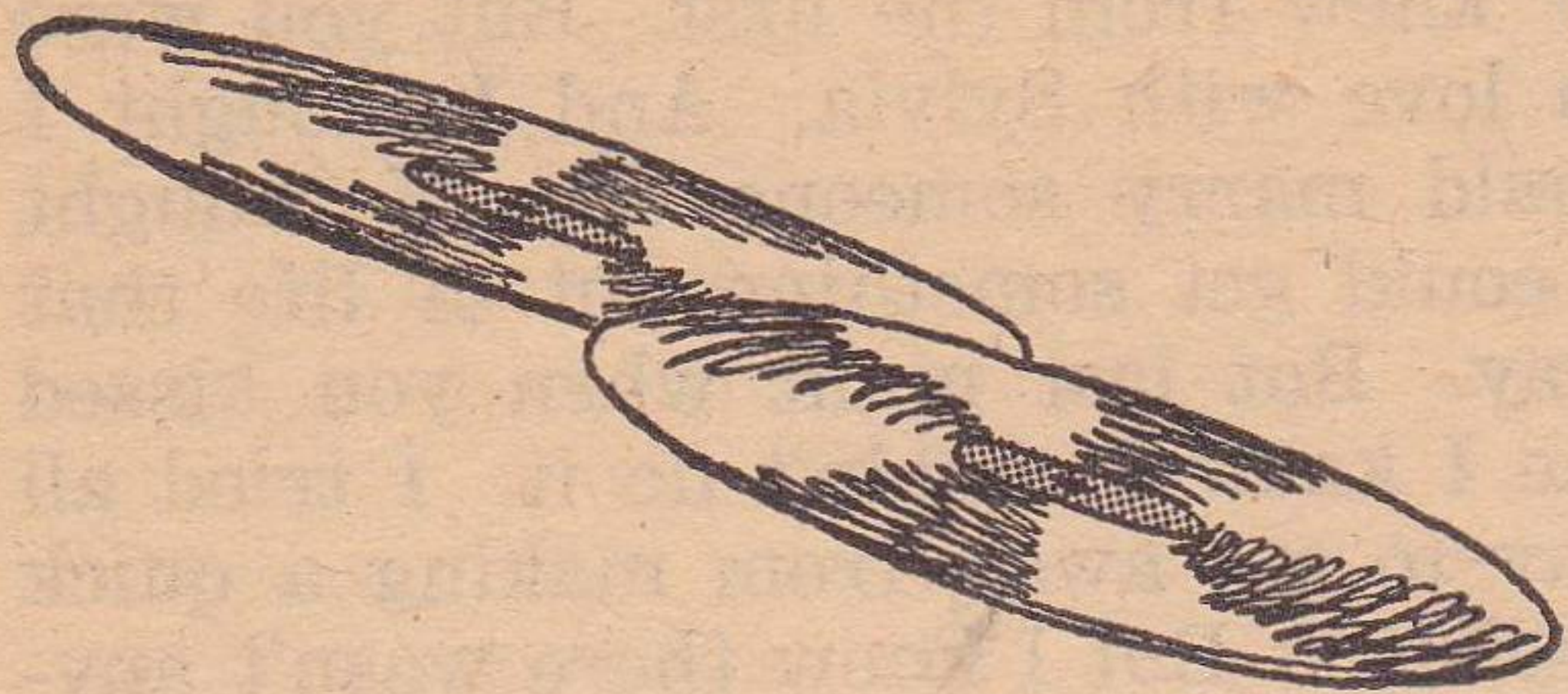
It was strictly personal, and it would always be that way.



Featured Next Issue: **THE STOWAWAY HEART**, an Exciting  
Novelet of Love and Adventure by **MARY MEADORS**



Meet  
**KITTY KALLEN**  
Popular Singing Star



A Record Department

# DISCWAYS

**P**RETTY Kitty Kallen has been making records with a flattering degree of success for a number of years, and now all of a sudden we hear that she's making a comeback! That's only because two of her latest *Decca* discs, **LITTLE THINGS MEAN A LOT** and **IN THE CHAPEL IN THE MOONLIGHT** have become such resounding hits that they outshine all her former successes.

Kitty accepts this new popularity modestly but with great inner satisfaction. "I always had a feeling of inferiority," she says, "which I try to overcome by being best in everything I do. I don't claim to be the *best* singer around," she adds hastily, "but I do feel that the success of these records shows that a lot of people like my singing."

Looking at Kitty's picture, it's hard to believe that her inferiority feeling stems from the fact that she was once an ugly duckling. She says it's true, though.

"I had freckles and a pug nose, and

that was bad enough. But, besides, I was so awkward that everybody—even my own family—used to call me 'Monkey.' Believe me, it was no fun," Kitty says. "I can laugh about it now, but at the time my appearance was a constant source of misery to me."

Dark-haired, dark-eyed Kitty Kallen was a very determined girl, and it wasn't long before her voice and her drive made her outstanding—even while she was still a child.

When she was only eight years old she won her first amateur contest, which resulted in a chance to appear on the original "Horn & Hardart's Children's Hour" over Radio Station WCAU in her native Philadelphia. Later she progressed to having her own program over the same station, singing with Jan Savitt's orchestra.

But there are some things which carry more weight with Kitty than even her determination to succeed. For instance, a couple of years ago, just as she had signed on as featured vocalist with Jimmy Dorsey's band, Bing Crosby



offered her the spot as feminine singing star of his "Kraft Music Hall." This time Kitty's sense of loyalty was stronger than her ambition. She stayed with Dorsey.

It's nice to hear that Kitty Kallen's loyalty was rewarded. While she was with the Dorsey band she recorded **BESAME MUCHO** for *Decca*, and it became her first big disc click.

There was another time when ambition had to take a back seat—for a most important occasion in Kitty's life. Some time after she had left the Dorsey band, while Frank Sinatra was the star of the "Hit Parade," he asked Kitty to join that program. But the Sinatra show was broadcast from Hollywood, and Kitty had a date in New York—to be married to her manager, Budd Granoff.

"That was one date I wasn't going to postpone," Kitty says, "not for any offer, no matter how tempting."

So Kitty gave up the chance to sing on the "Hit Parade" for a home and fireside in Hillsdale, New Jersey. "But

I'm not the star of the show there," she admits laughingly. "Ever since our son, Jonathan Glenn, was born, five years ago, he's stolen the spotlight from me completely."

Kitty doesn't mind, though. All her interests these days—when she's not busy with her career—center around her home and family. She loves to do things around the house, and has taken up interior decorating and antique collecting as serious spare-time interests. And when Mrs. Budd Granoff cooks, she puts a lot of care and thought into preparing the exotic dishes she and her husband love.

But, much as Kitty loves her home and her family, there's still room in her life for the career she's pursued since she was eight years old. So all disc fans who enjoy Kitty Kallen's velvety voice—and that takes in practically all popular-music enthusiasts—can look forward to listening pleasure from Kitty for a long time to come.

—Helen Tono

## LATEST PLATTER PATTERN

Let's start the turntables spinning with some discs we think you'll enjoy. There's plenty on the platter!

The rhythm and blues kick is taken up by Tony Bennett on *Columbia*, as he gives a dynamic version of **IT'S TOO SOON TO KNOW**.

Vivacious young thrush, Betty Madigan, gives a charming rendition of **BE A LITTLE DARLIN'** on an *MGM* label.

Les Elgart, in his crisp, swinging style, provides us with a lavish two-part treatment of **IT AIN'T NECESSARILY SO** on *Columbia*.

*MGM* brings you pert Joni James doing, as usual, her very best on a ballad, **WHEN WE COME OF AGE**.

In that rock and roll fashion, Mindy Carson brings you a clever and delightful song in **THE FISH** on *Columbia*.

**WEDDING BELLS**, a catching slice by Eddie Fisher on *RCA Victor*, seems to be very apropos for Eddie.

Teresa Brewer does a standout warbling job on **PLEDGING MY LOVE** for *Coral*.

Back again with a likely hit is Don Cherry

with **TELL IT TO ME AGAIN**. Let's hope Don has a good deejay ride with this one.

Frankie Laine's new disc, **BUBBLES** on *Columbia*, will bring some of his biggest hits to mind; it's the same pulsating beat as his other memorable recordings.

For a real musical treat give a listen to Joni James' newest album, **LITTLE GIRL BLUE** on *MGM*.

In his great fashion, Woody Herman and his "Third Herd" give you a solid workover of many of the old favorites in his new album, **THE WOODY HERMAN BAND** on *Capitol*.

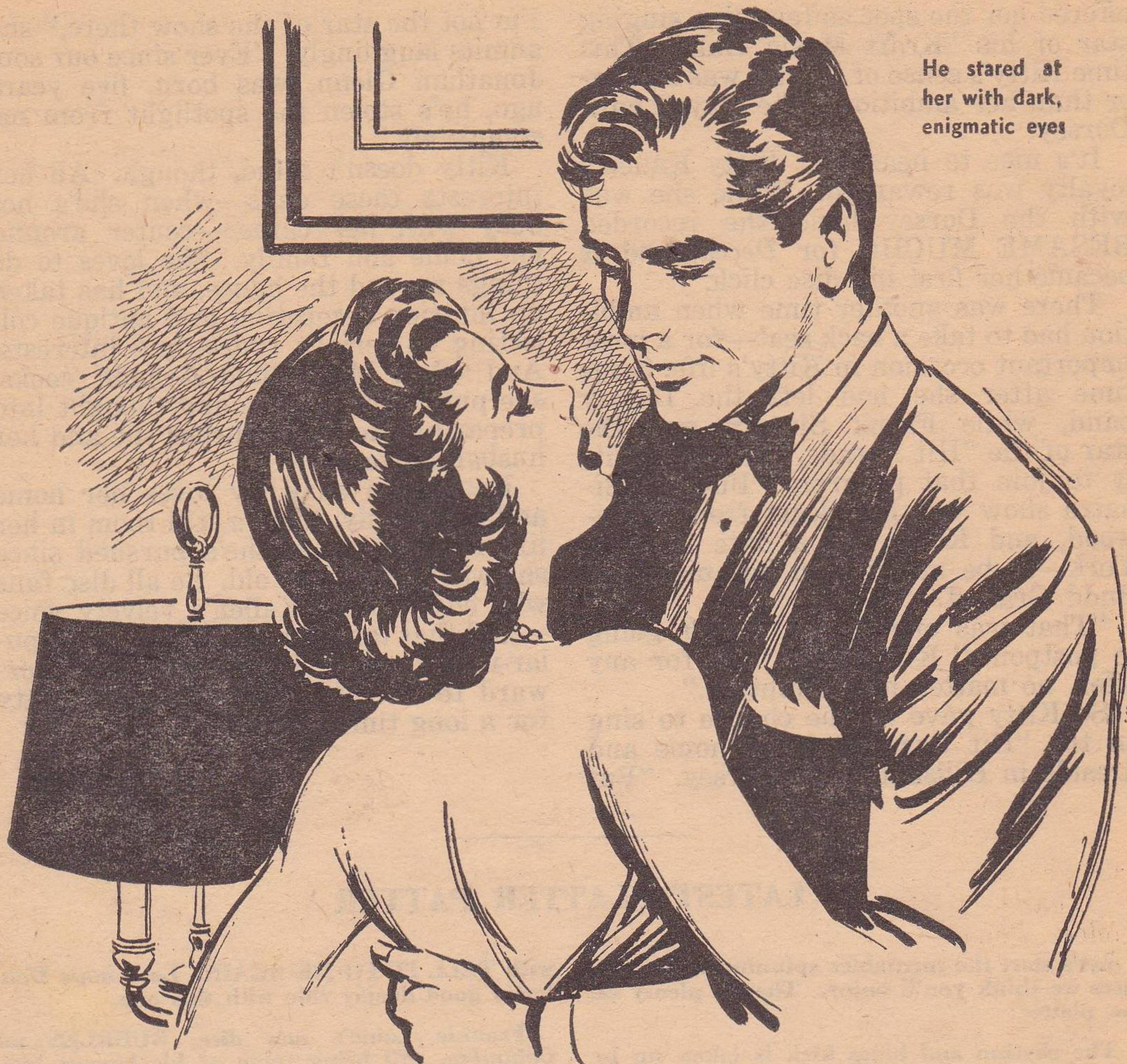
For you fans, Erroll Garner has a new album out on *Columbia*, **GONE—GARNER—GONEST**. And it's just what the title suggests!

Dixieland is at its best in Preacher Rollo's newest group of discs. **RIVERBOAT SHUFFLE**, an album presented by *MGM* is tops.

**HOUSE OF FLOWERS**, recorded by the original cast of the play of the same name, will give you musical enjoyment that you'll never tire of. On this *Columbia* album, you'll hear Pearl Bailey at her best.

—Z. Forman





He stared at  
her with dark,  
enigmatic eyes

# Bargain for My Heart

By NICKI STEVENS

*When Valerie accepts a  
stranger's proposal, her  
impish impulses lead her  
to an emotional impasse!*

VALERIE NIXON didn't know just when she first became conscious of the argument that was going on beside her. She had come into the bar of the Slipper Club to relax between floor shows, and was sitting now on one of the high stools at the bar, contentedly sipping a pepsi.

The first show was over, she wouldn't



sing again until one o'clock. Quietly relaxed, she sat there letting the cool liquid slide down her throat, and listening to the voices of the men beside her.

"Oh, cut it out, Clark. I can take care of myself." That voice was good-natured, but irritated.

"You can," the other man agreed. "But you don't." This voice was deeply resonant. "Dammit, Tony, you're twenty-four years old. You can't just make a career out of being a playboy. It's time you settled down, time you grew up."

A harsh sound of exasperation answered that. Valerie raised her glass to her lips, let her eyes move casually sideward until she could see the two men. They sat hunched over their drinks, both impeccable in white tie and tails, both scowling. The one nearest her, evidently the one who had been called Tony, was dark, slim, boyish. The other, equally dark, was taller and broader, with a mature look about his eyes. They must be brothers, Valerie decided.

That guess was confirmed almost at once. Tony set his glass down sharply on the bar, swung to face the other man.

"And time I married a good steady respectable girl like Sue Cook, I suppose," he mimicked, jeering. "And came into the office with you. And made a career of being a stuffed shirt. Just because you're my brother—"

"Just because I'm your brother," the man called Clark cut in, "I have a certain responsibility toward you. And why shouldn't you marry Sue, if it comes to that? She's pretty crazy about you, you know."

Tony rose from his seat with a motion of repressed violence.

"So help me," he grated, "if you don't stop throwing Sue Cook in my face, I'll marry the first little tramp I can find, just to shut you up!"

VALERIE, watching in fascinated curiosity, saw his hands tremble on the edge of the bar, saw the muscle

knot tight and hard along his jaw. But if his brother saw the warning signs, he did not heed them.

"Don't be a fool," Clark snapped. "You ought to thank you stars Sue's interested in you at all, instead of blowing your top every time her name's mentioned. She's a hundred times too good for you. Take my advice, and marry her—quick."

Tony's face was pale with anger. "If I wanted your advice," he growled, "I'd have plenty of it to choose from. You've been dishing it out for years. Just remember—when you see the precious Davis name in the papers. Remember that I warned you."

He glared for an instant longer, then turned away. And, turning, met Valerie's interested glance.

He stopped short. His eyes stared into hers for a moment. Then they traveled from the top of her sleek dark head down over the creamy skin of her bare shoulders and arms, down the whole slim length of her there, in the black gown shiny with sequins, to the glittering rhinestones on her high-heeled slippers.

She felt the beginning of an embarrassed flush at having been caught eavesdropping. But before she could tear her gaze away, Tony's eyes came up again to hers. The grimness in them had vanished completely, to be replaced by a dancing, impish light. He gave her a crooked grin.

"Hi, baby," he greeted. "You heard enough to get the idea, I suppose. How about it? You want to marry me?"

Valerie caught her breath, stared incredulously. She felt, rather than saw, the sudden involuntary movement of Clark's body, behind Tony. But she kept her gaze fixed on the younger man's face. He was grinning easily, quite unembarrassed. And she saw his eyelid flicker in the faintest suggestion of a wink.

She didn't know why she did it. Perhaps because the whole situation tickled her sense of humor. Perhaps because



she had conceived a dislike for Clark, the "stuffed shirt." Or perhaps because she wanted to teach both of them a lesson by pretending to take that joking, half-contemptuous proposal seriously.

Whatever her motive, she let her lips curve in a slow smile, and raised one shoulder in an insolent shrug.

"Of course," she agreed clearly. "Why not?"

There was a moment of astounded silence. Clark Davis rose from his place and came to stand behind Tony. His eyes, darker than his brother's and with a somehow disturbing quality in them, stared directly into hers. They were almost black, and veiled now, and filled with contempt. Valerie met them without flinching.

But that took some effort. This Clark Davis, she could see at once, was different from any man she had ever met. There was tremendous vitality and magnetism in him. She felt something almost like an electric shock as their eyes met and locked. Yet, aware as she was of his attraction for her, she was also aware, even though obscurely, of the danger in that for her.

They stared at each other silently, caught in the grip of an abrupt antagonism, like fighters meeting in a ring. Tony was the first to recover from his astonishment, Tony who broke the silence between them.

"Clark, old boy," he said easily, "I want you to meet my fiancée, Miss—uh . . . What is your name, honey?"

"Valerie Nixon."

Tony bowed formally. "Miss Nixon, may I present my brother, Clark Davis?"

Clark made a furious chopping motion with his hand.

"This has gone far enough," he said shortly. "You realize, Miss Nixon, that my brother is joking. He doesn't mean—"

"Oh, but I do!" Tony cut in. "I'm entirely serious. And so, I'm sure, is Miss Nixon."

He was still grinning, but there was anger in his eyes too, and a stubborn resistance directed against Clark. It made Valerie realize that he actually might go through with such an insane idea, if only to spite his brother.

SHE drew a quick breath and opened her mouth to speak. But before she could get a word out, Clark whirled on his younger brother.

"You fool!" he snapped. "Can't you see what you're doing? What you've done? You've laid yourself wide open! Do you know what a—a woman like that can do to you? Do you know what all this would sound like in court?"

Valerie felt a swift spurt of anger. "A woman like that," indeed! She bit back what she had been on the verge of saying, and favored Clark Davis with a cool, appraising stare. He represented everything she most disliked in a man—arrogant, conceited, domineering, the kind who rode roughshod over the feelings of others. Oh, he did have a certain amount of good looks, a thoroughly masculine attraction. But beyond that, he was simply a—well, just what his brother Tony had intimated he was. A stuffed shirt.

So she widened her eyes at him, innocently.

"Court?" she echoed. "But why should anything about this ever be mentioned in court?"

He stared at her, his eyes flat, black, antagonistic. His gaze probed hers then, without answering, he turned back to Tony.

"You'd better clear out for awhile," he suggested. "I think Miss Nixon and I understand each other. We can come to an agreement, I'm sure."

Tony glanced briefly at Valerie, seemed satisfied, and grinned at his brother.

"Okay," he agreed, and to Valerie, "Chin up, honey. I'll see you later."

And with a gay, mocking hand-wave, he was gone.

Clark slid onto the stool beside



Valerie's, leaned one elbow on the bar, and signaled for drinks. The small interval of silence gave her a chance to study him—the thin straight nose, the firm yet sensitive mouth, the square determination of his jaw. His dark hair was a trifle unruly. A cowlick stood up above his temple. She had to repress an insane impulse to put out her hand and smooth it down.

Then his eyes met hers, and the impulse vanished. The antagonism was there between them, stronger than ever. They measured each other warily, and Valerie felt the beginning stir of fright deep in her breast. But she kept her face carefully expressionless.

"Now, Miss Nixon," Clark began at last, "let's speak plainly. You played up to that very well, for a spur-of-the-moment thing. But you must know that you haven't got a case that would stand up. Tony's just a kid. He does fool things like that now and then, out of sheer bravado. But—"

"Just a moment," Valerie interrupted.

She had caught the undercurrent of nervousness, of worry, in his smooth flow of speech, and was suddenly ashamed of her own actions. The Davises, she knew, were an old St. Louis family. And Clark was seriously concerned about his brother. Impulsively she laid her hand on his arm.

"I don't think you understand," she went on quietly. "I have no intention of hurting Tony. And I'm sure you want to do what is best for him."

His eyebrows went up a trifle. "Yes, of course. That's why I'm talking to you now. I want you to—"

"Please," she interrupted again. "I haven't finished."

For an instant more she hesitated. After all, it was none of her affair. Without her own volition, she had been drawn into it. She breathed quickly, and plunged.

"Has it occurred to you that you yourself are responsible for Tony's wildness? He's a grown man, you know.

It must be rather maddening to have you making all the decisions for him. If you'd let him alone, let him find his own way, treat him as a man instead of a child—"

Clark was gazing at her with an expression of amused contempt.

"Yes," he agreed with elaborate politeness, "I'm sure that would make it much more satisfactory for you. Tony, I have no doubt, would be easy for you to handle. But you're not dealing with Tony. You're dealing with me. And my relations with Tony are beside the point. The only question is, how much do you want?"

She gazed at him blankly. "I'm afraid I don't understand."

He made an impatient movement. "Don't pretend to be naive. We've both been around enough to know the score. I mean exactly what I said—how much do you want, to forget this business tonight and let Tony alone?"

VALERIE caught her breath. She could feel the blood rushing into her cheeks, and she dropped her eyes to veil the swift blaze of anger in them. She had tried to be decent about this. But Clark had made up his mind, had labeled her, judged her, condemned her. In the first moment, he had spoken to her his eyes had declared war on her. And nothing she said had changed his opinion. Between them there could be nothing but strife. Tony, the apparent object of the battle, was almost forgotten in the bitterness of their own enmity.

She bit her lip, controlled her anger, and raised her wide dark eyes to his.

"I'm afraid," she said sweetly, "that you're making a mistake. I don't want your money. I'm really very much in love with Tony. And I wouldn't think of giving him up."

She curled her lip in a malicious little smile. Clark's face darkened and his eyes looked bleakly into hers. But then, amazingly, he smiled. He raised his glass to her in a mocking toast.



"You're smarter than I thought," he admitted. "Very well, Miss Nixon—or should I say Valerie? I certainly don't want to stand in the way of such an overpowering affection. And since you're practically a member of the family already, I know you'd like to get better acquainted with all of us. Suppose you come to dinner tomorrow night?"

She covered her consternation, kept her face a smooth and lovely mask. She had time for one instant of startled wonder at herself. What was she getting into—and why? She didn't know. Some force more powerful than her own will seemed to have taken over the direction of her actions. With only the barest flicker of hesitation, she answered in a voice as smooth and suave as his own:

"Why, thank you. I'd love to come."

She slipped off the stool, smiled at him brightly, and walked out of the bar. But with each step she felt his eyes boring like chill steel into her back. . . .

Tony called for her at her apartment at a little before eight the next evening. He looked unhappy, disturbed.

"You know," he said abruptly, "you don't have to go to this thing. I could make your excuses for you. I mean, it might be—embarrassing. That's what Clark's hoping for, of course."

Valerie nodded. "I know. But it's all right, Tony. I'm going."

He still seemed doubtful. "Well, so long as you know what you're getting into, I guess it's all right." He punched her shoulder lightly, encouragingly. "Just be yourself, and don't worry about anything."

"I'll manage," she assured him. And permitted herself the ghost of a smile.

She knew well enough what Clark hoped to prove. She was supposed to be made embarrassed and uneasy by a formal dinner. She was supposed to show up all her crudities of conversation and table manners. It was equally obvious that Tony was expecting the same thing, and trying to cushion the shock for her. It was rather sweet of him. But she smiled again, secretly.

Both of the Davis men were going to be disappointed. Both had made up their minds about Valerie Nixon. But what they didn't know was that Valerie came from St. Charles, only twenty miles away, and that in St. Charles the Nixons were quite as old and quite as good a family as the Davises in St. Louis. In fact, her brother Bill had known Clark Davis rather well at Princeton.

No, she had no worries about the dinner. She hadn't, however, counted on the effect it might have on herself. Not that she had any trouble with the amenities. She chose the right fork at the right time. She praised the wines, to the evident satisfaction of old Mr. Davis. She had read, and could talk about the books that were mentioned. And she was more familiar with the works of some of the modern composers than Mrs. Davis herself, who was something of an authority on music.

NOR was there any attempt on the part of any of them to make her feel ill at ease. Indeed, as the dinner progressed, the elder Davises warmed to her more and more, until it almost seemed to Valerie that she was dining with her own family.

But in spite of that, or perhaps because of it, she felt more and more ashamed. She had no right to be here. She should never have accepted Tony's gambit in the first place. Or she should have extricated herself as quickly as possible. She couldn't imagine why she had let such a ridiculous situation develop this far.

But there were Mr. and Mrs. Davis, pleasant and cordial, making her one of the family. There was Tony beside her with a new interest in his eye, a new attentiveness in his manner. But there also was Sue Cook, the girl who was "pretty crazy about" Tony. Sue, a small attractive blonde, watching Tony with obvious adoration — and watching Valerie with a kind of agonized despair.



Worst of all, there was Clark.

He sat across the table from her, erect, easy, casual. He took part in the general conversation. And always, whenever she glanced across the table, he was watching her with darkly enigmatic eyes.

As if he were studying her, a specimen under a microscope. As if he were searching for a crack in her defenses. As if he hated her!

Yet uneasily aware as she was of his dislike, she found her gaze drawn back again and again to his. And each time her resentment grew. What right had he to judge her? What right had he to interfere with Tony's life? She had gone into this on impulse, as a kind of lark. But the more she saw of Tony, and of Clark, the more indignant she became.

Tony was charming, irresponsible, boyish. A bit reckless and wild, perhaps. But at heart he was—well, he was sweet. If he was wild and rebellious, it was Clark's own fault. Clark, who was so sure of his own rightness and superiority.

Yes, it had been a lark to begin with. But now it had turned serious. She liked Tony, she wanted to help him if she could. But that wasn't the important thing.

Somehow, she was going to strike at Clark Davis. By whatever means she could find.

Fair or foul.

Her opportunity came immediately after dinner. As she rose with the others to move into the drawing room she found Clark suddenly at her side. He took her arm, drew her aside.

"Valerie." His voice was low, curt, commanding. "Come with me. I want to talk to you."

His hand was tight on her arm. She felt her breath quicken, felt the light and rapid pulsing of her heart. But she answered steadily enough.

"Yes, I think it's time we had a talk."

He led her to the deserted library, switched on shaded lamps, and then

stood facing her. He did not offer her a chair. And when he spoke, his voice was harsh:

"Exactly what is it you're after? What are you hoping to get out of this? I've offered you money. You've refused. Yet it's obvious that you're not in love with Tony."

She glanced up at him demurely through her lashes. "How do you know I'm not?"

He gave an impatient shrug. "Let's not be coy. I understand Tony's motive well enough. He's just trying to irritate me. But you, Valerie—you don't want to marry him. You can do better for yourself than that. A girl like you."

She stared in honest amazement, mixed with more than a little suspicion. What was the meaning of this new approach?

Her lips curved in an ironic smile. "You mean because I don't, after all, eat with my knife?"

He had the grace to look embarrassed. "That was a rotten trick to try to play on anybody," he admitted. "I apologize. My only excuse is that I was trying to protect Tony. But it's you I'm thinking of now."

"That's very kind of you," she mocked bitterly.

But he went on as if she had not spoken. "You deserve a better bargain than that. Oh, I can see how money and prestige might seem important. But believe me, they aren't. Not for marriage. In marriage, nothing counts but love."

HIS serious eyes held hers, and for a moment she was almost tempted to believe in his sincerity. But only last night she had seen an example of his ability to alter his tactics to meet the situation. What it came to, in the end, was simply Clark Davis using any means, fair or foul, to direct his brother's life in the way he thought it ought to go.

Of course, strictly speaking, it was all none of her business. But she reminded herself that she had a score of her own



to settle with this man. By fair means or foul. So she moved a step closer to him, glanced up into his face provocatively.

"Love?" she murmured. "What do you know about it? Have you ever been in love?"

He seemed disconcerted. "Never mind about me. I'm talking about you and Tony."

She sensed her advantage. For the first time he was on the defensive. She took another step toward him.

"But I want to know. Have you ever kissed a girl? Or have you always been too busy taking care of Tony's business?"

He had been staring at her with something very like consternation. But suddenly a glint showed in his eyes, the corners of his mouth twitched, and he closed the gap between them in one long stride. One arm encircled her, the fingers of his other hand tilted her chin, turning her face up to his.

"You want credentials?" he asked softly. "All right. I can furnish them. And maybe I can prove to you that I'm right about you and Tony."

Fright touched her heart again. This was more than she had bargained for. She struggled against his imprisoning arm, but he only held her more closely. She felt breathless, suffocated. Her heart raced wildly.

"Please!" she gasped. "Clark! No!"

He laughed into her face. "Scared?" he jeered. "You asked for it, you know. I wouldn't think of disappointing you."

His face came closer with every word. And as he finished speaking, his lips came down on hers. Recognizing the futility of struggle, Valerie bent her efforts on remaining still, cool—untouched. The more so since his kiss was obviously meant as an insult. It mocked and jeered at her, as his words had done.

But, unlike mere words, the kiss struck deep. It went on and on, seemingly endless, a harsh and bruising kiss that ate at the very roots of her pride.

At the same time it stirred something into life within her. It was hateful and repulsive—and bitterly, unbearably sweet.

She clung to him in spite of herself, her fingers digging into his shoulders. The wild, treacherous blood sang through her veins, pounded in her throat, sent a wave of weakness all through her.

He released her at last, not smiling now, only staring down at her with those dark, enigmatic eyes of his. She could only stand there, returning his stare. Then, stricken, she whirled and ran.

She was lucky enough to find a cab almost at once. At her apartment, she asked the driver to wait. Only one thought was in her mind now—flight, escape! She had meddled in something that was none of her affair. It had exploded in her face. There was nothing left to do but run.

Clark hated and despised her. Every word, every action, had shown that. And above all, the kiss! But that wasn't the worst of it. The kiss had shown something else, too. It had shown her a secret place in her own heart, the existence of which she had never even suspected.

"You can't!" she whispered to herself, snatching things from hangers, emptying drawers. "You can't fall in love—like that!"

And a mocking voice inside her answered, But you have, Valerie! You have!

She threw things into her bags, moving fast and jerkily, trying to blot out that voice, and returned to the waiting taxi. But as she was about to step into it, a small black car drew up behind the cab, tires squealing, and a dark figure leaped out.

VALERIE'S heart almost stopped beating. The man caught her arm, spun her to face him. She raised her eyes reluctantly to his face.

And gasped.



"Tony! What on earth!"

"That's what I want to know," Tony snapped. "What did he do to you? Why did you run out like that? Where are you going?"

The last question she could answer safely. "I'm going home." Her voice sounded flat and dead in her own ears.

Tony made an angry growling sound. "Some day," he announced grimly, "I'm going to take a punch at that guy. Valerie, don't go. Listen! I know this started out as a gag. But you've been so swell all the way through . . . Valerie, this time I mean it! Will you marry me?"

She looked up into his angry anxious face, and forced a smile to her own lips.

"You don't mean it, Tony. Oh, I appreciate the—the offer. I do. You're pretty swell yourself. But—no, Tony. You don't love me. Clark"—she stumbled over the name—"is right. She is the girl for you to marry."

He began an indignant protest, but she cut him off.

"Maybe you don't realize it yourself," she said hurriedly, "but the only reason you don't want to marry her is because Clark wants you to. That's silly and childish, Tony. Because Sue worships you. You mustn't let yourself lose that, just out of spite—"

She broke off abruptly at the sound of squealing tires. Another car pulled up behind Tony's. Another dark figure leaped out, caught her arm, spun her around.

"What's the meaning of this?" Clark demanded. He swung to Tony. "What are *you* doing here?"

"Trying to talk Valerie into marrying me," Tony rejoined. "If it's any of your business."

"It's my business all right." Clark was grim. "That's why I'm here. Dammit!" he roared, "I'd just about got this thing straightened out, and now you're trying to snarl it up again! Why don't you go home and talk to Sue for awhile and keep out of trouble?"

He transferred his glare to Valerie, shook her arm roughly.

"And you! I thought you'd have better sense than to start this business all over again!"

She pulled her arm from his grasp and faced him, trembling. Would he never let her alone? Hadn't he done enough damage? Wasn't it enough that she had to carry for the rest of her life the searing memory of his kiss, his bitter contempt? Was he going to keep after her and keep after her, simply forever?

"You needn't worry," she told him. She kept her voice low, but couldn't entirely control the quiver in it. "I'm not going to disgrace you by marrying into your family. All I want from you is to be let alone!"

Clark stared, open-mouthed, making no effort to speak. He wouldn't have had a chance, in any case. All the resentment and indignation she had been storing up burst out of her in a flood of words.

"And if you're wise, Clark Davis, you'll let Tony alone, too! He's able to manage his own life, without any help from you! The only reason he's ever acted foolishly was because you've been so—so darned superior at him all the time."

Clark continued to stare, saying nothing.

"And I've already told Tony," she swept on, "that I'm not going to marry him, because I don't love him. So you see, you're safe. And you've wasted your time chasing him down here. Now you can just turn around and go back home—both of you! I'm sick of Davises!"

Clark's head moved from side to side in slow wonderment.

"I think," he observed mildly, "that you're mistaken about a few things. It's true that I came chasing after Tony to stop him from marrying you. And it's true that I've been seven different kinds of damned fool. But it's not true that I don't want you marrying into



the family. In fact, the main reason I came was to persuade you to do just that."

SHE blinked at him confusedly. She was on the verge of tears.

"I've told you and told you," she protested. "I don't love Tony. You can't *make* me marry him! And you said yourself you wanted to stop him." She gulped, and went on in a small voice, "But—if you want me to marry into your family, and you don't want me to marry Tony—"

He nodded, the first trace of a smile showing on his dark features.

"That's it," he encouraged. "Now you're getting it." The smile went away again, and his voice went deep and husky. "Valerie—Valerie, don't you know what happened to me? Didn't you feel it, when I kissed you? All the time I was fighting you, trying to keep you away from Tony, but it wasn't until I kissed you that I found out why."

He moved a step toward her, raised his hand, touched her face gently with his fingertips.

"It was always love, Valerie. From the beginning. That's why I was so rotten to you—though I didn't know it. I couldn't bear the thought of you being married to anyone else."

She drew a quick sharp breath, raised her own hand, caught at his.

"Clark, wait!" Her voice, choking in her throat, and the pounding of her heart shaking her whole body. "I have to tell you. I've been—sailing under false colors. I'm not the—the little tramp I tried to act like. Remember Bill Nixon, from St. Charles? I'm his sister."

Clark stared for a moment, as if puzzled.

He shook his head.

"So you're Bill's sister," he granted. "And so what? Valerie, I meant what I said. None of that matters. Not for marriage. For marriage, the only thing that counts is love. Valerie—darling—"

His voice made a question of it. But it wasn't necessary for him to say more.

And though Valerie didn't say anything either, he seemed to understand her perfectly.

Tony and the cab driver understood, too.

Tony got into his car and drove away. The taximan, after unloading Valerie's bags again, climbed into his cab and settled himself to wait for his fare.

For there are, after all, certain things that even a cab driver would hesitate to interrupt.



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# *Our Second Romance*

By **TED OTSU**

*He was always  
a fiance—  
but never  
a groom!*

**J**IM GRANT had just fallen out of love, and he felt wonderful. It had been a narrow squeak this time. He'd even bought the girl an engagement ring and she'd worn it two weeks before she





had given it back.

Jim now had it wrapped in tissue in his wallet and occasionally he took it out and looked at it. It was a grim reminder—five hundred dollars worth of reminder. None of his three previous engagements had carried him so close to the brink.

How could he know this last girl was given to strange and pensive moods? That she wrote poetry when she got that way? Beautiful poetry it was, and he told her so. But one day Jim made the mistake of asking her what it all meant.

"I'm sure some mundane, unimaginative little creature will be happy to wear this," she had said when she had given him back the ring.

Jim had a vacation coming up at the office and he went away to forget—a poetic gesture he was sure she appreciated. He went to Kawakawa Inn on Lake Kawakawa. His Uncle Davey and Aunt Clara ran the place.

UNCLE DAVEY was patrolling the lobby beaming at his guests when Jim appeared. The beam immediately vanished.

"You!" he said. "Did you bring that girl with you?"

"Love withered and died," he told his uncle. "She wrote poetry. I am unattached."

"Fine," he said. "We can use you here."

He led the way to his suite behind the office. Aunt Clara rose to greet Jim with outstretched arms. Aunt Clara was plump and rosy and blue-eyed. She was an incurable romanticist.

"Jim got himself disengaged again," Uncle Davey told her.

"How wonderful!" Aunt Clara cried. "Now you can fall in love all over again, Jim. We have some splendid specimens on hand this summer."

"We like to back up our advertising," Uncle Davey said. "You know our slogan—'Romance Awaits You at Romantic Lake Kawakawa.'"

"And we've had such a slack season!"

Aunt Clara said sadly. "Only two engagements hinted so far."

"I am not in circulation," Jim said.

"In that case," said Uncle Davey, "our rate is twelve dollars a day."

Jim sighed. "Very well," he said. "I will circulate. But slowly and with extreme caution."

After dinner he strolled along the boardwalk at the lake front. The evening promenade was on. He noticed a short-bobbed redhead standing off by herself looking him over. He remembered she had been at dinner with an older woman, presumably her mother, and an outdoorsy sort of man with steel gray hair. She was petite and lovely and vaguely familiar. Then he placed her. He went up to her.

"Pardon me!" Jim said. "Aren't you Liz Brazwell? I believed I was in love with you in your freshman year at college."

"I recognized you at once," she said, "though you have deteriorated greatly. You were my first love, you see. I was really upset when we quarreled and I gave you back your fraternity pin."

"What was it we quarreled about?"

"I haven't the faintest idea," she said. "Does it matter now?"

"Well," he said, "we could avoid the same controversial subject during this, our second romance."

She lifted her beautiful eyebrows at him. "Falling in love with you," she said, "was just another of my childhood diseases. Like measles. You recover from it and you don't get it a second time. You're immune."

Jim glanced at the third finger of her left hand. It was unadorned. "I take it I would not be moving in on anyone, in any event," he said.

"No, darn it!" she said. "How are you set yourself?"

"At the moment I am alone and desolate," he murmured. "But—"

"Would you like to be engaged to me?" she asked, and quickly added, "For a short time only. Let's talk it over."

They sat on a bench, and she said,



"Did you notice that man having dinner with Mother and me?"

"A rugged son of the outdoors if ever I saw one. Your father?"

"Mother's been a widow for two years. This man's name is Roger Hendricks. He's a widower. Owns a ranch out West. We met him when we came here last week. He's in love with Mother. He wants to marry her immediately and carry her off to his ranch. I think Mother's attracted to him. But she would never marry him and leave me."

She talked on. It seemed she had left college after two years to study the piano in a large way at the Conward School of Music in New York. It was a full-time job for her, because she was aiming high. Her mother had made it financially possible. Mother had developed into a successful designer. Liz still had a couple of years before she could hope to get her start, and her mother was determined to see her through.

LIZ said, "I've told her I could support myself and keep on with music at a part-time tempo. But do you think she'd listen? Do you think she would let her little darling daughter dangle in mid-air?"

"Little daughter's grown up," Jim said. "Couldn't she manage to light somewhere?"

"That's exactly what I had in mind. I want to light somewhere temporarily. Just long enough to get mother married. And that," she announced, "is where you come in."

"You want to rent me as a temporary fiancé?"

She nodded. "Mother, who is a poor judge of character, will probably approve of you. If she thought I'd soon be safely settled with you—"

"A ten-day engagement is a bit under par, even for me," he broke in. "But I am happy to oblige." He took out his wallet. "Fortunately, I am well equipped for the emergency." He unwrapped the engagement ring from the tissue and held it out for her.

Her eyes widened. "It's real, isn't it?" she said. "Whose is it?"

"Mine. I mean it's yours, for the duration of our engagement."

"It would be a perfect convincer," she said. "I'll say I met you at a party in New York."

He agreed to this readily. "And I followed you here with the ring," he said. "I am madly in love with you." He leaned closer and drew her toward him.

She pulled back. "We'll skip the dress rehearsal," she said.

"I'm merely throwing myself into the part," he said.

"And I'm throwing you right back," she said. "We'll keep it on a less emotional level. Mother will want to know about your income. Is it adequate?"

"Certainly not," he said. "I'll double it."

She sighed. "I don't approve of such deception as a rule," she said. "But Mother's future happiness is at stake. I suppose I can put up with you for ten days. We'll confer here in the morning."

Uncle Davey and Aunt Clara were waiting up for him.

"Did you find someone, Jim dear?" Aunt Clara asked hopefully.

"Someone found me," he said. "We're engaged. She's wearing a ring to prove it."

Uncle Davey bobbed his head happily. "You see?" he cried. "'Romance Awaits You at Romantic Lake Kawakawa'."

"You're right," he agreed. "Her mother's in love, too."

Jim met Liz in the morning as scheduled. "What gives with Mother?" he asked.

"We're just in the nick of time," she answered. "Mr. Hendricks begged her again to marry him. He said if he loses her now he'll never see her again. He never goes to New York. Mother wept and admitted she loved him. But she remained firm."

She opened her handbag and took out his ring. "We might as well find her and deliver the clincher," she said.

"Just a moment," Jim said. "I always



slip the ring on my fiancé's finger."

She waited impatiently while he put it in its proper place. She was off-guard, so he drew her close and kissed her. She squirmed to freedom and he saw her hand start toward his face. It was quite a slap she handed him.

"Gracious!" someone behind them said.

He turned. Aunt Clara was watching them, bug-eyed.

"Meet my fiancée, Miss Brazwell, Aunt Clara," Jim said pleasantly. "We have just become betrothed."

"Does she always slap your face when you kiss her?" Aunt Clara asked.

"Just occasionally," he said. "She won't this time. Watch closely."

**H**E KISSED her again, and of course she had to get into the act.

"You see?" he said to Aunt Clara. "I am now off to meet my future mother-in-law."

They walked off together.

Liz said sharply, "I have to brief you. Mother will expect you to be the kind of man I've always said was my ideal. A thoughtful, silent man who—"

"Me silent? I like to jabber."

"Someone thrifty and prudent, who saves his money."

"It's the darndest thing with me," he said. "I can't seem to hold on to a dime."

Her mother was sitting alone on the terrace, a pensive look in her eyes. She was slim and small like Liz, and young-looking.

"This is Jim Grant from New York, Mother," Liz announced. She held out her left hand toward her mother. "Jim and I are engaged. He just gave me the ring."

Her mother gave a squeal of delight and sprang to her feet. She pounced on Liz and kissed her. Then she turned to Jim.

"I'm stunned speechless!" she cried. "I never dreamed Liz was in love! Tell me all about it, Mr. Grant. Have you known Liz long?"

"Sort of," he said. He remembered

the specifications of Liz's ideal man just in time. He clammed up.

"And what business are you in, Mr. Grant?"

"Advertising," he said.

"How interesting! I'm sure you must have a wonderful future ahead of you."

"Hope so," he said.

"Here comes Mr. Hendricks," Liz said quickly. "We'll tell him the news."

They were introduced, and when the word fiancé was mentioned Mr. Hendricks' eyes lit up. He sprang at Jim and almost crushed every bone in his right hand as he congratulated him.

"Fine!" he cried. "Best news I've heard in a long time!" He turned to Liz's mother happily. "This changes everything, doesn't it, my dear?"

Mother blushed.

"Whatever do you mean, Roger?" she asked coyly.

"You'll excuse us, won't you?" Mr. Hendricks said to Jim. "Mrs. Brazwell and I have things to talk over."

Liz and Jim watched them walk away. When they were out of hearing he said "Embrace me."

"Never!" Liz cried.

"You'd better," he said. "Mother's turned to watch."

She took a deep breath and closed her eyes. This time it really was a kiss. She was breathless when he let her free.

"This ceases to be funny!" she said bitterly.

Jim was a little out of breath himself. "You're darn right it isn't funny!" he said. "It's the most exciting, the most amazing thing that ever happened! And you're the most wonderful girl that ever happened. All of a sudden I'm in love with you! I—"

"Shut up!" she cried, and ran.

The four of them had dinner together at seven.

"We didn't see any reason for waiting," Liz's mother said. She looked at Liz appealingly. "I wouldn't have considered it if it meant leaving you alone, dear, but now that you have Jim, I know you'll be all right. I'm sure he'll let you



go on with your career if you want to. Won't you, Jim?"

"Well," he said, "it's up to Liz of course."

"I don't suppose," Mrs. Brazwell asked, "that we could make it a double wedding next week?"

"We certainly could not!" Liz snapped.

Jim sighed. "Liz is not the impulsive type," he said.

"Anyway, you'll be married soon," her mother said happily.

It was a gay dinner, and when they were finished Liz' mother said she knew that the two lovebirds wanted to be by themselves.

And Mr. Hendricks added, "And even if you two lovebirds don't, we do."

Liz and Jim went out to the terrace.

"Did you have to hold my hand all through dinner?" she asked.

"I'm lost in my rôle," he told her. "And it's a very nice hand to hold. Liz," he went on earnestly, "the pretense is no longer a pretense. Since that kiss



this morning I am a changed man. It did strange things to me. Didn't you feel it just a little?"

"It was a sacrifice I made for Mother," she said firmly. "I felt nothing at all. Next Wednesday is only six days off. You will have your ring back immediately after the ceremony. Good-night."

JIM sought out Aunt Clara and Uncle Davey. They were intent over a game of chess in their suite.

Aunt Clara said, "Where's your face-slapping fiancée?"

He sank into a chair and said, "It is

all a sham. A grim, tragic joke." He told them all. "And so I am no more than a decoy to lure her mother into matrimony," he finished. "After next Wednesday I will never see Liz again."

There was a far-away look in Aunt Clara's eyes. "A wedding!" she whispered. "Imagine a wedding right here under our own roof! It's wonderful! Dear Mrs. Brazwell! Happy Mr. Hendricks! We'll have the ceremony in the lobby. I'll turn it into a mass of flowers. We'll invite all the hotel guests. The bride will make her entrance from the garden."

"We'll take pictures," put in Uncle Davey. "We can use them in our next season's booklet."

"And you can give away the bride," Aunt Clara told him.

"Wait just a minute!" Jim cried angrily. "Can't we talk about me?"

"Sure," Uncle Davey said pleasantly. "You can be the best man."

Mother was all agog the next morning when Aunt Clara told her the plans for the wedding. Mr. Hendricks was also agog—but in a different way. He protested violently. He hated big, crowded weddings. The mere thought of one terrified him. He positively refused to be married that way.

They let him talk for half an hour. Then Aunt Clara said, "Daisy-chain! I'll rope off an aisle with a huge daisy chain. And I'll build an arch at one end at the foot of the mezzanine stairs. An arch with roses twining around it!"

The wedding didn't matter to Liz. All she wanted she said was to get the thing over in any shape or form. She was going to be her mother's bridesmaid. Jim agreed to be best man.

The precious days slid by. He was with Liz as often as she'd let him. They sailed and played tennis. She tried to look happy and even let Jim kiss her a few times, for appearance sake. She used the proper endearing words to him, but she spoke them in icy tones. He fell more in love with her every day.

Wednesday came. It was to be a four



o'clock wedding. Aunt Clara had a crew working on the lobby all the night before. The windows had been scrubbed, the brass polished, the floor waxed, the whole place garlanded with flowers.

Jim had a late lunch with Liz, then walked with her to her room door. He drew her toward him to kiss her.

"There's no need," she said. "No one's watching."

"One never knows," he said. "They might be peeking."

She smiled and patted his hand. "You have been sweet, Jim," she said. "Obnoxious at times, but on the whole sweet. I could never have got Mother married without you. You've made her very happy."

"Hang Mother!" he moaned. "I want to make you happy. For the rest of your life."

"You flirt, Jim," she said. "Your Uncle Davey told me. You've been engaged four times, haven't you?"

"This time it's different!" Jim cried.

"Poor Jim!" she said. "I believe you really mean it. You can kiss me if you want to. It'll be the last time."

He kissed her. Then he went to his room to dress. A little later he knocked on Mr. Hendricks' door. He was sitting on the edge of the bed, properly attired in a white linen suit with a red carnation in the lapel. He seemed in abject misery.

He sighed.

"Your Aunt Clara invited people from every hotel on the lake," he said. "There'll be thousands of them."

"I feel a little edgy myself," Jim said.

"I could annihilate your Aunt Clara," he said.

The telephone rang. It was Uncle Davey, saying that the moment had arrived.

Jim marched Mr. Hendricks down the hall to the elevator. His trembling increased as they descended to the mezzanine. They stepped out and looked over the railing into the lobby. It was packed with people. They were crowded together on both sides of the daisy-chain

aisle. Mr. Hendricks blanched.

"Be brave," Jim said. He took him by the arm and led him to the stairway.

Mr. Hendricks cringed. "I can't!" he moaned.

He backed up a couple of steps and turned around. Jim grabbed him by the arm and spun him around. Maybe he didn't know his own strength. Or maybe the newly waxed floor was too slippery. Anyway, Mr. Hendricks' feet went out from under him. He made a very unbridegroomlike entrance into his wedding. He rolled down the stairs and lay still at the bottom of them.

Jim found Liz on the terrace a little later.

"The ambulance is coming," he said.

"Is—is it bad?" she gasped.

"He broke his leg," he told her.

She bit her lips. "How long will it be?" she asked.

"At least three months," Jim said.

"Aunt Clara is going to take care of him here as soon as he can leave the hospital. Your mother is going back to her job in New York. But she'll visit him here week-ends. It'll be an October wedding. Aunt Clara will have the whole lobby festooned with autumn leaves." He stepped closer. "Do you realize what this means?"

She nodded. "Our engagement is extended."

He reached for her hand. She did not draw it away.

"Liz," he said, "it is true that I have messed up several engagements prior to this one. But I never stayed engaged long enough to work out the necessary adjustments that make for compatibility. If you will give me a chance this time—"

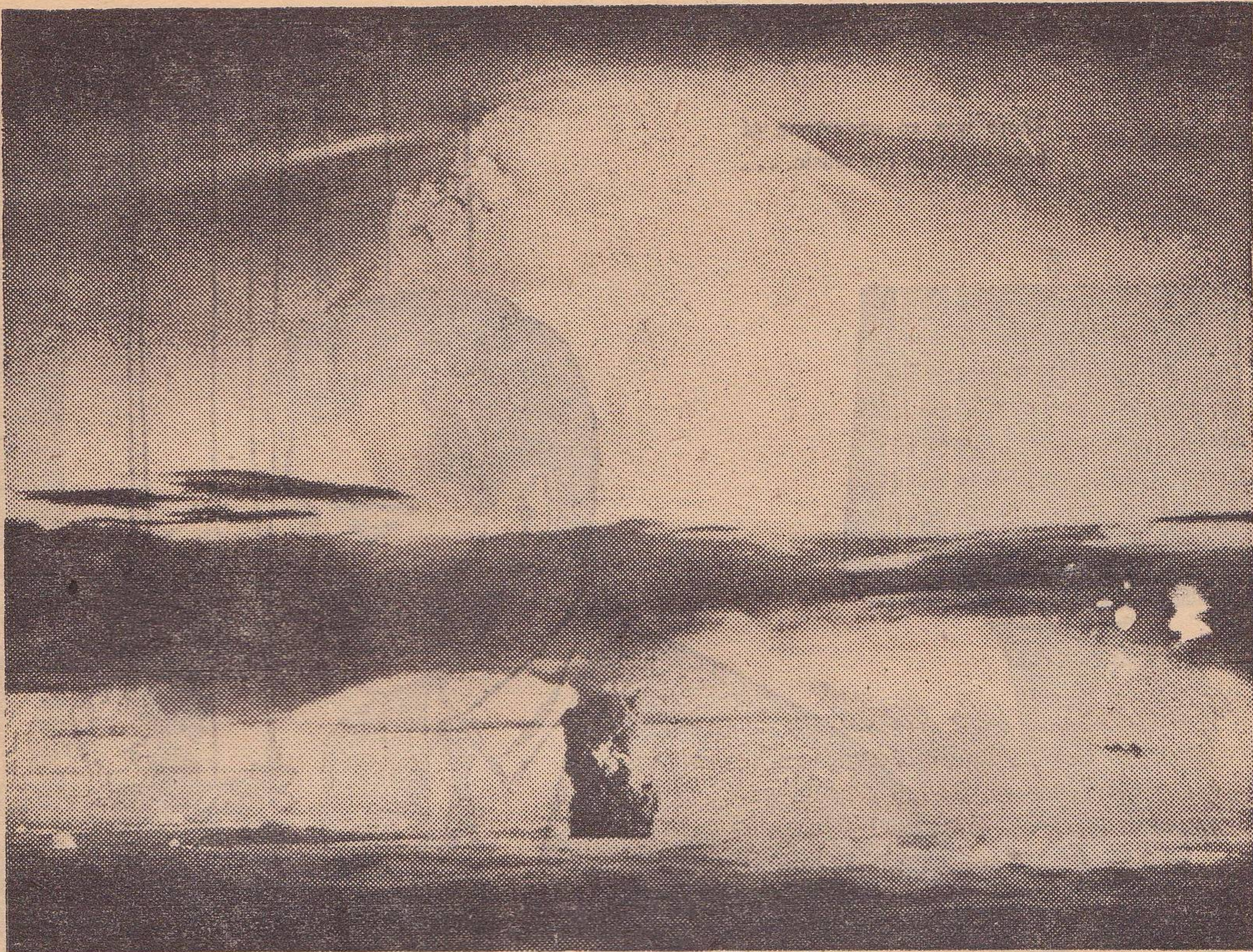
She smiled. "You really are sweet, Jim," she said, "even when you're obnoxious. I don't suppose I could hold out for three whole months, could I?"

"Not if I can help it," Jim said.

She lifted her face. "So I might as well give in now, don't you think?"

Jim did not answer. He was speechless. So was she. For quite a long time.





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There was an undertone of  
heartbreak in the music. . . .



# ENGAGEMENT FOR





*Though Vannie had given her heart to  
another, the haunting melody of her  
old love refused to fade away. . . .*

I

THE party should have been perfect. A casual, easy affair in the California manner, it had been the most important party ever given in the Carroll home. At supper, the guests, the family's oldest friends, had learned of Vannie's engagement to Kit Jannings.

But after the congratulations and the first excitement, a pall of quiet had settled over the crowd. It was only eleven, but the last vestige of spontaneous gaiety had fled.

Vannie put fresh records on the player, and said brightly to Kit, "Dance with me, please?"

# THREE

a novelet by LUCINDA BAKER



She gave a good imitation of a newly engaged girl being happy. She sparkled, she was radiant, her small figure graceful as a ballerina's in her bouffant pale pink gown. Her eyes were as intensely dark as her frosted-gold hair was pale.

Kit's arms welcomed her. A tall, dark man of twenty-seven, he looked as if he would be more at home in the North Woods than in a beautifully furnished modern house.

They had danced only a few steps when all Vannie's sparkle left her, and she was once again ill at ease and tense.

Kit said for her ears alone, "Darling, don't be such a worrier. Rick Alvarado is all right. He didn't come to the party, but we can't blame him for that. His absence probably has nothing to do with us. You were never engaged to him officially. Therefore your intention to marry me shouldn't be such a shock to him."

"I know," Vannie admitted. "But—Rick and I were always together. We've been inseparable for years, the best of friends. We weren't engaged, but everyone took it for granted we would be. But Rick was working terribly hard on his music, trying to get a break, trying to make himself good enough to be a concert pianist."

Kit grinned ruefully. "You mean, he was too busy to sweep you into marriage, and that he was foolish enough to take a gorgeous creature like you for granted? I can't buy that. Come on now, this is your party. Smile for the people."

Vannie trembled. "They all know something's wrong. Some of them hate me for doing this to Rick, I'm sure."

SHE sensed Kit's increasing grimness as he led her from the floor. He was angry. That was another reason the evening was difficult. She'd never known before what Kit's anger was like—quiet and violent, for all its stillness. Why couldn't he understand?

All right, so she and Rick hadn't been engaged. She flushed, remembering a

not so recent time when she'd thought she'd die if Rick didn't definitely propose marriage. They'd been so close; always confiding, dating. Vannie had been Rick's chief source of courage when he had been depressed about his work.

Then a month ago at a party in San Francisco, across the bay from the small Marin County community where she lived, Vannie had met Kit. Dr. Christopher Jannings, he was officially. A young staff surgeon at Serra Foundation Hospital.

Every detail of that meeting would always be vivid in her memory, because it was just as if she had come alive for the first time in her twenty years.

After the introduction, Kit had said, "Vannie. Short for Evangeline, of course. The name's as lovely as you." It might have sounded corny if anyone else had said it. Vannie had been hearing flattery since she was fifteen. But this wasn't corny, and it wasn't a line.

Within three days they were engaged and planning to be married in six weeks. It was a little frightening, as well as thrilling to have Kit in love with her, Vannie thought. He was so forceful in his quietness. There was an intense masculine strength about him which made Vannie feel exquisitely feminine, yet uneasy because of his possessive way with her.

One thing she had loved about him from the beginning was his complete honesty. There seemed to be nothing secret about Kit. He was passionately devoted to his work.

His only family was his older sister, Jeanne, a quiet young woman in her middle thirties. Jeanne had practically reared Kit after they had been orphaned when she was in her teens. A nurse, she had helped pay his tuition through medical school. Recently she had been ill, and was still unable to work. Kit felt a great sense of gratitude to her. But whatever Jeanne had done to help him, he had justified her faith, Vannie reflected. Despite his



youth, Kit had a glowing reputation as a surgeon.

And so Vannie had loved him. Only afterward had she thought of Rick Alvarado, or wondered how he would take it. At the time of her meeting with Kit, Rick had been in the East. When he returned, a few days ago, it had all been settled.

Vannie had hoped he would understand and rejoice with her, and realize that what they had shared had not been love.

But Rick hadn't rejoiced. He'd burst out 'dazedly, "But I love you, Vannie! I thought you knew the only reason I wanted success was for you! This thing with Kit Jannings is just a passing attraction."

He hadn't come to the announcement party.

Now, looking up at Kit's dark face, Vannie said sombrely, "It isn't easy to hurt someone, Kit. And I did hurt him. Rick isn't like most people. He's a sensitive musician."

"He'll recover," Kit said tightly, almost angrily.

Then they were not alone. Kit's sister, Jeanne, tall and pitifully thin, joined them. She would have been a handsome woman if months of illness had not taken their toll.

"The party isn't too much for you?" Kit asked her quickly.

"I love it," Jeanne said. "I wouldn't have missed it for anything. Even before my illness I never went to many parties. And I had to see you properly engaged, didn't I, Kit darling?" She touched his arm.

She turned back to Vannie, then. "You mustn't worry so about the boy who didn't come to the party. Of course your engagement was a shock to him. But he'll adjust. The human heart is pretty rugged, I've found. In nursing, you see people take heartbreak and adjust to it. Though if you never were actually engaged to Rick, it probably isn't real heartbreak."

"I hope you're right."

VANNIE envied Jeanne's quiet assurance. But how could such a girl know what heartbreak was, or how it felt to hurt someone? Kit had said Jeanne had never been in love.

Suddenly there was a disturbance at the room's entrance. A woman's voice said, "But I've got to see Vannie!"

Vannie turned to see the woman come in. Her white hair was wind-blown, her face agitated. Under an old coat she wore a negligée. She looked so terrified for a moment that she seemed almost like a stranger, not Rick Alvarado's mother.

"Vannie, please come!" she begged, seemingly unaware of the other guests. "Rick said he was going out into the bay in that old sailboat of his. You know he was never a good sailor, especially in weather like this. I'm afraid—afraid he doesn't mean to come back! Please, Vannie, help me! He was upset about you. He won't listen to anyone else. He's so terribly despairing!"

Vannie didn't even stop to get a coat. Her small sandaled feet flew over the familiar path through the back garden, through the gate and down across rough dunes to the bay. It was only then that she was aware of Kit beside her, trying to get her to put on a coat.

He said fiercely, "Just what do you think you're going to do?"

"If he's gone, I'll take out Dad's motor launch."

Kit caught her, made her wait. "You can't go out on the bay in a small boat, even a motor launch, tonight! It's dangerously choppy, and foggy as well!"

Vannie struggled against his restraining arms. She had a weird momentary impression that this man was a stranger. His harshness and fury shocked her, as well as his lack of human sympathy. A man's life was at stake, and he felt only hate and resentment.

She tried frantically to explain. "I can't let him just—not come back! Rick wouldn't consciously destroy himself, but when he gets in a depressed mood he might not think straight. And



he never was a good sailor. Please let me go!"

Kit's grip on her shoulders was painful. "This is probably a grandstand play. I won't let you go after him!" In the dim light, Kit's face was savage. "You're going home. I've told them to call the Coast Guard."

There was no time to argue. Vannie somehow managed to pull away from Kit and once more half-ran, half-stumbled down the path to the pier where dozens of small boats moved restlessly against their moorings.

Only then did she see, looming out of the fog, the tall, slumped figure. Rick. She was in time. But even as she watched, Rick boarded his little boat and prepared to push off.

Apparently he hadn't heard Vannie calling to him.

With Kit beside her she ran the rest of the way to Rick, calling to him all the way.

Finally becoming aware of her, he climbed up on the pier again.

Vannie whispered to Kit, "Please let me talk to him alone, darling. And please understand!"

Even through the thin veil of mist, Rick looked gaunt and ravaged, almost unearthly. Vannie had known he was hurt but not until that moment had she realized his agony.

"Vannie, you should be at your party," he said dazedly. Then hope came into his tone, hope that was tragically pathetic. "Did you announce your engagement, Vannie? Or does your coming here mean you've changed your mind?"

Vannie fought the dry sobs that tried to rise in her throat. She made her voice gentle. "Rick, the engagement was announced. But your mother came over to see me. She was terrified because you were going out on the bay. She asked me to stop you."

"I didn't mean to frighten her," Rick said quietly. "I was feeling low, and I wanted to be alone on the water. That's all, Vannie."

## II



GENTLY but firmly Vannie led Rick Alvarado away from the boat. He seemed dazed. A crowd of people were coming toward them now, guests from the party, and Mrs. Alvarado. Seeing them, Rick winced.

"Vannie, they didn't think I meant to—kill myself?" he asked in horror. Then the dazed sound came back into his voice. "I'd never do it purposely. But—"

He didn't complete the sentence. Vannie knew what he meant. He'd been at such a low point emotionally that nothing had mattered to him, least of all his life.

A moment later they were surrounded by people, and Rick was telling everyone they'd been foolish to worry. Even so, his despair was still obvious. Vannie, watching him, thought, Oh, Rick, Rick, if only I could have loved Kit without hurting you!

His next words were for her alone, but everyone else heard them. "I was keeping it as a surprise, but you might as well know. I'm to make my solo debut with the San Francisco Symphony this month. They called me when Thor Ephraim was injured in an accident."

Thor Ephraim was one of the world's most important pianists. The Symphony Association must have great faith in Rick's talent, his future, if they'd let him substitute for the great artist.

And she, Vannie, had ruined Rick's triumph by hurting him! Just when he'd needed confidence and happiness, to prepare for his concert, she'd broken his heart.

Now the suddenness of her love and her engagement seemed a little indecent. They could have waited.

"You've got to change your clothes," Kit insisted, leading her away from the crowd.



She hadn't realized it until then, but spray and fog had wilted the pink ballerina dress to bedraggled limpness, and the curl had all gone out of her soft, fine hair.

"The party!" she remembered. "I'll have to get back."

Actually, there was little party left after that. When she reappeared in another dress, the last of the guests took their leave.

Vannie had just a moment alone with Kit before he took Jeanne back to the city. His sister's personal physician had warned him that she must not be over-tired, since she was still really only convalescing.

It was when Kit kissed her good night that Vannie realized he was still furious. Even the kiss was brief, and Kit's eyes blazed the quiet violence of his anger.

"Well, Alvarado certainly succeeded in spoiling your party, didn't he? He ought to be a big success on the concert stage. He has a talent for drama."

"Kit!" Vannie gasped, incredulous. He'd seen Rick's awful despair. "Surely you're not heartless enough to think he staged what happened! He was depressed. And you have no reason to be jealous."

The anger left Kit's eyes. "Maybe you're right, and I'm jealous, my darling. I'll try to improve. Only—I love you so! When I saw you ready to risk your own life for his, I was frantic."

He drew her to him to kiss her again, with fierce tenderness this time, and the events of the night were blotted out.

It was only later that Vannie thought of Rick again, and was attacked by guilt. It seemed almost wrong for her to be so happy when poor Rick was suffering so intensely. Why hadn't she given him more time to accustom himself to the idea of losing her before she announced the engagement and set the wedding date?

The next morning, after the wind and fog of the night before, was warm gold, the kind of day Vannie loved. In

shorts and shirt she worked in her mother's garden.

She had been there for about an hour when Rick began to practice.

SINCE he lived just next door, less than a half-block away, every note he played on the great piano in the Alvarado music room was audible. It seemed to Vannie that she'd almost grown up to the exquisite sound of Rick's practicing. But today there was a sombre agony underlying the beauty of the music.

When she could bear it no longer, she went to do some marketing for her mother. But when she came home the music with its melodious tears was still echoing through the low-roofed redwood house.

Mrs. Carroll was depressed because of it. "I didn't realize," she said slowly. "I always thought of you and Rick as—good friends, Vannie. Childhood sweethearts, perhaps. But I never realized Rick felt so deeply. If I had, I think I'd have urged you to give him more time to get used to the idea of you and Kit."

That morning, quite a few of Vannie's friends telephoned her.

"Poor Rick," they each and all said. "Your engagement hit him terribly hard. He had no warning."

None of the callers definitely reproved Vannie, but reproach was in their tones, and certainly deep sympathy for Rick.

Several said, "It's funny you and Rick aren't going to be married. Everyone has always taken for granted that you would."

Vannie's replies sounded trite and inane.

By mid-afternoon she was suffering from a pounding headache. And when Kit arrived that evening to take her to dinner in Sonoma, she was tense and exhausted. It took skillfully applied makeup to disguise even slightly the dark shadows under her eyes. Usually responsive to color, she found that her



favorite yellow tweed suit had no power to make her feel vivacious tonight.

In contrast, Kit was his most dynamic self. He'd performed an operation that afternoon which had saved a child's life. But no matter what he said, heartbreaking melody still haunted Vannie—Rick's melodies.

After a long period of her silence, Kit drew the car to the side of the road and parked. "Tell me what's wrong, Angel," he said.

Vannie was filled with a terrible need to make him understand about Rick. She explained about the way his playing had sounded that afternoon. Then she added, "Kit, maybe I was selfish, never thinking of the way he'd take it. I shouldn't have let you rush me into an engagement and early marriage."

Kit didn't understand. She sensed his sudden anger. In answer, however, he kissed her. She found herself holding back from the kiss, not wanting to sink into the rapture which always made her forget everything else. She was even annoyed at Kit for trying to change the subject.

Finally when the kiss failed, Kit declared resentfully, "Maybe you'd better analyze your own feelings. Did you agree to marry me only because you were tired of waiting for Alvarado to ask you? Or because you wanted to jolt him into action?"

"No!" Vannie protested, feeling a little sick, not just because of the words but because of Kit's tone.

It made her feel cheap. And their love had been so beautiful! Anyway, how could he think she was uncertain of loving him, *him* alone? This was a new Kit, a stranger without compassion.

"Get this straight," he ordered. "You belong to me. You're going to marry me. You've got to get Rick out of your thoughts. Or are you in love with him?"

Vannie sickened a little more. She'd heard of men who in the grip of insane jealousy became unreasoning strangers. Kit was jealous now.

"Sorry," he said, suddenly humble. "I love you so much, Vannie. So very much. I couldn't bear to lose you."

They pretended, the rest of the evening, to be having a wonderful time, but the pretense was thin, shaming. There was, however, a brief and tender magic in Kit's good night kiss, before he drove back across the Golden Gate bridge to San Francisco.

THE next day, Saturday, Rick came over to the Carroll house. He stood in the patio and whistled for Vannie as he had always done, and Vannie called to him from the kitchen to come in.

He was wearing jeans and sport shirt, and he looked so familiar and natural that for an instant she felt as if nothing had happened between them.

"I'm making icebox cookies, the kind you like," she said, smiling, handing him the dish of chopped nuts. "I might as well offer you this. You'll raid it anyway."

Instantly the illusion that nothing had changed was dispelled. Rick's disturbingly serious face still showed the ravages of his emotions. He was thinner.

"I wanted to wish you every happiness, Vannie. In the excitement of the past days I guess I just forgot to do it formally. I suppose I thought you'd take it for granted that I wished only the best for you."

An ashen shadow of pain brushed his features, but he smiled it away.

"Thank you, Rick." Vannie felt humble and pitying and relieved all at the same time. Rick was accepting her engagement at last. She should have known he would, she reflected, and was ashamed for ever having worried about it.

Rick added, "I wanted to ask you if we can always be friends, Vannie. I don't want anything I've said or done to separate us or make you feel uncomfortable. I've heard you and Kit plan to build a home in Mill Valley, and I'd like to be your friend, and Kit's, too. And



with the concert coming up, I'll be able to play better if I know everything is settled. That's what we always were, really, I guess. Friends."

His troubled eyes denied that. But there was courage in them as well as pain.

Vannie took both his hands in her own small floury paws.

"Rick, thank you! I'd have been miserable if you hadn't wanted it this way. Everything would have been ruined."

Maybe that wasn't completely true. But knowing you'd broken someone's heart could spoil some of your own joy.

"Friends, then," Rick said. "We're certain to meet at parties and other places. It would be awkward if we had to avoid each other. And—I want you in the audience the night of my concert. You're—my luck, Vannie."

"I'll be there. Kit and I will be there."

Vannie didn't see Kit Saturday evening. Sunday morning he came over to Marin in time to go to church with her and her parents. Vannie felt more care-free than she had felt since her engagement. Even so, she had to keep reminding herself that everything was all right, that Rick would find his way to happiness.

After church, there was lunch at the country club, a tradition with the Carrolls and their friends. Usually Rick was in the group, but he wasn't on this particular Sunday.

On their way out to the patio where a long buffet table was set, Kit drew Vannie into a deserted television room.

For a moment there was only the warm, sweet eagerness of their embrace. Kit said fervently, "Vannie, you're lovely today. It's almost as if I'd lost you, then found you again. You're like you were that night we met, like sunshine and champagne. Coming to you after all the human trials and troubles I see in my work is like coming out of shadow into sunlight."

Even though it was still early in the day, his eyes were sombre and tired.

"Rough night," he said, shrugging. "Late emergency."

Vannie explained, "If I'm like my old self, it's because I'm so happy and relieved. Kit, Rick and I have made up. He's reconciled. He came over to talk to me yesterday morning. We're going to be friends. We knew we'd meet often, and it would have been embarrassing if we were awkward with each other. He wants to be friends with you, too."

She was totally unprepared for Kit's reaction. One minute he'd been all tenderness. The next, he was the dark, violently jealous stranger she'd seen a few nights before, on the way to Sonoma.

"Well, that will be cozy," he said tightly. "Pals. The three musketeers. You, me, and the guy who lost you."

Shocked, Vannie protested, "Kit, surely if Rick can adjust to what he's been through, you can at least be civilized about it!"

### III



FOR the first time since Vannie had known Kit, she felt angry and exasperated with him. He had no right to be sarcastic, no right to refuse Rick's attempt to be friendly.

The dismay in her face must have struck at Kit's heart.

He said, "Loving you as I do, I suppose it's difficult for me to be generous." There was something touching and appealing about his sudden humility. He did not kiss her again, but there was a magic closeness, a kind of ecstasy, between them.

Then somewhere in the clubhouse, someone put a record on the player. The deep, rich tones of a sonata for piano began. Rick wasn't playing the selection, of course, but it was one of his favorites. Vannie felt a sudden deep sorrow. It didn't seem fair that two



people found ecstasy at the cost of a third person's hurt.

During the next week, Kit was especially busy in San Francisco. His sister Jeanne had gone back to the hospital for a routine examination and check-up. Her recovery from her illness, a rare one, had been rather slow.

On Wednesday, Vannie went into the city to see the girl who would be her sister-in-law in less than a month. Jeanne, pale but cheerful as always, welcomed her.

"Vannie, how wonderful! I hope that book you've brought me has nothing serious in it."

"Absolutely nothing," guaranteed Vannie.

Before she left the hospital room at the end of visiting hour, Vannie told Jeanne, "I'm glad you're better. The results of the check-up must have been good, or you wouldn't be so cheerful. I'm glad. Kit worries about you."

"He mustn't," Jeanne said softly. "He's such a fine surgeon, Vannie, and so sincere. He mustn't be troubled about me."

Vannie said, "I'm counting on you as maid-of-honor."

"Thank you, darling," Jeanne said, then brushed aside the subject. "In a minute they'll be sending you out. The nurse on this floor is the ultra efficient kind. An ogre. I wonder sometimes if I was ever like that."

"You couldn't have been." Vannie waved to her from the door.

She had hoped to see Kit while she was at the hospital, but he was in consultation. Vannie went home feeling strangely lost and alone.

That evening, Rick came to see her as he had done in the old days before Kit. He was proving they were friends, that there were no hard feelings, no bitterness. No hurt.

He was almost like the old Rick had been. They laughed together over the antics of a television comic.

Then suddenly Rick said, "I want to play something for you, Vannie."

He drew enchanted music from the piano, dark, wonderful, unlike anything Vannie had ever heard. There was flame and shadow in it, stillness and crashing splendor. But there was, most of all, an undertone of heartbreak.

"What is it?" Vannie asked, spellbound and frightened.

"I call it, For Evangeline." He added softly, "My oldest friend."

Vannie's heart ached for him. He might call it friendship, he might be fighting to prove to himself that he felt nothing more, but he was failing in the attempt.

After he had gone, Vannie thought, Maybe it takes time. Maybe it takes time to teach your heart. She pictured how she would feel if Kit turned to another girl. Even the dream of it was like a dreadful illness. If Rick felt that way, she prayed, Give his heart rest.

ALL day Thursday and Friday he practiced for his approaching concert. The air reverberated, trembled, with his music. But under the technical brilliance of his playing there was always sadness. Vannie knew the critics wouldn't be kind to him unless that vanished. You couldn't play an *allegro* and have it sound like a dirge!

On each of those days and on Saturday, he came over to the Carroll home as if nothing had changed between him and Vannie. Once he brought her a baby bird he'd found blown out of a tree.

"You'll know what to do for it, Vannie," he said. "Remember, you were always headquarters for First Aid for Animals in the neighborhood."

All the time Vannie fed the little bird she could feel Rick's longing and loneliness as he watched her.

Saturday night, Rena Tennant, an old friend of Vannie's, gave the first of a gay whirl of parties for her and Kit. Brides in their crowd always were given a thrilling send-off.

Vannie wore cerise taffeta and, in honor of the occasion, her mother's



silver-blue mink stole. And Kit seemed a little spellbound by the way she looked. They hadn't seen each other for nearly a week, and their reunion had magic of its own.

Rena's parties were always gay, carnival affairs. This one began as no exception to that rule. Vannie never did know exactly when something started to change it, tarnishing the sparkle.

Soon after her own arrival with Kit, Rick appeared. He looked wonderfully handsome, slender and strong in his tux. He crossed the room to Kit and Vannie, walking briskly, purposefully. For just the space of a second, he hesitated before he took Vannie's hands. Then, after that, he spoke to Kit briefly. For the rest of the evening, he was never far away from them, even though Kit was stonily silent.

Rick sat at the same small table with them when supper was served, never faltering in his conversation, including Kit in it. Repeatedly he stressed that he and Vannie had always been friends. For Kit's benefit he recalled dozens of incidents from their childhood, picturing Vannie as she had been—a tender-hearted child who tried to mother everyone.

It was the most valiant effort Rick had yet made toward proving he had no bitterness even though he'd lost Vannie. It wasn't easy for him, that was plain. His pain was in his eyes. Several times when Vannie glanced up he was watching her with undisguised longing. Yet, when they danced, he carefully did not hold her close. It was, Vannie thought, somehow more touching than if he'd held her firmly in his arms.

It was Kit who caused trouble. He was silent and pale under his tan.

Finally, in the midst of one of Rick's stories of Vannie's school days, Kit broke in, "I'm sorry, Vannie, but we'll have to go. I have an early call at the hospital."

Vannie protested before she thought, "But—we're the guests of honor! And

you didn't tell me before about—"

She broke off, reddening. She hadn't intended to create a scene, but suddenly the room was practically silent. Everyone was watching them, as if they expected a clash.

Rick apologized, his voice low but resonant. "Kit, I realize now that I've been intruding between you and Vannie. I—I'm sorry. I didn't think. I guess when you've been friends for so many years with someone, you forget the situation isn't quite the same."

Kit's jaw set. "I think we'd better leave."

"No, I'll leave, of course," said Rick. Rising tautly, he went straight to their hostess to make a gracious departure.

It was done almost too graciously. Rick was leaving to avoid a clash with Kit, a clash over Vannie, and everyone knew it.

**K**IT still insisted on going, too. Vannie had never been so embarrassed in her life. If she had dared, she would have insisted that they remain. She dreaded a worse scene, however, so she did as Kit asked.

On the drive home they were both silent, but her anger was building up, strange, unaccustomed anger that sprang from humiliation and disbelief.

When Kit had taken her into her father's house her anger finally exploded. Shaking with it, fighting back tears, she blazed, "You made me feel cheap! And you embarrassed poor Rick. He went out of his way to show people we were all three friends, and you—you acted like a boor!"

Kit was ominously quiet as he said, "I'll admit I lost my temper. It was one of the few times in my life I ever did. But that guy—he was just too hard for me to take! His big show of friendship is too good to be true. Then every time he thought no one was looking, he stared at you soulfully. And you—" Kit's voice went harsh with the jealousy Vannie had learned to dread—"encouraged him! You led him on.



You hung on his every word. It was very cozy. An engagement for three. If being engaged to you means he'll have to be around for the rest of our lives, the answer is, 'No, thanks.' You're not to see him again. I'm not his friend, and I don't want any more of this heavy-handed friends stuff."

Vannie's anger rose to a new peak of hurt and intensity.

"You can't say such things to me, Kit, or give me orders like that, out of a jealous rage! There's nothing between Rick and me which could hurt you. You act as if—" Words failed her. This was Kit, her Kit, acting as if he had no trust in her.

"Don't call this an order—call it a request," Kit said. "I want us to give up this so-called friendship with Rick Alvarado. Call it insurance for our future. I know he's in love with you, and I don't want to share you. You belong to me. I don't want him always hanging around you."

Vannie felt as if she were being torn to pieces. She loved Kit, but if his idea of marriage was to give impossible orders for his wife to obey, she wanted none of it. She thought back now, almost hysterically, to the talks they'd had about marriage. They'd have mutual faith and trust, they'd said. Tenderness and understanding. They wouldn't fight. And yet tonight Kit had probably caused her to be the town's Number One topic for gossip.

When he tried to kiss her good night, she moved away from him. What she wanted, aching, was for him to apologize, somehow to see how wrong he'd been. But he did not apologize. He didn't try to kiss her again, either.

He only said, "I'll call you soon, Vannie, to see if you've told Rick there's no room for him in our lives."

Moments later she heard the sound of his car die away. It was only when she knew that he was not coming back to make up with her that she cried, at last, bewildered and broken.

Her lips ached, her heart ached, be-

cause Kit hadn't kissed her. Yet it had been his jealous fury and refusal to understand which had caused the rift between them. If she gave in to his wishes now it would probably establish a pattern for them. She'd always be expected to give in when he had a jealous rage.

As for Rick, under his valiant efforts at friendship had been tragedy. It had undoubtedly scarred his sensitive nature already. With his concert a matter of days away, he needed peace of mind, not more heartbreak. His whole future rested on the way he played with the Symphony.

As usual, Vannie went to church with her parents on Sunday, and to the club afterward for lunch. Pride made her go, but it could not make her stay. She could sense people looking at her, wondering, talking. Rick's mother was there. Poor Mrs. Alvarado was almost as distraught as she had been the night of the engagement party.

SHE told Vannie, loudly enough to be overheard, "I'm so worried about Rick. He wanted me to tell you that he was sorry about what happened at Rena's party. He only meant to be your friend. If your fiancé didn't understand . . . Well, Rick says he won't annoy you further. He wants you to know he won't trouble you." Mrs. Alvarado's face crumpled. "I'm so afraid all this will spoil his concert. He felt badly enough, even before tonight."

Vannie knew then that she could not and would not tell Rick to keep out of her life. If Kit wanted to be a jealous fool, let him!

She told Rick's mother, "I understand. Tell Rick he will always be my friend."

She left the club and walked home along the bay shore, past the yacht harbor, thinking, Kit, Kit, don't lose what we had, because of sheer jealousy. Please grow up! You must see that I couldn't begin a marriage by letting you dictate every aspect of my life.



She pretended the wetness on her face came from sea spray, though there was no wind, and the surf was quiet.

## IV



THE house was unbearably still when Vannie went into it. Then suddenly Rick's playing, Rick's music, vibrated through it. For *Evangeline*, the number he'd composed, rang with his heart-break. He was in the living room! Apparently he'd come through the patio entrance. He'd always known where they hid the key.

Vannie hurried into the living room, and Rick rose at her entrance. He had never been drunk in his life, never gone in for anything stronger than a coke. But now she knew he had been drinking. He was drunk, but he presented a tragic spectacle rather than a disgusting one.

"Vannie, my Vannie," he said. And then, "At least we'll always be friends, won't we?" His mind seemed to clear for an instant. "I caused you a lot of unhappiness last night. You quarreled with Kit, didn't you? I didn't mean it to be that way, my dear. I want you to be happy."

"I know, Rick," Vannie said. "I know."

Vannie knew she would never forget the awful need in his eyes. Poor Rick! He'd tried so hard. And she'd hurt him so deeply.

Confusion almost overwhelmed her. Were she and Kit right for each other? Was what they'd had only been a wild, senseless attraction? She'd been so sure, sure because she had been swept into a dark, swirling loveliness.

Now from the patio she watched Rick walk unsteadily across the garden, home. It sickened her to think of him drunk. Rick, a genius in his art, should not be enduring this torture on the eve

of his big chance.

Late that evening, Kit drove out from the city. Vannie, small and slender in leaf-green jersey, met him at the door. Kit, even after twenty-four hours, still had that look of a stranger about him.

He did not take her in his arms. If he had, Vannie thought, she would have known everything was all right, sure and secure. But he did not. He followed her into the living room before he spoke. A fire was burning on the hearth, but it seemed to give out no warmth. Vannie was icy cold.

Kit said at last, "Have you made your choice between Rick and me? It amounts to that, Vannie. If you insist on letting him hang around, you love him. Maybe you love me, too. But I don't want a divided love. Did you tell him you wouldn't see him again?"

Vannie shook her head in denial. "Kit, I can't hurt him now, of all times. It would be so senseless, so ridiculous, to destroy a friendship. And I can't let you start our marriage by dictating to me. I've known Rick for years. I can't ruin his chances for success at the concert. He was here today. He'd been drinking, and it was pathetic. It made me see just how much I'd hurt him."

Kit's black rage, now familiar, was a kind of mask for his face. It was rage mingled with hurt. Vannie knew that. Yet she could feel no pity for that hurt.

Kit said, "I've been wondering about you all day, Vannie. Do you really love the guy, or do you just love the sensation of knowing you have such power over a man? Is that why you won't break with him, but want him and me, too?"

Vannie's hand had darted out and struck the hard, flat plane of his face before she even knew she meant to hit him. Her whole body trembled because she was so ashamed.

What she and Kit had known had been so beautiful, so enchanted. Yet here they were, quarreling viciously, hurting each other.

"I deserved that, I suppose," Kit said,



tightly. "Sorry, Vannie. I'm sorry for everything."

With a swift motion she put her ring in his hand, and he took it and went out. That was all. This can't be happening, Vannie thought. Only it was happening all right.

Almost, she called him back. But in the end her pride would not allow that. She would not give in to a senseless whim of jealousy.

ALL the next day she waited for Kit to telephone, waited fruitlessly. That was only the beginning of waiting, as it turned out. In all the days that followed, she moved like a shadow through the house. And through all those days, the somber music from Rick's piano echoed in the air as he prepared for the concert.

Finally he came to see her, to apologize for having been drunk. He was painfully ashamed. His eyes were still haunted by grief.

She told him, "Nothing has changed, Rick, between you and me. We're still friends. But Kit and I have broken up."

He stared at her as if he could not quite take it in. It was then that she realized it was the first time she'd actually put it into words. She hadn't even said it in words to her parents, though they knew she had given back her ring, and had tried to get her to talk about it.

Rick was paper pale. Finally he said, his voice bursting through a barrier of attempted reserve, "I'm glad, Vannie! He was never right for you. I need you, darling, so much! I always have."

His arms tightened about her. He didn't try to kiss her, and the embrace was really not so much an embrace of love as it was of emotional need.

"It will be all right," he said, as if he were sure of his promise. "This will all seem like a bad dream."

Later, in her room, hating Kit for having hurt her, she thought, Rick was right. Kit and I were never right for

each other. Only why did a love that hadn't been right have to hurt so?

The days before Rick's concert dwindled away. There was no word at all from Kit, and finally Vannie began to realize there would not be.

She was in the audience the night of Rick's overwhelmingly successful concert. Rick, a dark, magnetic figure of drama, thrilled and captivated his listeners. As a final encores, he played his own composition, *To Evangeline*.

Afterward his dressing room was crowded with critics and important people. A representative of a famous concert agency wanted him to sign a contract. Rick was on his way to more concerts, tours, television appearances.

He told Vannie, "I would have failed without you. You know that, don't you?"

"No," Vannie denied.

He insisted, "It's true. And I don't intend to lose you again. You will marry me, won't you? You must, or none of my success will have meaning!"

He held her to him in an affirmation of that need.

"Let's talk about it later," Vannie whispered. "It's too soon."

"But you are going to marry me," Rick declared.

It was true, Vannie thought. She would marry Rick. When the memory and bewilderment of her love for Kit had faded a little.

The next morning when she came down to breakfast her father had news for her. His own face pale and shocked, he said, "I've got to show you something in the morning paper, Vannie. I'm afraid it can't wait."

At first Vannie thought it might be a review of Rick's concert. It wasn't.

A caption under the photograph of Kit's sister, Jeanne, said:

#### VALIANT NURSE DIES

The pictured girl was younger than the sickness-ravaged woman Vannie knew, but it was Jeanne, clear-eyed, laughing. So much like Kit.



VANNIE read the story through. Jeanne Elizabeth Jannings, beloved head nurse of the children's ward at Serra Hospital, had passed away after a two-year fight with a rare and incurable disease. For the past six months, she had known she had only a few months to live. Sharing in her tragic secret had been only her private physician, and her brother, a surgeon.

The printed words whirled before Vannie's eyes as grief hit her. In the short time she'd known Jeanne, she'd grown to feel a deep affection for the tall, quiet girl who was Kit's sister.

Even that last day in the hospital, Jeanne must have known her death was imminent. Yet she'd been cheerful, unafraid, uncomplaining. She'd had courage, real, quiet, inspiring.

And Kit. Poor Kit! The news story said he'd shared Jeanne's secret. Now Vannie's grief was for him, a wrenching, tearing knowledge that for the rest of her life she would love him. What happened to him, happened to her. He'd been going through deep tragedy, but he'd never complained, never cried out that he needed Vannie. But he *had* needed her, as all men need the women they love in time of trouble.

Vannie struggled against tears, tears that were more than grief for Jeanne. Did hurt never end, the awful hurt of a broken romance?

Perhaps an eternity passed as she stood there. Perhaps it was only a moment. A sound from the patio startled her back to reality.

Rick came in, tanned, tall, dramatic. He had heard the news about Kit's sister. His face was troubled. At first Vannie thought he'd felt the impact of the tragedy.

But then he burst out, "You can't go to him, Vannie! What you had with Kit is over and done with. I'm afraid if you go to him now, I'll lose you. And I need you, I need you!"

He would have caught her to him but she moved out of his reach. Suddenly the thought of Rick's touch sickened

her. The sight of him, the sound of him, thinking not of someone else's heartbreak but of his own possible need, repelled her.

It wasn't, she knew suddenly, an adult love he felt for her. Rick, for all his talent, his talk of love, was a clinging and spoiled child, emotionally. If he met trouble or disappointment, he whined or got drunk or made a grandstand play to get attention the way he had the night of Vannie's announcement party. Men like him, she realized, were the alcoholics of the world, the problem husbands.

Rick wasn't a man. Not like Kit.

*Kit!* She thought, perhaps she said it aloud, Kit, darling, what have I done to you? I sent you away because I didn't understand that pity and compassion aren't love. And when you fought for our love, I accused you of jealousy.

"I'll drive you into the city to Kit," said her father. "He'll want you."

WHEN they reached Kit's apartment on Russian Hill, she was terribly afraid he wouldn't want to see her. While they waited for the doorbell to be answered, ages seemed to pass. Vannie thought of what life would be without Kit. If she had to face it, she could, but in many ways it would be a barren waste.

She would not love again.

Then there was Kit, standing in the doorway, his face rigid with weariness and sorrow. When he saw Vannie, the darkness in his eyes deepened.

"I'm sorry about Jeanne," Vannie said simply. "But that isn't the only reason I've come back to you. I came because I know I love you, and that I almost let Rick succeed in destroying us in his own clever way. I'm sorry I didn't know it sooner, and terribly glad it didn't take me even longer to learn it. Kit, may I have my ring again?"

He said nothing at all, probably because he couldn't. But he reached out and drew her to him hungrily. ♥ ♥ ♥





# Handy Woman

By MARY MAEDER

*Nobody could be a better  
housewife than Diana . . .  
but she needed a husband  
before she could prove it!*

DIANA MARTIN emerged from her garage swinging the lawn shears on two fingers. She stopped in her driveway and looked up the street, down the street, and across the street. Blinds were still closed in all the bedrooms on Blossom Lane, and Diana imaged husbands and wives snuggled sleepily side by side. At least she supposed they'd be snuggled side by side. Not having a husband, she wasn't really sure.

She thought, I used to think I'd have a husband some day. But now I don't know— She sighed a deep, longing sigh.

Diana's gray bungalow with its inviting, lobster-red front door didn't look at all like a castle without a king. But that was what it was.

The early sun felt good on Diana's long bronzed legs. She made a striking picture in her turquoise shorts and halter which she'd bought, frankly, be-



cause she knew they'd complement her blond hair and her tanned skin. But no one wanted a picture of Diana that she knew of, except her Aunt Sophia in Milwaukee. And Aunt Sophia didn't count, being female as well as a relative.

Diana snipped off a few blades of grass along her cellar window. Then, out of the corner of her eye, she noticed someone in crumpled striped pajamas behind the bedroom window at the Lucas' next door.

She turned and smiled as warmly as the rising sun. "Good morning! Beautiful morning, isn't—"

Jim Lucas glared silently through the screen like a ferocious caged lion with a tousled mane. Then he slammed the window on her sentence.

Diana felt a chill, as if the sun had suddenly set on her day.

There! she thought unhappily. That was dislike. The real thing. Now I know I wasn't just imagining that my men neighbors have changed in their attitude toward me. But why? Not that I have any designs on any of these married men. It's just that they *are* men and if I repel *men*, why I'll never get a husband.

She snipped viciously at the grass as if the struggling blades were little worries she could behead.

When Diana had bought her cozy bungalow more than a year ago, all the wives in the neighborhood had been watchful. And while they had not been exactly unfriendly, they had been formal. They'd called her Miss Martin even after she'd repeatedly told them, "Please call me Diana. You make me feel like a spinster when you're so formal."

**B**UT the wives had continued to treat her like some stranger they'd just met and neither expected, nor cared, to see again.

Diana thought she knew why. She had 20:20 vision in her hazel eyes, and a full length mirror on her bedroom

door. But she couldn't call a conference of wives and say, "See here, I know I'm single, but I have no designs on any of your husbands. I bought this house only because I was raised on a farm and when I lived in a studio apartment I missed growing things so much I couldn't stand it."

But at that time the husbands had been nice to her, and Diana had dreamed of the day when she, too, would be a housewife instead of a—

Well, what am I, anyway? she wondered. I live in a house but I'm not a housewife. And I'm not a *housekeeper*, either, because I believe that term means to keep someone else's house.

By the time she'd lived in her house for two months Diana had all her storm windows stored for the summer, her screens up, her flowers planted, and her boxy hedges neatly trimmed. Hers had been the first house all transformed for the coming summer, and she had been rather proud of it.

One day she'd had her lawnmower upside down in the side lawn oiling all the places that looked as if they should be lubricated when Sara Lucas had come out lugging a huge basket of laundry.

Sara had glanced over, smiled, and said, "Good morning, Diana."

Diana had straightened up and waved her oil can jubilantly. "Whee! I'm going to run up a flag! You didn't call me 'Miss Martin' this morning!"

Sara removed a clothespin from her mouth to say, "Oh, you probably won't be hearing the more formal address much longer."

"Why? Is it the custom on Blossom Lane to treat new neighbors so—so formally?"

"Only if they're single, under thirty, feminine and pretty," Sara had replied, peering at her under Jim's striped shorts.

"Did you think I had designs on your husbands or something?"

"Not 'desgins' the way you mean, exactly. But we were afraid you'd be borrowing our husbands all the time to



do your chores, such as screens and hedges. We thought if that happened we'd *never* get our own chores done, and—"

"So that was it," Diana had cut in wonderingly.

"That was it!" Sara assured her airily. "And since you're a nurse, even the wife with the least imagination could picture you not only borrowing our husbands to clip hedges and put up screens, but tenderly bandaging any scratches they might have got!" She'd added, "Now that we see what a handy woman you are, why, we're all a little ashamed of what we used to fear."

Diana had sighed. "I guess I got to be a handy woman helping Dad on the farm before he died. He said I'd tackle any job!"

"From now on," Sara had promised magnanimously, "we'll treat you just as if you had a husband."

"Thanks. And I sure hope to have one, some day."

Diana finished trimming the edges of her lawn that Saturday morning and hung the shears high on the garage wall.

ONE day, shortly after the men had become hostile in earnest, the man two houses down had confronted her coldly. He had his small son by one hand and Diana's lawn shears in the other.

"Yours?" he'd asked brusquely.

"Oh, dear! I'm sorry. I guess I forgot that there are little ones around here. I'll fix that." She had immediately driven a huge spike high on the wall on which she hung the shears.

"There! I don't want any little boys to cut themselves on my old shears!"

But the man had just sort of grunted before leaving. And he'd once been one of her most ardent admirers! That is, he was as ardent as a married man can be to an unattached woman living practically next door.

As Diana went into the house now to prepare her poached egg and coffee, she told herself firmly, "Diana Martin, this constant mulling over the situation nei-

ther tells you what's wrong, nor solves the problem, so stop it!

She stopped it. But by the time the water was hot for her coffee she was at it again.

She was thinking, what could possibly ail me that as soon as the wives become friendly the husbands become unfriendly. I'm neighborly as the dickens. I hang the shears out of reach of their kids. I help find lost dogs. I never yell at kids who cut across my lawn. And I keep my place neater than the others and get my screens up before anybody else."

By then she'd run out of fingers on one hand, but instead of continuing to count off reasons on the other hand, she thought, To heck with it! and sat down to eat her breakfast.

After breakfast she washed her dishes and breezed through her usual Saturday cleaning.

About one o'clock, still dressed in her turquoise shorts and halter, she carefully applied her make-up and went out to put up the birdhouse she'd bought Friday. One of her reasons for buying that particular house was the huge maple tree that grew between the sidewalk and the street. They used to have a tree with a birdhouse on the farm.

While she was high up on her ladder and pretty well obscured by foliage from the waist up, she heard men's voices below her.

"Up there's Diana Martin." That was Jim Lucas' voice.

"All I see is a pair of legs. But even if that's all I get to see, it was worth coming for." That was the voice of a stranger whose words she was barely able to hear.

"Just wait," Jim promised. "You haven't seen anything yet!" He called, "Hey, Tarzan's mate! Come on out of that tree!"

For a moment Diana wondered whether the high altitude were somehow affecting her ears. Then she backed part way down the ladder to see for herself.



Jim Lucas was grinning up at her, as friendly as anything. He didn't even resemble the lion with the tousled mane who'd slammed his window on her early that morning. The stranger with Jim was the kind of man she'd have dreamed about meeting had she been the kind of girl to let her dreams get really out of control.

The stranger was a head taller than Jim Lucas, who was five-feet-ten. His eyes seemed riveted to the ladder where Diana turned to face them from halfway down. She leaned casually against the gently rocking ladder, perfectly at ease on it.

"Such agility," the stranger said softly with awed admiration. "Such grace. I've seen all sorts of things come out of all kinds of trees, halfway around the world, but I'll never see anything like you again if I gaze at trees the rest of my life."

Diana blinked a couple of times. "Jim, how about introducing us?"

"Diana Martin, this is Robert Hutchins—Bob," Jim said.

"How do you do, Mr. Hutchins?"

"How do you do, Miss Martin?" He added, "Please call me Bob, Diana."

Jim went home then, and Diana almost fell off her ladder with the impact of sudden realization.

"Jim was so nice and friendly—" she said, looking puzzled.

"He sure is a nice guy," Bob agreed, missing her point entirely. "I'll be indebted to him for the rest of my life. Especially if you'll go out to dinner with me this evening."

Diana was still staring at the Lucas' front door through which Jim had disappeared. "I'll have to think about it awhile."

Bob approached the ladder and reached up to help Diana down. She hesitated a moment, then took his hand. It felt warm and strong.

"Did you have any tools up there?" Bob asked, glancing into the tree as if half expecting a hammer to tumble on his head.

"Uh-uh. I wired the birdhouse to a limb."

"Well, aren't you the clever one, though!" Bob said admiringly.

"Oh, no," she told him. "Anybody knows that bird babies like to be rocked."

She pulled the ladder out of the tree and started to drag it toward the garage. Bob picked up the dragging end and they carried it the rest of the way.

WHEN they entered Diana's small, screened breezeway Bob dropped onto the lounge. "Ah! This beats all the well-publicized tropic isles. The breeze here is cooler, the girl prettier."

"Thank you," Diana said. "I enjoy my breezeway a lot." She sat down opposite him, searching for words. The best she could find was, "Would you like a glass of iced tea? Or ginger-ale?"

"Tea, please."

Instead of staying on the lounge, Bob got up and followed Diana into her pink and green kitchen, explaining, "I've only known you for a few minutes, but I felt faintly lonely seeing you turn your back and walk away from me."

"Oh, bosh!" Diana blushed, but she liked it. Even with the refrigerator door open, she felt a warm glow!

"Allow me," Bob said, taking the tray of ice cubes from her.

They were standing side by side at the sink and Diana felt almost daintily feminine to see his wavy brown hair so far above the crown of her blond hair which was all of five-feet-eight from the floor. Bob dropped three ice cubes into each tall glass and Diana poured in the tea. She was glad she'd made a whole pitcherful before lunch.

As soon as they were settled on the breezeway Bob said, "You're a nurse, hours three till eleven five days a week. You bought this house a year ago. You're a farmer's daughter, you're my ideal, and you're dazzlingly beautiful."

"And that leaves me with nothing to talk about," she said, "since you've said



what I was going to tell you. Is that *all* Jim Lucas told you?" She asked that with the merest hope for a clue as to the recent big chill in Jim and the other men neighbors.

"Not quite all. He also said you're a terrific cook, says he drools over the back fence sometimes when he smells your cooking. He also said you're a regular green-thumb at gardening, are good-natured, like kids and dogs and—"

"Please! I've heard enough about me. Tell me where he found you and everything else about you."

"I work with Jim down at Ace Advertising. Been there eight years. Veteran, World War Two. I like steak and baked potatoes and swimming and girls like you, of which there's only one in the whole world. Jim has been talking for months about the beautiful bachelor girl nurse who lives next door to him, but I thought it might be a gag or something. He had to take a picture of you to prove it before I'd consider coming."

"A picture? Jim never took a picture of me that I know of."

Bob removed a picture from his wallet and handed it to Diana. It was a color shot Jim must have sneaked the day she tied up her red rambler rose. She was wearing a pink tee shirt and navy blue shorts.

She frowned, more puzzled than ever. "That's funny. I mean, why should Jim take a picture of me to show you? Why, only this morning when I was out trimming my lawn, he didn't even answer when I spoke to him. He just sort of glared through the screen, slammed the window and stalked off."

"No fooling? What were you wearing?"

"These. Why?"

Bob shook his head slowly from side to side. "If I glanced through my screen early in the morning and saw you, I'd stand there with my nose pressed against the screen till it bagged out!"

"Oh, stop!" Diana laughed. She decided perhaps she'd better not tell him how the men had been acting toward

her. After all, why deliberately spoil what might conceivably develop into a good thing?

Bob looked at his watch. "It's going on three. I heard of a new steak place up on Lake Breeze, so if you'd like to, we can leave now and ride around the lake till dinnertime."

"I'd love to. I'll go change."

"Must you?" he asked regretfully, but there was an unmistakable twinkle in both blue eyes.

DIANA threw the morning paper at him. "Of course, silly! Unless this place you mentioned is a dive."

"I wouldn't take you to a dive!" he protested. "You shall have soft lights and music and perfect service and—"

"And if we stand here discussing it all day, we won't even get off the breeze-way," Diana reminded him.

"While you're getting ready, I'd better move my car. It's blocking Jim's driveway. Besides I want to thank Jim for insisting that I meet you."

While Diana showered, she thought, Bob Hutchins is probably a well-traveled wolf with a well-rehearsed line . . . No. No, I don't really believe that. I'm just trying to build up a little resistance in case he should leave as suddenly as he appeared.

But she decided that the thing to do was to enjoy her dinner date and not to worry about the future, even though she felt certain Bob Hutchins was a man she might fall in love with if she just let her heart go.

The combination of the effects of a refreshing shower and her unexpected good fortune set her vocal chords to humming. Suddenly a terrible thought muffled them, Hold on there, Diana Martin. Who brought this fellow over? And who's been acting awfully unfriendly lately? Why, Jim Lucas. I wonder just what kind of a trick he's playing on me anyway? Maybe I should carry a concealed hat pin just in case.

As if to further confuse her, Jim Lucas stopped his lawn mower to watch them leave. He smiled and waved them



off and shouted:

"Have fun, you two!"

Bob was so attentive, the air at Lake Breeze was so intoxicating, and the food at the steak place was so appetizing that Diana almost forgot her suspicion that Jim Lucas was playing some kind of trick on her.

After dinner they walked around a lakeside amusement park. Diana stood beside the merry-go-round for several minutes, smiling raptly at the tots.

"Kids think a ride on that is a big deal, don't they?" Bob laughed.

"Uh-huh."

They passed a popcorn stand and Diana sniffed, "Mm-m, doesn't that smell yummy?"

Before she could stop him, Bob stepped up and bought a huge bag of the stuff. As he gave it to her, she protested:

"But I'm not hungry! I only mentioned that—"

"Your merest mention is my command," Bob told her. "We'll save it for on the way home if you don't want it now."

It was after midnight when they pulled into Diana's driveway. Bob opened the car door, helped her out, took her key, unlocked her back door and followed her through the breezeway and into the kitchen.

"I'm dying of thirst," he said. "Must be the popcorn."

Diana didn't protest. She wanted to see whether he became unmanageable after midnight. Perhaps that was the trick Jim Lucas was playing on her.

Bob turned on the faucet and then remembered, "There's more of that good tea, isn't there? May I have that instead?"

Diana thought, He's stalling now. Aloud, she said, "Certainly. I didn't dream when I brewed that tea that a Prince Charming would be along to help drink it!"

There! Might as well encourage the beast and get it over with!

Bob half-sat, half-leaned on the kitch-

en stool sipping tea. Diana sat on one of the kitchen chairs, facing him, and thinking, That's sure an awkward position if he has heavy stuff on his mind.

"Diana," he said, "I hope your Sunday isn't already all planned. I'd like to take you swimming early in the morning."

"How early is early?" she asked suspiciously.

BOB drained his tea glass and went to the sink to refill it. "Six-thirty. We'll beat the mob and cook our breakfast there."

Diana laughed. "I've never been swimming earlier than three o'clock in the afternoon, but I'm willing to go for breakfast. What'll I bring?"

"You mean for breakfast? Nothing. I'll bring everything and even cook it for us. It won't be fancy, but it'll be adequate."

He started to sit down with the second glass of tea, but after glancing at his watch he remained standing. "I'd better hurry along or your nice respectable neighbors won't like me."

He immediately started toward the door and Diana stood up and followed. She asked, "Suppose it's cold or foggy in the morning? Shall I just turn off the alarm and go back to sleep?"

"Don't you dare! In that case wear slacks and a sweater and we'll go for breakfast, anyway."

"All right, then," she said softly. "Thank you for a memorable evening, Bob. Good night."

Bob turned to face her for a long look. "Good night, Diana," he said sincerely. "This was a memorable evening for me, too." And he left.

As Diana filled the empty pitcher and the glass with water she thought, Why, he really was thirsty! And here I was silently accusing him of trying to guzzle his way into my living room. Or worse.

Before Diana drifted into a contented sleep, she indulged her recently abandoned habit of dreaming of a husband out mowing the lawn while she pre-



pared his favorite breakfast in her pink and green kitchen. The only change in her dream was that now the man had definite shape and form and looks. He looked exactly like Bob Hutchins.

On Sunday morning the sky was darkly overcast, but Diana didn't mind. What did a few clouds matter when she had an early date? She hummed softly as she unzipped the mothproof bag and took out black and white checked slacks and a black turtle-necked sweater.

As they drove along the almost deserted streets Bob remarked contentedly, "the two of us all alone in the world. That's the way I like it."

Diana protested, "Don't you want there to be other people to enjoy life when it's so wonderful?"

"I guess you've got a point there," he proclaimed seriously. "Okay—let there be lots of people to enjoy life!"

A couple of blocks farther on Diana glanced worriedly at the threatening sky. "Do you think it'll rain before we get through?"

"Rain on us? It wouldn't dare!" They laughed and Bob added, "I'm sorry it's too chilly for swimming, but the summer is young yet. We'll have plenty of swimming time."

His casual mention of future fun made Diana so happy that not even an immediate downpour would have dampened her spirits.

As they unloaded the trunk of his small red car, Bob waved a black iron griddle and said, "We always have pancakes about nine-thirty at our house on Sundays. Mom has cooked them on this griddle ever since she and Dad were married. Says it beats all the new-fangled grills. Boy! Will Dad and my kid brother be furious if we don't return this in time for their pancakes!"

"Well, we can eat pancakes from now till nine, and still get it back in time!" Diana laughed.

She insisted on mixing the pancake batter while Bob built a fire. He'd brought a box of pancake flour and a quart of milk. He'd also brought tiny

sausages and instant coffee and syrup.

They were alone until they'd finished eating. Then several pigeons flew off the top of the bathhouse, landed in the sand quite near them and strutted about, nodding their funny little heads wisely.

"Bob, let's bake them some pancakes!" Diana said.

"Okay. Let's." He bowed to a nearby pigeon. "Be our guest!"

Bob baked the pancakes and Diana fanned them to cool them, then broke them up for the pigeons.

THEY fed pigeons until the first sprinkles of rain fell. Then they extinguished the remains of their fire and repacked their supplies and utensils.

On the way back into the city, Bob mused contentedly, "Good job in the best country in the world; plenty of food; a pretty girl beside me. I ask you, what more could a man possibly ask for?"

Diana could think of one thing more—marriage and three or four children—but she didn't say it. She thought she probably shouldn't even be thinking it, not when she hadn't known him for quite twenty-four hours yet! But when her two imaginary little boys insisted on looking like miniature Bobs she gave up trying to erase their features and let them look like him.

During the next few weeks, Diana was in a busy whirl, what with her job at the hospital, her house and yard work, and the round of dinner and dancing dates, early morning swims, and rides with Bob Hutchins. But she wasn't too busy to notice that there was a distinct change in the way the men neighbors were treating her. Jim Lucas hung over her fence and talked with her, and once early in the morning when she was mowing her lawn, he spoke a cheery good morning to her first through the bedroom screen!

The man down the street stopped several times to chat while walking his dog past her place.

Whatever it was that had ailed them



for awhile was certainly evaporating fast, she realized with a sigh of relief. But best of all was the way her dates had multiplied, as well as warmed up. Bob always kissed her hello and good-by now—and sometimes in between hello and good-by—and Diana was in love.

Although Bob hadn't yet said he loved her, she was sure he did. What more could I possibly ask for? she thought contentedly as she sat down in the breezeway to wait for Bob that Saturday evening.

Bob took her out for dinner and dancing at a night club, but they returned to her house as soon as the early floor show was over.

Diana put the kitchen light on, then returned to the breezeway. Bob grinned up at her as she approached the lounge where he was sitting. He put out the light and seized Diana's hand, pulling her gently onto his lap.

She relaxed in his arms. She felt at home there now. With his lips only inches from hers, he asked, "Would you like it now, or do you want to save it for later?"

"Would I like what now?" she asked softly.

"This," he said and kissed her thoroughly.

After a few moments Diana struggled up to regain her composure. Outlining Bob's ear with her forefinger, she complained gently, "The neighbors might see us. You'd better let me go."

Bob laughed. "I haven't been holding you down since you sat up. Am I such an ineffectual hugger that you can't tell the difference?"

"Stinker!" she said, and swung at his head with a pillow. "You jellied my bones with your kiss so that I couldn't tell whether you were still holding me or not."

He dropped the pillow on the other side of him and reached for her again. "Diana, honey, isn't it time we got serious?"

"Mm-m?"

"Tomorrow afternoon I'm coming over here with a proposal in my pocket, so you'd better start thinking about whether to sign it yes or no, because I love you."

Diana could hardly believe her ears. She stared at him. She felt like shouting, "Yes! I accept!" But instead, she said, "Am I supposed to start thinking about it right now, or after you go?"

"Right now. This minute. Do you love me, darling?"

"I haven't finished thinking about it yet," she replied. "I'll let you know tomorrow."

As she adjusted the blind on her bedroom window before retiring, she thought happily, Soon I won't have to put up screens or clip hedges or any of that. Then I'll have lots of time to devote to my flowers.

DIANA woke up on Sunday morning thinking, "I'm engaged! I'm engaged! Well, not officially, but just as good as. She felt like shouting the news to the world, so as soon as she finished her breakfast dishes she went next door to tell Jim and Sara Lucas. After all, Jim had been the one to introduce them.

After telling her good fortune, Diana couldn't resist adding, "And now that all my men neighbors are so nice to me, what more could I ask for? By the way, Jim, you were one of the grumpier ones, so maybe you can tell me. Just why were all of you so cold there for awhile, anyway?"

Jim laughed. "You mean you don't have the foggiest idea why we were so unneighborly?"

"Not the foggiest!"

"Well, we can't leave you in a fog, can we?" he teased and Sara warned, "Jim—"

Jim ignored Sara's warning word and look. "When you were such a handy woman, as Sara calls it, at getting your yard tended first and your screens up first, all the wives descended on us in a body and nagged us to get ours done. They said that if a mere woman could



get her yard work done so early after working eight hours a day and keeping house besides, then big strong men like us ought to be ashamed for dilly-dallying."

Sara scolded, "Jim, after all—"

Diana encouraged him. "Go right ahead. This is interesting."

Jim went ahead. "It's funny about Bob Hutchins. You two were just made for each other. He always said around the office that he wouldn't ever get married. He was going to stay home, he said, where his father and younger brother always do the yard chores. Did he tell you I was so determined to get him to meet you that I sneaked a picture of you to get him interested? Anyway, to make a long story short, every husband on this street is glad to see the romance progressing so well. Why, with you safely married to a man who won't put up screens and such, all our nagging wives will be content with us whether we get around to those jobs sooner or later."

Diana was staring numbly at the floor as if half expecting to see her crumbled dreams in a little pile of rubble at her feet. Then she said, "Well, folks, I—asked—for it, didn't I?" Her chin quivered slightly and she fled.

Jim must have started to follow her because she heard Sara scolding him, "Let her go. I hope you're satisfied now, you big brute, spoiling every—"

So that was why Jim had looked so smug immediately after introducing her and Bob, Diana thought. She'd thought of practically everything except the correct reason. By the time she slammed her back door as if she never expected to open it again, she was no longer angry at Jim. Instead, she was angry at Bob. So all he wanted was a handy woman! She'd fix him!

She called the Hutchins' residence. Bob's mother had to get him up. As soon as he found out who was on the phone he said:

"Darling! What a perfect way to start the day, hearing your—"

"Jim has told me everything! Don't bother to come over this afternoon. Or ever! If you do I—I'll scream so loudly all my neighbors will come running. All you wanted was a h-handy—"

"Di—"

She'd hung up. Bob called her back immediately, but as soon as she heard his voice she slammed the receiver down.

A half-hour later she was still sitting disconsolately beside her phone, which was in front of the window in the dinette. Her lawn needed cutting and she had a half-dozen little household jobs to do, but she'd lost all interest.

She told herself sternly, He spoiled my life, that's what he did! Before I knew him I used to jump out of bed with the sun and work like fury. So I'll simply pretend I never met him and get right at it.

But she couldn't even scold out enough false vitality to raise herself off the chair.

A PAPA bird stood in front of his neat little home bragging to all the world about his fine family and Diana remembered the day she'd put up the birdhouse and met Bob. Finally, she could stand the boasting bird no longer.

"Oh, shut up, will you?" she said and began to cry.

Suddenly she thought of something else to worry about. "I'll remember the first time I met Bob every time I look at that darned birdhouse, if I don't take it down! But how can I take it down and ruin that happy little family?"

Diana's misery closed in about her so densely that she felt stifled. She opened another window. It didn't help. She hadn't felt so completely miserable since spring a year ago in her little third-floor studio apartment. A year ago when the fingers of unhappiness over her lack of growing things had tightened day after day around her heart, squeezing the joy out of living, she'd bought the house so she could have plants and fresh air and all the sunshine she craved.



But what could she do now? She thought fleetingly of the children she wanted, but promptly dismissed them when she saw, with a start, that their faces still resembled Bob Hutchins'!

Of course, she could take him on his own terms. But her pride was involved. He'd been telling her how exciting, how beautiful she was, when all the time her beauty apparently wasn't her chief attraction for him. Besides, she didn't want the neighbors' admiration of her industry to turn into pity if she slaved outside while he lolled on the breeze-way.

Furthermore, he didn't fit into her dream of cooking breakfast for two, or of working among her flowers while he mowed the lawn!

And as if all that weren't enough, the way the men neighbors had been watching her love affair with ulterior motives behind their sudden smiles was enough to squelch the sweetest romance that ever bloomed!

But all the time her mind was arguing so heatedly, her heart just lay there in her chest and pouted, a stubborn, unhappy, disinterested organ that screamed so loudly for Bob it drowned out her mind's furious reasoning!

There was just one thing to do. She did it. She called Bob's home, hoping he'd still be there.

"Bob?" she asked sweetly. "Diana. Can you come over?"

"C-come—" Bob stammered. Then, regaining his usual smooth coordination of mind and tongue, he asked, "Are you the same Diana who called earlier?"

"I—I'm not sure. Can you come? Now?"

"Honey, if you don't hang up fast, you'll still be on the phone when I get there!"

She hung up with the thought, And honey, when you see the big, old trick I'm going to play on you, you'll be sorry you answered that phone!

She didn't change into more alluring attire, nor did she put on make-up. She went to the garage where she quickly

removed the cotter pin that held one of the wheels on her lawnmower. She looked at the small amount of black grease she'd got on her fingers removing the pin and, grinning resolutely, wickedly, she deliberately ran her fingers through the grease again.

Then she buried the cotter pin in a flower pot full of dirt so she'd know where it was in case she needed it again.

She rolled the mower out to the side yard on its one good wheel, then pushed it just far enough for the "adjusted" wheel to fall off. Then she sat disconsolately on the ground beside the mower to wait. While she waited she deliberately ran her greasy fingers across her face.

Bob wheeled his red car into her driveway on two wheels and jumped out so abruptly that he was standing on the ground before he'd finished pulling the emergency brake.

"Honey, what happened? Are you hurt?"

HE RAN to Diana and helped her up. He pulled out a clean, white handkerchief and wiped the smudges off her face, looking for wounds.

Diana, the handy woman, felt slightly foolish, but she didn't let Bob see it. "It—won't go," she said helplessly, pointing an accusing finger at her lawnmower.

Bob knelt beside it. "Well, no wonder it won't go! The wheel's off," he diagnosed accurately. And proudly.

"What'll I do?" Diana wailed.

Bob immediately put himself in charge of the situation. He felt all around in the grass for the missing cotter pin while Diana held her breath. Finally he gave up and held out his hand.

"Got a bobby pin?"

She gave him one. "What are you going to do with that?"

"I never fixed a lawnmower wheel before, but that doesn't mean I'm a dunce!" he boasted. "Watch." He maneuvered the bobby pin through the little holes where the cotter pin had been.



"Bob! You mean it'll actually *work* now?" Diana stared wide-eyed at him as though he'd just split an atom or pulled an elephant out of a thimble.

"Get those bare legs out of the way, woman, or you'll be stung by flying grass!" he warned as he started to push the lawnmower.

"Bob Hutchins, you're the first genius I've ever touched. Now I can finish my lawn."

"You? Go away. You'll get all smudged up again."

Do I dare go any further? she wondered.

"But who else will do it?" she asked.

"Who else? Why, I will, of course, if you'll let me. This is no job for a beauty like you. By the way, I dashed over here and left my breakfast untouched,

so how about going in and cooking me some?"

She ran toward the kitchen as if Bob were actually chasing her with the lawnmower. But before starting their breakfast—it would be her second, but she wouldn't miss the opportunity for anything!—she washed her face, put on make-up and changed to a blue sundress and white sandals.

While filling the teakettle she remembered the cotter pin and thought, As soon as Bob goes home, I've got some transplanting to attend to.

And as she listened to the water boiling, and the lawnmower clipping merrily outside, she thought again, I sure am glad I'm a handy woman. Otherwise I never could have fixed my broken dream.

## Unforgettable

In the pattern of stars  
When the night has begun,  
In the shadows that creep  
From the low-lying sun—

In the clouds marching by  
With the wind for their feet,  
In the flame of a fire,  
In the shimmer of heat—

In the framed bits of sky  
Where the trees interlace,  
Through the eyes of my heart  
I keep seeing your face.

For wherever I go  
And whatever I do  
I could never escape  
The remembrance of you.



by Hayworth Chaney



## Vacation Fun



**VACATION HEADED** your way? Then be sure to use it! Use it from the first glitter of the sun to the last minute's worth of freedom. As you plan ahead, look on this time as the reserve you'll be using and dipping into for a year's vigor, stamina, attractiveness and good spirit. You'll find you'll be able to give more to these things if you use this time to its best advantage.

Don't take your problems with you, get everything in order beforehand and simply relax and enjoy yourself on this vacation you've been looking forward to.

This is a time when nothing should seem much more vital than a big question like: To tan? To stay fashionably fair? So sit back and look good! Put on lipstick and eye shadow along with your anti-burn stuff.

Try out new colors; you'll never have a more opportune time for vanity, and just think—a change of face might even improve the state of your own private world.

Don't worry. Don't hurry. This is your vacation, you've earned it, so have fun with it.

### That Beauty Look



**IF YOU DECIDE** to get that beautiful tan, be sure you get it safely. You'll have a wonderful "beauty look" all your own. And think what you can do with it. That tan can be accentuated and dramatized by the careful choice of a summer makeup. Using that honest-to-goodness suntan as the basis, try a colorless foundation (cream or liquid) just enough to give a base for makeup without altering the true color of the skin. Dot on a trace of coral rouge and use a brilliant color lipstick, making it look like a vivid red-gold slash. For

this dramatic makeup, keep the lipline very straight across the top of your mouth.

Now for your eyes, do them in a brown-and-green scheme, smoothing a green shadow on upper lids before you apply your face powder. Choose a face powder that matches your tan as closely as possible and use it sparingly. Just once over lightly will suffice. Finally, with an eyebrow pencil, draw on a moderately heavy and quite straight brow.

### Fashionably Fair



**IF YOU DON'T** tan—just burn and find it better to stay out of the sun, or you just don't care for that tan-look, you may choose to stay fashionably fair. Your color will be pink and pale. To maintain that pale and pretty look this sum-

# Girl Talk



**A Department  
of Charm  
Beauty, Etiquette  
and Fashions**

**Conducted by  
PENELOPE WORTH**



mer, try a pink-blue-and-cream color scheme in your makeup. Start out with a soft rose-beige foundation. Dot on pink rouge. Blend violet eye-shadow on your upper lids, powder heavily then dust off.

For your lips, you will want to draw a full pink cupid's bow more accentuated than usual. Finish off by slightly curving your eyebrows with a brown pencil.

Whatever look you choose for this summer, take care with it and plan to get it settled before you start to relax. Then when the time for sitting back comes, you'll be ready for it and you'll be looking your best!

### Design for Dating



NOW THAT YOU'RE looking your best, let's concentrate on getting that guy to notice you. The time is coming when the weather will be warm and that's a sure sign the possibilities for *en masse* dating are at their best. So here's your chance to get the whole crowd together and get that certain guy over to see the new you. Whatever your current excuse for bringing the crowd together—a beach party, a picnic, a summer-stock excursion—remember the gimmick is that just about *everybody* ought to be there. So don't neglect to call everybody up and spread the news.

The first thing to keep in mind for this large scale dating is: planning is important. Realize your responsibilities and carry them out to the end. In large groups, people don't like to find plans are half-made and inadequate. If you need help, get it! But don't let things run their own course or you'll find they have taken a different trail than you meant them to. Remember it's going to be your idea and you want it to be a success so that all through the summer your good times can continue.

Now the thoughts going around in your pretty head are: where to go, when to start and how to get the plans organized. So here go a few tips in your direction to help you along.

As for where, let's start on familiar territory—any warm afternoon, or any evening where is the favorite spot for the crowd? Well the beach of course, and what a wonderful way to start off! All that wide open space just made for pleasure, and so inexpensive too. Just add some nice food—which the men always enjoy—and you're set for fun that everyone will relish.

For those who like to exercise (this is an excellent way to trim down those trouble spots and have fun while you're doing it), how about a mass pedal trek out into the country. Here also add some cooling food and punch and you have another inexpensive afternoon filled with enjoyment for everyone.

### It's Your Party



IF YOU LIKE competition, why not plan a round or two of golf for the gang. Almost everyone enjoys shuffleboard or badminton, team the guys against the gals and everyone will try their hardest.

There are always people who like to sit down while relaxing, so remember canoeing, fishing and horseback riding are also good things for the whole gang to do.

The bright lights of carnivals are at their brightest and zoos are always a good bet. Every time the bill changes at the hay-loft theatres you're in for a consistent fun-time.

When you're planning these things for a large group, don't forget to get a nod from the crowd before you make the final arrangements. It's best to move slowly at first and not try to boss everything. Saves a lot of hard feelings also!

The planners' job is to look ahead. And don't forget the fellows here, they can be quite helpful. It's your party and you'll have to try to foresee the problems, and decide how to cope with them if they do arise. But if your planning is done well, there should be no trouble!

If reservations are needed, be sure they have been made. Be certain the time is set and everyone knows it and agrees to it. Decide what the dress for the day will be. Make all your plans clear and make sure that *everyone* knows what to bring.

Keep these hints in mind and your summer will be filled with pleasant memories of all the good times you and the gang have had!

### Fair and Cooler



IF YOU CAN MANAGE to feel cool these hot, sticky summer days, you'll look better. If you look cool you feel better. Help yourself to defeat the heat with these few hints I think will prove helpful.

Nothing can beat a bath. A bright moment in these hot days will be those soap and water



baths. Why not try some bath oil to help condition your skin—or if you haven't heard, try starch, bicarbonate of soda or borax to sooth irritated skin. The summer is hard on your skin. Do everything to keep it at its best.

After you're out of the bath, give that precious skin a treat, give your body tone and use some after-bath lotion. For that fragrance with a flourish, why not try the aerosol spray bottle which dispenses cologne in a light and lovely mist. For extra pleasure get that favorite scent cologne to match your perfume. Always keep in mind your liquid cologne, stick cologne and perfume should be the same scent.

A way to keep this cool look up all through the day or evening is to carry a cologne stick. This is one way to make yourself feel like the proverbial cucumber. Just a touch on pulse spots—at temples, throat and wrists—you'll find has a very cooling effect.

You'll be happier and cooler with a hairdo that is light on the head and easy to manage. A fetching idea is a chignon with white or pastel colored flowers scattered through. Go light on the makeup and make sure it won't wilt or melt.

Don't forget that white always looks cool. Try some pretty white jewelry and crispy clean white gloves. A white collar and cuffs on your dress will do lots for your frosty look when the thermometer is zooming and everyone is melting.

### Hosiery Hints



HAVE YOU EVER GIVEN much thought to bare legs in the summer? They are fine in their place, but when you're all dressed up—what does it do to your appearance? You fuss and fuss over your looks, buy a new dress, have your hair done so it looks just right, makeup is perfect, manicure—everything is fine. Then you slip into your shoes, with no stockings and all the time you spent to look your very best has been off-set by the appearance of your bare legs. Why let bare legs ruin the picture?

The smart gal realizes that nylons do for her legs what a manicure does for her hands and powder does for her complexion. Even if you have a beautiful tan and your legs are smooth as silk, stockings finish the picture off. One thing to remember—always try to match your stockings in color closely to the tan of your legs.

Aside from being the ruination of your shoes, there are very few feet that don't need a touch to pretty them up. And in the summer when the fad is just a few straps for a shoe, your feet are exposed and need stockings to make them look more attractive. There is nothing prettier than a foot in a bare-foot-look stocking with just a few straps covering it. If you dress for a man, as most women do—take a tip—they like it.

With all the new styles in stockings, you need not be uncomfortable. With those full skirts, knee length stockings are a dream and leave you free above the knees. They are inadvisable with straight skirts as they tend to ride up and there you are with your knees showing!

A recent addition and a very good one at that—air conditioned stockings—many tiny holes all along the sole to let your feet breathe. If your feet tend to perspire, you'll find these a charm.

Not so recent, but certainly a comfort in the summer's heat, are mesh stockings. Mesh stockings are not so closely woven as your regular nylons and tend to let what breeze there might be through. By the way, they also make your legs look slimmer, especially when they are seamed.

You all dress for the special man—so why not please him. He likes to see you in nylons because they make even the prettiest legs look neater.

### Yummy Recipes



FOR A HOT NIGHT, a cool hostess, here's a menu to keep the cook on ice instead of over a hot stove.

*Smoked tongue in borscht aspic*

*Cream cheese corn*

*French bread*

*Poire Alice*

*Coffee*

*(Serves four)*

**Borscht aspic:** Drain  $\frac{2}{3}$  cup of juice from a medium-sized can of small whole beets and combine with  $\frac{2}{3}$  cup of tomato juice. Soak 1 tablespoon (1 envelope) of unflavoured gelatin in 2 tablespoons of this mixture. Dissolve 1 beef bouillon cube or 1 teaspoon beef extract in  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of boiling water. Pour this hot bouillon over the gelatin mixture and when gelatin has dissolved, combine with rest of the beet and tomato juice mixture. Add 2 tablespoons of sauerkraut juice. Chill until partially set and then add 1 can (15



oz.) smoked tongue, diced. Pour into mould and chill until firm. Marinate whole beets in French dressing. Unmould aspic on crisp lettuce. Arrange drained, marinated beets on lettuce cups; top with a tablespoon of sour cream.

*Cream cheese corn:* Heat together 1 #2 can of whole kernel corn, a 3-oz. package of cream cheese, and 1 tablespoon of butter. Salt to taste and flavour with a dash of nutmeg. Serve in casserole dish or enameled ironware.

*Poire Alice:* Top purchased meringue shells with chilled, canned pear halves and cover with chocolate sauce. Or top servings of vanilla ice cream with chilled pear halves and serve with chocolate sauce.

### Back to the Grind



AFTER YOUR VACATION is over and you're back to the old grind, there are ways of overcoming that depressed feeling. So while you are still refreshed let's start.

Have you ever thought of hobbies as relaxing things to do? A surefire cure for boredom, depression and loneliness? You can learn to enjoy life to the fullest extent. It's strictly a matter of becoming interested in everything.

Ever thought of trying your hand at drawing or painting? Well, you'll never know if you have talent if you don't take a try at it. If you discover you don't have talent, you'll have to admit trying is fun. If on the other hand your attempts are successful, you'll find many books to help you in your new accomplishment.

If you find painting is not for you, how about becoming a shutter-bug—in other words, taking pictures? You don't need an

expensive camera to make pictures interesting and with practice you may become good. You'll be surprised how much there is to learn—experimenting with camera angles and lighting effects. You'll soon feel you just can't learn enough about this new hobby. Maybe you'll even become interested enough to start developing and printing your own pictures.

Like to write letters? Exchanging ideas with people can be very rewarding. You'll find many pen-pal clubs (Mrs. Faith Simpson runs one in this magazine) that will put you in touch with others. It might be interesting to find out what their hobbies are!

In crafts there are many things you could take up as a hobby. Ceramics, wood carving, home decorating, jewelry making—just too many to mention. Have you ever thought of rug making, upholstering, cooking or sewing? They all make fine hobbies and put all your free hours to use as well as being money-making and money-saving hobbies.

In some of the larger cities you may find, in the adult education plan, courses that will aid you in starting some of these hobbies. Your public library will also have many reference books that will help you to get off to a good start.

These new interests can do many things for you. It will be easier to meet people and get acquainted if you have diversified interests. You can always be sure of having a good basis for conversations with others.

There's no reason for complaining of boredom—you have plenty to do if you just look around. And with less idle time on your hands, you may be a much happier person!



*Romance Rides the Rangeland in Every Issue of  
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## RANCH ROMANCES

Featuring the Best New Western Stories of Love and Action



OUT EVERY OTHER FRIDAY—25c AT ALL STANDS!







His kiss was full of tenderness and strength

## *Someday We'll Love*

By VIRGINIA M. LEE

*She'd be married in ten days . . . and she felt guilty about it!*

AT SHORE LINE edge, where the pine trees thinned out and the Gulf of Mexico suddenly shone as blue as turquoise, Julie McRay and Phil Powell pulled their horses to a stop.

Here was their favorite place for a

picnic—the only place where they could be alone. For guests from the prewar Mississippi plantation, which had been reconstructed into a modern year-round tourist hotel, were not permitted to ride this far on the bridle path.



They dismounted, and Julie lifted the lid on the small wicker picnic basket. She spread out the sandwiches and poured fragrant hot coffee from the thermos bottle. Phil tied up their horses and leaned against a tree, watching her, saying nothing.

He was so silent that finally Julie glanced toward him. Sunlight fired the red-gold hair that framed the pale oval of her face and the eyes that met his were as vivid blue as the Gulf, and serious.

"Phil," she said, "it's only ten days until our wedding. You're sure you want to go through with it?"

A smile lifted the corner of Phil's nice full lips. His dark brown eyes burned deep as he gazed at the slender figure in levis, plaid shirt and moccasins. He himself was tall and lean-jawed, with sun-scorched blond hair, and white teeth that flashed against his gipsy tan. Phil, at twenty-seven—five years older than Julie—was the owner of the Plantation Inn, the ancient white-pillared hotel surrounded by heavy-leaved magnolias and ancient moss-hung oaks.

"How do you answer that question yourself, Julie?" he asked her. "You know how I feel. It's plain enough. And I'll feel the same tomorrow, the next day, forever. If I seem to you to be unusually quiet, it's only because I'm happy."

Somehow she couldn't hold his gaze, couldn't accept the love she saw in his eyes without a little knife of guilt tugging in her heart. And yet she had been completely honest with Phil from the beginning.

"I'm happy, too, Phil," she murmured. "Coming to Plantation Inn—meeting you. It's all so utterly fantastic, too beautiful to be true. I keep thinking I'll wake up and find it's all been a lovely dream."

He looked at her searchingly. "The glamour and excitement in your life will be gone, Julie. Sure you'll never miss them?"

PHIL knew all about her unhappy childhood, the reason for her constant search for security and love. He knew of the years she'd spent as a struggling actress, brushing up against show business from Broadway to Hollywood, then her sudden rise to fame on a daily TV show.

She shook her bright head slowly as she said, "I was foolish to think bright lights and excitement were important, Phil. But I'd been on my own for so long, knocking around, looking for happiness, that I guess success went to my head."

"I understand, Julie," Phil said gently. "But that's all over now. You'll never be confused and unhappy again."

They fell quiet, and Julie knew that Phil was remembering, as she was, that day six weeks ago when they had met. She had arrived at Plantation Inn under a doctor's care, in a state of complete nervous exhaustion.

Never robust, even during childhood, the endless rehearsals and responsibility of carrying a daily television show had been too much for her. And one day just as the program was going off the air, she had collapsed. Ill and discouraged, she had come to the Mississippi Gulf Coast to rest and regain her strength, not really caring what happened. Until she met Phil!

"I still can't understand what you saw in me that first day, Phil," she said. "I was so mixed up, so bewildered."

"I saw only a young and lovely girl, Julie, lonely, confused, someone who needed me as much as I needed her."

"You were wonderful, Phil," she murmured. "But I'm well now. You've done enough for me and you deserve something better. You need a girl—" Her voice trailed away forlornly.

"A girl who's deeply in love with me, Julie?" Phil finished candidly. "I know you like me a lot, but you're not madly, desperately in love with me. You're going to marry me only because I'm sincere, and you're grateful for what I've done. But, Julie, I'm willing to



gamble that real love will come later."

"Oh, Phil!" Her heart stumbled. "I can't bear to have you hurt. Maybe if we waited awhile longer—"

He shook his head. "I've been waiting for you all my life, Julie. Trust me. I'll make you happy—you'll never be sorry."

Julie clenched her hands and prayed for the right words. She was still a little bewildered and bitter because of all that had happened before she had come to Plantation Inn. She'd been lost in a heavy fog of frustration and insecurity, Phil had saved her, and she was glad. But as for love, she didn't know what it was, really. She'd built up a wall of ice around her heart, allowing herself but one goal—success and security.

HERE with Phil, she'd found a deep sense of happiness and contentment, the first she'd ever known in her whole life. But there was no ecstasy when his lips met hers, no bells ringing, no stars falling. She'd always thought that love was a great excitement, the Fourth of July and Christmas Eve rolled together. She would marry Phil, and she would try to make him happy. If love for her never reached up to the clouds, it wouldn't matter.

"Phil," she breathed, "you're the most wonderful person I've ever known, but are you sure you want someone for a wife who doesn't even know her own heart?"

He came over and drew her close against him. "I was never more certain of anything in my whole life, Julie, believe me!"

She pressed her cheek against his shoulder and clung to his nearness, his strength. Something in her cried, "Stay here with him. Stay here with him forever, because he is decent and kind, and he loves you."

He lifted her trembling chin and looked into her eyes. "Don't be afraid," he said. "I'll worry about me."

"That's easy to say, but some day if

I'd tried and tried, and still hadn't learned—"

"I'm willing to take that chance, Julie."

Then his lips were on hers in a kiss that was full of tenderness and strength. For Julie, there was no pounding pulse, no rapture—just contentment, and a sense of being loved and wanted. But it seemed enough.

After awhile they had their picnic lunch, talking little, aware only of being together. Julie tried to erase all doubt and fear from her mind and heart. Phil was the first man she'd ever known she really respected. She enjoyed every moment they spent alone together. He was the only close friend she'd ever had. But she was getting everything, and had so little to give in return that it seemed unfair—like cheating.

Finally, they rode back to the Inn. Along the shore sandpipers advanced and retreated as the curling crests of the Gulf retreated and advanced. A solemn patrol of pelicans flew single file a few inches above the gentle waves. Across the road, just a few yards away, mocking birds sang from the black recesses of lush foliage—water oak, cypress, catalpa.

The winding bridle trail led through a small forest of pine trees. It had been an unusually dry summer and the small fallen branches snapped brittlely under the horses' hooves.

Phil dug a cigarette out of his shirt pocket and stuck it between his lips. But he waited until they reached the wide paved road before he lighted it.

One carelessly flung match or cigarette could start a sudden fire in the crisp leaves and dry pine cones.

Slowing their mounts to a walk as they reached the plantation, they crossed over to the stables in back of the Inn.

Phil's family had lived in the spacious plantation mansion since before the Civil War. At one time it had been a landmark of Southern hospitality and elegance. When Phil returned from the



two years he'd spent in Korea he had come into his inheritance of the plantation and the surrounding pine-covered acreage as his part of his father's estate.

There had been only one way he could keep the homestead and make it pay. So he had sold enough of the valuable acreage to remodel the house into a tourist inn, and add a swimming pool and stone terraced patio where guests could lounge or sun bathe under colorful umbrellas.

To Julie, the place was a paradise—a refuge from all the hurt and bitterness she had ever known.

"Phil," she said softly, "if this is a dream, please don't ever let me awaken. This is the peace I've always wanted."

He laughed a little as he helped her down from her horse.

"This is reality, dearest. And it will last forever. I love you, Julie, and some day you'll say those same words to me."

She lingered in his arms a moment, and when she raised her face to his, her blue eyes were shining with unshed tears.

"Phil, I'll try," she whispered tremulously. It was all she said, but she knew that Phil understood.

Julie went to her room then. It was large and sunny. The windows opened onto a view of the Gulf, and the furnishings were quaintly Victorian.

She showered, and changed into jade-green shantung that set her hair to shimmering and showed off her figure to perfection. Then she went downstairs to wait until dinnertime, walking on the wide gallery in the gathering twilight.

It was in a small reception room, now an ultra-modern cocktail lounge, that she first saw the strange young man. He was, she observed, unusually handsome. Something about him made him stand out from the rest of the crowd like a figure in Third Dimension.

Somehow Julie was drawn into the dimly lighted cocktail bar as if by a

magnet. She sat down three stools away from him and ordered a Martini. Casting a veiled glance at his profile, she saw then that he wasn't really handsome, after all. His features were too craggy, his mouth too wide—but oddly fascinating. He had curly black hair that lay in a careless disorder, and his eyes which suddenly met hers were a fascinating amber, flecked with brown. As their glances met and locked, an unfamiliar sensation that was shockingly pleasant swooped down Julie's spine.

"Hello, there," he said, his voice low and magnetic.

HE TAPPED a cigarette on the bar and flicked flame from a lighter. His eyes traveled from her bright hair to her wide eyes, lingered awhile on her soft, warm lips, and swept to her slender waist, slowing down around the curves.

Julie felt the color rising to her cheeks. Suddenly the very air about her seemed charged with excitement.

"Well, wishes do come true," he murmured.

She managed a soft laugh, trying to control her racing heart. "Oh, don't tell me that you believe in wishes, too!"

"Never miss a new moon, a white horse, or a load of hay," he assured her. "But this is the first time I've had such sudden results."

"That's strange," she said softly. "I wished on the first star when I was out on the gallery a few minutes ago."

Picking up his drink, he moved to the stool beside hers. "I wished on it, too," he said. "I wished to meet a beautiful redhead with incredibly blue eyes."

Her heart stumbled foolishly. "Frankly, I'm allergic to lines," she chided.

He shrugged. "It does sound pretty obvious, especially when you don't even know my name. I'm Wes Saunders, on my way to Miami to attend my kid sister's wedding. As I drove by, I couldn't resist this charming hotel. Decided to stay overnight."

"And I'm Julie McRay." Her voice



seemed to come from a great distance. "In ten days I'm going to marry the owner of this charming hotel. Phil Powell."

Wes stared at her, frank disappointment in his eyes.

"I should have realized a girl like you would be taken. That would be asking too much—finding you free, unattached. He's a lucky guy, this Phil Powell." He twisted the frosty glass in his hands, his gaze taking in the quiet elegance of the lobby, the mural-decorated walls of the cocktail lounge, and coming back to rest on Julie. "In fact, how lucky can one guy get?"

A small voice in Julie's subconscious kept trying to warn her that she had no right to be sitting here beside this strange young man. It was all wrong—crazy wrong—but she didn't get the message because of the pounding of her heart. Lifting the untouched Martini to her lips, she took a long sip. It had a nice dry zing and its potency spread through her, dissolving her tenseness, and quieting the butterflies in her stomach.

Within an incredibly short time, their glasses were empty. To her own surprise she found herself joining in Wes' quick laughter. Something about this warm, friendly young man drew her out—and faintly, but surely, she could feel the ice defrosting from her heart.

And then Phil walked into the lounge. He paused a moment in surprise, then hurried over to them.

"Wes!" he greeted. "What are you doing this far south? But I see you're running true to form, locating the prettiest girl here—my fiancée. How do you like my old college pal, Julie?"

Julie couldn't breathe for a second. It was impossible for her to tell him that Wes was the most exciting man she'd ever met. While she searched for an answer, Wes spoke for her.

"I'm afraid she thinks I'm a pretty impossible character, Phil. I haven't mentioned the fact that you and I have known each other for years, and I've

been telling her she's out of this world, and that you're a lucky guy," he said smoothly. "You must have a more subtle touch. She tells me you're going to be married soon."

Julie caught the quick look Phil gave her, then he smiled his slow, easy smile that never failed to warm her heart. "I see you two have already had a drink. If you're finished here, we'll go into dinner now."

ALL during the dinner the three of them had together, Julie tried to talk gaily, tried to pretend that the acute awareness she felt for Wes Saunders didn't exist. But there was no denying his charm and appeal. If only he'd stop brushing his shoulder against hers! Chances were he wasn't even conscious he was doing it, but she was.

Wes talked about his exciting life as a geologist. He'd just helped bring in a new oil field near Abilene and as soon as his sister's wedding was over, he was hopping a plane for Bolivia to take part in a gigantic oil-hunt expedition. Life, to him, was a gay adventure, and by contrast Phil seemed a little prosaic and unimaginative.

Julie's nerves were on edge as Wes gazed at her. His lips were speaking about his work, but his heart was saying things to her wordlessly. She felt shaken and confused.

Dinner was long over and they were having black coffee and cigarettes when Phil was called to the telephone. And Julie was alone with Wes. Instantly, his mood changed from one of casual friendliness to curiosity and interest. His strange eyes were warm and possessive. Reaching across the table, he covered her hand with his own.

"It's odd, but even in our college days Phil did all the winning—at football, poker games, even romance. It never seemed to matter until I met you."

Julie swallowed tightly, as his face came closer. Never before had a man's gaze ever made her feel as she was feeling now—all burning hot and icy cold at



the same time.

"Truthfully, Julie, are you in love with Phil?" he asked bluntly.

She pulled her hand away from his and her eyes widened. "Have I said or done anything to give you the right to assume that I might not be in love with Phil?"

Wes shrugged and smiled wryly. "No, not really, except your eyes are like deep blue pools, and looking into them I can see almost to your very heart. There's plenty of doubt and uncertainty there. I think you're just a mixed-up little kid, and I'm crazy about you, Julie."

She was speechless, caught completely off-balance. "Why, that's impossible! We scarcely know each other! Is this your usual routine with every new girl you meet?"

"I don't blame you for being skeptical. All this does sound too sudden. But a guy builds up his ideal of the girl he wants to love, then suddenly one day she's there, for real! But she belongs to someone else. Or at least, she thinks she does. I've always had an innate determination to win against great odds. I love a challenge, Julie. Many times wells have blown in when only one person believed there was oil under the ground—me! And you might as well know now, I've decided to stay at Plantation Inn over the week-end."

What he said made sense of a sort to Julie. He was honest and direct. He at least knew what he wanted.

"Let's find Phil," she said in a low, shaken voice. "And please—please don't ever talk to me this way again!"

But even while she was saying it, she knew he wouldn't give up, and she knew, too, that she would listen. And Julie hated herself for knowing it.

The next day, she was careful not to be alone with Wes Saunders. The three of them went swimming, had lunch, then drove down the white road beside the crescent sea wall to Biloxi. For Julie, the hours went by like magic. She should have been happy with Phil and his friend. But, instead, she knew only

a nagging icy fear that something was happening to her, and that she was completely helpless to do anything about it.

There was no denying that tension existed between Wes and herself. She was fascinated by his vigor and zest for life, and the smoldering sparks that danced in his eyes continued to defrost her heart.

IF PHIL noticed any of this, he gave no indication of it. Not until he and she were alone, saying good night at the door of her room, did his dark eyes try to search her thoughts.

"Julie, I've missed you." His fingers lifted a lock of her hair, then ran down her cheek lightly. "I have the oddest feeling, honey, that you haven't been with me at all today. Girls have always found Wes irresistible. Has that happened to you, too?"

Her throat felt parched. She looked away from his face and concentrated on a button on the front of his coat. She couldn't ever hurt Phil. He was a wonderful guy. Everything a girl could desire. Besides, what she felt for Wes wasn't love. It couldn't be!

"No, of course it hasn't happened to me," she said firmly. "Wes is attractive, but remember, Phil, I'm going to be your wife."

He drew her against him, kissed her, and whispered against her hair, "I may not be the most exciting man in the world, Julie, but if you'll give me a little time, I promise we'll find real happiness."

For a moment, Julie almost forgot about Wes. She knew what Phil was saying was true. She wanted desperately to believe him, to trust him. But deep within her heart were quicksands of doubt from which there might be no escape. . . .

Saturday night was one of the gay nights at Plantation Inn. A barbecue held under the moss-covered trees was a ritual. This was followed by a horse-back ride along the moonlit bridge trail. There was a combo playing on the stone



terrace, and the guests wore casual riding attire.

Julie, in blue jeans and a little doeskin jacket, with her hair tied back into a pony-tail, found her own spirits rising as she moved among the guests. Her mood of excitement mounted when Wes came over and stood beside her.

"You've been avoiding me all day," he grumbled, but his eyes were laughing at her. "Are you afraid to be alone with me, Julie?"

Her pulses skipped dangerously, but she kept her voice steady. "That's silly, Wes. Why should I be afraid of you?" But she *had* been avoiding him, and both knew it.

"Julie, I must talk to you. Let's take a walk somewhere, where we can be alone." His hand closed over her arm. "Come on—we'll be back in time for the ride."

She could feel the warmth of his hand through her jacket. A thousand reasons why she shouldn't go leaped into her mind, but she didn't listen to a single one of them. For some inexplicable reason, Julie allowed him to lead her down the walk around the Inn to a wrought-iron bench secluded by crape myrtle and oleander.

"Wes, it isn't right to be together like this!" she protested. "It's like hiding."

"You are afraid of me, Julie?"

She hesitated. "Perhaps I am, Wes. Afraid and confused. I don't like to hurt Phil. He's a great person."

Wes stuck a cigarette between his lips and the little flame of his lighter flared between them, flickering highlights across the rugged contours of his face. She saw the wry twist of his lips, and the veiled amusement in his eyes.

He said, "Somewhere along the line Phil's bound to get hurt, but good. You're looking for an anchor, Julie. Someone to keep you in calm waters. I can't offer you a safe harbor, but we could find life plenty thrilling, riding the high seas together. Let me tell Phil the truth—that you and I are in love?"

"How can you say I'm in love with

you, Wes—" she tried to be indignant—"when I don't even know it myself? Why, we're practically strangers. What would be left for us when all the magic and excitement was gone?"

"I think you do love me," he murmured. "After all, love is just a word. Each one reads into it what he wants to. From the moment I first saw you, Julie, I've longed to hold you close."

"Wes—no!" But whispering his name in that hesitant way only made him move closer.

**H**E SLIPPED his arms around her under the little doeskin jacket. She tried to draw away but he bent his head and took possession of her trembling lips in a kiss that was full of pent-up emotion and frantic satisfaction.

His breath was ragged when he finally let her go. She could feel the burning of his eyes as they searched her face, even though she could not lift her own to meet them.

"Julie, you can't deny it," he said huskily. "You do love me. You can't go through with that wedding. Let's tell Phil now—before it's too late!"

"How can you ask me to hurt Phil, after all he's done for me?" Her voice caught on a half sob. "He's your friend, Wes. Why, you've known him a lot longer than I have."

"Look, Julie, if you're meaning to marry Phil out of gratitude, you're really going to mix up not only your own life, but his as well. Sure, Phil's my friend, but he's not for you. You and I are the same kind of people. We've both been knocking around too long on our own to put down roots now. You belong where there's excitement and life. You'll never be content to spend the rest of your life here. I'll admit it has charm, but after awhile you'll get restless—bored. How will Phil feel when he finally discovers that you could never really love him, not in a million years?"

There comes a time when words are inadequate. To Julie, this was one of those times. Her pulses beat away the



moments as she stared up at Wes. His kiss had awakened slumbering emotions that she hadn't dreamed were possible. She had only to listen to her wildly hammering heart to say yes to Wes, and put an end to the battle that was raging within her.

"You better go," she said desperately. "Please leave Plantation Inn tonight—now! Everything was all right before you came. We may be alike, Wes, but one thing I know—we're not good for each other!"

"I'll leave if you go with me, Julie," he said flatly. "Not until. I've waited a long time to find you, and I'm not losing you without a fight."

Julie couldn't seem to think or reason. She only knew that if she stayed a second longer she'd be hopelessly lost. Leaping to her feet and wheeling quickly, she fled toward the Inn.

Phil caught up with her as she hurried across the wide gallery. He held the door open, and they entered the deserted lobby.

"Julie, are you ill?" he asked, his observant dark eyes full of concern and affection. "You're as pale as a ghost."

"I'm okay, Phil. But if you'll excuse me, I won't ride tonight."

"Is it Wes, Julie? He's been making love to you, hasn't he? Knowing Wes, I've been expecting this."

Julie knew she couldn't lie. Phil was honest; he expected honesty from her. It was the least she could give him.

"Phil," she said frankly, "when I'm with him I feel alive. I've tried to fight it, but it's no use. Oh, darling, I'd rather die than hurt you!"

She saw the muscle tighten in his lean, tanned jaw. Suddenly all the light was gone from his eyes and he looked a little tired.

"So you really believe you're in love at last," he said at last, dully. "Yet you've had so little time to get to know him." He sighed. "I guess I'm the world's biggest fool to think I could hold a girl like you. A girl with everything—beauty, honesty, talent—"

He gave her hand a little pat. His face was so solemn she could have wept.

He went on, "You'll be alone here at the Inn tonight, Julie, when we're all gone for the ride. You can think things out—make your decision. It's either Wes or I. Either you stay here and marry me, or fly to Bolivia with Wes."

Julia caught her breath sharply. Phil was looking at her with such disappointment and hurt in his eyes that she winced. It was almost as if he knew they were saying good-by.

**T**HROUGH a fog of tears she ran up the curving stairway. Sounds of careless laughter and gay music floated through the windows as she opened the door to her room. For a long time she stood there staring down at the scene below. After awhile, she peeled off her jacket and started leadenly toward the closet to hang it up. Instead, she dropped it abruptly in a heap on the floor and flung herself face-down across the bed.

In Wes' arms with his lips against hers, she had discovered a new-old ecstasy that was frightening in its intensity. This must be love. It had all the symptoms. Her hands were like ice, she was trembling like a leaf, and her lips were still warm from Wes' kiss.

She should be happy that at last she had found love—but she was miserable. For in accepting this love she would be breaking Phil's heart. There was a peculiar all-gone feeling in the pit of her stomach, and her head was beginning to ache. Burying her face in her hands, she tried to keep back the tears, but they had a will of their own. . . .

She awakened to the sound of voices under her window. Vaguely she wondered what time it was, and if the horse-back ride were over. She started to drift back to sleep, but something about the tone of those voices stopped her. This wasn't the gaiety of a barbecue party! There was a definite undertone of anxiety in what was being said.

She lifted her head, and a thousand



angry tom-toms beat against her temples. Dragging herself from the bed, she walked over to a window. Below, the terrace was filled with people. Guests, in riding attire stood clustered in groups, talking quietly.

Strange men were hurrying about the spacious grounds, asking questions, giving clipped orders. Someone was loading heavy cylinder-shaped objects into a jeep. Then suddenly the odor of smoke bit her nostrils, and she noticed the coral-pink tinge of the sky in back of the stables.

Her heart fell from her throat to the pit of her stomach. There was a fire. It was eating its way through the timber of the dry pine forest! Grabbing up her jacket, she hurried from the room and down the stairs.

Wes met her as she came onto the terrace. "What happened?" she demanded. "Where's Phil?"

Wes shrugged. "Someone probably dropped a cigarette along the bridle trail. Everyone's back but Phil. He stayed behind to make sure all the guests were out of the woods."

"But why isn't Phil back now?" Julie's heart had climbed back into her throat. Her blue eyes were streaked with fear. "Why aren't you out there looking for him?"

"Everything's going to be all right." He put his arm about her shoulders. "Don't lose your head. There's a searching party leaving in the jeep right away. They're taking fire-fighting equipment into the woods. If the wind doesn't shift, they'll have the blaze under control in a little while. Let's go into the bar. I could use a drink. How about you?"

She jerked away and stared at him in disbelief. "How could you *think* about a drink with Phil somewhere in that flaming forest?" she blazed at him.

"Look, baby"—Wes' hands gripped her shoulders, his lips were dangerously close to her own—"Phil told me you were going to make a decision. You and I both know what the verdict will be.

Let's stop kidding ourselves. We're just wasting time. Run upstairs and pack a bag. If we leave right away, we can make Pensacola tonight. When we reach Miami we can be married."

His breath was warm against her cheek. In another moment, Julie knew that he was going to kiss her again. She raised her head and looked directly at him. There was a flicker of triumph in his eyes, a half-smile on his lips—and suddenly she realized the truth!

WES was an attractive guy, but that was all. There was no real understanding in him, no humility. He was selfish and insincere and shallow. Maybe his kiss did have a magic formula. Maybe it did send her out of this world, but it had no tenderness. It wasn't for real!

"Yes, we are wasting time, Wes, because I've already made my decision. I'm staying here with Phil, and what's more I'm going to him right now!"

"Don't be a damned fool! You can't go in there—it's an inferno!" Even as Wes spoke, a twig still ablaze sailed through a cloud of smoke and fell at their feet with a shower of sparks.

Julie wrenched herself free and started toward the jeep. Wes didn't move. And, in that revealing instant, Julie made another startling revelation. Wes didn't really care whether Phil was found or not!

He was a coward, and full of deceit. Surely she must have seen all this before, but it hadn't etched its way into her consciousness because she had been too preoccupied with her own reactions to the violent physical attraction she had thought was love.

She had just succeeded in arguing her way into the jeep when a tall, familiar figure appeared at the edge of the woods. Phil! And he had his frightened horse by the reins, coaxing him inch by inch out of the smoking pines.

Julie was across the yard in a second.

"Phil, oh Phil, darling!" she cried. "I thought I might never see you again!"



She flung her arms about him, holding him close, her face pressed against his scorched windbreaker.

"I thought you might be gone, little Julie," he said softly. "I wasn't much caring if I got out of that inferno alive or not."

She raised her face to his, her eyes shining with unshed tears. "I'll always be here, Phil, always and forever! That is, if you'll forgive me for being so blind and—"

He stopped her with a kiss—a long, lingering kiss that was all Julie had ever desired.

"I love you," she whispered tremulously against his lips.

"Say it again," Phil whispered back. "I've waited a long, long time to hear those words."

"I love you—I love you!" she repeated breathlessly.

She was safe in the circle of his arms and knew she belonged there. She had come a desperately weary way to find the truth that love is not an elusive something to search and fight for. Love is often an awakening to the peace and contentment already possessed in the heart.

## INTERNATIONAL LADIES

*By Joseph C. Stacey*



**L**ISTED below in jumbled fashion are ten types of ladies, together with the names by which they are known in their native lands. Can you match up at least 6 of the names (numbered) with the descriptions (designated by letters of the alphabet) for a passing score? 7-8 is good, 9-10 excellent.

- |                |   |
|----------------|---|
| 1. GHAWAZI     | (a) in SCOTLAND, a maid.  |
| 2. MAHARANI    | (b) in FRANCE, a working girl (who takes her midday meal outside of her place of employment). |
| 3. RANI        | (c) an ITALIAN noble woman.   |
| 4. KADEIN      | (d) an EGYPTIAN dancing girl.   |
| 5. BONNE       | (e) in INDIA, a professional dancer.  |
| 6. LASS        | (f) a HINDU slave girl.   |
| 7. NAUTCH GIRL | (g) in TURKEY, a lady of a harem.   |
| 8. MIDINETTE   | (h) a HINDU princess.   |
| 9. DASI        | (i) a FRENCH nurse maid.  |
| 10. MARCHESA   | (j) an INDIAN princess.   |

(Answers Are on Page 113)



With so many  
men around,  
how could  
Nita ever  
concentrate  
on one?



## *The Weaker Sex*

By ROBERT C. ACKWORTH

THE telephone was ringing persistently as Nita Hunt poured a cocktail for Tony Morgan.

"Darn it," said Nita. Darting lightly across the small modern living room of the apartment she shared with Polly Smith she grabbed for the receiver. "This phone never stops ringing!"

"You can say that again!" said Tony,

his handsome face brooding darkly as he downed the cocktail quickly. "It's been ringing steadily for a year. Ever since I met you. That's why I say—"

"Please, darling," said Nita, lifting the receiver. "The only way I can stop it from ringing is to answer it." She tried to sound businesslike as she helloed into the telephone.



"Hello, Gorgeous!" a voice she recognized hummed smoothly from the other end of the line. "I'll bet you can't wait for me to get up there tonight so you can tell me you've decided to marry me." Hanley Martin's voice edged into a plea. "Please, Nita."

"No, Hanley. Absolutely not!"

"Aren't five dozen roses a day enough to show you how much I love you? Tell you what, I'll send a mink tomorrow."

"Don't you dare!" she said. "The flowers are gorgeous, Hanley." She saw with alarm that Tony's eyes shot to the giant bowl of roses Polly had imprudently placed on top of the coffee table, right in full glare. "Please stop sending them, Hanley," she said desperately. "I told you a long time ago that it's no use. I won't marry you."

"Please, honey!" wailed Hanley from the other end of the wire.

"I'll never change my mind. Good-by, Hanley." She quickly cradled the phone. Tony was impatiently downing another cocktail.

"So you've crossed Hanley off the list," he said a bit woozily, as Nita's sleek form dropped on the divan beside him.

"He never really was on the list," she protested. "I like Hanley, but I don't love him. I love you. That's what I've been trying to tell you tonight."

He slammed his glass down hard on the table. "It's a little late for that Nita. You've been dangling me for a year now, and I'm sick of it!"

"Not dangling you at all," said Nita, in as soothing a voice as possible. "I've been comparing notes—that's all. I wanted to be sure I loved the man I marry. I'm sure now. I've decided to marry you, Tony. Remember, I asked to give me time to think?"

"That was a month ago," he said. Rising, he began pacing about the room. "Since then Hanley Martin has asked you to marry him, and so has Steve Unger, and heavens knows who else. I don't like it."

"What difference does it make who's

asked me to marry him? I love you, and I'm going to marry *you*."

SHE rose and started toward him, to kiss away his crossness, but he backed away.

"No—just stay away. I'm going to have my say. Nita, you're fabulous. You're beautiful. That figure of yours is enough to detonate an atomic blast. You're—"

She edged closer, rose on her toes, and slipped her arms about his neck, bringing her lips upward. "Go on, darling."

He retreated to the divan and sat down, hunching squarely in one corner, his armor on thick, his arms folded in a fending-off fashion.

"As I was saying, you're beautiful," he said somewhat dreamily. "Gosh, I'll never forget the first time I saw you. It was at Joe Burke's apartment—remember?—and I had to plow through a couple dozen men to get within viewing distance. I thought, that's for me. I don't know what got me first—maybe that jet-black hair of yours, or that tilty little mouth that always looks as though it's asking to be kissed, or that figure! Anyhow, I said, That's for me!"

"That's what I want you to keep on saying," Nita said worriedly, reaching for him again.

"Not so fast," he said, pushing her eager hand away. "That's just the trouble. You're not only for me—you're for everyone. For Hanley and for Steve—and before them, Bill and Harry and Trent and Paul had their hats in the ring, to name a few. And not only that, but you're just about the most popular model in New York now—justifiably so—and still something cold goes through me every time I see a guy pick up a magazine with your picture on the cover and start drooling. Nita, I'm just not the type to share—"

"But you don't have to share any more. I've chosen you."

He set his lips firmly. "I withdraw my proposal of marriage—effective as



of now. I'm tired of your little game, Nita—playing all us fellows against one another, dangling us."

The tears started. "But I love you! I decided on the subway today. I said to myself, Well, Hanley's got money and a lot of sophistication, and Steve's got a great professional football career ahead of him, plus a pair of broad shoulders for me to lean on. But Tony, I said to myself, he's got everything. He's handsome, I said to myself. I've always loved black smoldering eyes like yours, Tony. Well, besides that, I said to myself, Tony's going to be a great lawyer some day—with my help. Also I said, I love Tony—I really love him. My heart told me, just like that!" She snapped her fingers.

He set his jaw hard. "It's no use, Nita. I've said everything I'm going to say. I'm bowing out. Matter of fact, I've asked Polly to go out with me tonight."

"What?"

Polly Smith made her entrance from the bedroom as though on cue. There was a sparkling radiance in Polly's amber eyes that Nita hadn't seen in weeks. Not since Phil Allen had given her the ditch. Polly's cuddlesome form was wrapped in the most daring of evening gowns, very décolleté, very chic. Her blond hair was shining. Funny, thought Nita suddenly. Polly was known as the "cold" type of model. She had found her niche in the sophisticated ads showing a cold, classic type of woman, swathed in chiffon, being helped into a foreign car by a millionaire. But Polly looked anything but cold tonight.

"Well, have you two had your little talk?" Polly asked a bit awkwardly, trying to smile off the daggers Nita was looking at her. "Nita, I honestly feel a bit foolish about this. But Tony said that everything was off between you two. And Hanley and Steve have been calling you so often that I assumed—"

"It's perfectly all right," said Nita. "Tony has every right to ask you out, and you have every right to go with him."

"That sums it up nicely," Tony said irritably. The telephone started jangling. "See what I mean? You'd better answer it, Nita. It's probably Hanley or Steve, or some other crazy man."

"Yes," said Polly as Tony swept her out the door, "it must be for you."

IT TURNED out to be Nita's agent, calling to arrange a sitting for her. When she cradled the instrument she told herself that Tony would come running back to her tomorrow. He was simply trying to scare her, trying to make her jealous.

Polly's actions were another matter, Nita thought bitterly. To think that her best friend—her roommate—had calmly walked out on a date with her fiancé! It was ridiculous.

And after all she had done for Polly. Why, she had arranged for Polly's first interview! She had fairly pushed Polly to her perch as a top model. She had even tried to help Polly with her men.

The trouble with Polly was that all Polly's men deserted her because she tried to grasp them too hard, despite Nita's warnings. Polly made the fatal mistake of playing against her men instead of up to them. Polly was in a manless desert right now, and she was hunting, so naturally she'd do anything to get her hands on Tony, who was a choice catch for any girl.

Nita was propped up in bed, pretending to read, when Polly came in at three A.M. Polly's usually milk-white face was uncommonly flushed, and her eyes were sparkling brightly.

"Had a wonderful time!" she bubbled. "Took in the Stork, but finally wound up in the Village."

Nita laughed lightly. "I'm glad you had an amusing time. Tony's a wonderful escort. In fact, he's wonderful, period. Polly, I can't blame you for tonight, because you didn't understand. The fact is, though, that I've decided to marry Tony. He asked me, you know, and I love him. Really I think he asked you out simply to spite me and make me



jealous. I know that sounds cruel, dear, but—"

"It isn't true! Tony asked me out to get better acquainted. He got tired of being just one of the mob with you, Nita."

"But, Polly, he loves me. Can't you see that?"

"No, I can't. I don't think he loves you at all. He's asked me for a date tomorrow night—and the next night. And I'm going."

"Polly, haven't we been good friends? Please listen to reason. Tony is a little confused right now. He has a distorted picture of the way I've treated him. He's turned to you in sort of reverse rebound. He's trying to prove himself to be the conquering hero with another woman. He wants to make me squirm."

"You're just jealous. Nita Hunt, you can't have all the men in New York!"

"I don't want all of them," Nita said angrily. "I just want Tony. Tony's a lark with you, Polly. You're starved. You've been in and out of love with a dozen men since I've known you, and you've driven them all away by being too persistent. Now you think you want Tony, simply because Phil Allen, Ed Thorne and Tom Rawley deserted you."

"Shut up!" shouted Polly. "As I said before, you're jealous!"

"So you won't listen to reason?"

"Not your kind of reason."

"Then it'll be a fight to the finish," said Nita.

"Right!"

Abruptly Polly turned out the light as a signal that the conversation had come to an end.

For a long, long time Nita lay awake, clenching and unclenching her hands. She was tempted to use them to strangle Polly. But by the time dawn arrived she had decided it wouldn't be necessary to strangle Polly.

That evening, promptly at seven, Tony arrived, corsage in hand. Nita, outfitted in blouse and slacks, was reading a magazine and munching chocolates.

"Hello, Tony," she said. "Polly will be out in a minute. Hope you don't mind if I go right on with this story. It's fascinating."

"Of course not," he said, trying to sound cold.

He plunked himself in a chair directly opposite the divan so he could watch her, she noticed. She appeared to be rapt in her reading when he said:

"Did Polly tell you what a good time we had last night?"

NITA looked up from her magazine. "Yes, she mentioned that. So glad you got along so well. Polly's a dear. You couldn't have chosen anyone more ideal for you, Tony."

"I haven't exactly chosen her," said Tony. "She's a nice girl. Pretty and entertaining."

"And more," said Nita. "She gives her whole heart to the man she chooses. That's important, Tony."

He reddened. "Well, it certainly isn't that serious."

Nita laughed. "Please don't apologize. You made everything perfectly clear to me last night. And you know what? You were right. Absolutely right."

"You saw what I meant then?"

"Oh, yes. Isn't it wonderful that you made me see the light before we made a ghastly mistake?"

Polly came bursting out just as the telephone began ringing.

"That's for me," said Nita, bouncing up. It was. "Hello, Hanley," she chirped, trying not to show that she was watching Tony, whose face was turning exactly the angry red it had last night. "Sorry, Hanley—it's still no. Besides, I have another engagement tonight. Good-by." Hastily she replaced the receiver and smiled apologetically. "Dear, Hanley. He never gives up. . . . Polly, you look ravishing. My, you two make a handsome couple."

"Well—thanks," said Polly hesitantly, her eyes a little wide with wonder. The girls hadn't spoken all day.

"And Polly," said Nita, "please for-



give me for being so obtuse last night. As usual, you were right and I was wrong. I'm feeling much better about everything today. Back to normal. Friends again?"

"Why, certainly," said Polly. "I'm glad you feel that way."

"Now you two run along," said Nita, practically pushing them out the door. "I've got to dress."

"Someone new?" asked Polly from the hall.

"Not exactly," said Nita. "But someone wonderful. Someone very special."

Tony stopped short in the hall. "Maybe you'd like us to wait for you. Maybe you and your—er—date—could go out on a double with us tonight. We're just going to the club."

"Oh, no!" squealed Nita. "We couldn't possibly! We've got to be alone. I'm playing the game differently with this one, Tony." She noted with satisfaction that a deep flush crawled up his face. "I'm concentrating on just one party from now on, Tony. Thanks for showing me what was wrong with me. I could have died an old maid if I'd kept on the way I was going!" And she sang as she closed the door on them, "'By, darlings!"

Nita leaned against the door and smiled as she heard Tony's reluctant steps going down the hall toward the elevator.

Phase One was accomplished, she noted with glee.

At one-thirty A.M. Nita got back to the apartment. As she had expected, Tony was sitting sullenly on the divan, with Polly nestling as close to him as she could.

Tony sat up stock straight when Nita slithered dramatically into the room.

"Just what are you made up for?" he snorted. "You look like a roaring Twenties vamp!"

"I'm glad you think so," said Nita. Moving about subtly she gave him a full vision of her gown, a low-cut black dream that packaged her perfect figure

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neatly. She caressed her stole. "I think mink is so luxurious, don't you?"

"Well, I'll be darned!" Tony hooted derisively. "Don't you think you're going too far, Nita? Letting a perfect stranger give you a mink stole!"

"He isn't a stranger," said Nita sweetly, "and it isn't a gift. It's sort of a loan—until we see how things work out. You wouldn't deny a girl a chance to get ahead, would you? As I said, I don't want to die an old maid, and thank goodness you made me see the light."

TONY barked, "Oh, stop it! You aren't impressing me. This is some kind of trick. Please don't act, Nita."

"I'm not," Nita said sugary. "Now don't be huffy, Tony. There isn't any reason why all three of us can't be wonderful friends, is there? After all, we're all getting what we want, and everything is turning out for the best for us."

"She's darned right," said Polly. "We've got to be modern about this. You actually sound as though you're jealous, Tony. As though you care that Nita has a new and wonderful friend."

"Well, I *don't* care!" boomed Tony. "I just wanted her to know how silly she's acting."

"Well, she isn't!" said Polly. "She's acting like a woman—but you're not acting much like a man right now." Then she cooed, "I'm sorry, Tony, I didn't really mean that."

"Of course she didn't, Tony," Nita said smilingly. "Friends? All three of us?"

"Friends!" confirmed Polly eagerly.

"Friends," echoed Tony a bit dimly.

"Well, I'll leave you two darlings alone," said Nita, "and I'll have a cup of coffee in the kitchen. Then I'm off to bed. Got a sitting at ten tomorrow. Looks as though I won't have to work much longer, though."

"You mean you've got the clamps on him that tightly?" said Tony.

Nita merely smiled coyly, turned the lamp to low, and walked into the kitchen. As she expected, silence ensued from

the living room all the time she was making coffee. When she walked in on them, coffee in hand, Polly had nestled even closer to Tony. When he saw Nita, Tony determinedly kissed Polly hard—not once, but twice.

"Coffee, anyone?" Nita asked nonchalantly. "Oh, I see you two are busy. Good night."

She walked casually to the bedroom without a backward glance, though she knew Tony was looking at her.

Nita pretended to be asleep when Polly came into the bedroom a half-hour later. Polly couldn't suppress her bubbling enthusiasm. She shook Nita. Nita pretended to come abruptly awake.

"Thanks, awfully," said Polly. "You're helping me with him, Nita, and you could be so difficult if you wanted to. It's wonderful that you want us all to be friends. He really became loving with me tonight after you went to bed. I think he does like me, Nita. You don't mind—"

"Why of course not," said Nita. "Tony's out of my life. I think things are *meant* to be, don't you? Well, Tony was meant for you, otherwise you wouldn't have him now."

"You don't even seem to want him," Polly said musingly. "Just who *is* this wonderful new someone of yours?"

"He's deliciously handsome and thrillingly exciting. That's all I can tell you now. But speaking of handsome men, I ran into Phil Allen today. Polly, how could you have thrown him over?"

"I didn't exactly throw him over," Polly paused. "Where did you see him?"

"I stopped for a cocktail, and there he was, perched forlornly at the bar, looking woe-begone. You certainly did affect him, Polly."

"Why, I never dreamed—I mean . . . Well, he had trouble."

"Too bad," said Nita. "If I weren't so wrapped up in my new man, I'd certainly step in and grab Phil. Why, he has everything. Of course, Tony has everything too, but don't you think it's kind of a toss-up between the two?"



"Well—yes. Just what did Phil have to say?"

"He didn't stop talking about you for a single instant! I had to run, but I'm sure Phil would have rattled on about you all evening to me if I'd stayed. You must have hit him like a bomb. Oh, well,"—Nita shrugged—"you have Tony now."

"Maybe we'd better get some sleep," said Polly, a bit mournfully.

"We certainly should. We have to keep fresh for our men, don't we?"

FOR the next week Nita was kept busy garbing herself in exotic outfits and making dramatic exits every evening just about the time Tony put in his appearance for his date with Polly. As the week progressed, Tony became increasingly irritable. This was all in Nita's favor, she knew. Now if she could only carry this through to just the right moment!

"Just when are we going to meet this dashing Romeo of yours?" Tony asked curtly one evening as Nita headed out the door.

Nita turned and smiled. "At the proper time, Tony. In the meantime, I'm hoarding him. You can understand that, can't you?" She noticed with satisfaction, as she closed the door behind her, that Tony's scowl deepened.

"You know," said Polly one night in the bedroom when they were retiring, "I think Tony is going to ask me to marry him. I think he loves me." She looked inquiringly at Nita.

"How wonderful!" cried Nita. "You'll be very happy."

"Of course, he hasn't told me he loves me. But I feel that he does."

"And you love him, don't you?"

"Well, I think so. It's been a thrilling week."

"Speaking of love," Nita said merrily, "I ran into Ed Thorne and Tom Rawley at lunch yesterday. They certainly were having a good crying session. They asked me to have lunch with

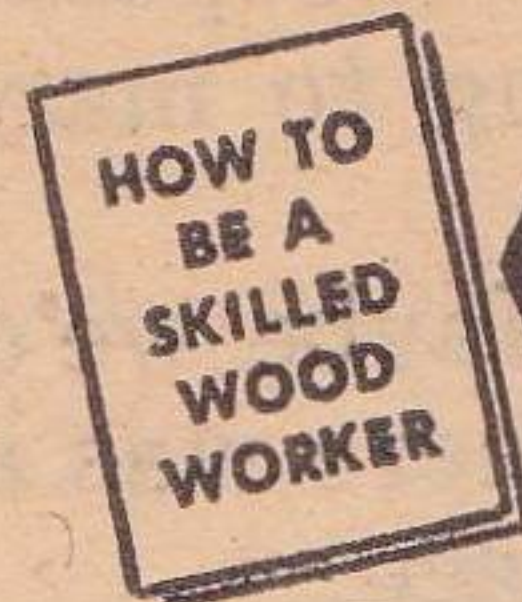
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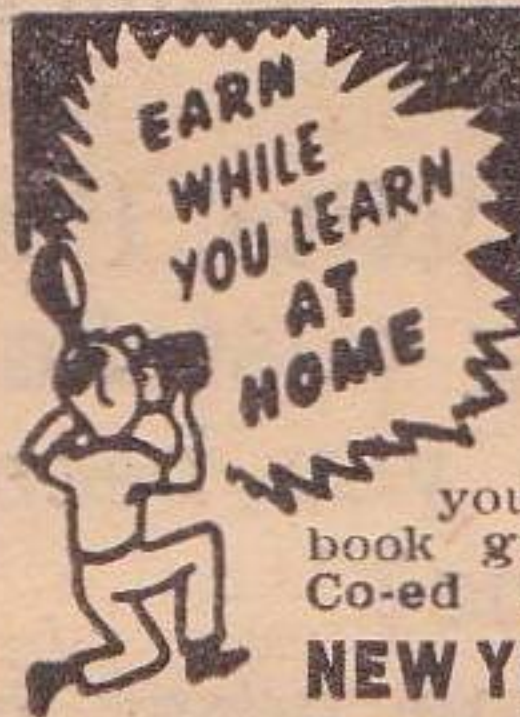
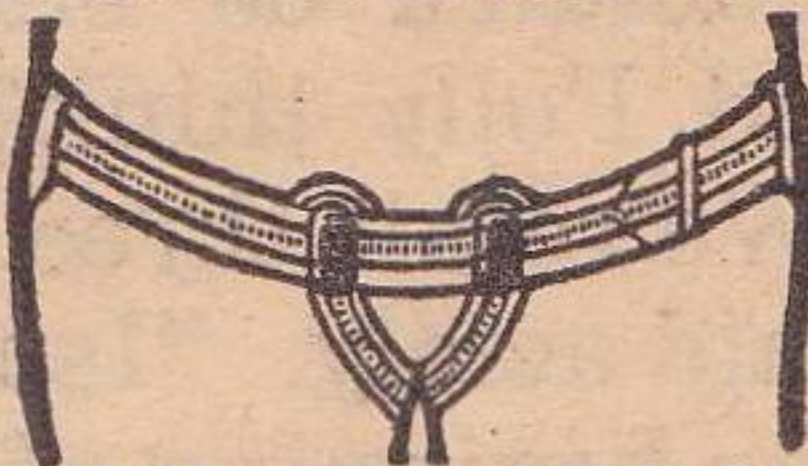
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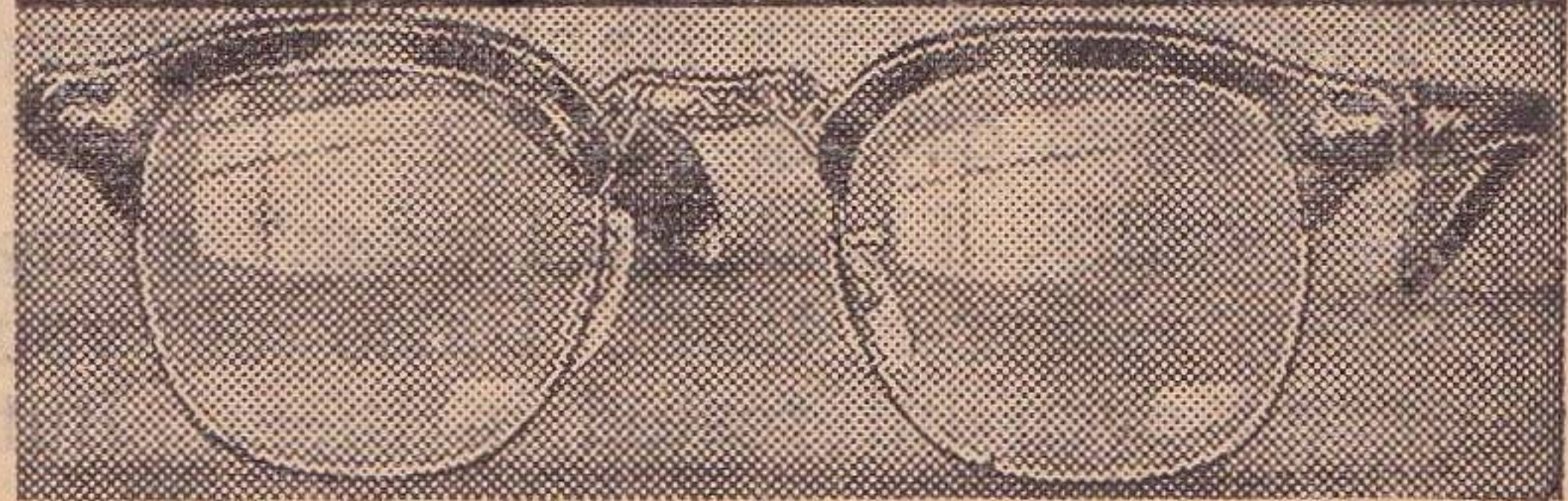


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them, and then all they did was talk about you. Polly, how do you do it? It isn't flattering to a girl to have men do nothing but talk about her roommate."

"You mean you saw them yesterday and you waited until today to tell me!"

"Well, I didn't think it was important. After all, if you're to the point with Tony where you're going to marry him—"

"Well, yes," said Polly. "Maybe we'd better get some sleep." But there was a worried expression on her face.

The next afternoon Nita found Tony waiting for her in the reception room at the agency.

"Why, Tony! Where's Polly?"

"Never mind. You and I are going to have a little talk." He took her arm and led her downstairs to the cool interior of a cocktail lounge. "And now," he said, when they were seated, "we're going to get things straight."

"Things are straight. I thought everything was understood. Really, Tony, I shouldn't be here with you. What would Polly think?"

"We're all three friends, aren't we?" he said acidly. "Isn't that what you said at the beginning of this?"

"Yes. But you can't fool me. You and Polly are more than just friends now. You couldn't have chosen a finer girl than Polly."

His hand closed over hers. "Nita, I'm wondering if I've made a big mistake. You seem so changed. Have you been trying to turn the tables on me?"

"No, I haven't. You told me what a wrong slant on men I had, so I listened to you."

"I've noticed that Hanley and Steve have stopped calling you."

"Naturally. I told you I wasn't going to marry either of them. I also told you I wasn't even interested in them. But you didn't believe me. Remember?"

"What about this new one?" he stormed. "Who is he?"

"Tony, that is none of your business!"

"All right!" he snapped. "I give up.

I just wanted to be sure, Nita, that this was hopeless. I'm going all out for Polly now. She's a fine, sweet girl, and she loves me."

"She certainly does," said Nita. "Polly is just full of love."

"Well, there's nothing more to be said," he said angrily, rising to leave. "I guess this is it, Nita." He walked swiftly out of the lounge.

Nita knew now that the time had come for final action. Tomorrow might be too late. She hadn't liked the look on Tony's face at all.

THAT evening, after Tony and Polly had gone out on their date, Nita got out the telephone book and went to work making a list. Fortunately she found Phil Allen at home the first time she dialed.

"Phil," she said, "don't you ever dare tell Polly I called you, but I simply had to call because I'm so worried about her. Ever since you and she had your trouble, she's been moping around here, getting older by the minute. Whatever did you do to her, Phil?"

Phil sounded amazed. "I didn't do anything. She's the one who gave me the heave-ho. Of course, if she's changed her mind—well, I do like Polly a lot, if she'd only settle down and let me take some of the aggressive action."

"Phil, I told a tiny lie. I told Polly I'd run into you, and I told her that all you did was talk about her. I had to do something, Phil. Her doldrums had hit rock bottom. You'd be doing her a big favor by giving her a call before she goes crazy and I have a love-lunatic on my hands."

"I didn't know she cared that much," said Phil, in a pleased tone. "I thought—"

"You thought wrong! Then you will call her? How about tomorrow afternoon, about three? She'll be home from work by then."

"Sure thing," Phil said happily.

Fortunately Nita found Ed Thorne



and Tom Rawley at home too, and her conversation with each was almost identical with the one she'd had with Phil. She decided not to bother with calling any more men, because Ed and Tom had been as enthusiastic as Phil. Three men should be enough to distract Polly.

Nita's hopes plummeted when Polly came in that night wearing a good-sized ruby and diamond ring.

"He asked me tonight!" she said excitedly. "The ring doesn't quite fit, but isn't it gorgeous?"

"Oh-h-h!" sighed Nita. So she had let it go too far, she thought with despair. Her plan had backfired. Tony had asked Polly to marry him too soon. "Congratulations, Polly," she said, disheartened, but trying not to let the tears in her eyes show. Of course Polly couldn't be blamed, she thought dimly.

Nita Hunt was a pretty distraught girl when she got home from work the next day. Try as she might, she hadn't been able to muster a convincing smile for the pose in which she was working. Well, when a girl lost the man she loved—

Polly's face was a mass of emotional intrigue when Nita came tiredly in.

"I don't know what to do!" cried Polly. "I've had a deluge of calls—from Phil, and Ed, and even from Tom."

"It must be nice to be popular," said Nita, a bit acidly. "I suppose you told them that you are now engaged to be married."

"Why, no," said Polly. "They were all so insistent that I see them. You know, Nita, I was never sure whether I was in love with Phil or not— Or with Ed or Tom, either, or—"

"But you are sure you're in love with Tony."

"No, I guess I'm not sure. I thought I was, but now that Phil and Ed and Tom have called, I'm not so sure." Polly paused. "Don't you think a girl has every right to make comparisons before she makes up her mind, Nita?"

[Turn page]

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"That's what I used to think, before I got put in my place. Remember? But a girl's got to make up her heart, Polly, not her mind. What does your heart tell you?"

"Maybe it was my heart that told me to accept a date with Phil for tonight, and one with Ed for tomorrow afternoon, and one with Tom for Saturday," Polly said tearfully. "How will I ever explain to Tony? Oh, I'm so confused! I don't know who or what I want."

"That can be a perplexing situation," said Nita, "and I'm speaking strictly from experience. But you must do what your heart tells you to do."

"It told me to accept those dates!" wailed Polly. "Tony is calling for me tonight at seven, and I don't know what to do. I'll be gone with Phil before then."

"I won't be leaving here until after seven. If you'd like, I'll tell Tony you were called to the hospital to visit a sick friend, or something."

"You're a darling!" exploded Polly, hugging her.

AT SEVEN, Tony arrived. Nita was in slacks and blouse, her hair tied neatly behind her head—a far cry from the glamorous personality she had been exuding all over the place for the last week. But then, the glamorous aura wasn't necessary any more.

"You can remove that smile of pleasure," she said to Tony. "Polly had to go clear across town—an emergency. Her aunt was taken to the hospital."

"Oh," said Tony, shoving through the door. "Well, I think I'll wait."

"No need," said Nita. "She can't possibly get back until late. Call her tomorrow."

"I'll wait anyhow," he said, heading for the divan. "Sorry I ran off the mouth at the lounge yesterday."

"It's all right," said Nita. "If you don't mind, I'll read while you wait." She opened a magazine and pretended to throw herself into intense concentration on it.

They sat in silence for ten minutes while she quietly went mad.

"Why," he suddenly asked, "aren't you out with your mysterious lover tonight? This wonderful new man we've never seen."

She glared at him. "Because I hate men, that's why. I've given up men completely. I can't stand them! They sicken me."

His hand crept over hers, and she dropped the magazine. "Nita, I love you. I can't help it. I don't even want to help it. I asked Polly for that first date just to make you jealous, to make you crawl to me—and then you turned around and actually promoted my romance with Polly. Even I got to believing I loved her. I think she believed it, too. But it's no good. I don't love her. I love you."

SHE fell neatly into his arms, and for minutes there was nothing but kisses between them.

Between kisses, she said, "To think I almost botched this whole thing! You turned the tables on me, so I turned them on you, and then you got mad enough to get engaged to Polly, and... Oh, what a mess!"

"Well, I'm going to get myself un-engaged to Polly and re-engaged to you," said Tony. "Polly will understand, I'm sure. You see, when I drove up to the apartment tonight I saw her leaving with another man. And Nita, I have a feeling you had something to do with Polly's going out with that man."

"A girl has to protect her interests," Nita said happily.

"Well, things have fallen right into place, where they should be. But I'll have to admit that you had me fooled for a long and agonizing time." He frowned. "There's only one more thing to clear up—this mysterious man of yours. The mink stole giver. I haven't liked him from the first."

Nita laughed. "My mysterious man is none other than Rolland Cranson, who—"



"The movie star?" Tony's eyebrows shot up.

"No less. But I'm getting awfully tired of seeing his latest picture. That's where I've gone every night for the past week. Also, I looked awfully silly sitting in the movies in evening gowns and in a mink stole the agency loaned me."

"To think they call women the weaker sex!" said Tony. "Why you had this planned scientifically!"

"And it worked," cooed Nita, snuggling into his arms. "We can all be happy now. Even Polly. After she's finished playing the field, she'll find the right one for herself, too."

"I was kind of playing tricks, too," said Tony. "That ring I gave to Polly is a size too large for her—but it'll just fit your finger. I bought that ring for you six months ago."

"I'm sure Polly will be willing to part with the ring," said Nita. "She'll understand. After all, we're all friends, aren't we?"

"Yes." He laughed as he kissed her. "We're all very much friends now."

## Answers to Quiz on Page 102

1-d, 2-h, 3-j, 4-g, 5-i, 6-a, 7-e, 8-b, 9-f, 10-c.

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—Bess Ritter

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## PLEASE FORWARD

(Continued from page 6)



### HOUSEWIFE

Dear Mrs. Simpson: I am a housewife, 29 years old, 5 feet 10 inches in height and 150 pounds. I love to meet people and make new friends. My hobbies are many and I'm sure we'll have something in common. I'll answer all letters I receive.

KITTY #965

### POPULAR BLONDE

Dear Mrs. Simpson: I am a girl of 15 and would like to hear from those between 15 and 21. I have blond hair and brown eyes, stand 5 feet 3 inches. I like basketball, baseball and tennis. I am not very lonesome, but I just like to hear from people. I date pretty regular and I am considered popular. I quit school in the 9th grade and I have a job baby sitting and keeping house. Come on kids, write me, will you?

RUTH #966

### FARM GAL

Dear Mrs. Simpson: I am quite lonely and would like to have some pen pals. I lived on a farm for a short time and last summer even raised a few chickens here in town. I am 49 years old, 5 feet tall, have brown hair and blue eyes. I like to watch TV and I've always liked farms. Your reply will be welcome.

CLARA #967

### NEEDS A HELPING HAND

Dear Mrs. Simpson: I have just moved to a farm and I'm a very lonesome gal. I am very interested in letter writing. I am 5 feet 4 inches tall with brown hair and blue eyes. I enjoy all sports and like music and dancing very much. Come on, all you nice people, and give a lonely gal a helping hand.

CISCO #968

### CARE TO WRITE?

Dear Mrs. Simpson: I am a girl of 13 and would like some pen pals. I have long brown hair and hazel eyes. I am 5 feet 1 inch tall and weigh 91 pounds. My favorite sports are swimming, roller skating, ice skating and dancing. I would like to hear from anyone that would care to write.

LORRETTA #969

### TV FAN

Dear Mrs. Simpson: I am 30 years old, stand 5 feet 8 inches tall, have brown hair and eyes. I do not smoke or drink. I am single and would like to hear from men 32 to 35 years of age. I like to listen to hillbilly music and watch TV. I am interested in hearing from some of you pen pals.

ELIZABETH #970

### 64 YEARS YOUNG

Dear Mrs. Simpson: I am a very lonely widow 64 years of age. I am 5 feet 4 inches tall, weigh 140 pounds, have gray eyes and brown hair.

I am very healthy and full of pep and look about 50 years old. I am an undergraduate nurse and have done private nursing for years. I am retired now and living alone. I do not drink or smoke, just love football and baseball and go to church regularly.

DOLLY #971

### NOT LONESOME

Dear Mrs. Simpson: I would like to have boys and girls between the ages of 18 and 21 write me. I'm not lonesome, but I do love to write and receive letters. I am 18 years old, have blond hair, blue eyes, stand 5 feet 3 inches tall and weigh 110. I love to dance, listen to popular music and swim.

BEA. #972

### AIR FORCE LAD

Dear Mrs. Simpson: I am in the Air Force, stand 5 feet 6 inches tall and weigh 139 pounds. I have blond hair and blue eyes. I would like to hear from girls all over the country, from the ages 16 to 20. By the way I'm 19 years old.

MAC #973

### CANADIAN GAL

Dear Mrs. Simpson: I would like to have pen pals from all over the world and especially the United States, from the ages of 15 to 17. I am a Canadian girl 15 years of age. I am 5 feet 7 inches tall, weigh 155 pounds, have dark brown hair and hazel eyes. I like sports, music and writing. I recently moved from Bermuda and have been living here for a short time.

ANN #974

### OUTDOOR MAN

Dear Mrs. Simpson: I live here on the Jersey Shore and am fond of spending all my time swimming, boating, fishing and in outdoor sports. I like to write letters and would like to hear from guys and gals who care to write and get acquainted. I live alone and do get lonesome at times.

BUDDY #975

### PLEASING PERSONALITY

Dear Mrs. Simpson: I am 5 feet 5 inches tall and weigh about 189 pounds and I'm afraid I'm starting to lose my hair. I have blue eyes and my friends say I have a pleasing personality. I have a college education and I am very interested in children and their welfare. So all who are interested, please write soon.

NEWTON #976

### DESIGNS FASHIONS

Dear Mrs. Simpson: I am a girl of 20, stand 5 feet 2 inches tall, weigh 130 pounds, have brown eyes, auburn hair and fair complexion. I sing, write songs, sew, design fashions and collect travel books. I like photography, most sports, movie and music. I hope I get a lot of letters to answer from everyone, everywhere.

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