

MAR.

FIFTEEN



25c

LOVE

15 STORIES

STORIES

25 CENTS



Adventure
IN LOVE
by
FRANCIS FLICK

Build a Fine Business ... Full or Spare Time!

I'll Put a "Shoe Store Business" in Your Pocket!

SHOE BUSINESS



You Don't Invest a Cent!

I Furnish Everything FREE!

Want to have lots of money in your pocket—always? Then rush the coupon below and start toward your own business. In many ways it's better than a retail store of your own! I plan to give it to you absolutely FREE. You don't invest a penny now or ever! Be in this highly profitable business QUICK.

HERE'S WHY IT'S BETTER!

As the Mason Shoe Counselor handling the quick-selling line of this 50-year old, million-dollar company you have a limitless market, because everybody wears shoes. Start by selling to relatives, friends, neighbors. That will prove the fine quality leathers—superb craftsmanship—money-saving value—and unequalled comfort-fit! Then branch out on a big scale.

It's easy to fit folks in the exact style they want—no need to substitute—you draw on our huge stock of over 200,000 pairs plus daily production.

Sales build up from friend to friend quickly, like a snowball. Recommendations, repeat orders and new customers build you a big income in a surprisingly short time. No wonder some of our top Shoe Counselors make from \$5 to \$10 every hour they spend taking orders!

EXCLUSIVE FEATURES

People demand nationally advertised Mason Shoes because of their exclusive comfort features, up-to-the-minute styling. Foamy-soft exclusive Velvet-Eez Air Cushion innersole makes walking a real pleasure—like "walking on air!" Ten-second demonstration lets customer actually feel air cushion, brings quick sales!

These splendid shoes bear famous Good Housekeeping Guarantee Seal.

SEND FOR YOUR FREE SELLING OUTFIT TODAY!



MASON SHOE MFG. CO.
Dept. MA-307 Chippewa Falls, Wis.

BIG, STEADY PROFITS FOR YOU—NO OVERHEAD!

That's right! You have all the advantages of a profitable shoe store business **without** the expenses of rent, light, heat, etc. You are independent and invest nothing but your time. Your generous profit is **ALL YOURS!** No wonder Mason men are making more money than ever before. Even if you start in spare time, you will soon want to devote full time to this steady, repeat-order big-income business!

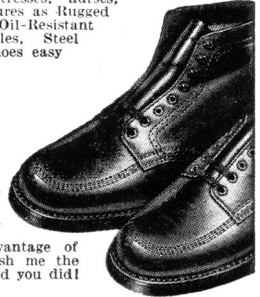
No Experience Needed ... Make Money First Hour!

You need no experience to make money right away. Some men have made up to 20 sales their first day. You feature 160 styles of smart dress shoes; casual sport shoes, and practical work and service shoes for men and women, boots and fine leather jackets, too.

Sell to service station and garage men, waiters, factory workers, barbers, waitresses, nurses, housewives—everybody! Such features as Rugged Horsehide Shoes, Neoprene Oil-Resistant Soles, Cork Slip-Resistant Soles, Steel Safety Toe shoes make Mason Shoes easy to sell.

SEND NOW!

I have a powerful Selling Outfit I'm going to send you absolutely FREE as soon as I receive your coupon. This outfit includes actual 10-second demonstrator, famous Automatic Selling Plan, and features exclusive Velvet-Eez Air-Cushion shoes, fine jackets—other fast-selling specialties. To take advantage of this opportunity of your life, rush me the coupon below NOW! You'll be glad you did!



SEND FOR FREE OUTFIT

Mr. Ned Mason, Sales Manager
Mason Shoe Mfg. Co., Dept. MA-307
Chippewa Falls, Wis.

Please put a "Shoe Store Business" in my pocket by rushing FREE and postpaid your Powerful Selling Outfit—so I can start making Big Money my very first hour!

Name

Address

Town State

BE A RADIO-TELEVISION TECHNICIAN

America's Fast Growing Industry Offers You a Bright Future



I Will Train You at Home
in Spare Time for Good Paying Jobs in
RADIO-TELEVISION

J. E. SMITH, President,
National Radio Institute,
has trained more men for
Radio-Television than any
other man. Our 40th Year.

I Trained These Men

Extra Money in Spare Time
"Four months after enrolling ... averaged \$10 to \$15 a week servicing sets in spare time. Now have full-time business."—William Weyde, Brooklyn, New York.

Business Continues to Grow
"Becoming an expert Tele Technician as well as Radiotician. Impossible without your course. Business continues to grow."—Philip G. Brogan, Louisville, Kentucky.

Broadcast Engineer at WLPN
"I am Broadcast Engineer at WLPN. Another technician and I have opened a Radio-Television service shop in our spare time."—J. H. Bangley, Jr., Suffolk, Va.

Video Control Engineer
"My position with WNET is video control engineer on the RCA color project. I owe a lot of my success to your textbooks."—Warren Deem, Malverne, N. Y.



TELEVISION is Making Good Jobs, Prosperity

Radio, even without Television is bigger than ever. 115 million home and auto radios and 3000 Radio Broadcasting Stations give interesting jobs to service technicians, operators, engineers. NOW ADD TELEVISION. 25 million TV homes and the total growing rapidly. 200 Television stations on the air, hundreds more under construction. Color Television soon to be a reality. All this adds up to good pay now, a bright future for men who qualify.

America's Fast Growing Industry Offers You GOOD PAY - BRIGHT FUTURE - SECURITY

Training PLUS opportunity is the PERFECT COMBINATION for job security, advancement. When times are good, the trained man makes the BETTER PAY, gets PROMOTED. When jobs are scarce, the trained man enjoys GREATER SECURITY. NRI training can help assure you and your family more of the better things of life.

illustrated lessons give you basic principles you need, and my skillfully developed kits of parts "bring to life" things you learn from the lessons.

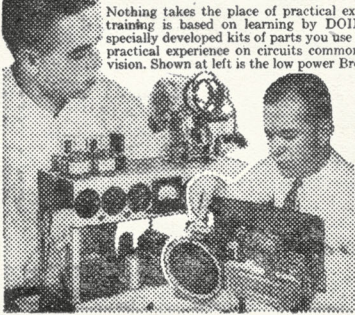
Start Soon to Make \$10, \$15 a Week Extra Fixing Sets

An important benefit of my Radio-Television training is that you can start to cash in fast. I start sending you special booklets that show you how to fix sets the day you enroll. Multitester you build with parts I send helps you discover and correct troubles, helps you make money fixing neighbors' sets in spare time while training. Many NRI students make \$10, \$15 a week extra this way. My training is practical, complete. You benefit by my 40 years' experience training men at home. My well-

Find Out About This Tested Way to Better Pay — Mail Coupon

Without obligating you in any way, I'll send an Actual Lesson to prove that my training is practical, thorough. My 64-page book, "How to be a Success in Radio-Television," shows what my graduates are doing, earning. It gives important facts about your opportunities in Radio-Television, tells about kits I furnish for practical experience. You don't have to leave home or give up your job to take NRI course. You learn at home in your spare time on terms as low as \$5 a month. Many of my graduates make more than the total cost of my training in just two weeks. Mail coupon below now to J. E. SMITH, President, National Radio Institute, Dept. 4BR1, Washington 9, D. C. Our 40th Year.

You Practice Broadcasting-Servicing with Kits of Parts I Send



Nothing takes the place of practical experience. That's why NRI training is based on learning by DOING. My training includes specially developed kits of parts you use to build equipment and get practical experience on circuits common to both Radio and Television. Shown at left is the low power Broadcasting Transmitter you build as part of my Communications Course. Also shown is modern Radio you build as part of my Servicing Course. My free book tells about other equipment you build. Mail coupon. All equipment is yours to keep.

AVAILABLE TO VETERANS UNDER GI BILLS

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Washington 9, D. C.
Mail me Sample Lesson and 64-page Book FREE
(No salesman will call. Please write plainly.)

Name.....Age.....
Address.....
City.....Zone.....State.....

VETS Write in date of discharge



FIFTEEN LOVE STORIES



15 STORIES

25 CENTS

Vol. 8

MARCH, 1954

No. 3

Novelettes

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(Copyright 1946 by Popular Publications, Inc.) | | |

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Next Issue on Sale February 26th

PEGGY GRAVES, Editor

Any resemblance between any character appearing in fictional matter, and any person, living or dead, is entirely coincidental and unintentional.

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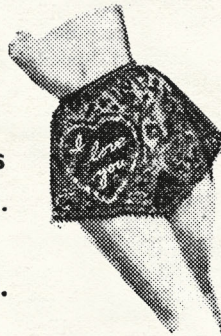
ALLURE...

with a
"PERSONAL" TOUCH



EXCITING PANTIES and NIGHTIE With Motto and Initials

There's "Sheer" magic in the breathtaking loveliness of the chantilly style black lace panties. Fetching and fascinating, you "wear your heart on your hip" with a daring, darling motto and personalized initials. The glorious nightie is an inspiring creation that beautifully combines clinging fine quality chiffon with delicate peek-a-boo black lace. The accent is on lovely, lovely you in these glamorous "personally yours" garments. Irresistible gifts that make you irresistible.



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Pink Blue

Panties
in Black Only

Nighties

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Panties

\$5.00 ea.

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Please send me ... Nightie, ... Panties. Enclosed \$..... check, cash or money order, postage prepaid. Sorry, no C.O.D.

NIGHTIE—Color Sizes: 32, 34, 36, 38, 40 [circle size]
PANTIES—Black Only, Sizes: Small, Medium, Large [desired]
MOTTO () I Love You () Forever Yours
[Check One] () Dangerous Curves () No Trespassing

INITIALS.....

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY ZONE..... STATE.....

Dear Reader:

Those of you who love the sound of horse's hoofs and the thrills that go with racing won't want to miss the lead story in the coming May issue. And even those of you who are not acquainted with the terms and spirit of this sport of kings, will thrill to Helen Erskine's romantic tale set against the backdrop of the turf.

It all began when Nan Corbett learned that her father was on the verge of bankruptcy. For years Dan Corbett had been a legend around American tracks, but for the past year his horses had been losing every race. In desperation he realized that something had to be done, and the answer seemed to be Kent Farrell, an up and coming young trainer.

Enid Carr, wealthy, beautiful, and a newcomer to the racing world, had expressed her desire to buy the Corbett stables, but Nan vehemently refused her offer. But she was baffled by Enid's interest in learning that Kent was joining the Corbett staff. Did she know him? And if so, how well?

When Nan finally met Kent she was instantly attracted to him. His interest in her was as strong, and before they knew it, they were in love. The hours they spent in each other's company were blissful, but many things shadowed their happiness. To make matters worse, a dark figure from Nan's past appeared out of nowhere. Lucky Nelson was anything but what his name implied. He had always been a jinx to the Corbetts and a menace to Nan's welfare. Why was he so interested in her, she wondered. And how did he amass such a fortune? But Nan bravely kept her fears and questions to herself.

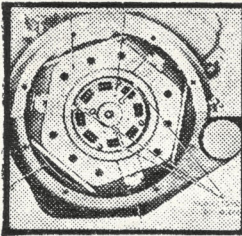
Kent did much to brighten the Corbett's lives, but their future grew darker by the minute. Finally despair and suspicion began clawing at Nan's heart, and danger began lurking around the stable she loved so well.

At last she realized she had to get to the bottom of the mystery that surrounded them, even if the truth might hurt her and the man she loved.

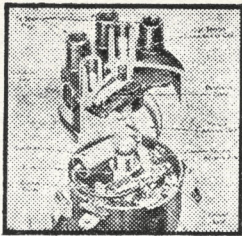
Whether you like horses or not, you won't want to miss this tender and absorbing story. Its heroine is completely charming, its hero captivating, and its subject matter, off-beat and engrossing. Look for THOROUGH-BRED HEART in the May issue of FIFTEEN LOVE STORIES, your biggest buy in love fiction. On Sale February 26th.

See you then.

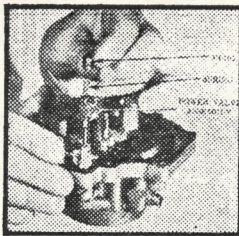
Peggy Seales



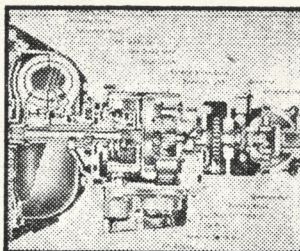
Cut-away diagrams make every operation easy. Above — Ford clutch.



Diagrams, tables and text take the "mystery" out of all ignition systems.

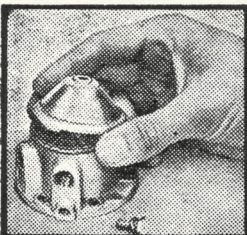


You get illustrated repair procedures for all types of carburetors.

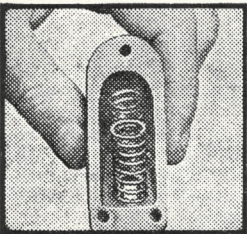


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Factory Specifications and Adjustment Tables. Tune-up Charts. Tables of Measurements and Clearances. Overhauling and Replacement Facts—**AND MUCH MORE.**

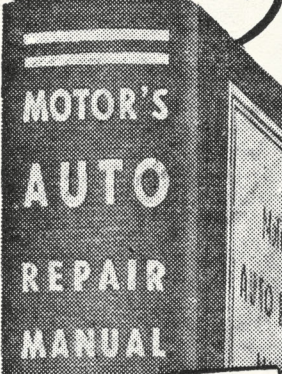
Used by Armed Forces, hundreds of thousands of auto service men! **YOU'LL** want to try it, too—on the following **UNCONDITIONAL GUARANTEE:**

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 MOTOR'S New TRUCK and TRACTOR REPAIR MANUAL. (Described at left.) If okay I will remit \$2.00 in seven days and \$2.00 monthly for three months, plus 35c delivery charge with final payment. Otherwise, I will return book promptly. (Foreign price: Remit \$10.00 cash with order.)

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 Covers EVERY job on EVERY gasoline-powered, truck and farm tractor made from 1939 thru 1953. 2267 pictures, 660 big 8 1/2" x 11 inch pages, 300,000 facts. Check proper box in coupon for free trial.

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| Dodge | Mercury | Studebaker |
| Ford | Nash | Terraplane |
| Frazier | | Willys |



Cosmetic Cues by Linda



Timely tips to the readers of Fifteen Love Stories from our famous Linda, who is on hand in every issue to glamorize your beauty-buying dollar

Here is a new cream that runs after dirt. And it's fluffy as the foamy whipped cream on your strawberry shortcake. It penetrates the skin and snuggles into pore mouths rooting out grit and grime and the day's stale makeup. It's APRICOT CREAM by HARRIET HUBBARD AYER and it feeds new beauty to your skin and wraps your naked face in new tones of loveliness, helping you to look lovely even without your makeup at bedtime. This newest, film-fine cream will give you the silkiest, softest complexion you could ever hope to have. In \$1.00 tube size or in jars at \$1.25, \$2.50 and \$4.00.

Complexion does not include just your face and throat, says DOROTHY GRAY, but it's all over, and concerns any woman who wants a good appearance. And to be specific, it includes one's legs. They should be soft, smooth, and hair-free, beneath a smart stocking and flawless shoe. For better leg grooming, more comfort and longer nylon wear, DOROTHY GRAY introduces HOSEMETICS. It's not just a leg makeup but an emollient lotion especially made for the legs. It's wonderfully soothing and smoothing, without being sticky or greasy. It's recommended for use after bathing, to be rubbed into the heels and dry patches of skin where nylons are apt to snag. The six ounce size is \$1.00.

If you're looking for an alert, alive lipstick shade to go with your alert, alive personality, you'll really go for YOUNGTIME PINK by TUSSY. It's a magic shade that is at home with the coloring of blondes, brunettes and even light titians. It has been created to blend with the blues, navies,

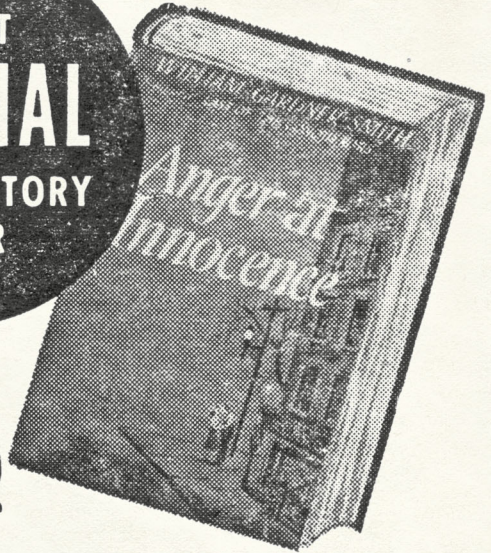
greens, greys and browns that are so popular this year; and to also complement lovely pastel pinks, blues and cream tones. A truly smooth, velvety lipstick, it lends the lips an enchanting color, and at the same time keeps them soft, smooth, moist, and glowing with an inviting sheen. Just \$1.00.

Your foundation can be the most enhancing part of your makeup. It can give your skin a smooth, even texture, help keep it moist, enliven drabness, act as a cover-up for complexion flaws, and add a glow of color to your skin tone. DU BARRY'S new fluid makeup, FLATTER-GLO does all of these things—and more. Available in four luscious shades: Truly Pink (a natural shade for light blonde skintones); Rose Beige (a beauty shade for dark blonde and light brunette complexions); Champagne Beige (for medium redheads and light brunettes); and Tropical (for suntanned skins and dark brunette complexions). For a creamy, dreamy complexion, apply four dots on your face—on the forehead, the chin, the right cheek and the left cheek. Now, with the help of your fingertips, spread it smoothly all over your face. Be sure to get it right up to your hairline and don't overlook your ears and neck. A lovely, flattering effect is achieved in a minute but it lasts beautifully for hours. \$1.10.

Be *scentible* and try FRIENDSHIP'S GARDEN LIQUID PETALS at \$1.25. This delicate blue, long-lasting cream perfume comes in a dainty hobnail bottle that is decorated with gold and flower-wreathed. It should be applied to the skin wherever body warmth will bring out the true floral fragrance.



GREAT
SPECIAL
 INTRODUCTORY
 OFFER



\$1.00

YOUR CHOICE OF TWO GREAT BOOKS FOR WOMEN

MADAME SERPENT by Jean Plaidy
 (Published at \$3.00)

This is the love story of Catherine De Medici who ruled everything but her husband's heart. She stands unique in that French court which was the most luxurious, the most intellectual, and the most immoral in Europe. About her move the colorful personalities of the age. Francis the King, fascinating, brilliant, witty, the greatest lover of the century. Dazzling young Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, and that sickly Dauphin, Catherine's eldest son, who loved her. And finally those two whose love affair was one of the most enduring in the history of France—Diane de Poitiers and Catherine's husband, Henry, the shy prince who became a king.

But this is Catherine's story—the story of a girl, growing through bitterness into a strange and sinister woman. It is the story of Catherine De Medici in love.

ANGER AT INNOCENCE by William Gardner Smith
 (Author of **LAST OF THE CONQUERORS**)
 (Published at \$3.00)

"No one is born evil," he told her. That was the miracle—she could be what she wanted to be.

Rodina's love for Ted, who left his wife for her, had sprung into being because this quiet, shy man—so different from her other lovers—believed in the possibility of her redemption, in her capacity for good. No matter how bad and self-defeating her life had already been, with its furtive thefts, its casual love affairs, its ugliness.

In this second novel, William Gardner Smith, author of **LAST OF THE CONQUERORS**, has written a story reminiscent in its passion, of the morality plays, if it is without their strictness of allegory. For it is in the conviction of his characters, dimensioned and vital, that he holds our fascinated interest.

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Enclosed please find (\$1.00) (\$2.00).
 Please send me:
 MADAME SERPENT (Published at \$3.00)
 ANGER AT INNOCENCE (Published at \$3.00)

This does not obligate me in any way to buy further books.

Name.....
 Street and Number.....
 City..... Zone..... State.....

Variable Calendar

by Gladys Martin

*The gladdest season that I know
May have a road of gypsy snow,
Small bluebirds in a byelow nest,
Hill twilight patching ragged vest,
A pumpkin moon for Halloween,
Gay tinsel tree of Christmas green,
The taste of sunshine in the wind,
White lilacs where some dreams are pinned,
Lace Valentines that Cupid made,
Brown autumn with a scarlet spade—
There are a lot of lovely things
To give each season satin wings
And paint the skies with filigree . . .
What is the happiest for me?
My very gladdest time of year
Is ANY time that you are here.*



First Date

by Catherine E. Berry

*Sweep the rugs and dust the room,
For someone's coming tonight,
Arrange the flowers, the table now
With candles of pale starlight.
Tie a ribbon around your curls,
And quiet your trembling heart,
Ring this date in a circle of red,
For this is the magic start
Of every wish, of every dream,
Handle them carefully,
This is the sweet beginning of love,
But never let him see!*

NOW, the pipe smoker's dream come true!

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Pat. Pend.

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gives it off to the air FAST. The smoke circulates in the space between the inner bowl and the outer briar shell, becoming COOL before you draw it. Your tobacco cannot get wet because cotton or paper tissue packed in the space below the inner bowl absorbs all of the saliva and condensation. Rotate the ceramic bowls over and over again as you would a set of ordinary pipes. Dr. PHILIP'S pipe is EASY to CLEAN. There is no need to knock this pipe against any object to get out the ash. It does not form a cake. There is no need to rest the Dr. PHILIP'S pipe for cooling or drying. It has a constant capacity. The SHORT SMOKE MODEL will hold enough tobacco for a pleasure packed smoke of 15 to 25 minutes and the LONG SMOKE MODEL will last from 45 minutes to a full hour!

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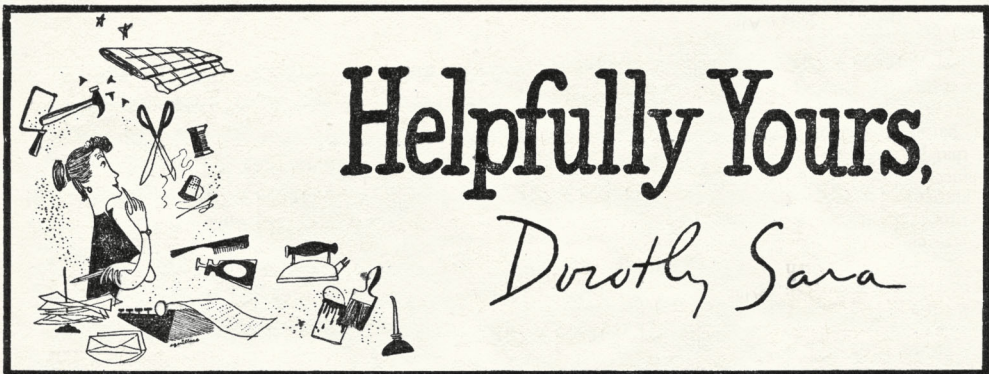
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Dorothy Sara

This is a department for the "happy problems" which everyone encounters every day. You may want to know what to wear for certain occasions; how to tackle the decorating problems in your house; the things to serve and how to serve them at a party; helpful hints for social life and hobbies; and the thousand-and-one other questions which arise in your everyday planning.

These will be helpfully solved for you, if you write to Dorothy Sara, in care of 15 LOVE STORIES MAGAZINE, 205 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y. and she will answer them in a forthcoming issue.

Dear Miss Sara:

Recently I went to a birthday party, where they had a cake with real flowers on it. I tried it myself by sticking the stems in the cake, but the flowers drooped and the cake broke around the stems. Can you tell me how to decorate this type of cake successfully?

Vie G. P.

Place the cake on a plate or platter which is at least two inches bigger than it. Cut the flower stems close to the blossom, dip the stems into melted paraffin, and then immediately put them into ice water. When the wax is hardened, arrange the flowers on top of the cake. Do not stick them into it. Also place flowers on the plate around the cake.

Dear Miss Sara:

We don't have enough solid color carpeting left over from the living room to use in the hall and on the stairs. And we can't match it. Is it all right to use a different color carpeting or one with a figure in it?

Mrs. Beulah F.

It doesn't need to match, but the carpeting should harmonize. I suggest you select a figured carpet, because a hallway and staircase get hard wear. But make sure that the texture and the background color of the carpeting is the same as you now have for the living room.

Dear Miss Sara:

Is a housewarming different from a usual party? I heard that people just go through the house to see and admire it, but that it isn't necessary to serve lunch or dinner.

Stella S.

A housewarming is no different when it comes to the hospitality the hostess extends to her guests. If you invite your friends for mealtime hours, serve a buffet lunch or dinner. If the invitation is for between-meals time, serve little sandwiches, coffee, tea, or other beverages. Also have a bowl of fruit, dishes of nuts and small candies available, so that your guests may nibble or not, as they desire.

Dear Miss Sara:

I wear glasses, but I also like to wear earrings. My girl friend says I should dispense with them as they don't go with glasses. Who's right?

Evelyn N.

You are. However, some compromise has to be made for the sake of style. If your glasses have any gold trim in their frames, don't wear silver earrings, or vice versa. If your glasses have colored frames, don't use earrings of a different color, but wear gold or silver instead. Your earrings should be

(Continued on page 109)

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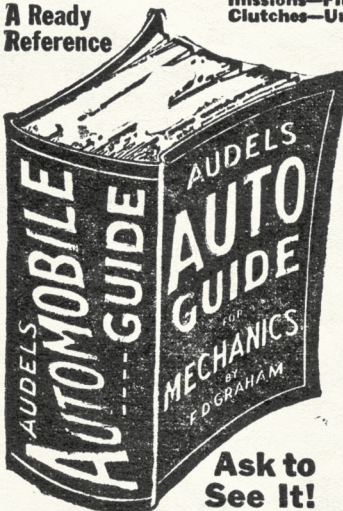
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Adventure In Love

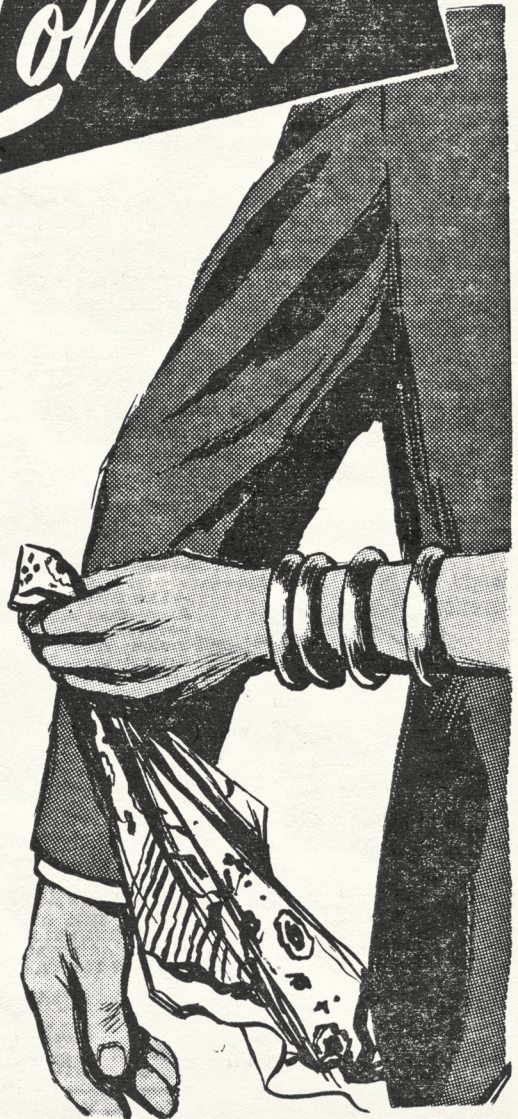
By Francis Flick

*It all started with a horoscope
and ended with a kiss—that
was written in the stars.*



THE BLUSTERY WIND whipped around the corner of the Hillsdale Station and Carol Lee made a grab for her hat and tried to keep her coat from billowing. She laughed, mostly because she laughed easily these days with a new and incredible sense of freedom. It would take little encouragement for her to flap her arms and soar like a bird up into the heavy, leaden sky.

The commuters' train to New York came into the station with another gust of wind and a gray snap-brim hat cart-wheeled down the tracks. A tall man in tweeds took off after it and finally caught up. Carol, along with the





"You're even more
beautiful when you're
mad as hops."

other morning commuters, smiled and the man grinned back sheepishly.

He must be a stranger to Hillsdale, Carol decided, because what girl could forget him if she'd happened to meet him in the supermarket or at a country club dance? He was too tall and well built and his face was too attractive to be overlooked. As Carol climbed up the train's steps she noticed two girls hanging back a little until the man went by.

Following her usual routine, Carol slipped into the seat by the window toward the front of the car, unfolded her newspaper to the crossword puzzle and dug a pencil out of her purse. *Your Individual Horoscope* was next to the puzzle and for the first time in weeks Carol read it:

Oct. 24 to Nov. 22 (Scorpio). Get out of town early. Make better and more efficient arrangements in home management. Unexpected message from a distance. New acquaintance gives big lift to your life.

A quiet chuckle made Carol turn her head quickly. The man with the roving hat was sitting beside her. He reached across and tapped the horoscope with his forefinger.

"Do you believe in that?" he asked curiously.

Actually, she only had a mild interest in what the stars decreed, but the man's amusement made her defiant.

"Of course. Some of the most brilliant minds do too." There, that should silence him until the train pulled into Grand Central.

"Mind if I look at it for a second?" he asked and before she could reply the newspaper was being gently drawn out of her lap. "Thanks."

He might be polite and gentle about it, but he still seemed to take what he wanted. It left Carol with a feeling of being pushed around—one she definitely disliked.

He looked at her and his sudden shy smile was startling. "Maybe there's something in what the stars say after all. What are you?"

Unless she wanted to make an absurd issue out of it she was compelled to answer. "I'm Scorpio." She said it with cold dignity.

"Ummmmm," he muttered as he read her horoscope. "I'm Taurus. Mine says, 'Analyze all points of difference with those necessary to your personal happiness.'" He lifted an eyebrow at her. "New friends bring better understanding and excitement. This can be a gainful day."

He returned the paper. "I'm convinced. You're the new friend, I hope." He smiled that sudden shy smile again and she couldn't seem to force her eyes down to the puzzle. "A girl with such honey colored hair and such clear dark blue eyes would be necessary to any man's happiness."

This time her eyes flew down and she felt a warm glow brush her cheeks. She'd picked a fine day to read her horoscope, after having ignored it for weeks. This man had a directness that was disconcerting.

"Mind sharing the sports page? After that chase for my hat I forgot to grab a paper."

Without speaking Carol handed it to him. She couldn't concentrate on the puzzle so she stared out the window, concentrating on the tempestuous wind that was bending the trees. She was glad this man thought her attractive. She wanted to look lovely today for her fiancé, Johnny. He'd sounded excited and a little mysterious when he'd told her he'd have a big surprise for her at lunch.

Carol could feel the man watching her and she unconsciously lifted her chin.

It was also with a sense of shame that she acknowledged how enchanting her sudden freedom from responsibility was.

Ever since her father's death three years ago Carol had taken care of her younger sister, Sally. She hadn't been quite old enough for the responsibility and recently she'd wondered just how badly she'd spoiled the lovely capricious Sally. It hadn't been easy bringing her up, and in the exigencies of earning a living she had let Sally have her own way too much.

But she would have done an even worse job without Johnny's constant help. As long as she could remember Johnny had lived around the corner waiting to marry her. They wouldn't go ahead with their own plans, because neither of them wanted to uproot Sally.

Then suddenly, unexpectedly, twelve days ago Sally met a new man. He was a southerner whose charm had captivated her. A few nights later his mother telephoned from South Carolina inviting Sally for a visit, and she'd gone. And shortly after her arrival a telegram came announcing their wedding the following month. Even Johnny's equanimity had been ruffled by the abruptness of it. They didn't know this boy, Carol argued, but after endless discussion they decided there was nothing they could do.

But Carol's thoughts were then interrupted, as was the train's steady jogging.

"I said," the man sounded plaintive, "couldn't we talk? You're my new friend. Your horoscope and mine prove it."

She turned and looked at him with deliberate thoroughness. "No," she said.

He stood and turned up his collar. "You're a blast of winter. But you'll be sorry," he promised. And she caught an unmistakable twinkle in his eye as he walked toward the smoking car.

Her dark blue eyes strayed from the puzzle to the horoscope. Taurus, he'd said. April twenty-first to May twentieth. He hadn't made this up. She read aloud, "New friends bring better understanding and excitement." Then she glanced at her own again reading, "New acquaintance gives big lift to your life." Coincidence, she thought, was a crazy thing.

When the train creaked into Grand Central the stranger was nowhere in sight, and she was glad. Idly, she wondered why he'd been in Hillsdale, and if she'd ever see him again.

COUNTESS DULAIN'S CHIC costume jewelry shop was a narrow four story building tucked in between two skyscrapers on Madison Avenue. A small bronze elevator whisked Carol up to the top floor. Even after several months she still tingled when she walked through the big workroom to her office at the back with her name lettered in gold on the door.

The enormous skylight showed up the litter on her drawing table and Carol hastened to straighten things up before she slipped off her coat. As head designer for the firm she'd been having trouble with the rest of her spring line these last days. Fortunately there were still about three more weeks in which to finish it.

She sat on the high stool doodling, trying to design jewelry that was chic and one step ahead of the fashion trend. As she crumpled the umpteenth sheet of paper, the door was flung open. Only the Countess herself entered a room like that.

She talked with the speed of a machine gun. Through her sputtering Carol managed to gather that the spring designs had to be finished in one week to meet a new production schedule. It was with some difficulty that Carol kept from tumbling off the stool.

"You see Johnny, *non?*" the Countess demanded.

"I see Johnny, yes, for lunch."

Because Johnny's father's firm handled the Countess' legal business he'd suggested Carol for this job after she finished her course at the School of Design. She didn't start as a head designer in the beginning, but when the Countess fired Carol's boss it was Carol, amazingly, who took over. Her work more than justified the Countess' gamble.

"Tell Johnny no marriage for a while." The Countess' eyes glinted. "I'm sending you to Paris for the fashion showings. It's a reward," she hastened to add, "for turning out a superb spring line." Then she went out again like a whirlwind.

Carol stared at the blank sheet of drawing paper. *Paris!* The Countess would work her like a donkey, but she'd still see Paris. And she'd be as carefree as a lark. Sally would be safely married to the man she loved, and Johnny who always understood would wait a little longer. This would be more than just a trip to Paris. It would be Carol's first big adventure . . .

Johnny was waiting near the entrance of the quiet restaurant off Madison Avenue when Carol came in.

Seeing Johnny always brought a nice warm feeling to her. His smile was so eager and his eyes had a habit of lighting as if there was a torch behind them. He made a girl feel precious and desired.

"I'm late." She made it an apology. "I've been trying to make something fabulous come out of my drawing board, but I only got doodles."

"I like waiting for you." He smiled. "It makes me feel superior when I see what the other men draw."

She laughed up at him. "No wonder women love you, Johnny. Even the Countess. You make us so very special."

He looked down at her. "You are, Carol."

Their table was in the center of the room, the flowers on it were the small yellow roses she liked, and the sherry was dry and delicious. Without effort Johnny always got the best. Life with him would be serene and gracious, because he was a quiet contained man, very gentle in his relationships with people. Yet, Johnny had always been able to control Sally when her temper flared and it was he to whom she turned with her problems.

They were drinking their coffee when Johnny smiled. "Remember my surprise? Maybe you haven't realized it, but I've been jumping up and down like a yo-yo."

"I'd love to see that just once." Then her quick laughter died. She'd been stupid not to have realized that his surprise must be her engagement ring. Since their marriage had been set for some future date Carol hadn't wanted a ring. She'd been afraid that it might make Sally feel unhappy. Johnny had understood and been sweet.

Somehow, she had to stop this. For a little while she wanted desperately to savor freedom, to try her wings just once before she settled down to marriage, to do the silly harmless things she would have done if her father had lived.

"Johnny, I've never been free before," she said with painful slowness. "Not since I was a little girl. When dad was alive I still tried to run the house for him and Sally."

Carol knew by the quiet watchfulness in Johnny's eyes that he was bewildered. She told him quickly, the words tumbling out, about the Countess' offer. "I've never been to Paris." She couldn't stop the yearning in her voice.

He took time putting out his cigarette and his face was expressionless. "You mean you don't want to marry me, Carol?"

It wasn't what she meant. She was doing this badly. From the moment he'd asked her months ago she'd never considered anything else but their ultimate marriage. She loved him, but she needed time to be by herself and on her own. She needed a first and last glorious adventure.

"I didn't think a few more weeks would matter, Johnny."

HE TURNED THE MATCHES slowly in his fingers, around and around. "I suppose I took it for granted that you loved me."

"But I do, Johnny. Oh, I do." Her eyes pled with him. "I only wanted a little time free of responsibility."

"In Paris," his mouth twisted wryly, "to kick up your heels without me." He thought about it, then suddenly smiled. "I have it. We'll go to Paris on our honeymoon. I'll show you all the places I went when I was in service." He covered her cold hand with his and kept smiling.

"Now, I'll tell you my surprise. Remember I've talked to you about my college room-

mate, Zack Talbot? He's a terrific guy. Our paths separated when I studied law and he went in for mining engineering, but we always managed to keep in touch. Now, hold tight to your chair, darling. Zack's here! No kidding, without warning he dropped into my office yesterday afternoon."

"Impulsive." She couldn't think of anything else to say.

"Sure, that's Zack." He grinned. "He's between copper mines now and he's staying with me in Hillsdale. He came out last night, in fact, and he's agreed to be my best man if we get married in a week." He leaned toward her and his face was still. "We will get married, won't we, Carol?"

"Complete with red carpet and an organ grinding the prisoner's song," an amused voice said. Carol looked up quickly, and straight into the grinning face of the man with the roving hat. She gasped.

"You look exactly like the picture I saw of you last night, Carol. Only you're much more alive and so much more beautiful." He pulled out a chair and sat across from them. "I rode in with her on the train this morning, Johnny. I pretended I didn't know who she was."

Sometimes being a lady is a catastrophe. And right now Carol wished she were a shrew. "I'm sorry I can't go along with your plans. Besides my job there's Sally's wedding, so it won't be possible for me to marry Johnny in a week." She managed to smile coolly at Zack.

"Anything's possible with the Talbots," he informed her grandly. "I have it all set. Johnny told me your sister is unpredictable and that there's nothing she likes as much as a sudden change of plans. So we'll have her come right back and make it a double wedding."

He looked delighted with himself as he ordered champagne. "Since everything's settled we'll celebrate."

Carol could feel the color slowly rise in her cheeks. It took tremendous effort not to breathe fire. Here this Zack Talbot sat beaming at her while he calmly arranged her life. Charmingly he simply ignored any of her objections. This morning on the train he'd seemed to take what he wanted, even if it had been a newspaper. Well, he wasn't arranging her life for her. She wished she could bribe the waiter to drop a little rat poison in his champagne.

"I told Zack he and Sally would be great pals. They're a lot alike. They both make quick decisions and they're always doing the unexpected." Johnny looked happier than she'd ever seen him. It made her dislike Zack even more, if it were possible.

After a polite sip of champagne, Carol gathered up her gloves and purse. "This is festive, but I'm knee-deep in designs." It was Zack who helped her on with her coat and patted her shoulder with big brother affection.

"This is a gainful day for me because you're my new friend." Zack grinned as he reminded her of his horoscope.

"I wouldn't count on it," she said quietly.

There was that nice glow in Johnny's eyes again. "I'll call you later at the house, darling. You've made me so happy."

"But, Johnny, I'm not going to—"

"Run along," Zack said heartily, "or those designs will get cold."

"Don't let it bother you," she said. "Just let me worry about my business while you go tend to your copper."

He laughed delightedly. "Johnny, you didn't tell me she had a temper."

"I don't think I knew it." Johnny sounded perplexed.

She smiled much too sweetly at Zack. "It's just that I have to become accustomed to your gruesome sense of humor." At least she had the satisfaction of seeing him start before he laughed again. "Good-by, Johnny," she said softly.

Walking back to the Countess' she admitted that she had never met a man who so thoroughly annoyed her. Well, he wasn't bullying her into a fast marriage. It was incredible that she thought he was so attractive when they met on the train.

The wind blasted around a building, and sent her hat sailing through the air. It dropped in front of a truck whose wheels crushed it. The wind whipped her honey colored hair as she looked sadly at what had been a gay jaunty thing. That miserable Zack Talbot had managed to rescue his hat, but hers had to get smashed. It might be an omen.

Nothing went right for the rest of the day. Her mind remained a blank as she doodled. At last Carol climbed wearily off the high stool. She wished she could call Johnny and ask him to take her for a quiet, peaceful dinner, but she was afraid Zack Talbot might come along.

Rushing for her train, the wind snatched her umbrella and turned it inside out with the speed of a magician doing card tricks. She jammed it into a trash can and tried to be very nonchalant about her dripping hair. On the train she watched the rain pelt the window and thought until her head hurt. Everything was about to happen to her in a week. The spring line had to be completed, and Johnny was insisting on their marriage, aided and abetted by the insufferable Zack. Marriage, designs, marriage designs, marriage—the words pounded through her brain in rhythm with the train's wheels.

CHAPTER TWO

Don't Disturb My Heart

AT HILLSDALE STATION she dashed through puddles to her parked car. It seemed just like a thousand other evenings when she returned home from work, except for the rain. The same lights shone brightly from every window, the same music was heard on her car radio. But suddenly she slammed on the brakes and stared at the house. Something was wrong. No one was home but the place was alive with lights.

In a flash she was out of her car and running across the lawn and up the stone steps. And as she stuck her key into the lock, she heard her sister's warm flirtatious laughter.

Carol closed the door quietly and stared as if ghosts were inhabiting the place. She could hardly believe what she saw.

Sally couldn't be here dancing with Zack Talbot.

Carol could feel herself getting cold and hot as waves of indignation rolled over her. When Zack had talked so blithely at lunch about making it a double wedding, he'd already contacted Sally and arranged it. He'd made a fool out of her and Carol's eyes blazed. If he thought he could run her life he had a great deal to learn.

"Carol, darling!" Sally cried and started to run toward her before she caught the look in Carol's eyes. "I'm sorry to come home again," she cried, "but Malcom turned out to be a perfect heel." She shuddered charmingly and turned so Zack wouldn't fail to get the full benefit. "I'm sorry you're disappointed I

didn't marry him, but you can't make yourself love someone any more than you can make yourself stop loving someone."

Carol felt sick inside when she realized that Sally had completely misunderstood her indignation. She loved her and the thing she most wanted was Sally's happiness.

"Darling, of course I want you here. You certainly couldn't marry a heel."

Zack slipped his arm around Sally with an easy familiarity. "It isn't you, sweetie. It's me. Carol's just rebelling against what the stars foretell." When he grinned there was that infuriating twinkle in his eyes again. "But you better pay attention, Carol. Remember your horoscope said to make better and more efficient arrangements at home. And didn't it say you'd get a message from a long distance and a new acquaintance? You were warned."

"Do you two know each other?" Sally was surprised.

"This is the third time today I've seen him." Carol couldn't quite keep the bitterness out of her voice. "I'll go change into something dry."

Going up the stairs she realized with something of a shock that if she'd stayed another second she would have burst into tears. She hadn't done that in years but then she hadn't felt this way in years, either. Her resentment of Zack, her worry about the designs she must get out, Johnny's insistence upon an immediate marriage and the ache she felt for her unexpected loss of freedom, made her feel awful.

Carol stayed under the shower a long time, thinking. One thing was certain, Zack wasn't quite as infallible as he thought he was. Because of Sally's return there could be no marriage next week for her and Johnny, and no glorious adventure in Paris. Things were exactly as they'd been before Sally left for South Carolina. It was as if these last few days had been make-believe.

After her hair was dry she slipped into a taffy colored wool dress whose skirt flared from a wide saddle leather cinch belt. She wore a gold necklace of her own design, with wide bracelets and earrings to match. When she opened the bedroom door and heard laughter, she suddenly, inexplicably resented it and ran down the stairs. What on earth was wrong with her? The stars must have put a jinx on her today!

When she entered the room, Sally took

one look at her and switched off the record player. "Zack's a divine dancer." She smiled at him before she turned to Carol again, her eyes narrowing a little. "I really shouldn't have come home," she said quietly. "Zack just told me you and Johnny planned to get married early next week."

"Zack's mistaken," Carol said lightly.

"Oh?" Sally's smile was weak. Then she changed the subject. "Malcom taught me one thing—how to make a magnolia cocktail. I'll mix some so you can see why I left him." Her laughter didn't hold much mirth as she went into the kitchen.

Carol's eyes were cold. "I hope you're thoroughly satisfied," she stormed at Zack. "None of this is any of your business and you act as though your whole mission in life is to interfere in our affairs. You're Johnny's friend and that's his privilege, but it doesn't mean that I have to like you or want to have you around. I won't have you hurting Sally."

"I'm not the one who hurt her, Carol," he said quietly.

"I know Sally. She's upset enough about her latest romance without your telling her that Johnny and I are getting married. We're not. That was your plan, not ours."

"Not yours anyway." He smiled. "You're stalling old Johnny, and long engagements lose zest and excitement. If they keep on like that for long, soon you're as settled and unromantic as though you'd been married for years."

He watched the color flare into her cheeks and her eyes flash. He smiled again. "You're going to dislike this, but you're even more beautiful when you're mad as hops."

He slipped his arm around her and practically dragged her over to the record player. "Let's dance and bury the hatchet. I won't be here long, Carol, though maybe it'll be long enough."

When he switched on the record it was easier to dance than argue about it. He held her lightly, yet she could feel the strength of his arm around her. And when the music ended he still kept it there.

"I've wanted to do this ever since I saw your picture at Johnny's last night." There was a diabolical gleam in his eye.

Then he kissed her. She tried to jerk away, knowing it was useless. She hated his ruthlessness in simply helping himself to whatever he wanted, and she stiffened. Then she wondered why she was making so much of

this kiss? Other men had kissed her and she'd taken it lightly enough. But now she wasn't.

A TRAY SLAMMED DOWN on the coffee table and Zack let her go. She whirled to meet Sally's white infuriated face. "Isn't Johnny enough for you?" Sally yelled. "Do you have to take a new man I'm interested in, too? You always spoil everything for me." She rushed out of the room and her angry sobs echoed back to them.

Carol stood perfectly still, unable to move. She'd never taken any man away from Sally, or even tried.

"I've done a miserable job with her," she finally said. "But I'm only two years older and I'm pretty stupid, I guess." Her voice caught. "Now, she doesn't even like me."

Zack lit a cigarette and put it-between her lips. "You're right, Carol," he said almost gently. "You're pretty stupid."

There was a peculiar little tight feeling inside of her, one she'd never felt before. It was because of Sally's outburst. It couldn't be anything else. But she wasn't absolutely sure.

"I'm sorry, Carol." Sally said, coming back into the room. "I'll apologize. I'm a spoiled ungrateful brat and you do everything for me."

Except give you happiness, Carol thought. But she managed to add, "Zack only kissed me because he knew it would make me mad," she said. "And believe me, he's the last man I'd ever want."

"You know you shouldn't flatter me like that." Zack chuckled.

Carol didn't glance at him. "Johnny'll be phoning any time and--"

"Oh, I called him when I got into New York this afternoon." Sally was off-hand about it. "He's bringing steaks and a bottle of wine to celebrate my return."

Carol walked over to the fireplace and tossed her cigarette on the brightly burning logs. It always had been Johnny to whom Sally turned. He was always around to make her feel better when one of her romances fizzled. It was Johnny who always calmed Sally and made her behave when her temper flared. Zack was right. Carol was stupid.

Sally held out her arms to him. "Let's dance."

He had just whirled her around when she reached up and kissed him, her lips pressed

hard against his and her eyes closed. Carol froze. She discovered that her nails were biting into the palms of her hands. Zack wasn't any good for Sally. But then she was honest enough to admit that it wasn't that at all. Incomprehensively, monstrously, Carol was, for this one moment, jealous of her sister.

Everything in her screamed out in protest. It couldn't be true, it just couldn't. She almost hated Zack and his infuriating infallibility. He'd never be anything to her. Never!

Finally she turned and looked down into the fire. She was mixed up and this was just the end of a hard, confusing, and terrible day.

The front door burst open with the howl of the wind and Johnny was standing there, his arms full of packages. There was that wonderful eager smile on his good looking face.

"Hi, darling!" Sally called, and was out of Zack's arms and into Johnny's, packages and all.

They all went into the kitchen and Johnny kissed Carol's cheek and smiled down into her eyes. "Hello," he said softly.

"Hello," she answered and held onto him for a minute.

While Johnny mixed cocktails, Zack took complete charge of the steak. Sally hung on his every movement, her eyes wide with wonder at his competence. Even Johnny beamed with delight that his friend was there among them, feeling at home. But Carol didn't feel comfortable, and glared at them as she mixed a salad. You'd think no man ever slapped a steak under a broiler before the way Sally and Johnny were applauding Zack's cooking ability. It didn't help any when Zack caught her eye and winked.

Dinner was gay enough with Sally at her best. She was hilariously amusing when she described her sojourn in the deep South with her ex-fiancé. Then Zack took over and Carol in spite of herself, was impressed with his high good humor and his undeniable charm. And she was conscious of his hand touching hers when he passed her the pepper.

They were finishing dinner when Sally abruptly asked Johnny, "Did Carol tell you she kissed Zack?"

There was a small startled silence before Carol said, "No, I didn't tell him you did either because I simply forgot about it."

Sally's eyes were wicked as she slid them from Carol to Zack. "I'll bet."

Johnny didn't look happy about this, but he smiled. "Zack's always been a bear with the girls, Sally."

"Especially girls as beautiful as you two," Zack said easily. "I'll admit I shouldn't have done it since they're your girls, Johnny." He grinned. "But it was mighty nice."

Sally shoved back her chair and jumped up. "Let's go see lights and people. There's a midweek dance at the club tonight." She raised her arms above her head as though she were trying to push through a confining cage, and a restless discontent was mirrored in her eyes.

"It's blowing a gale, honey," Zack protested.

"Afraid of a little wind and rain?" she taunted.

He chuckled. "Away we go. You and Carol coming out into the hurricane with us, Johnny?"

"Later. I want to talk to Carol first."

While Sally got ready, Carol cleared off the table and by the time she brought the coffee into the living room, Sally and Zack had left.

JOHNNY STILL LOOKED UNHAPPY as he leaned against the mantle. "I don't think I like your kissing Zack very much," he said evenly. "I don't think it showed particularly good judgment when Sally's so obviously interested in him."

She put her cup down hard. "It hasn't occurred to you that Zack might have kissed me?"

Johnny smiled wryly. "From Sally's tone I don't imagine you objected, and Zack is terrific." He shook his head, evidently remembering some of Zack's escapades in the past. "My point is, darling, that Sally should have a clear field with him. It would be great if she could fall in love with him."

"And if he reciprocates." There wasn't the slightest use telling Johnny that she found his friend an insufferable bully bent on re-arranging their lives.

"Sally and he are made for each other. They're both unpredictable, sparkling and volatile." He was positive about it. There was an excited glow in his eyes, and for the first time Carol realized how much he admired such qualities in them. "Now, about us." He finished his coffee.

"We're just back where we were, Johnny, before we thought Sally was going to marry

Malcom. We'll have to keep on waiting." She looked into the fire remembering her short taste of freedom and felt ashamed.

"No," he said, "we won't keep waiting." She looked up at him, startled by the stern lines around his mouth. "I've done some thinking and I've come up with a few answers. We'll get married on Monday. That'll give us time to get the license and for you to finish up your spring designs and tell the Countess you're quitting."

He smiled at her. "I want a full-time wife, not a part-time designer. We'll take Sally along to Paris with us. The three of us will have a big time and it'll be a thrill for Sally too. When we return we'll move into my house. The important thing is that Sally'll know she's one of us and that'll give her a feeling of real security."

He came and stood in front of Carol, looking at her steadily. "You will marry me on Monday, won't you?"

She started to laugh and stopped. If Johnny didn't see that no girl wanted her sister or anyone else on her honeymoon, it would be useless to point it out. Yet, wouldn't it be the solution to her confusion and her doubts and a long engagement? Everyone had to finish growing up sometime and settle down.

Suddenly she looked hard at Johnny. This wasn't like him. Before he'd always recognized that their situation with Sally took patience and understanding, and at no time had he mentioned taking her along on their honeymoon. She began to understand.

It took a second to quiet the turmoil in her. "You've been talking to Zack, haven't you?"

"Yes. And he crystallized the entire issue for me. Zack showed me that you and I can't just mark time waiting for Sally to settle down, when we can so easily take her into our lives and make it a pattern for three." He smiled his lovely eager smile. "Zack says our long engagement has made you restless and that's why you wanted to take off to Paris alone."

Zack says, Zack says. The words beat through her until she thought she'd scream. She wished the wind would pick him up tonight and carry him out to sea where he could start fixing things for the gulls.

When Carol could trust her voice again she said, "I'm just a little tired of your friend Zack." She ignored the shocked surprise on

his face. "And I don't intend to have him run my life." She sneezed.

Johnny let out the breath he'd been holding too long and smiled. "You're catching cold." That explained to him why she was antagonistic toward Zack. "Let me mix up a hot lemonade and then you run on up to bed."

"No lemonade, thanks."

He leaned down and kissed her lightly. "I'll go to the club and tell Sally and Zack our plans." He reached for her hands and pulled her up. "I'm so glad it's settled. I'm happy, darling."

She didn't say anything because there wasn't anything to say that Johnny could understand. Zack, the great guy, was always right as far as Johnny was concerned. And a girl can't tear down a friendship that's lasted through the years.

After the wind blew Johnny away, she stood staring at the front door. She was tired of everything tonight. Bone tired. She sneezed and went to the kitchen to clean up.

CHAPTER THREE

The Zodiac Was Right

THE ALARM FAILED to waken Carol the next morning. When she opened her eyes and took one look at the clock she sprang out of bed. She'd missed the early train, but if she dressed with speed she could still snatch a cup of coffee and make the eight-fifty.

Rushing to the kitchen, she passed Sally's closed door and smiled indulgently. Sally never stirred an eyelid before noon if she could possibly help it.

But this morning Sally must have been up and out early because there were breakfast dishes for two stacked in the sink. There was also a small astrology magazine with the signs of the zodiac on the cover, propped up against the coffee pot. A scrawled note clipped on the top said:

Watch your stars, Carol.

ZT

She drank her coffee standing. So Zack had been here to breakfast with Sally and they'd gone off somewhere together, while she had to dash to work, cold or no cold. Suddenly she grinned at herself. Whining self-pity had never been one of her qualities.

Glancing at the kitchen clock, she jammed some things into her purse and grabbed her gloves. As she ran to her car she wondered where Sally and Zack had gone.

Riding into New York, Carol didn't open the newspaper to the crossword puzzle. And the last thing she wanted was to look at her horoscope.

The morning seemed endless as she sat on the high stool in her office trying desperately for an inspiration. The Countess came in, wrung her hands in wild anguish, and stormed out again.

Finally Carol pushed back her hair and sighed. She opened her purse for a package of cigarettes and the astrology magazine tumbled out on the drawing table. She realized she must have jammed it in when she gathered up her things to make the dash for the train. Idly, she looked at the cover as she lit a cigarette. She stared at it. Then she smashed out her cigarette and grabbed a pencil.

Working feverishly she transferred the zodiac signs to her drawing paper. She was concentrating so hard she didn't even notice when the Countess opened the door and looked in. Carol was too busy drawing clever modern modifications of each symbol, and the possibilities were endless.

It was after four when the Countess walked in again.

"I've got it," Carol cried. "The stars were really good to me today after all. Come look."

The Countess looked, and her sharp eyes began gleaming. She patted Carol on top of her blonde head.

"Perfect! Superb, *cherie*. I am proud of you. Take off the rest of the week to celebrate. Jan, Phillipe, Baptiste," she yelled at her workmen and went out like another whirlwind, waving the sketches.

Carol grinned and stretched her back. It was hard to believe that the spring line was finished and the Countess loved it. It left her feeling warm and exhilarated.

It was after five when Carol came out of the narrow building and found Zack waiting there. She forgot about disliking him because he was indirectly responsible for her success today.

"I can't tell you how much I appreciated your leaving that astrology magazine this morning for a gag." Carol's laughter was light. "You didn't know it, but you gave me the idea for the rest of my designs."

He took her arm. "You don't know it, but I've never been so glad about anything. You better start paying attention now to what the stars have in mind for you." He laughed down at her. "Johnny's car's parked up the street. We're meeting him and Sally at Stoney Hill Inn for dinner."

She was so elated about her work she didn't bother asking what he was doing in New York. The wind was still a little blustery but most of its fury had died in the night along with the slashing rain. There was a crispness in the air as Zack drove expertly through the heavy traffic.

Carol was bubbling over but she had to let it out. Very surprisingly, Zack was wonderful to talk to. He listened as if what she had to say was really important.

"You like your work, don't you, Carol?" he asked after a while.

"I love it. It's exciting." She laughed. "Even when things go wrong I adore it."

She looked down the Connecticut parkway scarcely seeing it. "Johnny doesn't want me to go on with it. He says he doesn't want to share his wife with her work. But it's such a big part of my life." So big that she hadn't been able to make herself tell the Countess that she was quitting.

Zack drove faster. The wind whipped about the parkway. Then he glanced at her.

"You'll miss your work more than Johnny realizes." Then he asked casually, "Ever work in copper?"

"No, but I hear it's interesting. You see, Countess Dulaine abhors mass production and mass appeal. She wants her designs expensive and exclusive."

Zack told her a lot about copper and suggested that topaz or synthetic emeralds would be striking combined with it. He told her there were some South American native designs that could start a whole new trend if properly redesigned for the American market.

CAROL FOUND HERSELF turning in the seat so she could look at him, instinctively excited. It was absurd, but she almost felt as if she were having a date with a terribly attractive man who was both intriguing and charming. She smiled wryly at herself, knowing he'd deliberately talked about copper jewelry to please her.

"If you're going to be unhappy not using your talent, Carol, why don't you talk to

Johnny about going into business for yourself?"

"He wouldn't see it." She turned around in the seat again. It was curious, but her antagonisms toward him weren't quite as acute as they had been yesterday.

Zack turned in between two stone gates, and when he stopped in front of the inn, he turned toward her. "Johnny says the wedding's all set for Monday. Is it, Carol?" There was something in his eyes that held hers.

"Yes, it's set," she said. "But since you're the one who promoted it, why are you so surprised?" She got out of the car, trying to ignore him as she walked toward the big Colonial structure.

As she entered, Carol smiled at Mr. Lord, the manager, who informed her that Johnny and Sally were in the small alcove to the right. Carol still didn't speak to Zack as they moved toward it.

The alcove was fairly good sized with a table along each side to assure reasonable privacy. But neither of them was occupied. Carol saw Johnny and Sally standing instead, in front of the brightly burning fire. They were in each other's arms.

Carol started into the room when Zack caught her arm and pulled her gently to one side. "Let's leave them alone tonight. Sally needs reassurance about going to Paris with you." He smiled. "Please have dinner with me alone."

"I'm really not hungry."

She was too resentful to be. Zack was interfering again, trying to make this into something it wasn't. He sounded as if she'd be intruding if she interrupted Johnny and Sally.

"If you don't want any dinner, then let's stop and have a hamburger." She nodded a weak assent.

In the car he looked at her curiously for quite a long time before he asked, "You don't object to Johnny's kissing Sally like that?"

"You love to cause trouble, don't you?" she asked him curtly. "They've always adored each other and as you say Sally's probably upset about the whole situation."

"So you really don't mind," he persisted. "Even about the honeymoon." He started the car and picked up a gay mood. "To heck with them. Let's have a little fun."

And Zack was fun. It was incredible that Carol could have such a delightful time with him eating a hamburger and drinking a coke.

He entertained her with ridiculous stories about South America and the copper mines, about the people whom he understood and loved. Soon she forgot all her previous resentment and antagonism.

It was early when he brought her home. Surprisingly, after unlocking the door and turning on the lights, he refused to come in. Abruptly, he turned her toward him, his hands pressing on her shoulders.

"Do you really love Johnny, Carol? Do you love him enough? Is he in your mind every walking hour and are the things you do all tied up with him? When the moon's bright do you think it's really just for you and Johnny? Is your love your great adventure?"

His voice was low and husky and his eyes held a strange burning light. "Because if you don't love like that, Carol, it's no good. It's not enough." Then he turned and went down the steps. She stood there until he drove away.

A love, she repeated to herself, that is your great adventure.

She went into the silent house. What he'd said disturbed her. And long after she was in bed she lay there thinking. She did love Johnny. She always had, even though it didn't fit Zack's description. *Zack!* He was a disturbing influence in their lives from the moment he sat beside her on the train.

"Darn him!" she said aloud.

CAROL OPENED ONE EYE and stretched luxuriously. It was nine twenty-seven. If she kept this up she'd be running races with Sally for the sleepyhead sweepstakes. Tomorrow was time enough to go in to see Countess Dulaine.

But since Zack might be coming for breakfast this morning with Sally, she sprang out of bed. She decided to make waffles, which were one of her specialties.

Sally's door was closed again when she went downstairs. She was sorry because she felt that she and Sally ought to have a talk about the clothes they'd need for Paris. It was a little startling when she realized that she was thinking about her trousseau and Monday would be her wedding day.

While Carol was straightening up the living room she suddenly knew Zack wasn't coming for breakfast with Sally. It had been only a silly idea she'd had when she'd been half asleep, and she felt let down.

The coffee was strong and hot and she sipped it while she made her grocery list. Then she opened the morning paper and glanced over the headlines before she turned to her horoscope. It was dismal:

OCT. 24 TO NOV. 22 (Scorpio) Today's planetary aspects show need for patience and understanding. Turn to better influences. Be duly concerned about your intimate affairs.

She threw the paper down and straightened up the living room again, hating her restlessness. If this was all she was going to do after she married Johnny, the days would stretch out endlessly.

Carol was lighting a cigarette when she realized the house was too quiet. She flew up the stairs and knocked on Sally's door. Then she opened it.

The bed hadn't been slept in and there was a note on the pillow. Carol snatched it, her hand trembling a little.

Darling,

I'm going back to South Carolina and Malcom. We patched things up so you go on your honeymoon in peace. Thanks for everything, Carol. There's so little I could ever do to show I've appreciated all you've done. You're pretty wonderful.

Sally

Tears stung Carol's eyes and she closed them. Sally would never find happiness with Malcom because she didn't love him enough. She ran to the closet. Most of the clothes were gone and it looked bare and forlorn. Whatever else she did, Carol was going to stop Sally from making an irreparable mistake. So she telephoned Malcom's mother in South Carolina.

When the connection was made she asked two questions and got two cold answers. Then she hung up and leaned her forehead against the palm of her hand. Sally wasn't there, nor was she expected, and Malcom announced his engagement to another girl.

But why had Sally lied? And where was she? No one lies and runs away unless she's wretchedly unhappy. Tears ran down Carol's pale cheeks and she brushed them away.

Zack! Maybe Sally had told him where she'd gone. Frantically she phoned him at Johnny's house.

He listened quietly and then he said, "I'll be right there. Have you called Johnny?"

She was shocked herself that she hadn't.

"I will," she promised. But Johnny was out of his office and not expected back for an hour.

The minutes dragged like little separate eternities. Fear grew until it was a cold, terrifying thing clutching Carol's heart. Her sister must have been desperate or she never would have run away. But Carol hadn't noticed anything amiss. How stupid she had been!

Finally Zack arrived. Silently, she handed him Sally's note and he followed her into the living room. After he read it he smiled gravely at her.

"I wonder if you know how hard she's tried to be a good sport? She's done everything she could. She even tried to marry a man she didn't love."

Carol looked at him steadily and wet her lips. "I don't know what you mean."

"You're smart. You figure it, though I'll give you a key to the puzzle. What's a six letter word that spells love for Sally and starts with J?"

Her eyes widened as she stared at him. Then with the suddenness of the sun bursting through a cloud bank she saw it. "Oh!" she gasped.

Zack grinned. "You've really been blind, honey."

"I've been criminally dumb," she said.

It had been right there before her all the time. She remembered the way Johnny could handle Sally, and the way she turned to him. Now Carol knew that all of Sally's quick romances had just been a means of escaping the fact that she was getting the only man Sally loved. And Johnny himself suggested that they take Sally along on their honeymoon because subconsciously he didn't want her away from him.

She dialed Johnny's office and he was in. Quickly she told him about Sally and that she was sure Sally would get in touch with him because she loved him. Johnny gasped, as Carol went on. "It's Sally you've always loved. It's she you want on that Paris honeymoon alone."

"And I've been awfully stupid, Johnny. I kept using Sally as an excuse for postponing our marriage, when all along, I just didn't love you enough. Sally is the girl for you. I guess it's been that way all along."

He laughed shakily. "She did call me early this morning to tell me she's at the Plaza. I—I didn't know I loved her, Carol, until last night when she broke down."

"I know. Tell Sally to come home because there are a million things we have to do before she marries you on Monday." Carol smiled at Zack. "And your best man's impatient."

Johnny's voice sounded excited and happy. "You've been wonderful about all this, Carol. I don't know how to thank you—for both of us."

"Don't try, Johnny," Carol said. Just be happy."

She put the receiver down, thoughtfully. Now she was really free.

She walked back to Zack and stood in front of him. "How did you know this when I didn't? And if you knew, why did you keep pushing my marriage to Johnny?"

"I knew Sally would crack when she realized she was losing Johnny to you for keeps. I knew he loved her from the way he talked about her the first night I got there. But he didn't know it himself."

Zack grinned. "Someone had to do something and I had a stake in it too. I'd fallen in love with you that day on the train." He reached out and put his hands on her shoulders. "You're not badly hurt, Carol, are you?"

"No. I didn't love Johnny enough. Not the way you said love must be. And I want Sally to be happy."

His hands tightened. "Could you love any other man enough, Carol?"

"Maybe."

He pulled out a piece of paper from his pocket. "Here's your horoscope for today, I copied it. Listen! This is the most momentous day of your life if you'll listen to your heart. Follow the man who loves you. You'll find enchantment in South America and you'll start a new business in copper. Obey the stars!"

He chuckled as he pulled her into his arms. "I know it's much too soon, darling, but I can stay here another three weeks. Will you let me try to teach you to love me the way I love you? Will you give me a chance? We can't let the stars down."

"I'd love to have you teach me," she said and buried her face against him.

Carol snuggled closer and smiled happily. She'd never tell Zack that she'd already read her horoscope. Not when his was so much nicer!

GYPSY FORTUNES



Cross Zamora's palm with silver—fifteen cents will do—and she will tell you a real gypsy fortune.

Select the card that represents you from a bridge deck: Queen if you are a woman; King if you are a man. Diamonds if you are very blonde; Hearts if you are a medium blonde; Clubs if you are medium brunette, and Spades if you have black hair and black eyes. List that card in the space marked No. 1.

Now make a wish. Shuffle the full bridge deck

with the self card withdrawn. Spread them in a horseshoe and select any twenty-one cards.

Lay them out in four piles of five cards each and you will have one card left. That is the surprise card.

Fill out the diagram and the coupon and send them with fifteen cents and a stamped, self-addressed envelope to Zamora, and in a personal letter to you, she will tell you your fortune from the cards you have laid out.

2. YOUR HOME

3. YOUR WISH

4. YOUR ROMANCE

5. SURE TO COME TRUE

1. SELF CARD

6 SURPRISE

Zamora
Fifteen Love Stories
205 East 42nd Street, New York City 17

Dear Zamora:
Here is a list of the cards in my fortune. What do they mean? I enclose fifteen cents and a stamped, self-addressed envelope for your reading.

NAME

STREET or BOX

City STATE.....

BIRTHDAY AGE.....

SINGLE..... MARRIED..... DIVORCED.....

March, 1954

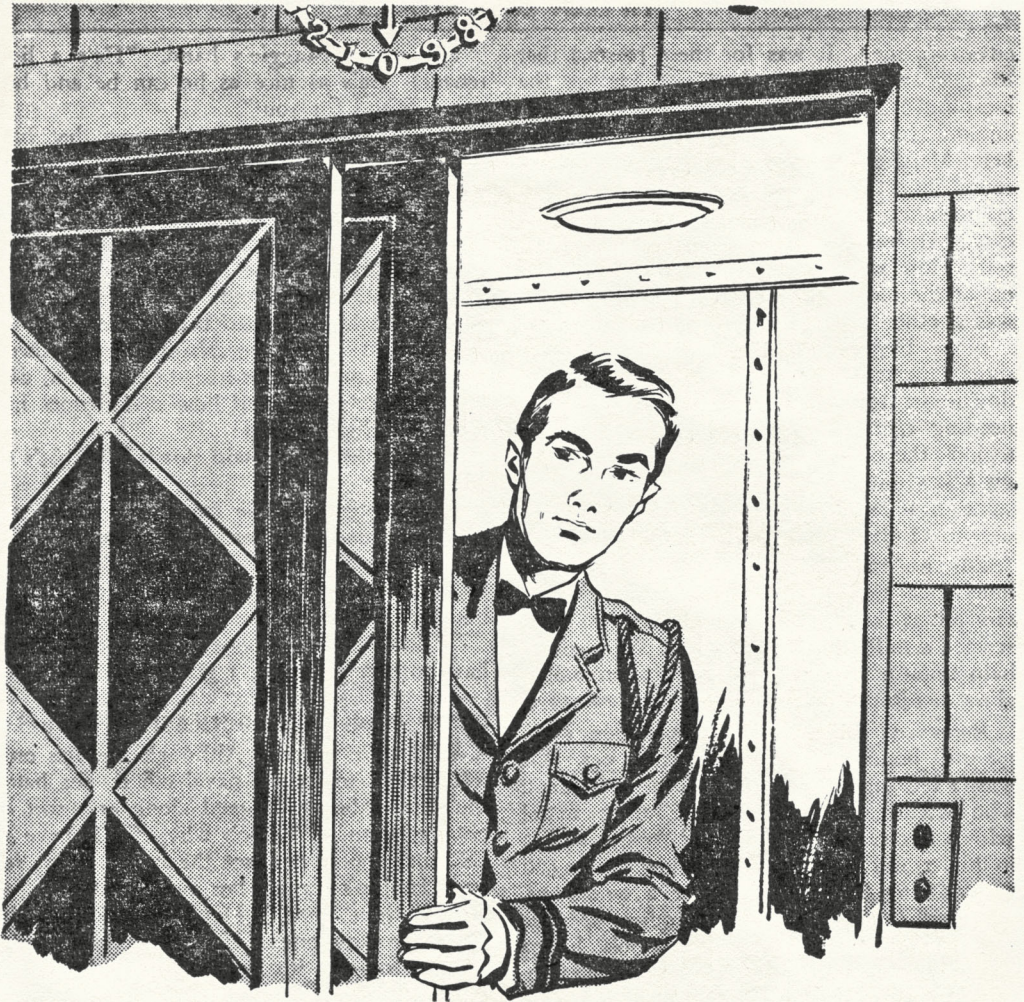
She knew when the door closed she'd never see him again.



A MAN FOR MAGGIE

By

Dorothy Brodine



When a girl goes on a vacation to meet "Mr. Right," she's often surprised when she does.

EIGHTEEN dollars a day. She couldn't afford it, but that was what Maggie Wayne was paying for her share of the double room at the Deauville Plaza. Maybe it was because the room overlooked the ocean. From the big French windows, she could see the Atlantic sparkling like a live thing, in the bright Florida sun. She could see gulls swooping, sailboats tossing far out to sea, and a long, informal stretch of boardwalk. But most important of all, she could see the smartly uniformed young officers from the nearby navy supply base, as they walked

along it when the day's duty was through.

Eighteen dollars a day. Not so bad, Maggie thought, in view of the fact that the aforementioned young officers used the Deauville-Plaza Hotel as a sort of stopping off place for their social activities. They streamed in and out of the bar, ate dinner on the terrace, and made liberal use of the telephone booths and newspaper stands. Now all she had to do was to meet one of them.

That was where June Carlson came in. June was a tall, green-eyed blonde, with a flair for clothes and a natural born talent for

attracting men. It was for these reasons that Maggie, who hitherto had not known the meaning of the word "shrewd," had been so anxious for June to spend this week with her. Maggie figured June would be able to round up at least a half dozen of the smoothest men the first day, and the rest would be easy. At least, that was what she told herself. How was she going to pique the interest of the men June decided she didn't want, was another matter entirely.

Now, briefly alone in her room, Maggie started unpacking her suitcase. June had gone downstairs to the lobby on the pretense of needing cigarettes, but actually she wanted to look the place over. At least it gave Maggie a few minutes to hang up her dresses, put some film in her camera, and dream big dreams of the week that was to come.

For no particular reason, she began to hum. She was really enjoying her freedom. Her job at Barton and Cummings, a law firm, seemed a million miles away, and she couldn't help hoping that this winter vacation would allow her some fun and gaiety and romance.

Romance. At the age of twenty-four, Maggie still hoped it would happen to her. She wasn't looking for the son of a vice-president, who would weigh down her fourth finger with a two-carat diamond, and fly her to Rio in his own Beechcraft for a honeymoon. It was nothing like that. Maggie, a quiet, sensible girl, was looking for a quiet, sensible fellow, who could hold down a job, had a sense of humor, and believed in large families. In short, she just wanted a nice guy.

"Maggie! Maggie!" a voice cried, interrupting her thoughts.

It was June. She'd blown into the room with such force that the curtains on the French windows trembled. Her green eyes were shining. And when June's eyes shone, it could only mean one thing. She'd met someone interesting.

Maggie jumped up. "Oh, June, what happened?"

June shut the door behind her. She was a tall, slender girl with hair that reminded you of melted butter. It was very long, and no matter how she twisted it, piled it or bound it, it looked wonderful. Just now, she had it in a pony's tail, which seemed particularly appropriate for her tailored pink linen suit and her matching low-heeled pumps. She looked indeed like a high fashion mannikin who had come to life.

She seized Maggie's hand. "He's a lieutenant! He's as nice as he can be and he's got a friend for you!"

Maggie sighed. She had known that June would come through, but she hadn't dared to hope it would be this fast. A lieutenant! Then he wasn't too young, and he probably had several years of sea duty behind him, maybe he'd even been in the Korean war.

Then she remembered. The lieutenant was for June, while she had been ear-marked for someone as yet vague, shadowy and uncertain. How many times had she agreed to date somebody's friend, and how many times had she been disappointed!

"This friend," she said slowly. "What's he like, June?"

June shrugged. The matter, as far as she was concerned, was settled. She couldn't see any point in discussing it further. She stepped to the mirror, and began dabbing powder on her already perfect complexion.

"I don't know, Maggie," she said. "You'll have to take pot luck, I guess."

HEARING THE PHRASE "pot luck," Maggie winced. Although she was only too anxious to meet a naval officer, she hated the idea of being dragged along as a sort of poor relation. Why, oh why, did it have to be June who always got the men! Why, for once, couldn't she get her own date!

"All right, June." Her mood, fortunately, was a passing one. "If it's pot luck you're serving tonight, it's pot luck I'll take—"

Maggie decided to wear her yellow shantung. She had planned to save it until later in the week, but when she saw June, she changed her mind. June was wearing a dazzling white pique, with a skirt so full and stiff that it bumped when she walked. Also, she'd changed her hair. She'd taken it out of the pony tail, and moulded it on top of her head, like a crown. Needless to say, she looked terrific.

So Maggie wore the shantung. She didn't really mind the fact that June overshadowed her, but she didn't want to be blotted out entirely. After all, it was ages and ages since she'd had any fun and maybe her blind date would be interesting. A girl couldn't help hoping, could she?

She turned to the mirror. There, looking skeptically back at her, she saw a small, slim girl, with candid gray eyes, and a fresh white complexion. Her hair was black, like a short

bolt of satin cloth. She was pert and attractive, but she wasn't what you would call pretty. Maggie was no glamor girl, but she was wholesome and adorable.

Pleased, and at the same time displeased, by her image in the mirror, Maggie turned back to June. She smiled, and as she smiled, she spoke with a false air of bravado.

"Let's go!" she said.

They descended, like two disdainful princesses, to the lobby. Maggie's heart was beating wildly. She wanted to look about her, but she was afraid to. No matter what, she must appear to be as cool and detached as June.

Still, she couldn't resist grabbing June's arm. "Do you see them- If you see them, nod. I promise not to look."

June accomplished the unusual feat of surveying the lobby without moving her head. "I see Jimmy."

"Jimmy?"

"Jimmy?"

"My date, Jimmy Stockman. Gosh, Maggie, he looks as if he's alone!"

At this point, Maggie completely forgot herself. She not only looked quickly around the lobby, but pinned her eyes on a tall young Navy man who happened to be standing near the reception desk. Since he was the only Navy man in the lobby at the moment, she assumed he must be Jimmy.

"June!" she breathed. "My date fell through!"

Still, June did not move her head. "Please, Maggie! Don't stare!"

"I'm sorry." Obediently, Maggie jerked her eyes away. "It's just that I think I'd better go back upstairs."

"You'd better not!"

They'd just reached the foot of the stairs, and Jimmy Stockman caught sight of them. With long, facile strides, he started across the polished stone floor to them. Seeing him, Maggie felt her intentions to be cold, practical and remote, melt away. She found part of herself running forward to meet him.

He's perfect, she thought. And in the next instant, she remembered that he was June's date.

Jimmy Stockman was six feet two, if he was an inch. He had an easy smile and restlessly blue eyes. His shoulders were phenomenal, and his crew-cut blond hair made him look very boyish.

He presented himself to June. "You not only look wonderful, you're on time!"

June laughed. She enjoyed compliments, but she didn't pay much attention to them. Generously, she drew Maggie forward.

"Hi, Jimmy," she said. "This is Maggie Wayne. I told you about her."

Jimmy, gravely courteous, turned to Maggie. "It's nice that you could come."

They shook hands, and Maggie felt a little bud of pain blossom within her and burst. Now, why wasn't he abrupt with her, or at least indifferent? That way, at least she could dislike him.

"Oh," she said, "I'm always glad to tag along after June, but—"

June finished the sentence for her.

"She's worried, Jimmy. She doesn't see the man we promised to get for her."

Jimmy could have chuckled at that, but he didn't. He put one arm through June's, and the other through Maggie's and with a faintly proprietary manner, got them started across the corridor to the bar.

"Chuck," he said, "will be here a little later." As he spoke, he looked down quickly at Maggie, and smiled. "In the meantime, I'm to buy you both a drink."

Maggie felt as if someone had pulled the stars down from the sky for her.

THE SURF ROOM was small and dim.

There was a bar made of blue mirrors at one end, and at the other end, behind a huge plate glass window, there was the sea. In between, there were tables. Jimmy got them seated at a table for four in a corner, pushed the dish of popcorn toward them, and signaled for the waiter. The waiter, surprisingly enough, appeared promptly.

Jimmy's glance included both girls. "Well, what'll it be?"

"Scotch and soda," June said.

"Coke," Maggie said.

They all looked at her, even the waiter. June, with an unlit cigarette in her fingers, went so far as to laugh a little.

"A coke!" she said. "My goodness, Maggie!"

"A coke."

She had a reason for ordering the coke. Once, when she had dinner with June and a couple of engineers, she'd ordered a Manhattan. She'd felt at a loss for words with the engineers, and in the hope of giving herself poise, she'd ordered a single Manhattan. The poise had turned out to be something else. All evening she'd prattled, she'd giggled, and

made herself an awful carbon copy of June.

"A coke," she repeated.

The waiter, seeing she meant what she said, took their orders and vanished. June, politely refraining from further comment on the matter, leaned across the table toward Jimmy's outstretched lighter. As the flame came up, a pale, golden mask fell briefly on her face. How pretty she was! Her skin had a moist, luminous quality, her lashes cast fantastic shadows on the curve of her cheek. And Maggie, looking at her, slumped as under the weight of a heavy stone.

Oh, come now! she told herself. Surely, you're not surprised at how beautiful she is. You've known that for a long time. Isn't that the reason you were so anxious for her to come on this vacation with you?

And then, like a dismal, contrapuntal theme, the words came from another part of her brain: Yes, yes, that's the reason I wanted her to come with me. She attracts men like a blue suit attracts lint, and I'm too stupid and shy to get along on my own. But that was centuries ago, before I met Jimmy!

That was it in a nutshell. She'd been hearing about love at first sight, but she'd never put any stock in it. You couldn't fall in love until you knew something about the object of your affections. But now, she knew she had to throw all her fine theories overboard. She must face the fact that she had fallen in love with this tall stranger.

The drinks finally arrived. And as Jimmy paid for them, Maggie stared unashamed at his battered wallet, and thin-fingered hands. Deep inside her, she began to cry.

At eight-thirty, Chuck appeared. A slim, sandy-haired young man, he was pleasant-faced rather than handsome. But Maggie wasn't especially interested or enticed. And it was all Jimmy's fault. He loomed so large in her mind, that everyone else was crowded out. But she had to make it a point to be nice to this amiable stranger.

"Hello!" she said. "Are you and Jimmy in the same boat?"

Chuck didn't get the joke. "We're over at the base. We're taking the supply course together."

"Really? What fun! Which of you does the homework?"

"We do our own. We've got to. We have quizzes every day."

"Quizzes! Oh, dear! I can remember when I—"

In the middle of her sentence, Maggie wondered whether she should bother to finish it. For during the last moment or two, Chuck had shifted his gaze from her to June, and she doubted that he heard a word she said.

She was girding herself for a fresh assault on his attention, when she was interrupted by a disturbance at the door. Turning, she discovered what looked like a full platoon of young Naval officers. Pressed and shining in their dress blues, they were obviously looking for diversion. And when they caught sight of the little table, they made up their collective minds that they had found it.

The next thing Maggie knew they were milling around the table, demanding to join the party. Chuck just stood there, looking confused. Resourcefulness, she saw was not one of his strong points. Jimmy, however, bowed good-humoredly to the inevitable, and invited his friends to pull up chairs. They almost fell over one another in their eagerness to carry out his suggestion. Two of them placed their chairs on either side of June and in the resultant chaos, Maggie found herself sitting next to Jimmy.

"Oh!" she said. "You've lost June!"

He smiled. He hadn't counted on this invasion, but since it had taken place, he was making the best of it. There was nothing else for him to do. June, on the other side of the table, was chatting with three other men.

He lit a cigarette. It's Navy policy, Maggie, to share the wealth."

"Do you like that policy?"

"Why fight it? Things usually work themselves out in the end."

"I hope so."

"Why, Maggie, you're a skeptic!"

"Could be."

"What made you that way? Did somebody tell you the moon was made of green cheese?"

"That's right. And when I grew up, I found out it was made of yellow cheese."

ALL OF A SUDDEN a hand came down on her shoulder. She thought, for an instant, that it was Chuck's. But instead she looked up at a very young ensign with bright red hair and freckles.

"Say!" he piped. "Maybe you can tell me something."

She forced a merry note into her voice. "Why, what's the trouble, mate?"

"Your girl friend won't give me a tumble. What can I do to get her to look at me?"

"Well, you could try a few card tricks, or—"

At this point, the waiter descended upon them and the red-headed ensign, to her relief, promptly forsook her. Watching him, Maggie couldn't help but feel a little stab of disappointment. Even that ensign, young as he was, had been blinded by June's beauty.

She turned back to Jimmy. "Are you ordering something?"

"Guess I'd better." He looked at her. "How about you, Maggie?"

"Yes, please. A—a Cuba Libre."

"Hey! You're breaking training!"

Breaking training. Yes, she thought, she probably was. But she had her reasons. She wasn't drinking for pleasure, but to kill the pain.

She gave Jimmy a side-long look. "You won't tell the coach, will you?"

"No, Maggie." His eyes, meeting hers, were serious to the point of sadness. It was as if he knew what was in her heart. "I won't tell this time."

The music had begun in the main lounge and the red-headed ensign proposed that they leave the bar, and continue the party inside. He also announced his availability as a dancing partner, and would have pulled June from her chair, if Chuck and another officer hadn't intervened. June, they said, was allergic to redheads. Jimmy, deft as always, broke up what would probably have been a good-natured wrangle by calling for the check.

"Relax," he said. "You'll get to dance." He winked at Maggie. "Don't forget, we've got two beautiful girls with us tonight."

He'd meant to compliment her, she supposed, but the situation being what it was, his words didn't come out right. They sounded forced and unnatural.

"That is," he went on, "if Maggie is in a dancing mood." He paused. "Are you, Maggie?"

They were looking at her now, some of them, she felt sure, for the first time. Even the red-headed ensign was looking at her, although he didn't seem particularly impressed.

She stood up. "As a matter of fact I'm not in a dancing mood."

"Maggie!" Jimmy said.

"I'm pretty tired. I hope you don't mind, but I think I'll turn in."

They set up a polite howl. June, belatedly, howled, too. It was as if she couldn't believe that Maggie really meant what she said.

"Well," June said, "if you feel you must—"

Maggie nodded. "And I want to unpack. I didn't finish unpacking this afternoon, and my dresses will be a perfect mess."

There was a stirring sound at the table. Jimmy, was getting out of his chair, probably because Chuck, her original date, did not.

"I'll see you to the elevator," he said.

They wove their way through the phalanx of tables to the exit. Maggie felt as if she were one big ache. One of these days, she'd learn to live with pain. She might even get used to it.

In the corridor, she stopped short, looking up at him. "Thanks a lot, Jimmy."

"Maggie," he said, "you're not fair to yourself."

"No?"

"You wanted to dance. You know you did. Why don't you do something you want to, for a change?"

"I told you, I'm tired."

"You're like a cocoon. You've got layers and layers of protective material around you to keep people from seeing the real you."

"Never mind the real me."

The elevator doors slid open. The operator, a slight, bored-looking youth with plastered down hair, said: "Up!" She hesitated, wishing that Jimmy Stockman would put out his hand, and ask her, even as an afterthought, to let her packing go until morning. She knew when the door closed she'd never see him again.

"Good night, Maggie." It was a pleasant, impersonal valedictory. "Sweet dreams."

She didn't answer him. She couldn't. As she hurried into the elevator, it seemed to her that her heart was a balloon, blown up to the bursting point.

THE NEXT MORNING Maggie got up very early. She had breakfast alone in the dining room, and then stood on the veranda, watching the clouds move across the sky, and listening to the ruffle of the waves on the beach. After that, she put her camera strap on her shoulder, and started for the village. Why she was going to the village, she didn't quite know, because she wasn't in the market for toothpaste or post cards or anything. But it was a lovely morning, and

June wouldn't be up for hours, and she had to pass the time some way.

She swung down the wide, sunny street. It may have been the weather, or it may have been her natural resilience, but whatever it was, she felt better this morning. Jimmy was now merely a pleasant shadow in her mind, as substanceless as someone encountered in the pages of a magazine. She'd get over him, she promised herself. The week was still new and auspicious, and there were other men at the supply base.

The village was sunlit and informal, pretty much as she had known it would be. There was a small, public square, flanked by a movie theater, a gift shop, and a drug store. For no reason at all, she wandered into the drug store, blinking a little as she moved from the dazzle of the outdoors to the dim, sweet-smelling coolness. She'd buy some film, she decided. She had several rolls with her, but if she didn't use them up during the week, she could probably use them when she got home. Photography was her real hobby, and she'd been neglecting it lately.

"Maggie! Hey, Maggie!"

In front of the magazine rack, she whirled. It shouldn't have been, but it was. Jimmy Stockman, looking tall and nautically tidy in his khaki uniform moved toward her. And as she stood there, wordless with surprise, he lifted his visor cap and smiled at her. The smile put little crinkles at the corners of his eyes, and a tiny crease in his broad forehead.

"I thought it was you," he said. "I had to look twice to be sure. What's that you're wearing?"

"Pedal pushers." She was staring at him. "June's still asleep."

"Did you get unpacked?"

"Yes. Everything hung out, the way I expected. It must be the air. What are you doing off the base so early?"

"I'm on an errand and stopped off for cigarettes. I've got a car. Can I drop you somewhere?"

"Well—" She said the first thing that came into her head. "You wouldn't be going past the hotel, would you?"

"I would indeed."

It was silly to have him take her right back where she started from but what else could she do? If she told him she'd just gotten here, that she still hadn't picked out her film, he'd march out without her.

"Let's go," she said.

The Navy car was long, slim, and gleaming, and fairly bristled with official insignia. As he helped her inside, he glanced with mock anxiety over his shoulder, down the long, quiet street.

"Mustn't let the taxpayers see this," he said. "They'd probably sit down and write their congressmen. They'd ask them where I got off hauling a gal in a government automobile on government time."

She giggled. "You mean to tell me I'm illegal?"

"You're government approved as far as I'm concerned, but you know these seaside busybodies."

She sank into cool leather upholstery. The window was open, and looking out, she saw the glint and sparkle of the ocean, the gleaming boardwalk, the faultless blue of the sky. Oh, she was happy! If she'd stumbled on a million dollars, she couldn't have duplicated this feeling of flight, this sublime sense of not wanting her life to move backwards or forwards an inch.

In a moment or two, of course, she came to her senses. This whole thing was an accident. If the Fates had been tending to business, they'd never have let her run into Jimmy as she had.

Jimmy heaved himself into the front seat, and got the motor going. "The hotel, you say!"

"Please."

The car shot into the street. "By the way, Maggie, it was fun last night in the lounge. You shouldn't have left."

"That's why it was fun, because I left."

"The things you say about yourself! You don't mean them, do you?"

"Maybe not." She sat back, resting her head against the upholstery. "What happened to June? Did you two finally get some time together?"

"For the space of one dance. After that—well, I had to share the wealth."

"I peeked before I left this morning. She was fast asleep. I was scared to death I'd wake her. That's why I came out."

THEY STOPPED for a traffic light. Jimmy glanced down at her. In the daylight his face was smooth and his visor cap set at an angle over one eyebrow, making him look, temporarily at least, like somebody's kid brother.

He indicated her camera. "Going to add some snapshots to the family album?"

She shook her head. "I'm not going to take pictures of myself, if that's what you mean."

"Why not?"

"I'm not that kind of photographer. I want pictures of lighthouses, fishing boats, buried treasure, and that sort of thing. I mean, if I'm going to exhibit—"

"Exhibit?"

"Photography's my hobby. My father taught me. He had a dark room in the cellar, and all the gadgets that went with it. I've been taking pictures since I was twelve."

"Why, Maggie, I had no idea."

The light changed, and he started the car. She blushed. She shouldn't have talked so much about her pictures. He wasn't interested in them. None of the men she'd ever met had been, and it made her look so anxious, so fearful—like a comedian pulling every trick he knew, in the hope of waking up a lethargic audience.

She got up some courage, and moved the conversation on to a more suitable subject. "What do you like to do, Jimmy, when you're not preparing for quizzes?"

He eyed her. "Promise you won't laugh?"

"I promise."

"Well, I like to watch birds. I'm strictly from Audubon. Do you know what I saw the other day? A red-eyed vireo."

"A—what?"

"It's a little bird. Its name means 'I am

green.' Now you probably think I'm a bird, too, don't you?"

"No! No, I—"

They had reached the hotel. Maggie suddenly felt tired. The conversation, she realized, had been an effort for her. Had Jimmy noticed? He must have, she thought. She'd talked too fast, and tried to say too much.

Jimmy looked at his watch. "Gosh! Eleven o'clock already!"

"Yes," she said.

"What time will June be up?"

It almost didn't hurt. Naturally, he'd want to know about June. From the minute a man met her, he wanted to know about her. She sighed, and then, because she was pretty sure he'd heard the sigh, she smiled.

"I don't know. She left a note not to wake her, but lunch begins at twelve-thirty, so—"

"I'll call about twelve," he said. "I have the afternoon off, and I thought—"

"Of course."

She opened the door before he could. As she hopped to the curb, her camera suspended from its long strap, swung back into the car. Jimmy picked it up, and leaning across the seat, he handed it to her.

"Buried treasure," he said. "I must remember that."

And then he drove off.

MAGGIE HUNG AROUND THE lobby almost until noon. When she finally went upstairs, she found June at the dressing

(Continued on page 102)

Marry For Love

By Grace Stewart-Patterson

As soon as she saw him, Jenny knew that Simon Bruton was the man for her. But she quickly learned that he was wary of love and that in order to win his heart, she would have to combat both a beautiful ghost and her own glamorous sister.



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**FORGET MY
DREAMS**

*By
Nicki
Stevens*



Marcey's past was glued to her, and so was the man she thought she'd left behind.



"I came," he observed casually, "to warn your friend not to marry you."

SHE CAME OUT onto the wide veranda of the old house and stopped, letting the voices whisper: *Marcey, you're the last of them and you're selling out.*

When she heard the voices, her mouth twisted sidewise, and her heart twisted a little too. But then she shrugged, scornfully. She was Marcey Pollock, but she wasn't the little girl who had wandered on rainy days through the old house, who had spent the long summer afternoons deep in a hammock near it.

She was grown up now and practical, and the house was a millstone, a weight around her neck, holding her back from where she wanted to go.

She moved her shoulders impatiently, and stepped down from the veranda and turned at once without thinking toward the left. Involuntarily her feet followed the path, carry-

ing her through a cold drizzle of March rain toward the summerhouse at the end of the garden.

The summerhouse had always been her own special sanctuary. It was where she had taken her grief the day her mother died, and it was where, much later, on the night of her eighteenth birthday, Jeff Sloan had kissed her for the first time. And it was where, still later, she had gone to say good-bye to the place and to Jeff, just before leaving for New York.

Her feet carried her up the rickety steps, through a pile of dry leaves blown in by the wind, into the dimness and gloom. There was no honeysuckle now, no sound of the music that had been there when Jeff had kissed her. Only a persistent rustling of rain, and a sense of decay and death, was about the place.

Marcey closed her eyes against it, drew a deep breath, and turned to go.

Then she stopped, with a quick gasp of in-drawn breath, as a voice spoke behind her, "The past is always a dreary business, isn't it, Marcey? I don't wonder you've decided to sell out."

Marcey whirled, one hand at her throat. "Jeff! What in the world are you doing here?"

Jeff Sloan rose from the bench where he had been sitting and came toward her.

"Just looking around," he said. "If I'm going to sell the place for you I want to know what I have to work with."

"You!" Marcey was incredulous. "Your father was the one I wrote to! Your'e supposed to be in Washington!"

She stopped abruptly, conscious that she had said too much. She hadn't meant Jeff to know that she had been keeping track of his movements.

Jeff grinned with faint amusement. "I left Washington about six months ago," he told her. "That place got too hectic for me. It's not the kind of town where you'd want to put down roots."

There was a sense of familiarity in this, too, Marcey thought wearily. It was as if they had played the same scene many times, with Jeff taking one stand and herself the other, with no common meeting ground, and always the same negative result.

Yet something drove her on, something twisted her mouth with scorn, and dictated her words, "You mean you couldn't take it. You mean it was out of your league, so you came running back home."

"If you like." His tone was maddeningly indifferent. "Dad had been wanting to retire, anyway. And this is my kind of town, with my kind of people in it. So I came back."

"You had your chance and you lost it," Marcey commented bitterly. "That's what it boils down to. You could have gotten away, you could have lifted yourself out of all this. When I heard you were in Washington, I hoped—"

She broke off, shrugging. "I should have known better. You'll never get away from it, Jeff. You're caught in the old pattern, caught in the past. You'll never get out."

He matched her shrug with his own. "It isn't a bad pattern," he observed. "A lot of people have lived and died by it."

Marcey felt her face whiten. She turned her back on him, staring toward the huge white house that was shuttered, uncared-for, dying.

"Your pattern!" she jeered. "Can't you see that it's dead, rotting away, just like that house? A harsh laugh bruised her throat, and she went on, "The old plantation, the lord of the manor, ole Marse Jeff—"

Her voice choked as his hands fell on her shoulders.

"Be quiet, Marcey," he commanded. His voice, though gentle, had a thread of steel running through it. And his face, close to hers, had grown darker. For a moment, she was almost frightened, and a wave of faintness went over her. Jeff's hands were touching her again, Jeff's face was close to her own. Then his fingers tightened on her shoulders and she gasped.

"Please," she said coldly. "You're hurting me, Jeff."

HE RELEASED HER AT ONCE. The taut lines of his face relaxed.

"I'm sorry," he conceded. A faintly mocking yet friendly grin touched his lips. "You could always get under my skin, Marcey. But there's no point in our quarreling again, is there? Let's just say we don't see eye to eye on some things."

"To put it mildly," Marcey agreed. In spite of herself, she returned his smile. And that, she reflected, was a part of the pattern, too. Somehow, he always had the power to stop their quarrels with a grin and a lightly mocking word. All except the last one, which had taken place two years ago, here in the summerhouse. That had been the final, definitive

quarrel, the quarrel that ended everything between them.

"Well, then," Jeff spoke briskly, returning to the original subject. "You're going to sell the old place at last. Considering everything, I think it's a wise move."

Marcey frowned. "Oh? I was under the impression you wanted me to carry on my family tradition."

"But you're not," Jeff pointed out. "The place is going to ruin. A house needs to be lived in, Marcey."

She flushed at the implied criticism. "I told you two years ago—"

Jeff cut her off, wearily. "You told me," he agreed. "There was a lot of talk about stagnation and decay and living in the past. So all right. We'll try to sell it for you, though it may not be easy, you know. The place has a lot of drawbacks."

"Drawbacks?" Marcey echoed.

Jeff counted them off on his fingers. "It's old-fashioned. It has too many rooms. It costs a fortune just to heat it through a Maryland winter. It's too far from town, and this old summerhouse is a wreck." He shook his head in despair. "It's a monstrosity, that's all. The only thing you could do would be to tear it down."

"No!" Marcey cried out sharply. "It doesn't matter," she said, fighting a deep sense of shame and disloyalty. "Just so I get rid of you. I don't care what happens to it after that. All I want you to do is sell it for me. I didn't ask for catalog of its bad points."

Jeff shrugged. "I was only warning you. You mustn't expect too much. Your letter said twenty thousand, but of course that's out of the question. We might be able to get ten."

"Ten thousand!" Marcey was startled again out of her careful indifference. "But it worth much more."

"It's worth exactly as much as somebody's willing to pay for it," Jeff asserted. "Of course, if you want to wait for a while we might do a little better."

Marcey shook her head. "No. I must sell right away. I want to be rid of it once and for all." She hesitated for a moment, oddly embarrassed. "You see," she explained, "I'll be leaving for Hollywood very soon now." She hesitated again, drew a deep breath, and finished, "Because I'm going to be married."

There was a long moment of silence, then.

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Jeff's face was dark and unreadable, but his eyes were bitter and accusing. They spoke of things that she wanted to forget. They were like the voices she had been hearing ever since she came back to her old home, and they spoke in almost the same words: *So you're selling out, Marcey. All down the line.*

The stillness there in the summerhouse was unbearable. Cold gray rain dripped from the roof, and the smell of dead leaves was strong in Marcey's nostrils. Jeff stood solid and immovable before her, and though she didn't look at him, she could feel his gaze.

"Married," he said at last, and there was a heaviness in his voice that she had never heard before. "Somehow, Marcey, I thought you and I were engaged."

Though she was shaking, she answered evenly enough. "That was a long time ago, Jeff. You're forgetting a certain conversation we had in this very spot two years ago."

Jeff moved his shoulders impatiently. "Oh, that," he said. "Sure we quarreled. We've been quarreling, off and on, ever since we've known each other. But we've always been engaged. There have always been promises, between us."

ANGER FLARED UP IN HER suddenly, but she could still keep her voice steady. "For two years," she reminded him, "you've made no effort to see me. You've never even written me a letter. And, if you remember, I gave back your ring." Some of the anger came into her voice now in spite of her efforts. "But now, you can talk about promises!"

Jeff replied quietly, "Yes, Marcey. Oh, I don't mean promises in words, but we had something that couldn't be touched by words. It was a part of us and still is. It can never be changed, by anything. We belong to each other. You can't marry this—this whoever he is."

"Roger Denton," Marcey supplied. "He's staying at the hotel in town now. He's a very talented actor, and as soon as I sell the place we're going to Hollywood together. He's going to work in the movies. I'm certainly going to marry Roger, whether you like it or not."

Jeff looked at her for a long time. At last he shook his head. "Somehow, Marcey, I don't think you will. I've waited two years for you, because I knew that some day you'd come back to me. And, although you may not have realized it, I think you were waiting, too."

Marcey laughed, scornfully and incredulously. It was true enough that there was once something between her and Jeff. She had been in love with him for a long time. Perhaps something of that remained, but she doubted it.

There had been afternoons at the beach with Jeff, dancing at the country club, with Jeff, and, on the night of her eighteenth birthday, kisses from Jeff. Jeff's voice had been husky. "You're grown up now, Marcey, and I can tell you at last how I feel about you. Jeff's lips then told what his words could not fully express. And when he kissed her the air filled with music and the scent of honey-suckle . . .

Their love was dead, but the memories still had power over her, and stirred and troubled her heart. She shook her head angrily to shake off the mood.

"I didn't expect a scene like this," she admitted. "But perhaps it's just as well to have it settled once and for all. I don't love you, Jeff. We've grown away from each other. This is just another loose end that has to be cut off, so we can both go on with our lives."

Jeff laid his hands on her shoulders, and gazed into her eyes.

"A loose end, eh?" he murmured, and grinned at her. "All right, then, let's cut it off properly."

And before she could move, before she could open her mouth to protest, his arms went around her and his lips came down on hers. She didn't struggle. That would have given the thing too much importance. Instead she held herself still, unresisting, like a statue sheathed in ice.

But somewhere deep in the recesses of her being, something stirred and moved, and there was a choking sensation in her throat. But, she told herself through a rising faintness, it was all memory and illusion. She fought his kiss, and willed herself not to respond.

And she succeeded. She was cold and still and unmoving until he released her and stepped back from her, his lips curving again in the old mocking smile. Marcey could not speak. She only stared at him in frozen immobility. And suddenly the mockery was gone from his expression, and replaced by an old warm tenderness that almost melted her and brought tears to her eyes.

He raised one hand and touched her cheek lightly with his fingertips. He acted as if he were sorry for her.

"All right, honey," he murmured. "It's a tough fight, isn't it? The past sticks like glue, but everything will work out. Don't worry about it."

He dropped his hand, and smiled gently before he turned away.

Marcey stood without moving where he had left her, watching his tall rain-coated figure disappear along the path toward the drive. It was some moments before she discovered that there was a mist of tears in her eyes. They were tears shed for the past, for a young girl who no longer existed, for a dead love.

IT WAS WITH a kind of relief that Marcey faced Roger across the table in the hotel dining room that evening. Roger, tall, and blond and clean-featured. No wraiths from the past clung about Roger to haunt him. His face was turned toward the future. He was a part of that great world that Marcey used to dream of, a part of the main stream of living.

"Marcey." Roger's blue eyes held an expression of concern. "Something's happened to you. You're troubled about something. Can I help?"

With an effort she brought her thoughts back to the present, and forced her lips into a reassuring smile.

"It's nothing," she told him. And then, with assumed lightness, "I'm just drenched with emotion. I've had a very teary and sentimental afternoon."

Roger smiled, but his eyes remained thoughtful. "The old home place, eh? I hope we can sell it quickly and get out. I'm afraid all this is bad for you, Marcey."

She shook her head. "I'll be all right. It's just—" She hesitated, wondering whether she ought to say anything about Jeff. It would probably be better for Roger to know, to be prepared. There was no telling what Jeff might do or say. "It's just," she finished, "that the real estate man turned out to be an old flame of mine. And, for a while, things got rather strained."

Roger lifted an eyebrow and eyed her curiously. "Jeff Sloan, you mean? We had a couple of beers together this afternoon while you were out at your place. He's quite a likable, intelligent sort of fellow, I thought."

Marcey stiffened. "Jeff came here! What did he want?"

Roger looked at her for a moment blankly. "You know," he admitted, "he never did say. He asked about you, and then we sort of got to talking."

Marcey felt her lips tighten, and her hands clench into fists. It was clear enough. Jeff had taken the opportunity to look Roger over, to see what he was like.

"Talking," she repeated warily. "About what?"

"Oh, nothing special. I told him about my work in *The Hidden Door*, and that I was on my way to Hollywood to make some contacts there. So he used to be in love with you? He didn't mention that."

Naturally he wouldn't. Marcey explained carefully, "Jeff not only used to be in love with me, he still is, or so he pretends to be. He was rather difficult about it. He tried to tell me that we're still engaged."

Roger became white. "And are you?" he asked quietly.

Marcey shook her head in impatience. "Of course not! We broke our engagement two years ago. He hasn't made the slightest effort

to get in touch with me since. There's nothing whatever between us!"

"But then why—?"

Marcey could only give a hopeless shrug. "He thinks he's trying to prove something, I suppose. He can't bring himself to admit that he was wrong about me."

Roger bit his lip, and drummed nervously on the table top. "There's nothing he can do, of course, unless you're still in love with him."

She felt the blood wash into her face but she kept her gaze steady and clear.

"Certainly not!" she denied. She was sure that she spoke the truth. Those deep dim feelings that had troubled her all afternoon, those wild stirrings in response to Jeff's kiss, were nothing. But—

She sat bolt upright as a sudden thought struck her. There was one way those ghosts could be buried forever. There was one way to stop Jeff and one perfect answer to the possibility of treachery from herself. She leaned forward eagerly and stretched out her hand toward Roger.

"Roger," she said, "marry me now!"

His face went blank. "Now," he repeated. "You mean tonight?"

"As soon as we possibly can. After all, we know what we're doing. There's no point in waiting."

His fingers drummed on the table again, he chewed at his lip, and his eyes flickered away from hers.

"What's the sudden rush?" he demanded at last. "Our plans are all made. Why get into such a hurry?"

It was Marcey's turn to shift her gaze. She couldn't very well tell him her real reason. She couldn't say: *Because I'm afraid of Jeff Sloan and myself. Because Jeff kissed me this afternoon. Because the past sticks like glue, and pulls and pulls at you!*

She gazed down at the tablecloth without answering, and after a moment Roger went on. "I think we'd better stick to our original plan. Let's wait until you've sold your house and we're ready to leave. Why, it might be weeks before you find a buyer!"

Marcey replied at once. "That's just it, don't you see? Why should we wait all that time?"

ROGER SEEMED to have recovered his composure. He smiled fondly at her, giving her hand a gentle squeeze.

"Darling," he murmured, "when we're married I want you all to myself. I don't want you to be bothered with business deals. Wait till all these loose ends are cut off, and then—"

He stopped abruptly, his gaze going past Marcey's shoulder. She turned her head to follow his gaze and looked straight into the gray mocking eyes of Jeff Sloan.

She caught her breath sharply, even while she chided herself for being silly. It was a little embarrassing, of course, having Jeff and Roger come together like this. But, she reminded herself, they were civilized people. They could get over an awkward moment or two without making a scene.

She forced a welcoming smile as Jeff stopped by the table and stood looking gravely down at her.

"Won't you join us for coffee?" she invited. "You've already met Roger, I think."

Jeff nodded. "Evening, Denton." He sounded, Marcey thought, friendly enough. But she waited warily, while he sat down. He glanced at Roger, and then at Marcey, and gave her a quick smile.

"I came," he observed casually, "to warn your friend not to marry you."

Marcey suppressed a gasp. Roger's jaw dropped, and he stared in nonplussed astonishment at Jeff.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

Jeff turned to him, apparently quite sure of himself. "Marcey doesn't love you. She may think she does now, but actually she's only running away. She's been doing that for a long time. But some day she's going to stop running."

Roger had been staring in utter bewilderment, but now he gave a short laugh and his mouth twisted unpleasantly.

"I see," he said. "Marcey told me about you just a moment ago. So I'm not as impressed as I might have been." He laughed again, almost jeeringly. "You're a hard loser, aren't you, Sloan?"

Jeff regarded him without changing his expression, and neither of them so much as glanced at Marcey. Jeff's gray eyes, steady and expressionless, met Roger's blue contemptuous ones. There was a bitter, vibrant antagonism between them, and Marcey couldn't help feeling helpless and alone.

"It's not a question of winning or losing," Jeff stated. "It's a question of Marcey's happiness. She can run away from her old home, the place where she belongs, and me, but she

can't run away from herself. You're not her kind, Denton. It will only mean unhappiness for both of you if you go through with this."

"You'll break my heart," Roger returned sarcastically. "Your concern for Marcey's happiness is quite touching. But suppose we give Marcey a chance to make up her own mind."

The two pairs of eyes, blue and gray, converged on her face. Marcey's gaze flickered from one to the other. So she had to choose. On one hand there was Jeff and the old house, and the stagnation she had fled from two years ago. Jeff was the slowly dying past, while Roger was the future. Roger was the world outside, the world of great events, of electric excitement.

Marcey made her choice. She drew a deep breath, staring directly into Jeff's eyes.

"You spoke of promises," she reminded him steadily. "I have promised to marry Roger as soon as you find a buyer for the house."

Jeff met her eyes for an instant. Then he lifted one shoulder in a faint shrug and rose to his feet.

"Still running, Marcey," he murmured. His habitual mocking smile was tinged with bitterness. "Maybe this will help you on your way. I have an offer for you from a local girl, Ethel Bixby. She'll give you ten thousand for it. It's all she can raise, but she loves the old place and will give it the kind of care it needs."

Marcey's breath caught in her throat. She hadn't, somehow, been prepared for everything to happen all at once like this. And the feeling of shame touched her again, as if she were about to betray a friend for money.

"I don't know," she hesitated. "It's worth so much more."

Roger interposed swiftly. "I'd advise you to take it, Marcey. Nobody's likely to pay more for an old wreck like that."

She fought against a twinge of resentment. Roger was right, of course. The place was a wreck. It was neglected and uncared for, and if she accepted the offer, she and Roger could leave at once. It would be stupid to allow mere sentiment to stand in the way now.

"Very well," she agreed tonelessly, "I'll sell."

Jeff nodded, the brisk businessman now. "Be out there at ten tomorrow," he instructed. "I'll bring your check, and the deed prepared for your signature."

He hesitated then for a moment, and his eyes met Marcey's. It was as if, she thought, he waited for her to say something, to show some sign of wavering in her decision. But she met his gaze steadily, and after a moment he shrugged and walked out.

MARCEY'S SLEEP THAT NIGHT was troubled, and the old house standing isolated beyond the edge of town was full of voices of reproach. But she shut her ears to them, closed her mind to the memories that fluttered like birds around her. She had made her decision, and she was sticking to it.

A little pale and drawn, she opened the door to Jeff at ten o'clock the next morning. Roger had arrived a few minutes earlier. Gray rain still fell outside, but a log fire crackled on the hearth and the flames danced cheerfully, throwing flickering light about the room.

Jeff advanced to the fire, nodded to Roger, and drew papers and a fountain pen from his pocket.

"It's all set," he announced. "Here's your certified check for ten thousand. Sign the deed right here, on this line."

Pen in hand, Marcey hesitated for an instant. It was more than just the house, it was a part of her life. She was signing away her girlhood. But more than that she was signing away the past, the time before she was born. Pollocks had lived here for a hundred years. Her father had been born in this house. But the past was dead. The old ways of living were changed, and she, Marcey, belonged to the future and to Roger.

With a swift gesture of decision, she spread the deed out on a table and signed it.

Jeff laid the check before her, pocketed the legal paper, and turned to the fire.

"Funny thing," he observed in a conversational tone. "I thought we'd have trouble finding a buyer. But I had another offer last night, after I'd already closed with Ethel. He offered your full price, twenty thousand.

But of course I'd already accepted Ethel's offer."

He paused then for a slow doubtful head-shake, and finished, "Still, you probably wouldn't have wanted to sell to him, anyway. He's a big-time gambler, and he wanted to remodel the place for business purposes.

Marcey shook her head in automatic agreement. "Naturally not," she began.

An explosive exclamation from Roger interrupted her. "Twenty thousand!" he cried. "And you turned it down? Are you crazy?"

"Well," Jeff put in mildly, "we'd already made the other deal. We couldn't go back on it."

Roger made a strangled sound. "There wasn't anything in writing! This Bixby woman couldn't have held you to it! And now you've thrown away ten thousand dollars!"

He broke off suddenly, his eyes narrowing, while Marcey stared at him in blank bewilderment.

"Wait a minute," Roger said. "It isn't too late! Give me that deed. All we have to do is drop it into the fire. Then you can tell Miss Bixby that Marcey changed her mind, and we'll go on and sell to the other fellow."

Jeff gazed at him for a moment without answering, then turned to Marcey. She glanced once into his questioning eyes. Then she swung about to face Roger, staring as if she had never seen him before.

"But of course that's impossible," she said quietly. "I've agreed to sell to Ethel Bixby. I can't go back on my word."

Roger made an impatient gesture. "Nobody'd ever know," he argued. "Think, Marcey! It means ten thousand dollars!"

She shook her head. "Don't you see, Roger, I promised. The money doesn't matter. It isn't important."

"Not important!" Roger shouted. "Marcey, do you realize that an extra ten thousand might make the difference between getting or losing a contract for me in Hollywood? It's going to take money to make contacts out

Statement required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Acts of March 3, 1933 and July 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 2337), showing the Ownership, Management, and Circulation of Fifteen Love Stories, published bi-monthly at Kokomo, Indiana, for October 1, 1953. 1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, Henry Steeger, 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York. Editor, Henry Steeger, 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York. Managing editor, None. Business manager, None. 2. The owner is: Popular Publications, Inc., 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York. Henry Steeger, 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York. Shirley M. Steeger, 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York. 3. The known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: none. 4. Paragraphs 2 and 3 include, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting; also the statements in the two paragraphs show the affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner. Signed, Henry Steeger, Publisher. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 25th day of September, 1953. Eva M. Walker, Notary Public, State of New York. Qualified in New York County, No. 31-8506600. Certificate filed with N. Y. Co. Reg. Commission expires March 30, 1954. (Seal)—Form 3526—Rev. 8-50.

there! We'll have to put up a front. We'll have to entertain the right people, and to . . ."

His voice went on, frantically, almost pleading with her, but Marcey hardly heard him. She could only stare in disbelief at his flushed, contorted face. This was a Roger she had never seen before, a Roger she had never known existed.

And yet, the signs had been there all along, if she had only stopped to see them. There were Roger's excuses, Roger's evasiveness when she wanted to marry him immediately, Roger's insistence that she sell her house first. It wasn't that he wanted her to be free of the past, or free of business worries. It was much simpler than that. He wanted to be sure of the money.

And now, he was willing for her to break her word, to do anything sly and underhanded, for the sake of more money. He would have her turn the old Pollock place into a roadhouse to finance his own future.

She gazed at him as if across an unbridgeable chasm. Yet, oddly, she felt no sense of hurt or disappointment. She must have known subconsciously all along what Roger was. It was evident that she had never really loved him, or she would have been heartbroken at this revelation.

It was Jeff, finally, who finally broke into Roger's tirade.

"That's about enough, Denton," he said quietly. "You're not accomplishing anything. There's nothing you can do to change it."

Roger turned on him belligerently.

"Slick, aren't you?" His voice was choked with rage and frustration. "You've set it up very neatly. I suppose you've already arranged with the Bixby woman to sell to this other fellow and split the profit with you. Or," a look of calculation came over his face, "the Bixby deal is just a front. I'll bet she's just acting as a dummy for you! You're going to put the whole thing into your pocket!"

Jeff's jaw set hard, his gray eyes looked cold and dangerous as he took a step toward the other man. But he hesitated then and glanced at Marcey.

MARCEY SHRUGGED. She was suddenly overpoweringly weary. "You'd better leave now, Roger," she advised. "It seems that Jeff was right. It seems we're not the same kind of people at all."

Roger controlled himself with a visible

effort, as he saw everything slipping from his grasp.

"Now, wait," he protested. "Maybe I was a little hasty. But I was only looking out for your interests. I don't want you to be cheated."

Jeff took another step toward him. Roger glanced once more, pleadingly, at Marcey, but she shook her head and turned away. Then, as Jeff continued to advance upon him, he broke for the door. A moment later there was the sound of a roaring motor, a clash of gears, a scream of tires, and finally silence.

Marcey crossed the wide veranda and turned to the left, and her feet carried her through cold rain toward the old summer-house at the end of the garden. She wanted to make one last concession to the past, one last concession to sentiment, one last good-bye.

Jeff walked beside her in silence, up the rickety steps, through the pile of dry leaves. As she came to a stop in the dim gloom under the roof he kicked the piled leaves, scattering them across the floor.

"Place needs a good cleaning," he observed. "Those steps ought to be fixed, too."

Marcey didn't answer. There was nothing to say. She had lost the right to say anything. She was a stranger here now, an intruder. Even the whispering voices had ceased. She listened, but there was only the ticking of rain against the roof, and the slow drip from the eaves.

Jeff continued to look about him, appraisingly. "But it's not too far gone, after all. Some minor repairs, a couple of coats of paint, and it will all be just like it was. Remember, Marcey?"

"Oh, shut up!" she cried. "Haven't you done enough? Do you have to go on talking about it?"

He stared at her, his face suddenly grim. "Yes," he asserted. "I think we have a little more talking to do, Marcey. What are your plans? What are you going to do now?"

Marcey gazed out at the gray curtain of rain, and lifted one shoulder in a hopeless shrug. "I'll go back to New York," she said drearily. "Pick up my life where I left off."

Jeff made a harsh sound in his throat. "I'm darned if you will!" he gritted. His hands fell on her shoulders, and turned her roughly about. "I'm darned," he repeated, "if we'll go through all that again!"

"I can't very well stay here," she pointed out, steadily enough. "There's nothing more for me. The house is gone."

Jeff shook her a little. "The house! Don't you understand yet, Marcey, that the house doesn't really matter? It's only a symbol, the way New York was a symbol, for you."

His voice softened and deepened. "Don't you see that places don't matter? It's what's inside you that counts. You don't have to let the past drag at you and smother you, but you don't have to throw it all away, either. You can use it, as a foundation to build the future on."

Marcey bit her lip. His voice, and the touch of his hands, reached deep inside her to stir an emotion she thought was dead.

"Marcey." Jeff's voice was even lower now and husky with tenderness, as his arms pulled her close to him. "Marcey, darling, I've been waiting for you such a long time. Aren't you ready to stop running yet?"

She raised her head, and brought up her eyes to meet his clearly at last, without reservations. Her face glowed.

"Jeff," she whispered. "Oh, Jeff, yes!" But then as his face came closer to hers, a faint cloud went across her happiness. "I wish," she sighed, "I'd waked up a little sooner, before the house was sold. So much of our lives were here—"

Jeff chuckled. "And all the rest of our lives will be, too," he promised. "Roger was right about one thing. Ethel Bixby is my secretary, and she bought the place for me. I have her deed to me right here in my pocket with the other."

Marcey drew back a little, frowning, and

a bitter stab of disappointment shot through her. "Jeff! You were planning to make that deal, if Roger and I hadn't broken up!"


Jeff was entirely unabashed. If anything, his grin broadened. "But you see, I'd already listened to Roger enough to know what type he was. I knew what the smell of money would do to him, and, of course, I knew you. I knew too that you would both react as I expected you to. That's why I felt safe in inventing a buyer with twenty thousand dollars. I knew I'd never have to produce him."

"Inventing!" Marcey echoed. She stared up incredulously into Jeff's face, trying to adjust herself to this new idea. "You planned it all!" she burst out at last. "Ethel, and the gambler never existed!"

Jeff nodded, traces of amusement still visible in his eyes. But soon the amusement faded, and he stared at her adoringly.

"I'd been waiting," he reminded her, "for a long time. And I finally decided waiting wasn't good enough. I had to do something." His amusement faded then and his voice roughened with emotion. "Darling, when I think how close I came to losing you, forever—!"

His arms tightened again and drew her close. She only had time to breathe out a faint whisper, "But you didn't, Jeff. You've got me forever."

His lips were on hers, and suddenly the air was filled with music, and the scent of honeysuckle was all around them. 

HERITAGE OF LOVE

By Grace Stewart-Patterson

Sandra was sure she was in love with Drake Roberts. His sophistication, his good looks, even his moodiness attracted her. When he asked her to marry him, she told herself, here was the right man, at last. And then she met Chris . . .



Chris' smile was magnetic, his kisses tender. Torn between two men, Sandra had to make a momentous decision. Don't miss this poignant novelette in the March issue of LOVE SHORT STORIES. On sale now.

LOVE

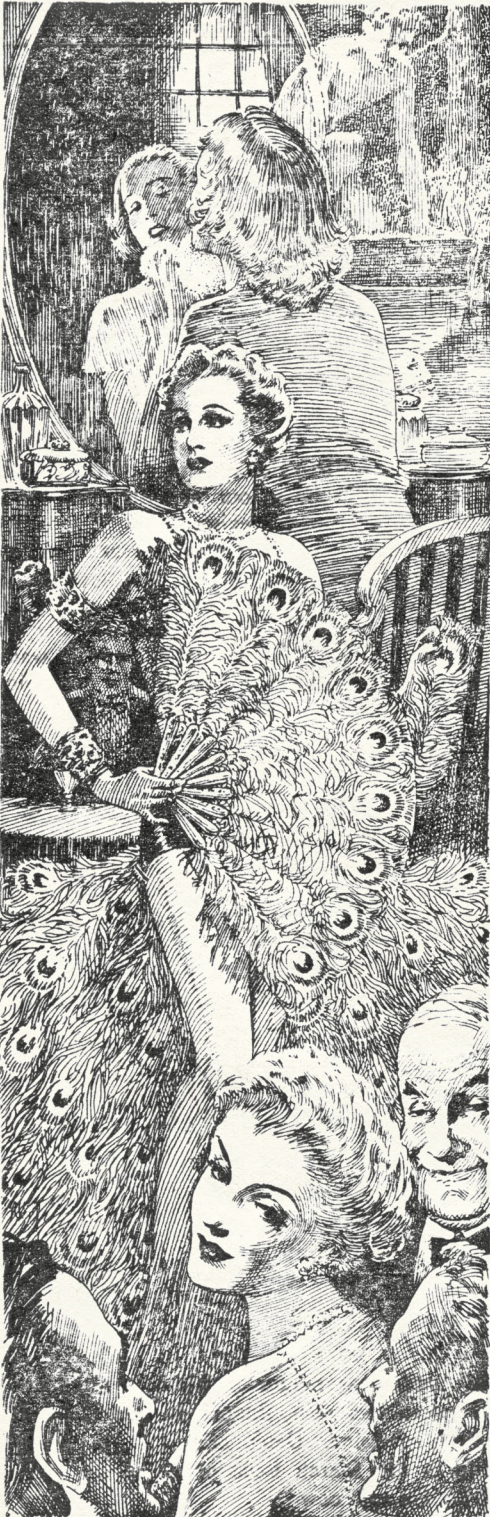
SHORT STORIES

Design For



The Myth and the Legend

By Natalie Jenkins Bond



Once there was a boy named Narcissus who looked into a pool and fell in love with his reflection. But that was only a myth.

In New York City there was a girl named Hyacinthe who looked at her reflection. She was no myth, but she soon became a legend.

When Hyacinthe looked in her mirror the story of Narcissus was repeated.

Surely, she thought, there is no one so lovely and charming as me. So she brushed her golden hair, powdered her charming nose, and went to the Painted Peacock, a night club, where she was immediately hired.

She couldn't dance and she couldn't sing, but when you have a face like Helen of Troy's and a perfect figure, talent is too much to expect.

So Hyacinthe paraded nightly in a peacock train, and more than one playboy offered her his purse strings in exchange for her hand, if not her heart.

But to the bedazzled men she smiled her slow lovely smile and shook her head. Wealth was not enough for Hyacinthe. The man she loved must be Prince Charming as well. So she continued her job at the Painted Peacock and her salary soared.

One morning Hyacinthe arrived at the Club for a rehearsal. She was early and seeing no one about, dropped into a lounge chair. A moment later she heard a voice, "Would you mind moving. I've got to fix a wire behind that chair."

ROMANCE



It was an order, not a request. But Hyacinthe had started to light a cigarette and she continued to do so.

"Look sister," the voice said, "move! I'm a busy man."

For the first time in her life, Hyacinthe looked at a man carefully. The speaker was tall, slender and red-headed, and at the moment his face was more pugnacious than handsome.

"Some women"—he began. But before he could continue, Hyacinthe turned her head away and thoughtfully blew out a cloud of smoke.

Suddenly she found herself lifted into the air, carried across the room, and deposited, none too gently, on a couch.

When she looked at the man again he was on his knees splicing a wire. And it was then that she noticed his profile, which had the clean-cut quality of a face on a coin. And as she regarded him, her lovely eyes became soft and luminous. Here was a man who was different from the playboys she was accustomed to meeting. Here, indeed, was her Prince Charming.

They had lunch together at a beanery on Broadway and Hyacinthe didn't go back to the rehearsal. In fact she never returned to the Painted Peacock in spite of the manager's frenzied pleas and offers of fame and fortune.

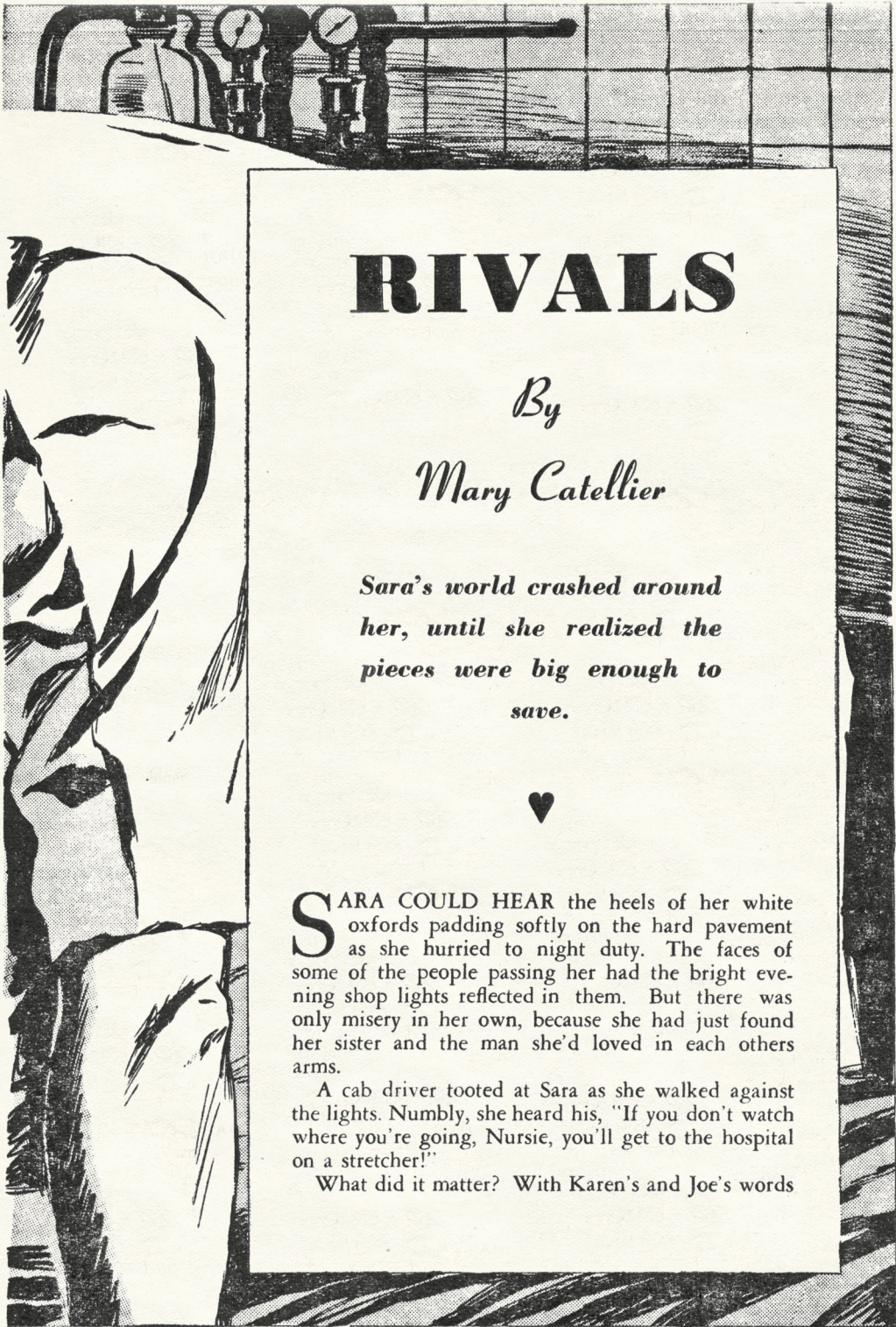
And before the week was out she married her red-headed electrician and the following year she presented him with a red-headed son. Hyacinthe was lovelier than ever because happiness made her assume an inner glow and radiance.

That's how the Queen of the Night Clubs became a legend. She threw away her crown to become plain Mrs. Robert Jones of New Jersey.



"The prettiest red hair I ever saw," he said. "Anywhere."





RIVALS

By

Mary Catellier

Sara's world crashed around her, until she realized the pieces were big enough to save.



SARA COULD HEAR the heels of her white oxfords padding softly on the hard pavement as she hurried to night duty. The faces of some of the people passing her had the bright evening shop lights reflected in them. But there was only misery in her own, because she had just found her sister and the man she'd loved in each others arms.

A cab driver tooted at Sara as she walked against the lights. Numbly, she heard his, "If you don't watch where you're going, Nursie, you'll get to the hospital on a stretcher!"

What did it matter? With Karen's and Joe's words

still ringing in her ears, what did anything matter?

After you've faced yourself in a mirror and decided you're not the worst looking redhead in the world, after you've convinced yourself that the man you love cares for you, even if you aren't quite as pretty as your younger sister, it's pretty hard to accept the truth. It's a nightmare to come home early and find Joe holding your sister in his arms, and hear her saying, "It's a beautiful diamond, Joe."

Sara couldn't believe what she had seen when she crept blindly from the kitchen door. Numbly she had changed into her uniform, and slipped dazedly from the apartment, trying to escape the hurt, the awful hurt.

The last thing she had heard Joe say, was, "It's going to be rough to tell Sara."

Rough! She had a wild desire to laugh. As she waited impatiently at the curb for the lights to change, the lights changed and she stepped off the curb.

Suddenly there was a screeching of brakes and somebody, somewhere, screamed. Sara felt a brief, sickening impact. Then nothing...

"She's coming to," the surgical supervisor's voice said. From other familiar sounds, she knew she was in the familiar operating room of St. John's Hospital. Her arm felt the faint prick of a hypodermic needle. It seemed strange to be getting a hypo instead of giving one.

She opened her eyes.

A figure loomed above her, blurred for a moment.

Then she said, "Hello, Doctor," trying to make it light, as if her world hadn't toppled since she had seen him yesterday. Not that Doctor Bill Randall wouldn't have listened to her while she poured out her heart. Bill was the kind of doctor who would have shooed everyone else out of the operating room and listened for as long as she wanted to talk. He had listened to her the night she told him about Joe and being in love with her and he would have now.

But Sara didn't pour out her heart. All she said was, "My head hurts. Do something, Medicine Man."

They were pals. They had been friends ever since she had assisted him with an appendectomy during her student nurse days. She could say anything at all to him.

Bill didn't grin and crack back at her the way he usually did. His eyes, she noticed, were grave. They seemed suddenly much too

old for his young face. And the touches of gray hair that had always seemed out of place on his dark head suddenly seemed to belong there. He works too hard, she thought. Bill needs someone to look after him. He needs someone to love him, the way I once loved Joe.

Bill was saying, "Don't you know better than to hail a cab by stepping in front of it, especially when the light is turning green for him?"

"I wasn't hailing him," she protested weakly. "And the light was turning green for me."

Bill gave her a queer look. "According to the driver, it was the other way around. I talked to him when he brought you in. He said he couldn't understand it. You seemed to step deliberately in front of him."

Sara stared up at him numbly, not quite meeting his eyes, her gaze moving from the white surgical cap he wore to the neck of his gown.

Watching her, Bill added cheerfully, "But let's not worry about the psychological part until we've made darn sure you're all in one piece."

"The psychological part!" She realized she sounded hysterical. "What's psychological about being hit by a driver trying to beat a red light?"

"Shush," Bill ordered, pressing his hands through her red hair, probing gently. Then he began to dictate his findings to the supervisor who wrote them down on Sara's chart.

"Scalp and spinal lacerations," was the final diagnosis. "Nothing serious, apparently," he said, "but do head and back X-rays and hold for observation, to make sure." His eyes made her feel warm, safe.

SARA COULD HEAR water running in the scrub-up room. The sound reminded her of something Joe had said one night when he had still loved her.

They had been washing the dinner dishes while Karen primped for a show the three of them were going to see. Suddenly, unexpectedly, as Joe bent his head to kiss her, she had dropped a lovely old platter. Afterward, when she tried to throw it away, he stopped her.

"I don't know why," he said, "but I always feel responsible for something that's broken. Let's have it mended."

"If I were broken," she had teased, "would you feel that way about me?"

Soberly, Joe had said, "If anything ever

happened to you, precious, I would never rest until you were glued back together as good as new."

Joe had sealed that promise with a kiss that still burned on her mouth. It had been heaven then but now it was torment. She had been sure it was love then. Now what was it? What did she feel for Joe?

Bill came back. He put his hands through the solutions and got into a sterile gown and gloves, watching her all the time. As he performed the necessary surgery under local anesthetic, his eyes met hers as if wishing something, trying to tell her something. His hands were gentle, almost caressing. Bill had changed since they met. He changed about the time she told him about Joe.

But Sara was thinking about Joe. What would be his reaction if she were crippled, as she could have been? Terrible, but she almost wished . . .

"A penny for your thoughts," Bill said, but quite seriously.

"They're not worth it, Doctor," she hedged.

"Joe and Karen are waiting for you in your room," he said, watching her closely. She wondered how much he knew, how much he was guessing. They had told him something, that was plain.

He asked for a special dressing, and the supervisor went to the supply room to get it. The suture nurse left with the instruments, beginning to clean up.

"It's not the end of the world, Sara." His hand lingered on her cheek, softly.

"Of course it isn't the end of the world." Trying to keep it light, she faltered a little. "Men are like street cars. All I have to do is wait for another one."

"Sometimes waiting is a good thing." He pulled down his mask, revealing his strong mouth and chin lines. "Some people wait a long time for the real thing. I know a man who—"

He stopped. His voice had been oddly husky. She looked up, her gray-green eyes meeting his dark ones questioningly, her pulse beginning to race. His lips held hers gently, yet with a seeming urgent passion that brought a rising, gathering feeling within her. When he straightened up, his hand remained tangled in her red hair for a moment.

"The prettiest red hair I ever saw," he said. "Anywhere."

She couldn't answer, not until heart and breathing steadied.

She and Bill had worked together day after day, and he had never so much as tried to kiss her before. Now, it seemed as if . . . And then she understood.

"Some doctors," she said, "will do anything to lift a patient's morale."

It would have been comforting to have him deny that remark. Her vanity needed comfort, desperately.

"Sure," he said, again in that odd way. "Sure. And now how about some X-rays, and I'll see you as soon as I get the report."

After the X-rays, when Sara was taken to her room, Karen and Joe were waiting for her, as Bill had said. She looked at Karen, standing beside Joe, so completely beautiful, so sure of getting what she wanted. Joe's diamond glittered, possessively on her left hand and Sara hated her.

They must have read it in her eyes, or was it guilt that made Joe look so miserable. Finally Karen blurted out, "Doctor Randall says you aren't seriously hurt so I guess it will be all right to tell you about Joe and me. I can't bear it on my conscience any longer."

The hard, bitter laugh that followed was her own, Sara realized in a dazed, numb way. Poor Karen! She never had been able to bear the guilt after taking one of Sara's beaux. She always had to confess. After that, she could blithely date them in front of Sara. And if it ever occurred to her that Sara suffered, she never bothered to mention it.

"Never mind confessing, Karen. I know. I heard you when I came home to change into my uniform this evening. If you and Joe hadn't been so blinded by the glitter of that diamond, you would have seen me too. Or at least heard me."

Joe's hat was taking an awful beating. Every now and then he would run a nervous hand through his brown hair. He reminded Sara of a big handsome dog pleading with his eyes for forgiveness.

"I'm sorry you had to find out that way." His voice was as full of misery as his eyes.

"I'm sorry, too," Karen said, "but if Joe loves me instead of you—" She spread her hands in a pretty gesture. She didn't utter one word about loving Joe. With Karen, it had always been the thrill of getting something, of conquering. Once she had a man in the palm of her little, grasping hand, she lost interest.

"You're to be my maid of honor, of course," she added. "So hurry and get well so we can go ahead with plans for the wedding."

For one awful instant, Sara could have killed her.

"That can wait, Karen!" Joe said sharply. "We won't even think about it until Sara is back on those pretty little feet of hers, until she's good as new."

Good as new! Won't even think about it until . . .

CLOSING HER EYES, Sara prayed that she'd never be back on her feet again, if it meant Karen would marry Joe.

Karen's high heels tapped toward the door. "We promised your doctor we wouldn't stay long, but there is one other thing I simply have to tell you. Joe and I want you to live with us. Don't we, Joe? We're going to find an apartment with an extra room for you."

There were two deep grooves in her forehead. When Sara didn't answer, Karen went on, anxiously, "You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

And Sara knew Karen was afraid she would like it. Sara knew she was supposed to refuse. Feeling a wild desire to laugh, she replied, "I would love every single minute of it."

In the back of her mind, a terrible idea was forming, and she couldn't let go of it.

By that time, Karen was in the doorway, but Sara could clearly hear her dismayed gasp. Karen hadn't expected that reply from the independent Sara who had always looked after her young sister. Now Sara was going to live in Karen's new home. How cozy they would be!

As she listened to Karen's and Joe's steps recede down the corridor, Sara began to feel like a stranger to herself. She didn't really know if she would want Joe back even if he came to her on his knees. All she knew was that Karen was going to get a taste of the bitter medicine she had been dealing out for years.

Someone came and stood in the doorway. He hesitated a moment, and then came over to the bed. It was Joe, and there was a pleading look in his eyes.

"I'm glad you're going to live with us," he said. "I was afraid you wouldn't. I wouldn't have been able to stand it, thinking of you living alone in some two-by-four apartment."

So it had been Joe's idea! She should have known. It was Joe's big heart plus a feeling of guilt.

"Joe—" she stammered.

"I don't know how it happened," Joe said.

"I thought the world of you. I still do. But I couldn't marry you—now, feeling the way I do about your sister. She's not half the woman you are, but I need her."

Quickly, impulsively, he bent and kissed her, before walking out without looking back. Joe had said he didn't know how it had happened. Sara hadn't believed it would happen, because Joe seemed different from the others who were trapped by Karen. Maybe that was the reason it hurt so.

Sara met Joe in the neighborhood radio and TV shop he was gradually turning into a paying business. She had taken a small radio set to be fixed because his place had been convenient. When she had stayed to talk while he put in a new tube, he invited her out to dinner that night.

From that evening on, Cupid did overtime, leading them straight toward the altar. Then, when Sara could keep them apart no longer, Joe met Karen. She was a nurse, too, but she had day duty. Sara had been unable to have her hours changed right away, so Joe and her sister began spending evenings together, in a brotherly-sisterly fashion. Then, overnight, it became a nightmare to Sara, the kind where you find yourself cornered, terrified, powerless to do anything except wait to see what happens.

And what had happened was that Karen had stolen Joe, the way she had stolen as all the others. Only the others hadn't mattered enough for Sara to fight back. But this time, she was going to fight. Joe still cared; she knew he did.

Remembering and planning in a half-conscious way, sleep didn't come. The night nurse made her last round and dimmed the lights. It must have been quite late when Bill slipped in, closing the door tightly behind him. Sara wondered how he had gotten in without an attending nurse.

"It took some maneuvering," he grinned, pulling up a chair and lighting a cigarette, "but I thought there might be something you wanted to talk over."

"No," she said sharply. "No, there's nothing I want to talk over. What about the X-rays?"

"Negative."

His steady gaze made her move restlessly under the white spread. It made her say against her will, "Don't bother thinking about Joe and Karen. It's just one of those things."

"Sara," Bill said taking one of her hands in

his, "don't bottle it up. If you won't talk it over with me, then cry it out. Beat the pillows with your fists. Do anything! But get it out of your system."

She laughed at him. It wasn't a very convincing laugh. And because it wasn't convincing, she added, a little cruelly, "Since when did you take up the practice of psychoanalysis? I liked you better when you took care of physical hurts."

"Sometimes the two go together," he said. "You know that."

"All I know," she said, withdrawing her hand from his, "is that I want to go home, to Karen's and my apartment." *Back to the apartment where Joe will be running in and out at every opportunity, when Karen will be working in the hospital.*

Bill was shaking his head. "I want you here where I can keep an eye on you," he said. Then, after several other trumped up reasons, he gave the real one, "Seeing Joe and Karen together will be pure torment, Sara. Why don't you move out, get away from them?"

"No problem is ever solved by running from it," Sara replied, knowing it was the right answer to give him. And finally, and reluctantly, he agreed to release her the next day.

KAREN AND JOE CAME for Sara the next evening. Bill told them to let her sit up for a while.

"But put her to bed early," he said, going down in the elevator with them. And Sara felt more than a little lost when they left him standing in front of the hospital.

For the rest of the evening Karen was a most conscientious nurse. She allowed Sara all of five minutes in a living room chair before putting her to bed and closing the bedroom door. Through the plywood walls, Sara could hear her high-pitched voice, but caught none of Joe's low answers. But then Sara didn't need to hear replies to know that her sister was changing her plans to a quick, simple wedding—because she was afraid of waiting.

The last thing Karen said to Joe that night proved she was afraid of something else. "Joe," she said, "after thinking it over, I don't think Sara's living with us is such a good idea, after all."

Joe said something, and then Karen protested, "But—"

Then there was one of those agonizing si-

lences during which Joe kissed Karen, the way he used to kiss Sara.

Sleep came late to Sara. Then she woke up suddenly, not quite sure she had ever really been asleep. The hair at the nape of her neck was moist, the pillow damp. She didn't really go back to sleep. Somewhere in that black world between consciousness and sleep, she realized her back ached and that her legs felt a curious numbness. Through a haze she saw a traffic signal that kept changing from green to red, and a china platter which Joe mended over and over again because she kept on dropping it.

When Sara opened her eyes next morning, she couldn't move her legs. This she accepted with a strange calmness, as if it were happening to someone else, not herself.

But Karen didn't accept it calmly. Making a wild dash for the phone, she had Bill there in a matter of minutes. Then Sara could hear her phoning Joe, her voice rising in panic, asking him to stop in on his way to the shop.

When Bill came striding into Sara's bedroom, his face didn't hide the fear in him, as she knew he hoped it did. After a thorough examination, he settled himself into a chair by the bed, lighting a cigarette in that easy way he had with patients. For what seemed hours, he smoked in silence, searching her face.

Then he asked, "Why don't you tell me about it, Sara?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," she lied.

He knew she was lying, but he knew when to be silent, too. For a few minutes, he chatted about this and that, and then went out into the kitchen where Karen was getting breakfast. All Sara could hear was their cautious undertones. They were discussing her, of course. She wanted to scream out at them to stop. She wanted to throw something or smash something.

Joe came as Karen was removing the breakfast tray Sara hadn't touched. When he brushed past her and walked straight over to Sara, the look of dismay on Karen's face was almost funny.

Bill didn't waste any time bringing up the subject of Karen's and Joe's engagement, watching Sara's face as the three of them talked. He must have gotten the whole story from her sister.

Bill and Joe shook hands, and Bill asked, "When's the wedding to be, Joe?"

Joe's eyes bounced from Sara's to Karen's. "As soon as Sara is well enough to be maid of honor," he said firmly.

Bluntly, Karen asked, "When will that be, Doctor?"

Bill's reply was just as blunt. "When she's ready. Let's see if she's ready now."

Sara couldn't get angry at Bill's ridiculous psychological theories because he had such a sympathetic way about him. She allowed him to help her into her slippers, lift her from the bed.

Sara stood there, clinging to him for support, feeling absolutely nothing in her legs. They might as well have been made of wood.

"If I could only do it for you," Bill murmured softly, so that she was the only one who heard. His will for her to walk was so strong that for a moment it seemed she must.

Then Karen urged, "Please walk. If it's only one step!" She might as well have said: *Please walk, Sara. Walk so Joe and I can be married. Walk so you can be there to hear me say the words you should be saying.*

If it hadn't been for Bill's supporting arms, Sara would have crumpled in a heap at his feet. Slipping his arm around her, he helped her back into bed. Above his, "We will try it again tomorrow," she could hear her sister let out an explosive breath.

Suddenly, Sara turned on both of them. "You think it's all in my mind, don't you? Don't you! Why don't you come out and say so, Karen, the way Bill does?"

Vaguely she knew she was being unreasonable, including Bill in her resentment against Karen, but she didn't seem to be able to stop.

Karen might have been answering a naughty child. "The X-rays were negative, Sara."

Joe hadn't made a sound all this time. He just stood there, looking bewildered and anxious.

Sara said sharply, "Spinal X-rays can baffle specialists forever, and you know it!"

Her sister stared at her accusingly, and Sara stared back, defiantly, feeling sick and miserable and all mixed-up.

Karen started to say something else, but Bill took her by the arm, none too gently, and closed the door behind all three of them. Joe seemed to want to say something, but Bill ushered him out, too.

Sara turned to the wall. Tears would have been a relief, but none came. Only the weight was there—against her heart, crushing

out all feelings except utter gray despondency.

IN THE DAYS THAT FOLLOWED, Sara didn't really live. A dull weariness settled over her. More and more frequently she found herself wishing she could go to sleep forever. What was there to live for? One miserable day marched along behind another miserable day.

Bill provided the few bright spots. She couldn't have gone on if it hadn't been for him. He came every day, literally forcing the will in her to face another day, another sleepless night. There were more X-rays, specialists, consulting physicians, and everything Bill could think of. But Sara could tell he believed the answer lay in her own mind.

"Try to forget Joe," he said. And though the visits from Joe brought a kind of dull agony, she wanted and had to go on seeing him. But in reality his visits weren't a help. He didn't comfort her the way Bill did, but instead brought something more akin to balm for a deep wound that wouldn't heal.

Karen turned ashen the evening she came home early from the hospital and found Joe holding Sara's hand sympathetically. Later that evening they quarreled about it, and the day Joe bought a wheel chair for Sara, the rift really began. As he lifted her into it, carefully, Karen looked sick.

"You act as if she were going to be a permanent invalid!" she said in a shrill voice.

Joe lifted his head in shocked surprise. "Nothing of the kind. But she has to have some way of getting around the apartment, doesn't she? You said yourself you can't afford someone to stay with her."

The rift widened when Joe began dropping in from the shop to fix lunch for Sara. That caused the first bitter quarrel.

"What do you want her to do?" Joe shouted at Karen. "Starve? It's precious little attention you're giving her."

"And it's precious little attention you're giving me!" Karen shouted back at him in desperation. And for the first time, Sara began to wonder if it were possible Karen really loved Joe and that he loved her in return.

Then she began comparing Joe with Bill, unconsciously at first, but then deliberately. And one day she realized with a kind of wonder that it was Bill's footsteps that were bringing little tingles of excitement to her. His visits were the high spot of any day, not Joe's.

Soon she tried to persuade Karen and Joe

go ahead with their wedding plans. Her sister agreed eagerly, but Joe stubbornly refused. And another quarrel followed. Only this time it was more than a quarrel.

Joe's chin set, and he said, "We'll wait. Happiness can't be built on a setup like this."

Then came the night they quarreled so violently that Karen gave Joe back his ring. It was during a light, pre-spring snow, and Joe, Karen and Sara were watching the neighborhood children on their sleds. Karen was keeping alive an argument with Joe that had started during dinner.

She said, "I can't stand staying here night after night, never going anywhere. We haven't gone dancing since Sara's accident."

"Neither has Sara," Joe said quietly, "and she's not complaining."

"Sara! Always Sara! I'm sick of this whole, hopeless mess! And I'm sick of waiting to be married. I've waited as long as I'm going to. I want a home of my own." She glanced down the street at the playing children. "And I want it before I'm too old to have a family."

"Every woman wants a home," Joe said softly, looking at Sara.

"All right. All right!" Karen said. "Sara can live with us. I'll quit my job and take care of her."

It was the first time she had ever heard Karen make an unselfish offer. Sara couldn't believe it! And suddenly she was as sick of the whole hopeless mess as her sister was.

She choked out, "I have a little money saved. I'll go to a nursing home. Go ahead with your own lives—"

"Don't talk like that," Joe said gruffly. "And get the idea of a nursing home out of your pretty head. We're all going to keep working at this thing until you're back on your feet. Bill says it's only a matter of time and love."

"Bill says! A lot he's doing about it!"

Sara could have slapped Karen for talking that way about Bill.

Karen's voice rose in panic. "It's been days and days, and Sara hasn't taken one step by herself. She doesn't want to. She doesn't want to! If Bill weren't in love with her, he would admit she's doing it to hurt me. Can't you see, Joe? She hates me for taking you away from her. She means to ruin our lives!"

Joe's eyes blazed! Sara could see that he had to get away before he struck Karen. He grabbed for his hat on the way out.

"Here—" Karen tore at the diamond on her

finger, flinging it into his hand. "Take this with you. It doesn't mean anything. It never will until she's on her feet!"

The door slammed behind Joe with cold finality, leaving only the sound of Karen's violent sobs as she fled to her room.

Leaning her head wearily against the back of the wheel chair, Sara waited for the feeling of satisfaction that should have come knowing that Karen was finally receiving her just deserts. But outside, the night seemed blacker than any she had ever lived through.

Karen's racking sobs pounded like a pulse against her and a realization came slowly but persistently over her. She had never stopped loving Karen, as cruelly selfish as she had always been.

And all at once Sara wanted to see Bill. She wished he would walk in the door. She would talk to him now, tell him everything, and even admit why she hadn't wanted to walk. She had known that Joe would never suspect her motives. He was a factual man. To him life was like precision tools, with all parts fitting. All he could see was a girl in a wheel chair, a broken platter that hadn't been put back together, and nothing anyone could

(Continued on page 104)

Orchid

by Alma Robison Higbee

**Cold and lonely blossoms
With never a fragrant breath,
You make me think of jungles
Dark with death.**

**For your brittle petals
One pays a bitter price,
Surely God mislaid your seedlings
In paradise.**

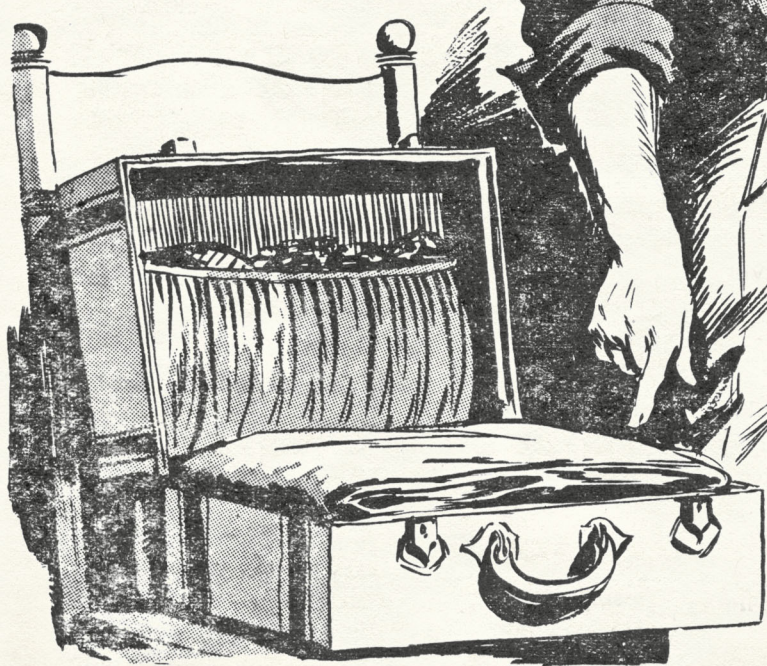
**Your contraband a question
But let the answer go;
One sent me red carnations
With a silver bow.**

LOVE'S SHINING BEACON

IT HAD BEEN a brave try, living on a wind-swept rocky island as the wife of a lighthouse keeper. But Terry Daniels knew she was licked.

She couldn't take any more of the bleekness, the howling winds, the screeching night birds, the raucous sea lions and killer whales that surrounded the rock-bound coast. She couldn't take any more of the confinement, the narrowness of the life, and Sue and Bing Olson, the MacBrides and the seven unmarried men, who composed the personnel on the island.

But most of all she couldn't bear the deafening foghorn that often blew for days on end. And—she had to face it at last—she couldn't take any more of Rush, her husband of a year.



Terry dreaded this final show-down.

By Frances Youlin McHugh



*Terry's husband was more interested in
running his lighthouse than seeing the
light in her eyes.*

If he'd only get upset about something once in a while. If he'd only try to understand how she felt about it. To him it was one big lark. He took his work seriously, but he never seemed to mind the hardships, the way she did.

He might have minded the first year, but after they were married and she was with him, everything was wonderful.

Terry was desperately ashamed that she couldn't feel the same way. At first just being with Rush had been enough. But now he was always so busy, that even the few hours they were together each day didn't seem the same.

Lately she felt so edgy that everything got on her nerves. She hated nagging wives but that was what she'd become.

After a three-day honeymoon, he'd brought her here to the rocky island, thirty miles from San Francisco, out in the open ocean.

She'd joined the other two wives gladly and tried to fit in. But soon she knew it was hopeless. All she wanted now was to get back to dry land and civilization, where people lived like people, not like exiles.

She saw Rush coming over from the shack where he'd been on duty for six hours, from midnight to six in the morning.

Hurriedly she shoved her partly packed suitcase under the bed. As yet she hadn't gotten up the courage to tell him she was leaving when the tender made its weekly visit to bring supplies.

Rush breezed into the small but prettily furnished apartment, which was in the house they shared with the Olsons.

"Hi, light of my life," he said with a grin. She clenched her hands. "Hello," she said tonelessly.

He swung her off her feet and kissed her. "Been thinking of you for the last six hours," he told her.

She wrenched herself away from him. "You have not! You've been thinking of radio beams and beacons and electronics, and loving every minute of it!"

He grinned again. "Sure I have. And I do love every minute of it. But I also love you."

She turned away and went into the kitchen to fix his breakfast. His tall leanness, his short clipped red hair, his eyes of bright blue, did things to her even now.

A sudden fierce wind rushed at the white frame house and seemed bent on its destruc-

tion. The windows rattled and a door banged.

"Storm coming up," Rush said, standing in the doorway watching her.

She didn't answer. She couldn't bear another storm on this ocean-swept rocky island, especially since the foghorn began to moan.

She slammed a pan on the stove but no one could hear it. The Olsons couldn't even hear their baby crying when the darn thing was going. Everyone had to yell at each other to be heard.

She yelled at Rush, "I hate this place! It's driving me crazy!"

"Two eggs'll be enough, if we have enough to last until the boat comes," he yelled back.

She opened her mouth to yell, but she knew he wouldn't be able to hear her.

They ate their breakfast in silence. It was useless trying to out-shout the foghorn.

After breakfast Rush went to bed for some sleep and Terry did some washing. As she was hanging it on the folding dryer in the kitchen, Sue Olson came in the back door.

"Looks like rough weather ahead," she yelled with a wide smile.

Sue was pretty and blonde and always happy. The only thing that really bothered her was when the weather was too bad for the supply boat to get to the island with milk and food for her baby.

Terry had become jealous of Sue lately. She almost hated her for always being cheerful. Also she'd heard rumors to the effect that Rush used to be in love with Sue, until she turned him down in favor of Bing Olson. But of course Rush had never said anything about this to her.

Rush had taken Bing home to Los Angeles when they were on liberty and had introduced him to Sue, his next door neighbor. It had been love at first sight with Sue and Bing and they'd married after only a couple of meetings. When the two boys had been assigned to the same duty on Sea Breeze Island, it had been rather strange for Rush, seeing Sue married to his best friend.

Then, on one of his eight-day liberties from the island, Rush met Terry.

IT HAD HAPPENED early one foggy morning in San Francisco. Terry was out early walking her Great Dane, when Rush turned a corner and nearly tripped over them. To save him from falling, she'd grabbed his arm. Then they'd stood perfectly still and looked at each other.

Terry had her short brown hair up in pin curls and a scarf was tied around it turban fashion. Her violet-tinted gray eyes were still heavy with sleep, and she knew she must look a sight.

"I'm sorry," she said, after a moment.

Rush grinned. "Why be sorry? I enjoyed it."

The Great Dane sniffed at him and he patted her head. She didn't like too many people outside the family, but she seemed to adore this tall lanky red-headed sailor.

Terry had said, "Well, I guess I'll be going."

"I was thinking about a cup of coffee," Rush added quickly. "How about joining me?"

Terry hesitated. "Oh, I'm afraid I couldn't. Besides there's no place near here. This is a residential district."

Rush glanced around but all he could see was fog. "Then I'm lost. I couldn't sleep so I decided to take a walk. Guess I got farther from my hotel than I realized."

Lady, the Great Dane, gave a friendly bark and licked Rush's hand. Then she stood up on her hind legs and tried to kiss his face.

Rush laughed and braced himself against the weight of the huge dog. "I'm glad to see one member of the team knows how to treat a sailor in a strange port," he said.

Terry laughed. "How about coming home with me for breakfast?" Mother and Dad will be up by now. They'd love to have you.

Rush grinned. "Thanks," he said. "I'd sure like to come. I'm from Sea Breeze Island."

"The lighthouse?"

"That's right."

They were walking along together through the fog, Lady straining at the leash and leading the way.

"It must be terrible exciting to live in a lighthouse," Terry said a little breathlessly.

"It's not bad. We have fun. But we don't actually live in the lighthouse itself. There are about twenty buildings on the island. There are ten of us. We unmarried men live in a barracks. One couple lives in a two family house, the other half of which is empty and Mac, the Chief Boatswain's Mate, and his wife live in a little five room house."

Terry smiled warmly at him.

When they arrived at the house her mother and father welcomed Rush quickly and whole-heartedly. He kept them entertained with stories about the life on Sea Breeze Island and made it sound very exciting and

romantic. And so three liberties later, he and Terry were married. But when she went back to the island with him, she found a very different kind of life than she expected.

To begin with, it had taken them two days to land, because of rough weather. That meant that Rush would have to deduct those two days from his next liberty. Finally, when the tender was able to get them near shore, they were put into a small boat loaded with supplies. Then a platform was lowered from a boom arm and they were snatched up as the boat heaved to, and several sailors had to haul them onto a concrete platform high above the crashing surf and the raucous sea lions that seemed to be waiting for them to fall in.

Terry was shaking with fright when she finally reached her new home. She wasn't afraid of the water, but she didn't relish the idea of being dashed against the rocks.

But she felt somewhat better when Sue and Bing, George MacBride, called Mac, his wife Martha, called Ma, and the sailors, welcomed her with open arms.

In a loud booming voice Mac said, "We're sure glad to have you. It may be a little rough at first but we'll all try to make you happy. And if there's anything you don't like, come and tell me, and I'll see what I can do about it. Ma here, is a good one to tell your troubles to if it's just woman stuff."

Martha MacBride, a short woman with a jolly face, hugged her and said, "We're going to get along just fine, honey. You'll brighten things up a lot."

Bing, tall and slender, shook hands with her and grinned. "No wonder Rush went overboard for you. You're sure whistle bait. Glad to know you, Terry. Sorry we couldn't get to the wedding."

But Sue's welcome was a bit more reserved than the others. When introduced, Sue looked her over and smiled. But Terry felt there was a chill in her words.

"Hi, there," she said. "Welcome to the end of the world."

The two girls looked at each other and right then and there Terry had the feeling that Sue had felt she was competition. Before Terry had arrived, Sue had all the attention and she loved it.

But Terry was also pretty and once she arrived on Sea Breeze she never wanted for someone to talk to. There was always Rick, the tall ex-football player, who liked to tell

her about all the games he'd won for his team. And there was Knox Rogers, the boy from New York, who missed the bright lights. And all the other coast guardsmen who suffered from periodic spells of loneliness, were anxious to talk their troubles over with her.

Rush didn't seem to mind her talking to the other boys, or even dancing with them. If Rush had shown the slightest signs of jealousy, she wouldn't have felt so deserted. But once he married her Rush seemed to stop worrying about her, and let her take care of herself.

Having been the only child Terry was used to being taken care of. But Rusty seemed to take her for granted, now that he was married to her.

But, it seemed he always had time to do things for Sue, and when Bing was on watch or working on various jobs, Sue usually managed to find something for Rush to fix right away.

And they always seemed to have things to talk over. Terry hadn't really minded this, until she noticed that Bing was annoyed by these private jokes.

IN SPITE OF THIS, Terry tried to be friends with Sue. She spent afternoons helping her with the baby and talking to her about Rush.

But soon she noticed that whenever Sue spoke of Rush she always did so in connection with herself: "Rush and I were always paired off in high school. Rush's mother and my mother just took it for granted we'd get married. Our folks were furious when I didn't marry him, but I hear Rush's folks thought you were a sweet little thing."

Terry had only met Rush's parents at the wedding and she'd thought they were darlings. If they had any regrets about his choice they didn't show it. And Rush's father and her father hit it off wonderfully, because they both were lawyers. Their mothers also had liked each other and were friends immediately.

But Sue continued making barbed remarks, and one day Terry, goaded beyond endurance, asked, "Why didn't you marry Rush?"

Sue's cheeks became a deep pink. "Well, I guess I didn't feel that way about him in the final analysis. I guess we got too used to each other, living next door and everything. It wasn't like Bing and me. We met, we looked at each other and—Bing!"

Terry didn't think it was funny. She didn't even smile. She said, "That's the way it was with Rush and me. I guess you only meet one person in your lifetime that hits you like that."

After that afternoon she avoided long chatty sessions with Sue.

Then one night, when Rush was on watch, Terry had become frightened and decided to go over to the shack and sit out his watch with him. Seeing her go out from an upstairs window, Sue had called, "Better take a flash light with you."

So she'd gone back and gotten one. But she'd no sooner left the house than she was immediately bombarded by thousands upon thousands of screeching night birds. She fought them off as best she could, whanging at them with the lighted flashlight. But the more she battled them the more they swarmed about her until she was so terrified she couldn't even call for help.

Fighting desperately she managed to run over to the shack, and when she burst in, crying hysterically, Rush grabbed the light from her hand and snapped it off.

"You little fool!" he cried. "Don't you know better than to use a light? That's what attracted them. They're bad enough in the dark but if anyone so much as lights a match, he takes his life in his hands."

Terry sank down on a chair and sobbed until Rush came and took her into his arms and soothed her.

When she was able to stop crying she said, "Sue told me to take the flashlight."

Rusty gave her a surprised look. "Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure."

He didn't answer for a moment. Then, shaking his head, he said, "You must have misunderstood her. Sue knows better than that."

But Terry knew she hadn't been mistaken about Sue's advice. The night was clear and the foghorn was silent, so she'd heard her words quite distinctly.

After that, Sue never tried anything vicious, but she never failed to goad Terry about being over-sensitive.

But the island was too small to bring a feud off that sort out into the open. So Terry had kept it to herself. And Rush was too busy to notice. Or if he did, he didn't attach any importance to it.

And so, after a year, Terry had enough.

Bing and Rush still had another year in the Coast Guard and would probably have to spend it here on the light because of their knowledge of electronics. After the year was up Rush would go to college to get his engineering degree. And when that time came, the Olsons and the Daniels would separate. But Terry couldn't wait that long. After the next boat arrived and she left on it, she'd never see Sue or the island again.

But to avoid suspicion, Terry carried on the pretense of being friends with her. And when Sue yelled, "Going to the movie show tonight?" Terry nodded. She might as well go. Maybe Rush would go with her. He didn't have the watch tonight. But she hated the movies lately, because they showed people all dressed up in evening clothes and having fun in a civilized manner. She'd forgotten what it was like to have fun.

RUSH SLEPT until early afternoon, and then she gave him his lunch. While they were eating she thought he watched her covertly.

She wondered if he'd discovered the partly packed suitcase beneath the bed. But it was probably just her guilty conscience.

When he left to go out and help with some work that had to be done before dark, he came to her and taking her face in his strong hands, kissed her lips tenderly. Then, close to her ear he asked, "Anything wrong?"

She shook her head but an achey lump came into her throat.

"Sure?" he asked and searched her eyes.

She shook her head again.

"Why don't you go over and stay with Sue this afternoon? Or go over and see Ma? Or take a walk around the island before it starts to rain. Rick's off duty until six. He'll go with you."

She pulled away from him, wanting, yet hating his nearness. He treated her like a child who needed a baby sitter!

When Rush went out, the ache in her throat was too much to bear. Rushing upstairs to the bedroom she flung herself on the bed and sobbed.

When her emotional storm had spent itself she pulled the partly packed suitcase from beneath the bed and finished packing it. It was Saturday, and the tender would be out Tuesday, weather permitting.

She made the bed and tried to keep herself busy all afternoon. With the storm

brewing, all the boys were preparing for it, scurrying around from one building to another. But Sue was ironing. She could hear the iron as it banged down on the board. Sue was so full of vitality she banged everything.

Martha Mac spent her spare time baking pies and cakes which she distributed around, especially to the barracks. Somehow Terry hadn't found anything to take up her spare time. She wasn't much of a cook and she didn't have a baby to take care of—yet.

But this afternoon she did make some biscuits and a meat loaf and when Rush came in for dinner she had everything ready. She even took her best blue dress from the packed suitcase, and put it on. She'd brushed her hair until it gleamed and had arranged it back from her face, the way Rush liked it. Why she was making all these concessions when it no longer mattered whether or not Rush approved of her looks, she didn't know.

When Rush returned, the foghorn was still moaning and the wind howling. The dusk had fallen early and the rain was beginning to come in gusty sheets. The light had been turned on and its long penetrating beam swung round and round, warning the ships and planes of danger and telling them where they were, in case they were lost.

"Want to go over and see the movie tonight?" Rush called as he hung his wet slicker in the closet.

Terry nodded and began putting the dinner on the table while he went upstairs to change his clothes.

Then, like a bolt of lightning it struck her. She'd forgotten to hide the suitcase after taking the dress out of it. She'd left it open on a chair.

She ran upstairs, hoping Rush had gone into the bathroom first and she'd have time to snap the bag shut and put it away before he saw it.

But she was too late. He was standing there, looking down at the packed suitcase.

Her movement at the door must have attracted his attention because the foghorn was making too much noise for him to have heard her footsteps.

He looked at her mutely. Their eyes met and he pointed to the suitcase.

She nodded, feeling suddenly faint. She'd dreaded this final showdown, when she'd have to tell him she was leaving.

He said something, and she couldn't hear him. But from the movement of his lips

she guessed he'd asked her if she were going home. Living for such long periods of time with the foghorn moaning, they had become quite adept at lip reading.

He came over to her. "Anything wrong with your folks?" he yelled.

She shook her head.

"You sick or something?"

She shook her head again.

"Fed up, maybe?" His blue eyes were beginning to look worried.

She nodded and tears spilled from her violet-tinged eyes and ran down her cheeks.

He took her into his arms and put his cheek against hers. "You take things too seriously, honey," he said close to her ear. "You ought to be more lighthearted, like Sue. She—"

She pushed him away. "I hate Sue!" she screamed at him. "Hate her, do you hear? I wish she'd married you, instead of Bing! Then I'd never have met you!"

His face was white and his lips tightened. Flashing lights seemed to snap on in his blue eyes.

"So that's the way it is?" he cried, his broad chest was heaving like an angry wave in a storm. "You just married me for the adventure of coming out here to the light-house, and then when you got here you found it wasn't as much fun as you'd thought it was going to be. And you resent Sue because she's a good sport and can take it!"

Her right hand came up and hit his left cheek with a stinging blow. For a frightening moment they stood glaring at each other.

She knew he had the kind of quick temper that went with his red hair, when sufficiently aroused, but few things annoyed him to that extent. Now, his face white, except for the red imprint of her hand, he stood with his hands clenched at his sides.

"Okay! Run home to your mama," he yelled. "We need women with guts out here!"

With a gasp she turned and ran down the stairs and out of the house, slamming the door behind her.

INSTANTLY THE RAIN whipped her clothes into streaming soggy rags. She ran blindly, not knowing where to go. There were no refuges on the rocky island for frustrated, unwanted wives. And she didn't want to go to the Mac's and get them all upset. And obviously she couldn't go to the barracks and tell the single boys her troubles.

Then she thought of the tool house. She could stay there until Rush had gone to the movie. Then she'd go back, and by the time he came in to sleep, she'd be in bed. And even if she weren't asleep, she'd pretend to be.

When she was there a few minutes Mac came in to get some tools.

When he snapped on a light and saw her, wet and sobbing, he said, "Well, well! What's the matter?"

He was a kindly man, homely, but with a likeable face. His short brown hair stood up on his head in a rather porcupinish manner and his face, arms and hands were covered with freckles.

He came and sat down beside her. "Had a fight with Rush?" he asked his voice booming out loud enough to be heard even above the moan of the foghorn.

She nodded.

"First one?"

"First serious one."

He shook his head. "That's too bad. But it'll blow over, just like this storm will."

"No, it won't! I'm going home Tuesday when the tender comes out."

"Good idea. Little vacation'll fix you up fine."

"But I'm not coming back!"

He didn't say anything for a while, then he took her hand and patted it. "Think you're different from Sue and my wife?" he asked.

She nodded. "They've got guts. They can take it. I can't!"

He kept patting her hand. "They couldn't always," he confided.

She looked up at his face and he smiled at her.

He said, "Martha left me three times when we first came out here. And Sue left Bing and was sure she wasn't ever coming back. But that was when her baby was coming and she was kind of jittery."

Terry was letting the tears run down her face and sniffing like a child.

Mac took his handkerchief and wiped her eyes and face, saying, "Blow."

Then he asked, "You and Sue don't get on too good, do you?"

She shook her head.

He nodded. "Thought not. Sue's all feline but she's a good kid. She makes Bing happy and that's what counts most. If a wife makes her husband and kids happy, nothing else matters."

He gave her a searching look. "You aren't going to have a kid, are you?"

She began to cry again. "I don't know."

"Rush know?"

She shook her head.

"Don't you think you'd better tell him?"

"Not now. He hates me. I've made a mess of everything. He'll be glad to get rid of me."

Mac stood up. "I'm not so sure about that. Takes more than you've done to make a man hate his wife."

He began collecting his tools and when he had them assembled, he said, "Better get back home now. This storm isn't getting any better. Or would you like to go over and stay with Martha?"

"No, thanks. I think I'd better go home."

She left the shed with him and he watched her until she'd reached her door.

But when she got there, Rush had gone, and the dinner was ruined. The meat was cold and the biscuits, which had been in the oven, were burned to hard black discs.

She turned off the oven, took off her wet clothes and put on slacks and a sweater. Then she cleaned up the ruined meal. After that she went to bed. She didn't want to go over to the movie, and Rush didn't come back to take her.

She dreaded seeing him when he came home. But maybe he wouldn't come until morning. Maybe he'd stay in the barracks, or take someone's night watch, just to keep away from her.

But he did neither of these things. He came in about eleven. She pretended to be asleep and he moved around quietly so he wouldn't disturb her. And in almost no time at all she could tell by his regular breathing that he was asleep.

But with the foghorn bellowing, she couldn't sleep. Nor would Rush sleep for long. On stormy nights like this, none of the men slept soundly for more than short periods. And Rush was naturally restless, getting up frequently to be sure the light was working.

AT TWO, the alarm gong sounded, clanging loudly.

Instantly Rush was on his feet. Then the phone rang.

When he finished talking, Terry sat up in bed and snapped on a light. "Who was that? And what's wrong?" she asked, trembling with nerves and apprehension.

"Bing. The lead-in wire from the radio-beacon antenna has been carried away. We're off the air and a troop ship from Korea is due, not to mention other planes and ships that may be depending on us in this storm. Bing says he tried to lower the antenna so he could rig a new lead-in wire, but the pulleys are rusted to the mast."

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

Fastening the last button he snapped, "Fix it of course!"

"But you can't go up that pole in this storm and in the dead of night!"

"Who says I can't?" He started down the stairs but she was after him, clutching at him as he reached the front door.

"Rush, please! You'll be killed!"

He pulled away from her. "What do you care?" he yelled and ran out.

With her heart pounding she ran back upstairs and threw on slacks and sweater over her pajamas. Then she ran downstairs to the hall closet where her raincoat was and out into the dark and treacherous night. It was too stormy for the birds, but the wind was so strong she was afraid she'd be blown down on the rocks.

As she neared the antenna pole she saw Rusty start shinnying up. It was sixty-five feet high and she knew only too well how slippery it must be. She could hear it creak in the forty-mile wind and she held her breath as she saw it sway.

The other men were hurrying about doing necessary jobs, but no one paid any attention to her. Sue and Martha were probably home, calmly worrying about their men, while she was out in the storm making a fool of herself.

She stood staring up at Rush. He was at the top of the pole, holding on for dear life. Directly below him were the jagged rocks, waiting for him, while the angry surf held out its open arms ready to receive whatever came its way. Rush moved slowly to the antenna and she saw him reach out carefully and cut it. He was shaken as the wire snapped, and Terry herself felt the impact, inwardly. She started to rush to him as he slid down the pole, but he was up and away the minute he grabbed some new wire.

The rain was coming in sheets now, as he began his ascent up the pole for the second time. Once more he was on his terrible perch, battling the wind and time for his life. The minutes seemed like hours before

(Continued on page 106)

Come into the Kitchen

With The **AUTHORS!**

By ALMA PORTEGAL

Living in the exotic surroundings of San Francisco, has given Lucinda Baker a rather cosmopolitan outlook as far as cooking is concerned. And since this fabulous city is the United States' gateway to the Orient, it is only natural that her taste and culinary partiality would be for unusual dishes.

When I asked her what her favorites were, she replied:

Chinese cooking is almost a natural for anyone who has lived in and around San Francisco. My family and I have several dishes that are favorites, and this one probably heads the list.

SWEET AND SOUR PORK

- 2 small green peppers
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- 1 cup canned pineapple chunks
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 cups cooked diced pork
- cooked rice
- 3 tablespoons butter or oil
- ¼ cup vinegar
- 1 cup pineapple juice
- ½ teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
- 4 tablespoons brown sugar

First I remove stem and seeds from peppers and cut into small strips about 1 inch long. Melt butter, add green pepper strips and cook slowly about 5 minutes. Blend cornstarch and vinegar together, add pineapple juice, salt, and Worcestershire sauce and add to peppers. Add pork and pineapple and brown sugar and cook slowly, stirring constantly until juice thickens and mixture is hot and well blended. Serve with hot cooked rice.

Another Pork dish we're fond of is also Chinese in character. I like to make this dish when I have some left-over pork.

STRING BEANS WITH SLICED PORK

- 1 lb. boneless pork
- 1 tablespoon Sherry Wine
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- 1 lb. string beans
- ½ cup stock or water
- 1½ tablespoons soy sauce
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 2 tablespoons water
- 1 tablespoon cooking oil
- 1 teaspoon salt

Cut meat in thin 2 inch squares. Mix sherry, soy sauce, sugar, cornstarch, and 2 tablespoons of water, and let the pork stand in this while string beans, cut in diagonal inch strips, are cooking. Cook until tender, but crisp to the taste. Heat oil and sauté meat in this for a minute or so, then add marinade mixture, about one-half cup of vegetable water or soup stock, beans and salt. Then cook until hot and blended. Serve with crisp Chinese noodles or cooked rice.

If I'm having quite a few people in for the evening, I often make a

PORCUPINE BALL

- ¼ cup cottage cheese
- 1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
- 3 tablespoons finely chopped walnuts
- 3 tablespoons finely minced parsley
- 1 box short thin pretzel sticks
- 6 oz. cream cheese
- 1 teaspoon grated onion

Mix cheeses and grated onion plus Worcestershire sauce and cream well. Let stand in refrigerator for several hours to mellow and blend. Shape into ball and roll in nuts. Then sprinkle with parsley. Use more nuts if necessary to completely crust the ball. Place on pretty plate and stick pretzels, porcupine fashion, all over ball. Place additional sticks

around. Let your guests pull the sticks out. They'll come out coated with the cheese and make nice nibbling. Make this just before serving as the pretzels become limp if they stand around.

TOMATO BOUILLON WITH AVOCADO

Here's a quick put-together that always gets compliments and is amazingly simple to make.

Season a large can of tomato juice with a little Worcestershire sauce, salt, pepper, and garlic salt to taste. Then heat and serve piping hot adding a thin slice of avocado just before serving.

BARBECUED STEAK STRIPS

We like our meat on the spicy side, and this one's just right in flavor.

- 2 lbs. chuck or round steak
- 2 medium onions, thinly sliced
- 2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- ¾ cup boiling water
- 3 tablespoons fat
- 2 tablespoons vinegar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ¾ cup tomato catsup

Cut meat into three inch by one-half inch strips. Remove bones and fat. Brown strips in hot fat then transfer to a casserole. Add seasonings, catsup and water, and pour over the meat. Bake in a 300 degree oven for about two hours until meat is tender. Add some additional water if necessary. This serves 6 or more and is very nice with mashed potatoes.

As a change from meat, I sometimes make a fish dish.

SALMON ROLL

- 2 cup baking powder biscuit dough
- 1 tablespoon chopped parsley
- a can of condensed cream of mushroom soup
- 5 oz. can of salmon
- 1 tablespoon chopped onion

Roll out biscuit dough to an oblong. Mix salmon, free from bones and skin, with the parsley and onion. Spread on dough, being careful not to get it too close to edges. Roll up like a jelly roll and pinch the edges together to hold filling. Put on greased cooky sheet and form into crescent. Prick all over

with a fork. Brush lightly with milk or diluted egg yolk to give a nice topping. Bake in 400 degree oven for about 25 minutes. Serve in thick slices and serve well-heated cream of mushroom soup as a sauce, over it. This serves 6 or more.

When we are especially thirsty I often serve this drink.

ORANGE MINT DRINK

- 2 cups sugar
- handful of mint leaves
- 6 lemons
- 2½ cups water
- 2 oranges
- ginger ale

Dissolve sugar in water and bring to a good boil. Pour over mint leaves which have been slightly crushed. Add grated rind and juice of oranges and lemons. Let stand for several hours. Then strain and add about ⅓ cup to full glass of finely crushed ice. Fill remainder of glass with ginger ale. All our friends vote this the most refreshing drink they know of.

Californians all use lots of raisins, since they're grown here. But you might be very interested in this recipe:

RAISIN COCONUT PUDDING

- ½ cup shredded coconut
- 1 tablespoon melted butter
- 1 egg yolk
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1 cup raisins
- ½ cup bread crumbs
- 2 cups hot milk
- 1 egg white, stiffly beaten
- ¼ teaspoon salt

Add coconut, crumbs and butter to milk. Beat egg yolk slightly. Add sugar, salt and raisins, and add this to milk mixture. Cool, then fold in egg white. Pour into greased baking dish and bake in 375 degree oven for about 35 minutes until firm. This is nice both hot or cold, and can be given a little whipped cream for topping. Serves 4 to 6.

Though we like the unusual food, we all adore a truly American chicken salad. Everyone has their own favorite kind, so here's the one we call our own.

CHICKEN SALAD, SUPREME

- 3 cups diced cooked chicken
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice

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STOP- AND- GO



By
William
Fayr

HEART

It was just a case of simple arithmetic: One policeman plus his girl, divided by a rival, subtracted by a school teacher, and multiplied by danger, had to equal a happy ending.

ROD OWENS HESITATED at the entrance to Ware's Drug Store, wishing he didn't have to tell Cindy. Mentally squaring his shoulders, he opened the door.

Cindy was busy with a customer. She only had time for a glance at Rod, but her look was adoring and almost said: Good morning, darling. I'd kiss you now if I could.

Knowing how a caught traitor must feel, Rod sat down at the soda fountain and asked Polly Adams to bring him some coffee. When it came he swiveled around on the stool, and watched Cindy fondly. She was small, with dark hair—much too pretty for those second graders she taught. Her pupils were much too young to appreciate her. But now she was away from them. She was on her Easter vacation, and helping her father run the store.

In a few moments she was free and joined him at the counter.

"Cindy, I can't take that scholarship," Rod blurted. "I want to stay here."

Cindy sagged as if she had been hit. Raggedly, she asked, "You want to stay here and be a policeman all your life when your tests showed such wonderful promise?"

Rod tried to cloak the firmness of his words with soft tones. "Maybe those occupational tests you're so crazy about do show I'd be a whiz at chemistry. But I don't want to be

a chemist. I like being a policeman. Right here in Coquina Beach."

"But, Rod, that scholarship took all kinds of string-pulling, and it's such a marvelous chance. With your showing on the tests, I'm sure you'd be rich and famous."

"The only thing I want that I don't have is you, Cindy. Let's get married right now. I can get a week off and we can spend the rest of your vacation in Miami and the Keys."

Cindy's lip stopped trembling and there was frost in her voice. "I'm not so sure I want to marry a man as stubborn as—In fact, I know I don't." Her words were tumbling out. "Go back to playing cops-and-robbers!"

Rod got to his feet, and looked down at the small furious face. "Ever since you got home from college with those fancy tests, you've been trying to make me over, Cindy. Maybe you ought to forget being a school teacher for a while and think about being a wife. We'd both be a lot happier."

"Oh, no, we wouldn't." Cindy twisted at the diamond ring on her third finger. "Here. You better get your money back on this. If you're going to be a dumb cop all your life, you'll need it."

Rod stared at her for a long moment, while the veins throbbled in his forehead. His voice was dangerously low as he finally said, "All right, Cindy, if that's the way it is . . ."

Officer Rod Owens stood at the intersection opposite the drug store across the street. It was a nice looking store, with big, plate-glass windows, and they made the best

"Did those occupational tests tell you how I'd be as a husband?" he asked.



milk shakes in town. But Cindy was still working there.

Other intersections in Conquina Beach needed traffic control, but this was the **one** he had to draw. If he as much as warned a careless driver, **Cindy** would see it. She wouldn't say anything, because they weren't speaking any more, but there'd be that look. *So you're playing cops-and-robbers again.* That's what the look would say.

Resignedly, Rod stepped into the thickening morning traffic and, with whistle and up-raised hand, began to assist the traffic light in keeping traffic moving.

In a few moments Cindy was pushed into the back of his mind. Rod was fascinated by all kinds of police work and he didn't even mind directing traffic. Of course, he was looking forward to a promotion where he could wear plain clothes. It would be more interesting and surely Cindy would take a different attitude when he no longer had to wear a uniform. Rod brushed a speck of dust off his natty trousers. Although Cindy didn't like it, he was darn proud of his uniform.

THE YELLOW WARNING LIGHT blinked on. Rod blew his whistle and turned as the light changed to red. One stream of traffic surged forward and another halted abruptly. All except one ancient sedan which chugged serenely forward, disregarding both the red light and the cars coming from the other direction.

With a guilty glance in the direction of the drug store, Rod blew his whistle and stepped in front of the battered sedan. It screamed to a halt and a wide-eyed woman leaned out the window and stared up at Rod. A blue hat with a red feather rode atop her gray hair.

"Stay where you are, Ma'am," he ordered detouring the traffic around her vehicle. When the light changed again, he directed the woman to drive across the intersection and stop at the curb. A Maryland license, he noted. Tourist!

"Driver's license, please," he said politely. While she rummaged in her purse, he asked, "Didn't you see the light, Lady?"

"Of course I didn't see it, young man," she snapped. "Think I'd drive right out in front of those cars if I had?"

"Some do," Rod replied mildly. He read the information on the license rapidly. Her name was Elizabeth Digby. She was sixty-one and

she was a school teacher. He blurted out, "School teacher?" questioningly.

"And what's wrong with that?" she demanded.

"Nothing, I'm sure," Rod answered. Or was there? If Cindy weren't a school teacher, would she be so busy with her tests and plans that had nothing to do with police work? They'd grown up together, and had been planning on marriage since they were ten. The other couples they knew were married and raising kids already. Yes, maybe there was something wrong with being a school teacher.

"The trouble with you," Mrs. Digby was saying, "you didn't like school teachers when you were a boy and you haven't grown up yet."

That same old phrase, "You haven't grown up yet." How often Cindy had thrown that at him when he patiently tried to convince her he honestly liked being a policeman.

"Tell you what, lady, I really should book you. But you see that drug store over there. It's a nice place, air-conditioned. You go over there, get some paper, and write 'I promise not to go through red lights' five hundred times. Or I'll take you to the station, if you prefer.

Mrs. Digby's blue eyes were cold. "Your development is even more arrested than I thought." She opened the car door. "You'll find me at the drug store."

Rod, a grin on his face, went back to his place in the intersection. Cindy, of course, would find out Mrs. Digby was a school teacher and she'd be furious all over again. But sometimes a man had to fight with whatever weapons were handy.

The good feeling lasted only a few minutes. It ended abruptly when Steven Spack drove past, waved languidly at Rod, and parked in front of the drug store.

Rod absently let a car make a prohibited left turn while he considered the new development. Steven, as well as being an assistant city counselor, thought he would make Cindy a much more suitable husband. And maybe Cindy thought so too, Rod mused grimly. She often cited him as an example of an aggressive young man who knew what to do with his abilities.

Rod fervently hoped there wouldn't be any accidents or bad jams while he was away from his post, as he started toward the drug store.

Steven was at the soda fountain. Cindy's lovely face was close to his, and she was speak-

ing in a low voice. When she saw Rod she jumped up, her dark curls dancing.

Mrs. Digby sat at a booth, her mouth grimly set, while her pencil moved swiftly across a tablet.

Cindy disregarded his greeting. Her brown eyes showed angry flecks. "Mrs. Digby told me about you. I'm glad I found out what you really think about school teachers."

"Wait, honey—"

Steven cut in. "That sort of thing is illegal, Owens. I've advised Mrs. Digby to file a complaint, but she doesn't want to. You'd better tell her she can go."

Cindy's voice snapped like a whip. "Now I know why you like being a policeman so much. You love ordering helpless old women around."

Mrs. Digby piped up unexpectedly. "Just who are you calling a helpless old woman? I can look after myself, young lady." She thrust several pages at Rod. "Here's my home work, Officer. May I go now?"

Rod nodded mutely. Mrs. Digby pulled at her hat until the feather rode at a jaunty angle. Then she swept toward the door. "Good-bye, Officer. I assure you, when I come back through Coquina Beach, I won't pass any red lights."

Steven said severely, "You were lucky, Owens. If that lady had preferred charges, you'd be off the force."

With a wry grin, Rod looked at Cindy. "You'd like that, I guess."

Her jaw stiffened. "What happens to you is of no concern to me, Mr. Owens. And by the way, I'm sure you realize by now that I won't be going to the Easter dance with you."

To cover his dismay, Rod turned and asked Polly Adams to get him a glass of water. Their date was made so long ago, he was sure it was a chance to make up with Cindy. She'd probably have gone with him, if he hadn't pulled that corny school teacher gag.

"You'll go with Steven, I suppose?"

Cindy glanced uncertainly at the lawyer and nodded. Steven brightened. "With me, of course, Owens. Aren't you supposed to be directing traffic out there?"

Rod's hurt soon turned into anger and he retorted, "That's fine, Cindy. I wanted to take another girl, anyway. You saved me the trouble of telling you."

Cindy's eyebrows shot up. "Oh, really?"

"Yes, really." He looked at Polly, who was the other end of the fountain polishing

glasses. Her blonde head was bent over her tray, but Rod was sure she was listening.

Impulsively, he exclaimed, "I'm taking Polly Adams. Isn't that right, Polly?"

Polly's pony tail hairdo twitched as she turned suddenly and straightened up. Her wide, blue eyes were doubtful. "Well, Rod—"

"Sure, you remember," Rod interrupted. "I asked you just a couple days ago. Don't tell me you forgot."

Polly's round, pretty face brightened. "Sure, I remember now. How could I forget that?"

Rod glanced at Cindy. She turned away contemptuously. If he had hurt her, she certainly wasn't showing it.

THE EASTER DANCE was one of the biggest annual social events in Conquina Beach. It took place each year, before the winter residents began leaving for their Northern homes, and it was somewhat in the nature of a farewell party for them.

Rod felt strange going with another girl. Ever since he and Cindy had been old enough to go anywhere, they had been attending the dance together.

The dance floor was crowded, but through a sudden rift he caught a glimpse of her, and wondered if she felt as strange being there with another man.

He missed a step and Polly winced as his foot came down on her toe. "I'm sorry, Polly," he said abjectly. "I wasn't thinking, I guess."

Her young face looked up at him wisely. "You were thinking, Rod. That's the trouble I saw her too."

Rod pulled Polly closer and made an effort to get his feet in time. Polly was a sweet, pretty kid and she deserved more fun than he was giving her.

"You're carrying a pretty torch for her, aren't you?"

Rod nuzzled her fine, bright hair with his chin. Polly had the utter frankness of the very young. "Yes, I'm afraid so," he admitted.

"Then why don't you let her make an educated man out of you? I can't see why you want to be a cop."

Rod stopped so suddenly that Polly stumbled against him. "How did you know that?" he demanded.

Polly massaged her stomach tenderly. "Everybody in town knows it. Say, put out your hand when you're going to stop like that, will you?"

"Okay, honey," Rod said affectionately and patted her shoulder approvingly. She was a good kid, one of the best, and she was giving him good advice. As she said, there wasn't anything to being a cop if he couldn't have Cindy. He could be happy doing anything, if they were together."

With resolution forming within him, he said, "I want to cut in on her. Can you manage by yourself for a few minutes?"

Polly gave him a pixie grin. "Just watch."

A few steps later they danced by a dark-haired teen-ager who nodded at Polly. A moment later the youth tapped him on the shoulder and Polly gave Rod an encouraging smile as the boy swept her away.

Rod moved hurriedly through the crowd to tell Cindy his decision before he changed his mind. All of a sudden he saw her, and moved swiftly to her side.

Steven scowled at Rod. "Cindy doesn't want to dance with you. Leave her alone."

"Please, Cindy." She moved away, but he followed her, aware of the heads turned to stare. "Remember, Cindy, we haven't missed one of these dances since we were kids. Just once, please."

She relented. "All right, to keep from having a scene."

Rod grinned at Steven's sullen look and whirled her away. But Cindy followed stiffly, refusing to fall into the old familiar pattern of his dancing. Then Polly went by dancing with a boy in a navy uniform, and Cindy asked coldly:

"Having fun with your new girl friend?"

"She doesn't seem to be missing you. Perhaps you ought to be protecting your interests."

"Let's quit fighting, Cindy. I've been miserable. Whatever you want, I'll do. If you think I'd make a good chemist, I'll be the best in the country."

"I don't care what—"

Rod shook her lightly.

She looked up and Rod saw that her lip was trembling. "Please, Rod. This is no place to talk."

"Later? After the dance?"

Polly came close to them again. Now she was dancing with Steven. With only a muttered word as an apology, Steven turned away from Polly and tapped Rod on the shoulder. Cindy slipped out of Rod's arms to meet him. Her lips soundlessly formed the words, "I'll see."

Polly smiled perkily and let Rod dance away with her. "I tried to keep him away from you," she said. But he's a little hard to handle."

THE ROOM SEEMED suffocatingly hot to Rod. "Let's go for a walk on the beach," he said. "I need to cool off."

Polly nodded in assent and they moved out on the veranda and toward the beach.

Still churning inside, Rod walked up the hard-packed sand with Polly's small hand tucked confidently in his. He was glad she didn't seem to want to talk. His brain was too confused to make sense out of anything.

After they had walked in silence they moved back to the beach pavilion. But the orchestra was taking an intermission. Not wanting to go back inside, they strolled across the tiled patio and stopped in the shadows of a palm tree. For a moment Rod stood there, staring out at the waves glinting in the moonlight, his arm around Polly. "Pretty, isn't it?" she whispered.

Rod thought of all the wonderful evenings he and Cindy had spent here watching the moonlight on the waves, and his arm involuntarily tightened around Polly. She responded to his pressure. Cindy was forgotten, as his lips sought hers and found them.

As from a long way off, he heard Cindy's contemptuous voice. "I see you've found your own level finally. A dumb cop finds his dumb blonde."

Rod, jolted back to reality, stared at Cindy. "Wait, honey. You don't understand."

"I understand perfectly. And if I never see you again, that will make me very happy."

Steven before turning to follow Cindy said, "You heard that, Owens. Don't annoy Miss Ware again, or you'll answer to me."

All Rod's frustration and confusion turned to sudden anger which exploded against Steven. Polly sensed what was coming and tried to hold him. Rod brushed her aside, took one swift stride, and his fist crashed solidly against Steven's jaw. The heavy-set lawyer fell backward and crashed to the ground. Rod, his head clearing, stared unbelievably at Sidney's prostrate body and then at the crowd starting to assemble. He tried to meet horror-filled eyes, but couldn't.

Steven opened his eyes. Raising his head, he looked warily at Rod. Polly was pulling at his arm. "Come on, Rod. We'd better get out of here."

But Rod didn't move. He looked at Cindy, his eyes pleading for her to understand and forgive. For an instant he thought there might be an answering flicker. Then, her chin high, she said, "Yes, you'd better leave before Mr. Spack decides to call one of your own precious policemen."

ROD STOOD UNDER a eucalyptus tree and looked at his intersection with distaste. The morning rush was over and the automatic traffic signal was adequate for the volume of traffic.

Without enthusiasm, he glanced at the occupants of every passing car. Two criminally-insane prisoners had escaped the night before in Miami, although they were expected to head for the other side of the state. Even the possibility that the fugitives might come through Coquina Beach didn't excite him. He no longer liked being a policeman. All the fun had gone out of it.

He raised his eyes toward the Ware Drug Store sign and knew the reason. His job had cost him too much. Because of his stubbornness, Cindy was completely lost to him.

Hardly being conscious of what he was doing, Rod found himself walking toward the drug store. This was the last day of Easter vacation. On Monday Cindy would be back at school teaching.

Polly smiled brightly as he entered and reached for a coffee cup. Rod sat down, looking around, but failed to locate Cindy.

"That torch you're carrying would light a football stadium," Polly said gaily. "Cindy ducked behind the prescription counter when you came in."

"Oh," Rod said lamely and sipped his coffee. Polly settled herself in front of Rod, her elbows on the counter, her pixie face only a foot or so from him.

"Why don't you relax, Rod. There are lots of other girls around. Some of them are pretty too."

Rod had to grin. "You're a monkey, Polly. Of course you're pretty. Very pretty."

A wise, slow smile spread over her face. "Gee, Rod, you really—"

"Polly!" Cindy spoke sharply. She had come from behind the prescription counter and stood only a few feet away. "You haven't finished the breakfast dishes yet."

Polly sighed elaborately and slowly started toward the sink.

"Your romances are your own business,

Mr. Owens," Cindy said severely, "but please don't interfere with our employees when they're working."

"Cindy, we shouldn't be fighting like this."

"Fighting? Mr. Owens, we're not fighting. I don't care what you do, as long as you don't waste our employee's time."

Polly smothered a giggle and Cindy swung furiously on her.

"Cindy—" Steven Spack opened the door and stood there.

Rod didn't finish what he'd started to say. Steven's jaw still showed the bruise made by Rod's fist.

"There's a manhunt on, Owens," Steven said. "Every officer should be on duty."

"Perhaps Mr. Owens finds it safer to be nasty to old ladies and citizens than try to capture a real criminal."

Rod stared at Cindy, hardly able to believe what he had heard. "Cindy, you don't—you can't—"

Steven held up his watch. "Owens, unless you're out of here in thirty seconds, I'm going to call your captain."

Rod glanced at Cindy. Her face was pale but her chin was held high. With the sour taste of defeat in his mouth, he put a coin on the counter and left. He hadn't even the heart to respond to Polly's impish wink.

Back on his corner, Rod's mind was in a maze of emotions. But one thing emerged clearly. Cindy had gone too far. His neck turned red with anger as he recalled how she taunted him in front of Steven.

She said she didn't care what he did. Well, that worked both ways. He was through trying to please her. Maybe he was through being a policeman too, at least in Conquina Beach.

But one part of his mind was still devoted to the escaped maniacs. There weren't many cars with just two men in them. A Cadillac whispered by, the uniformed chauffeur giving Rod a friendly nod. Behind the Cadillac a jalopy banged along, all its joints protesting. There was only an elderly woman in that.

Rod's eyes went to the jalopy and then he jumped and took a couple of steps into the street. Even as he moved, his belief turned into certainty. The gray-haired lady driving the relic was Elizabeth Digby, the school teacher from Maryland.

"Hi," Rod yelled, and waved. Elizabeth Digby turned her head slightly, looked at him, and then proceeded on. It was as if she had

(Continued on page 111)

PRODIGAL LOVER

By
Lucinda
Baker

THE NIGHTS WERE DIFFICULT for Eve even though a year had passed since she had known Jonathan was never coming home. She had moved seven hundred miles from the town where they had grown up, the town which was crowded with memories. Now she was making a place for herself as a model and designer of teen-age fashions in a smart Chicago shop. But when darkness came each evening, loneliness tortured her again.

It was more than loneliness in the usual sense, more than grief. It was an awful unfinished restlessness. Yet, she had never talked about it to anyone. Talking wouldn't have helped.

A wind from Lake Michigan blew icy rain against the windows of her North Side tower apartment. Each time the raw gusts came she shuddered, as if she were outside, facing their cruelty unprotected.

On such nights, at least she got a lot of work done, because she couldn't sleep. Now, she walked across the room, opened a neat sewing machine cabinet, and unfolded a long portable work table. A moment later she unrolled lengths of mist-pink tulle that was ready to be cut and turned into the full, whispering skirt of a gown she was designing.

She touched the soft pinkness tenderly. Each dress she designed was one she would have loved to wear dancing with Jonathan.

The doorbell chimed. Though she hurried to answer, she still moved with an inherent grace and dignity that made her small, slender figure seem more imposing than it really was. Above the sapphire velveteen of her housecoat her pale hair burned like a silver flame.

An Army sergeant stood outside her door.

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Two brothers—so utterly different—had a claim on Eve. The one she waited for never returned, and the one she detested came back to offer her his heart.

His khaki colored slicker still dripped rain, and little rivulets of water slid over his tanned skin. He was young, perhaps twenty-six, but his slanting smile and the light in his eyes had an ageless daring, a kind of challenge.

"Hello, Eve," he said, and when she stepped back, startled, he came in and took off his slicker. "How's every little thing?" he asked flippantly.

"Kim," Eve said. "Kim." She stared at him, her voice no more than a breath, her eyes darkening.

And then she felt a savage resentment toward life for what it had done to her and Jonathan. Kim had come back, but Jonathan was dead. He had been dead almost a year now, though her heart still tried not to believe it.

She had known, of course, that Kim was safe, though he had fought in Korea, too. She still got her home town paper every week, and there had never been any mention of his being wounded or killed.

Actually, Eve hadn't trusted herself to think much of Kim, because each time she did dark emotions rose in her and were unbearable. What she felt about Kim could not have been put into words.

No, you couldn't hate a man for not getting killed in a war. But you could be bitter, because someone like Jonathan, good and fine in every way, had to give his life, while a man like Kim, who was just the opposite, came home unscathed.

It was so horribly unfair.

And Kim had not changed. As he looked at her now, she knew he was just as he had

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"So it's still the same," Kim said.



always been—egotistical, irreverent, laughing at all that was decent, loving to shock people, loving danger, holding nothing sacred.

"I could use a drink," he said. "And I haven't had dinner. I had quite a time finding this plush apartment of yours. You're doing pretty well for yourself, aren't you?" As he spoke his eyes gleamed sardonically, as if he were implying that she'd done something wrong to get where she was.

Rage kept Eve from speaking. She started for the kitchen to make the coffee, moving a little unsteadily. She would have refused to talk to Kim, let alone give him anything to eat, if there hadn't been two facts she couldn't overlook.

The first reason was that he was Jonathan's brother. No matter what he'd done, no matter what a bad reputation Kim had, Jonathan had loved him. But Jonathan hadn't known that Kim had tried to make love to her.

The second reason she wouldn't send him away at once was that she had something to give him. She hadn't thought of it in months, but on Jonathan's last leave, he had given her a packet of old letters.

"I forgot to take them down to the safety deposit box," he had explained, "so you'll have to keep them, darling. They're letters and papers belonging to the first Jonathan Seabright, my ancestor, dating back to the early eighteen hundreds. Keep them for me. And if I shouldn't get back home, give them to Kim, will you? He doesn't show much interest in such things now, but some day he will."

Jonathan! How trusting he had been, always so sure that Kim was decent at heart. He had been so fine, he'd been incapable of seeing evil in others. He'd taken it for granted that, like him, they were good.

"I looked for you back home in Seabright," Kim said, after he lit a cigarette. "They told me the old town had gotten too quiet for you, that you were off to the city for more excitement."

EVE CLENCHED HER FISTS until the nails cut into her palms. "You didn't hear that, back home. I came to Chicago so I could find work as a designer and model, and because home held too many memories. I missed Jonathan too much," she finished stiffly.

"Still the faithful little fiancée, aren't you?" Kim observed, as if he were making fun of

her, as if he knew something about her that no one else knew.

Eve's face blanched as horror crept through her. Kim still remembered, obviously, that he had brought a secret nightmare into her life.

She said, trying to change the subject, "I have something for you—some letters Jonathan said to give you if—if he didn't come back."

She turned then to the task of preparing a meal for her unwelcome guest. But rebellion almost overwhelmed her, and made her actually ill. Her hands trembled, and her head hurt.

Kim was alive! Kim with his evil smile, his cock-sure manner, his crazy sense of humor to which nothing was sacred. Jonathan was dead!

Kim would probably go on spending his life as a rebel, a ne'er do well. But what wonderful things Jonathan would have done with his life, how many people he would have helped!

It was incredible that two brothers could have been so different. Jonathan, the eldest, had been tall, blond, and gentle, despite his deeply masculine, strong nature. He distinguished himself in both scholastic and athletic affairs in school and college. He had been an outstanding citizen as well, civic-minded and responsible. At twenty-eight, before he had gone to Korea, he had been a practicing lawyer, known all over the state for his achievements. Everyone said he was sure to be governor some day.

In contrast, Kim had been an eternal rebel. Five years younger than Jonathan, he was only of medium height, dark and wiry, though powerfully built. He'd done well in school, but he had never had Jonathan's extraordinary ability, and he had none of Jonathan's ambition.

All he had had, apparently, was a desire to shock people, in one way or another. He'd driven the fastest cars, gotten into the most scrapes, and dated the wildest girls. He'd taken job after job, tiring of them almost at once. He'd finished college, but it had taken five years simply because he'd neglected his work.

Everyone in town had always said it was too bad Kim would never be like his brother. Everyone knew Kim would never amount to anything, while they were sure Jonathan would distinguish himself.

Every girl in town had admired Jonathan,

and most of them had loved him at one time or another. When he had fallen in love with Eve, she'd felt thrilled and humble and grateful. It had seemed almost too wonderful to be true.

But Kim even tried to ruin that. The memory seared through her now in consuming violence. For a long time she had avoided it. Now, with Kim in the same room, she was at its mercy.

Several times, before Jonathan had gone away, Kim had kissed Eve against her will. Once at a dance, once at the local swimming pool, and once on a wintery evening when he'd come to her house on a flimsy excuse. And all three times he had kissed her as if he were challenging her to resist the thrill of it!

And each time, afterward, he'd asked, "You never reacted to Jonathan like that, did you, Eve? Why don't you admit it? Why not face it? You're marrying him because he's the best catch in town, and you'd be a fool not to. But I'm the one you really want."

Only Kim could have had such shocking conceit, only Kim would have tried to steal his brother's girl.

Eve closed her eyes against the memory. Because though she had never admitted it, though she had fought the knowledge, those kisses had stirred her. There had been no tenderness in them, only a frightening excitement, a thrill that seemed to rise as much from fury as anything else. Even the memory sickened her.

She was thankful that Jonathan had never suspected. She had never told him because she'd dreaded hurting him or worrying him in any way. And she had hated Kim so much she could not trust herself to talk about him. Some hatreds, like some loves, were too deep to put into words.

SHE SUCCEEDED NOW, at least, in getting her emotions under control. She decided she would be casually formal with Kim. She wouldn't tell him what she thought of him. Because he was Jonathan's brother she would give him his dinner and send him on his way. And she would give him the packet of letters.

"Where are you stationed now?" she asked politely.

"I'm on my way East to a new assignment at an Army school. I got home from Korea several months ago, and I've been at a base

in California. I've just finished a ten day furlough. I took my buddies back to have a look at my old home town. Now we're on our way East, as I said. We had a three-hour delay between trains and I knew you'd hate it if I didn't look you up."

He seemed to be laughing at her as he spoke, laughing at all that was decent and fine, as he always had. "After all, I'm Jonathan's brother."

Before she could make any comment, he went on, lightly, "You hate me because I didn't die instead of Jonathan. It would have been more fitting, probably. But you know what they say. The good die young."

"Eve's breath caught. "Kim, how can you be so flippant?"

He laughed at her. "I'm not flippant, baby. And though you may not admit it to yourself, you do hate me because I'm alive and Jonathan isn't. When I was home those few days I saw that. All of Jonathan's old friends look at me as if I'd betrayed them by living. A couple of them practically told me so to my face."

Then Kim's flippancy seemed to melt away, to be transformed into treacherous thoughtfulness.

"You're more beautiful than ever, aren't you, Eve? You'd really have made a lovely wife for a governor. By now Jonathan probably would have been on his way to something even higher than that."

As he spoke, Kim studied Eve's face, and the expression in his eyes was more important than what he said. She's seen that look before. It was a look of defiance. She'd seen it always before he kissed her.

He was going to kiss her now.

She knew it and she was filled with dread. Yet she couldn't run from him or escape. As he came toward her, she knew that this kiss would be more than simply an attempt to shatter her composure. It would be punishment because she hated him. It would be a grim struggle between reason and control.

It was all of that. The kiss hurt her mouth, burned through her in a storm of fire. But then, unexpectedly, it turned to treacherous sweetness, to tenderness and gentleness. Even as she responded to it she knew that his gentleness was contrived to trick her. Kim wasn't capable of sincerity. Yet she couldn't resist his embrace. It was as if she turned to it with desperate need and longing, as if she had never known Jonathan's love.

Finally, however, she regained her sanity. She struggled in Kim's arms, fighting him with a strength she hadn't known she possessed. She pounded her fists against his chest, sobbing drily, all the time.

"So it's still the same," Kim said.

As he let her go, he was very casual, very calm, even jaunty. She knew he was remembering that every time he'd kissed her she'd forgotten, at least for the space of a second or so, that she was Jonathan's girl.

"Get out, get out!" she gasped, over and over again.

He picked up his slicker, but didn't put it on. Giving her a little salute, he walked out, in that cocksure way of his.

She collapsed then, and fell on the sofa. Her body shuddered with grief, but her crying was horribly tearless and dry.

Finally she was conscious of her own voice, saying thinly, repeating, "It meant so little to you, Kim. It never meant anything."

The words shocked her even more deeply than Kim's kisses. Because they were the truth, wrenched from the dark, secret depths of her heart.

What had hurt her the most about Kim's kiss was that it meant nothing to him! And she knew now that it had always been that way. Her grief now was grief and defiance several years old. It had not been merely her voice that cried out, "It means so little to you, Kim. It never meant anything." Her heart had said it, her heart had mourned aloud in bitter grief that Kim could kiss her and not care!

His kisses could have meant a great deal to her. They could have meant everything. If tenderness had been a part of them, if Kim had taken life seriously, if he had been decent at all, she might have turned from Jonathan to him in the past.

She had felt a deep reverence and affection for Jonathan, but never this lawless rapture. Maybe there came a time when you had to face even the most terrible truth about yourself, when you could no longer escape it. This was that time for her. And the truth was that she was in love with Kim.

Exhausted by her emotion, she sat up, brushing her hair away from her face. And it was then she remembered that she had not given Kim the packet of letters.

She had not carried out Jonathan's wish. She knew suddenly she must do so, not only because it was Jonathan's wish but because

she wanted to sever the last connection between herself and Kim. Her desire to do so was frantic and desperate. It was as if destruction awaited her if she didn't succeed in breaking all ties with him. It would be a kind of destruction to be forever in love with a man like Kim.

AS LONG AS SHE POSSESSED anything that belonged to him there would be a chance that she might see him again. She had no idea where he would be stationed, or what Army school he was going to attend. It might take weeks, even months, before she could get in touch with him by mail since he had no living relatives. But she would find him!

In unreasoning haste, Eve dressed in a dark gold sweater and skirt, and bound back her hair. She put on her old tweed coat, covered her head with a scarf, and got her umbrella. Then she stuffed the packet of letters into her purse.

It was only after she was in a taxi that she realized she had very little chance of overtaking Kim. He'd said he had only three hours between trains. If his train hadn't left by now, he was probably at the Union or LaSalle Street Station.

She went to Union Station first, and spent twenty minutes pushing her way through the crowd, searching for a dark, wiry man in a khaki uniform. The search was fruitless.

She gave up, finally, and went to LaSalle station. It was raining harder than ever now, and the streets were black and shining with cold wetness.

She had no better luck at La Salle station. She saw dozens of soldiers, but none of them were Kim. Finally there was nothing left for her to do but go home.

There were no taxis at the taxi entrance, but she couldn't endure waiting. She went back through the station to the main entrance. Just outside the door, she almost bumped into a little group of soldiers.

Three of them were circled around one of their buddies, a sergeant, who stood slumped and wet, as if he had been walking in the rain. There was something vaguely familiar about him. Because of that haunting familiarity, Eve, looked at him again. Kim! Incredibly, he was Kim. But he vaguely resembled the man who had been in her apartment less than two hours ago. That Kim had been swaggering, cocksure, antagonistic, as if he had dedi-

cated his life to shocking the world. This one looked almost pathetic.

His rugged and uneven face was no longer lit by the savage defiance. He was soaked with rain because he hadn't bothered to put on the slicker which hung folded on his arm.

The man was just a dejected, ordinary guy, down on his luck. One of his buddies said, sharply, "We were afraid you'd miss your train when you didn't come back, Kim! No matter what this girl did to you, she isn't worth going over the hill. Not with your swell record, and you slated for officer training school."

Another one of the men held out a cigarette. "Buck up, Kim. Forget her."

The third one said, his voice gruff and angry, "So this Eve still hates you for living when your brother was killed."

Kim shrugged, but there was no defiance in the familiar gesture, only resignation.

"Something like that," he said, in a heavy voice. "Only I can't blame her. I had everything planned. I knew how I meant to act. But the minute I saw her I snapped into my old routine. I acted the way I used to, back home. I couldn't help it. I acted the way I used to, because no one ever knew I was alive if I didn't."

One of the soldiers said, "Too bad you had to have a brother like that Jonathan. He must have been a prize stuffed shirt."

"No," Kim protested, and for the first time Eve heard a note of loyalty in his voice.

"No, my brother Jonathan was fine and good. He really deserved everything he ever got, except that bullet in Korea. It wasn't his fault he had intelligence and the power to make people like him. But it wasn't my fault that I couldn't live up to him. Maybe if he'd never existed, or if he'd been like me, people would have known I was alive too."

Kim waited a moment. "I had a chance to see Eve tonight. But I went into the old routine, automatically trying to shock her, to show her what a tough guy I was. As a result, I lost her. I'll never see her again."

There was a calm finality in his tone, complete defeat.

He hunched his shoulders, shaking some of the rain from his cap.

In a second, he and his friends would board their train. Eve tried to move, but her whole body seemed paralyzed. She was held transfixed by amazement and wonder and sorrow, all mingled together.

This was the real Kim. For the first time in her life she saw him as he was, as no one else had ever seen him back home. Jonathan must have known what he was really like. He had had faith in Kim. But not even Jonathan could have realized what Kim had gone through, trying to live up to a brother like him.

Kim had been desperate, trying all his life to make people realize he existed, too. The only way he had been able to do it, apparently, had been to take a negative approach.

But this was the real Kim, and she loved him. That was why his kisses had always had the power to stir her, even though she fought them. This the real Kim, the man whose lips had made hers flame, yet who could be unbelievably tender.

She loved him. She always had. Only the shadow of Jonathan's perfection had come between them. It was not between them now. But at the same time she felt a poignant regret that she had not understood Kim before this. The time they had lost!

She walked out of the shadows to him. "Kim," she said simply. "I know now that I've always loved you."

Wonder came into his eyes slowly.

Eve started to speak, but the words froze on her mouth as Kim took her in his arms, and gently brushed her lips with his. This, Eve thought, is where I belong. She stood on tip-toe and returned his brief kiss. No words were necessary.

The other soldiers melted into the background and vanished. Kim and Eve were alone in the rain, alone in the magic circle of the shining warmth that was their love. CROSS

GIVE THE
GREATEST
GIFT OF ALL



SEE YOUR
RED CROSS
TODAY



*Marta's pets adored Phil, but not half as much as
their mistress did.*

MISS MENAGERIE

*By
Virginia
Laughlin*

MARTA WANTED TO CRY! The only man she'd ever met who had started her thinking about marriage was walking right out of her life. She was figuratively speaking, of course, because Phil Brown would be back. He would be back once a month for the next three months, until Mr. Wright, senior member of Jensen & Wright, Realtors, returned from Mexico. While Mr. Wright was gone, Phil Brown, the youngest member of the firm, was making the monthly report to Mr. Stoner. Since her father was incapacitated by arthritis, the Stoner real estate holdings were managed by the firm.

And when he comes back next month, Marta told herself fiercely, I won't be here! I'll go some place and stay all day!

Phil was getting into his car. At Marta's knee, Carmel, the big boxer whined sadly, his nose was pressed against the glass door. He sounded like a baby and his body twitched and quivered with anxiety as he heard the car start. On her other side, Shorts, the black cocker spaniel, yipped sharply, and scratched at the door.

As Phil waved and drove away, Aussie, the green parakeet, perched on Marta's shoulder said, "Bad boy!" and then scratched his yellow-crested head with a tiny claw. Marta smiled wryly. Out of his vocabulary of almost a hundred words, Aussie had picked the one phrase most nearly appropriate to the occasion.

Marta got the dogs away from the door and noticed her father looking at her, one eyebrow cocked in quizzical half-amusement.

"Those dogs," he said, "are emotional chameleons. If you're glad, so are they. If you're sad, they are too. And when you stood there wishing Phil wouldn't go just now, their doggy hearts yearned right along with you."

"You're the cutest thing," he said.

"Oh, pooh!" Marta said. Sometimes, it was hard living with a man as perceptive as her father. "You know Carmel and Shorts love everybody. Phil has petted them, and let them climb into his lap, so they're out of their minds about him."

Mr. Stoner was sitting in the old leather chair which, after long years of usage, had molded itself to his body. He was leaning forward, both hands clasped over the handle of his cane.

"But you did stand there yearning after Phil, didn't you?" When she flushed without answering, he said, "Come on, Marta, tell your old Dad all about it."

That did it. She began to cry in anger. "He makes me sick!" she stormed. "Coming around here two and three times a week, taking me out, while he's engaged!"

She flounced down on the sofa, brushing the wetness from her cheeks with quick hands. Alarmed by the abruptness of her movements, Aussie flew to the top of his cage. Shorts and Carmel flopped down at her feet, their heads on their paws, their eyes limpid with sympathy.

"Your statement," Mr. Stoner told his daughter, "is as confused and exaggerated as most statements made by a female in anger and frustration."

He lighted a cigarette, his arthritis-twisted hands awkward with the match. "Now then," he said, drawing smoke deep into his lungs and exhaling, "in the first place, Phil wasn't engaged during this past month when you've seen so much of him. Rosalie Moore has been

in California the past six weeks visiting an aunt or somebody. If you'd stayed and listened, instead of rushing out, you'd have heard him say he became engaged last night."

Mr. Stoner leaned back in his chair. "If you'd been here, you'd have seen that he had a rather dazed look when he said that, like a man who's wondering what hit him over the head."

Marta gulped, and sat up a little straighter. "He did?" The boxer and the cocker raised their heads, their tails thumping hopefully on the rug.

"He did," Mr. Stoner said. "To these old ears, he sounded like a man who'd become engaged without quite knowing how it happened. Do you know this Rosalie Moore?"

"We were in high school together." Marta brushed back a lock of brown hair, as her lavender-blue eyes deepened to a light purple. "She belonged to a crowd who put on airs, and tried to act sophisticated. 'Dah-ling,' they called each other. You'd have thought they'd been raised in a night club."

Mr. Stoner chuckled. "I remember now, you telling me about them. Well, it's been two years since your high school days. I wonder what she's like now?"

Marta told him. She ran into Rosalie now and then downtown. "She's right out of the pages of *Vogue*. She's very sleek, always dressed in the latest thing. Her blonde hair is always just so and her cool blue eyes try to tell you she's been everywhere and done everything. I can't stand her!"

"You shouldn't mind taking him away from her then."

For an instant, Marta couldn't believe her ears. She stared at her father. He was old. He'd been in his forties when she was born, and he wanted to see her happily married with a child or two while he was still around. Now and then he said, "Young marriages are the thing. If I had it to do over again—"

Marta would soon be twenty. In the past four years she had met several men she liked, but not enough to marry. And lately, she had begun to think her heart was lacking something because she couldn't fall in love. But that was before Phil Brown had walked into the house a few weeks ago. Was it love at first sight? She'd always pooh-poohed the notion, until it happened to her.

Ten minutes after she met Phil she had known that this was the man she wanted to love and cherish the rest of her life. But if

her father thought she could take him away from Rosalie Moore, he was out of his mind!

MMARTA LAUGHED SHORTLY. "Take Phil away from Rosalie? Oh, Dad! The trouble with parents is they think their children can do anything!"

"You're not my child, Marta-girl, if you don't at least try. You love that boy, I know. Your eyes fairly shimmer when you look at him. Now, listen, Marta, you've always underestimated yourself. You've been too shy, too conscious of your freckles. Personally, I think they add a piquant touch to your face."

"I hate them!"

Mr. Stoner sighed. "Marta," he said gently, "as I've told you before, you have to learn to live with them. Make the best of it. Instead of doing that, you've made an obsession out of your freckles. I don't know why. You've had any number of men in love with you. That should have convinced you that you're attractive. Why does Rosalie Moore frighten you so? What makes you think that you can't take Phil away from her?"

"Dad, you don't understand. Let's not talk about it, please!" She walked out of the room, the two dogs following devotedly at her heels.

Marta walked into her studio room at the rear of the house and stood at the window looking out into the back yard. March had touched the trees and the early-flowering shrubs. In a few more weeks the warm sun, would bring Shell and Pell, the two tortoises, out of hibernation to roam the flower beds, keeping them free of insects. They were her pets too, never retreating into their shells when she came near, never trying to snap at her finger when she gently stroked their strange small heads. People thought she was a bit crazy, having so many pets. Several years ago, she even had tamed a small garter snake she found in the garden, but he'd wandered away and never came back.

Phil didn't think she was crazy. Only a few days ago he'd said, "I think it's wonderful, the way you like animals. When I can get out of that apartment I'm living in, I'm going to get a puppy right away. Maybe I'll get two. Will you help me pick them out?"

Not now, she wouldn't. Let Rosalie do that!

Marta sat down at her work table, and pushed aside a litter of paper. She designed greeting cards here and most of them sold well, because she had clever ideas, and could

write cute little verses. It was something to occupy her time and her mind and fairly lucrative too. Many of her ideas featured animals, and she used Carmel, Shorts, and even Aussie as models for her drawings.

Deliberately, she stopped thinking about Phil and Rosalie. Work was the thing to keep her mind occupied. How about a picture of a tortoise on the front of a card, or a sketch of a boxer running after a bird?

But down in the hall the chimes sounded and she heard her father bellow, "Come in!" Phil's voice answered him.

Marta got weak inside. The dogs tore up the hall to welcome him, barking loudly and happily. Emotional chameleons, are they? Marta thought, remembering her father's words. If they felt the way I do, they'd wouldn't have been able to get off the rug!

Phil came down the hall, into the studio, and Carmel and Shorts threatened to trip him in their exuberance. Finally he tossed two rubber bones on the floor.

"Presents for this man's best friends," he said. "Had them in the car all the time and forgot to bring them in. I didn't remember until I was back at the office."

Marta glanced at him, then looked quickly away. "I'm sure Carmel and Shorts appreciate your leaving work for their sakes."

"I had to come back this way, anyhow. Some people over on the next street want to sell—Marta, what's the matter?"

"Matter?" Her voice went so high it almost squeaked. "Nothing's the matter!"

He came close to her chair, and stood looking down at her, his gray eyes troubled. He put out his hand, and touched the tip of her small freckled nose with one finger.

"You're the cutest thing," he said. "You're almost like an elf."

"Elves don't have freckles," she said stonily.

"Yes, they do."

"You've seen some lately?"

"No, but I know what they look like."

It was the most ridiculous conversation she had ever had with anyone. She said, knowing it sounded waspish and not caring, "Is this a new routine for engaged men, going around telling other girls they look like elves?"

Phil reddened. "Look, I don't know how to explain that—"

"There's nothing to explain! But I think you might have told me you were planning on getting engaged!" Her voice was cold with outrage.

"But I didn't know!"

He did look dazed, as if he didn't know quite how it had come about. So her father was right. Rosalie Moore had somehow maneuvered Phil into proposing!

Marta drew a deep breath and stood up. The top of her head came to the knot in Phil's tie. She said bravely, even though her voice quivered, "It was probably silly of me, but I'd gotten the idea you liked me a lot. Or was it just my dogs!"

"I do like you a lot," he declared, his face getting redder. "I think you're a wonderful girl." It took the ear of love to detect the slight unsteadiness in his voice. "I hope we'll always be friends," he said. "Good friends."

It was too much!

Marta said, "You mean, take rides together, go to movies, take the dogs out to the country for runs?"

SHE DIDN'T KNOW what he had to be mad about, but suddenly he was angry.

"You little—" He stopped. His sudden dignity was almost ludicrous. "I hope all three of us will be friends—you, Rosalie and me. You and Rosalie have a lot in common, you know."

"Rosalie and I have a lot in common?" Marta's lavender-blue eyes widened.

"Yes. She's almost as crazy about animals as I am. We intend to have dogs, parakeets, cats—everything!"

A bell rang in Marta's mind. She remembered Rosalie on the high school grounds, shrieking in terror as a dog came near her. It was just a friendly mongrel, some student's dog, that had come loping up to her, wanting a friendly pat.

Marta stared at Phil. *Brother, are you being sold a bill of goods*, she thought. Or was he? Perhaps Rosalie had changed. Well, one could always find out, couldn't one?

Coolly, very poised now, Marta said, "That's wonderful, because I know you well enough now to know that you'd never be happy with a girl who didn't like dogs."

A little ashamed, Marta looked down at the toes of her moccasins. She was a novice at this kind of thing, and a little unsure of herself. But she continued, "Why don't you and Rosalie come for dinner tomorrow night? Dad and I would love to have you. And we can talk about dogs."

He thought it was a wonderful idea. "You'll love Rosalie," he said.

Marta doubted that, but she smiled widely, although it almost killed her. "Seven, then?"

So it was arranged, and when Phil left Marta went to look for her father. He was sitting in his corner of the living room.

"Well?" he asked, so eagerly that Marta had to laugh.

"Who says women are match-makers? You're awful," she scolded, "egging me on."

"Pshaw!" Mr. Stoner said. "You love the boy, don't you?"

Marta's eyes blurred with tears. "Yes," she said simply. "I love him."

"Can you imagine him happily married to Rosalie?"

Marta shook her head. "No! Oh, I don't know, Dad!"

He reached for her hand, and gripped it with his twisted fingers. "Listen, Marta-girl, follow your heart. Fight for the man you love the way all women who are worth their salt do. Young men are easily fooled by a bit of glamor, and can easily marry the wrong woman. But if they're lucky, the right woman is around to—" He stopped, absorbed in his own memories.

"You speak from experience?" Marta said gently.

He looked up. "You're darned right I do! If it hadn't been for your mother, I'd have married a girl who— Marta," he roared, "my past is none of your business!"

She laughed, kissing him. "Oh, pooh to your past! You're just trying to impress me. You're trying to make me think you were a devil with the girls when you were young."

He gave her a smug look. "And so I was . . ."

The next morning Phil called Marta to confirm the dinner engagement. "We'll be there at seven," he said gaily, "with bells on!"

Ding-dong. Marta thought bitterly. She said, "Does Rosalie know about the menagerie I keep?"

"Well, no . . ." A little silence came humming over the telephone. "I," Phil said finally, but a little uncomfortably, "wanted it to be a surprise for her. In fact, I just told her that we were having dinner with old friends of mine. I didn't see any point in telling her that you and I—" He stopped, clearly at a loss to explain himself.

Marta smiled. Men!

"You mean," she said coldly, "that you'd prefer if Rosalie didn't know that we had been seeing each other while she was out of

town. You think it would be easier for the three of us to be friends, if she didn't know about that."

"Yes, something like that," Phil said hastily.

"I'll act just like a sister to you," Marta said sweetly, and hung up.

At six-thirty, the Caesar salad was crisping in the refrigerator, waiting for its dressing. Mr. Stoner came into the kitchen, his cane making staccato sounds on the linoleum.

He sniffed. "Well, if Rosalie can't cook, she's a dead duck!" He looked at his daughter with an objective eye. "Er—couldn't you get into something a bit more—well, you know—"

"Glamorous?" Marta looked down at her peasant blouse and pleated skirt under a protecting apron. "I'm just me, Dad, remember? I'd look pretty silly all togged out in something slinky with these freckles!"

"There you go again!" He smiled suddenly. "You're right, Marta-girl. You know your own style. You'll do all right."

His cane had a happy sound as he thumped out of the kitchen. Back in the living room, he roared, "Where are the animals?"

"Shut in the studio," Marta yelled, "and leave them there!"

"Even Aussie?"

"Even Aussie!" Marta said firmly.

PHIL AND ROSALIE arrived at three minutes past seven. Rosalie looked seductive and feline in a black satin dress, and Marta appraised her carefully.

"Marta!" she breathed throatily, turning to Phil. "Marta and I were in high school together." Then she turned her blue gaze on Mr. Stoner, and held out both hands to him. "I saw you," she said huskily, "in the bank, one day—oh, maybe a year ago—and I said to the girl I was with, 'Who is that distinguished looking man with the wonderful prematurely-gray hair?'"

Marta shot a quick glance at her father. He was inclining his head, gallantly. "I remember," he said. "Your golden hair was like a shaft of sunshine in that gloomy place. I've never forgotten."

Marta did a double-take. There was faint mockery in her father's eyes. Then she looked at Phil who was beaming, as if he had just invented Rosalie and had the patent on her!

"A spot of sherry?" Mr. Stoner asked. "Marta?" He winked slyly.

"Of course," Marta said. The tray was ready in the kitchen so she went to get it, serving Rosalie, Phil, and her father. Then, setting the tray on the bookcase, she drew a deep breath, and looked at Rosalie.

"Now, I'll bring in the rest of the family." She walked briskly down the hall, and threw open the door of the studio. "Come, Carmel, come on Shorts!" And she opened the door of Aussie's cage which she'd moved out of the living room an hour ago. Aussie flew down the hall after the dogs.

For an hour, the two dogs had been confined. Now they skidded down the hall, bounding into the living room. Phil and Rosalie were sitting side by side on the sofa.

There was a scream as Carmel and Sports jumped across Rosalie's lap in their frantic effort to reach Phil as quickly as possible. The scream became a series of screams, all issuing from Rosalie's mouth.

When Marta arrived in the living room, Rosalie was beating at Aussie, whose tiny claws were entangled in her bright hair, and she was screeching. "Take them away! Take them away!"

Phil went into action. So did Marta.

"Down!" Marta yelled at the two dogs. They beat a hasty retreat to Mr. Stoner's chair, and cowered at his feet. Phil had Aussie perched on his finger. Panting, the little green and gold bird flew to the top of the mirror and clung to its frame.

Forgive me, Aussie, Marta pleaded silently.

Rosalie Moore stood up, a wild, hysterical look in her eyes. Her hands flew to her disarranged hair.

"Filthy things!" she snapped. She whirled on Phil. "Get me out of here! Now!"

"But I—" He was distraught, embarrassed.

A convulsive shiver went through Rosalie. "I hate animals! Hate them! They're messy, dirty things!"

There was a blind look in Phil's eyes as he glanced at Marta and Mr. Stoner. "I'm so sorry," he said. "I guess we'd better go."

Marta handed him Rosalie's stole.

"Well, well," Mr. Stoner said, when Rosalie and Phil had gone. "Imagine such a morbid fear of animals."

Marta, mopping up the sherry Rosalie had spilled, said nothing. Finished with that job, she went to the mirror, held up a finger and coaxed softly, "Pretty bird, pretty bird . . ."

Aussie jumped down onto her finger, and flew to her shoulder. Marta sat down in a chair across from her father. The two dogs were as close to his feet as they could get, their eyes wary, half-guilty. Something had gone wrong, and they knew it.

Marta patted her knee. "Shorts," she called softly. "Carmel!" They wriggled across the floor to her. She patted their heads, and they licked her hand, looking up at her. "It's all right," she crooned. "It's all right."

Mr. Stoner looked at his sherry. "Is it?"

"Yes! Rosalie was pretending to Phil that she was crazy about animals because he was! But I happened to remember that in high school she was scared to death of dogs. May I have a cigarette, please?"

She rarely smoked, only when she was upset. Mr. Stoner tossed her his package.

She lit one, saying, "Dad, it was a beastly trick, wasn't it? I mean, I didn't even get time to know if she'd changed. You know, I feel sorry for anybody who has such a morbid fear of dogs or cats or birds, or anything that's harmless! But it wasn't fair of her to pretend to Phil that she loved animals, was it?" The question ended in a wail.

"No, it wasn't fair. Don't feel badly, Marta-girl." He finished his sherry in a swallow. "If she cheats about one thing, she'll cheat about something else. He'll never know where he stands with her."

Marta picked up her untouched sherry. She took a warming sip. "But he left with her." Her voice had a wobble to it.

"Yes. He's a gentleman, which is probably the reason he got engaged to her without quite knowing how."

"He won't be back," Marta said.

"Give him time!"

"He won't be back," Marta repeated dully. "You saw her. She's beautiful and charming, and she knows how to make a man feel special!"

"Ah, yes . . ." Mr. Stoner said. "But Marta, a diet of honey can get to be pretty sickening. Really men aren't as stupid as they sometimes appear to be."

"No?" She puffed moodily at her cigarette. "You're old and wise, but Phil isn't."

Mr. Stoner looked at his daughter with a slightly disgruntled air. "Women," he said, "think they have a monopoly on intuition. If I were a betting man, I'd give you two to one that upon leaving Rosalie tonight,

(Continued on page 107)

WHEN KISSES ARE CASUAL

When a man realizes a girl is more important to him than his business, he'd better start running—for the altar.

By

Mary Marsh Brown

THERE IN THE DISCREETLY lighted restaurant, Harry Reece looked at the girl across the table and smiled warmly, but a little uncertainly. She seemed rather pensive and remote tonight. She was slender with short dark curls and clear blue eyes that had a disturbing way of studying him. Her name was Letitia Hobart, but everybody called her Tish. For several months she'd been working as secretary for Montridge Builders Inc., a firm comprised of four ambitious young men of which Harry was president.

He'd been taking Tish out nearly every Saturday night since she'd been with them. Of course, he couldn't do anything about it, but she was the kind of a girl he'd always wanted to know. Tish was the independent type, only she had plenty of feminine appeal. Laughter came easily to her and she was good company. Harry could talk shop to her whenever he felt like it and she'd be interested because her father had been a builder. She'd grown up in the construction business and she understood his problems.

"You've been pretty quiet tonight, Tish," he observed. "Something troubling you?"

She didn't answer right away and her gaze wandered over him as if she were looking at him for the first time. He knew she was seeing a big, rangy man with sandy red hair and smoky eyes who could be called passably good looking.

"I don't know, Harry," she murmured. "Maybe there is. Maybe I've been thinking too much lately."

"Such as?" he prompted gently.

"Well—" She drew a deep breath. "A lot of people are beginning to take it for granted we'll be married, Harry, or didn't you know?"

He felt a strange chill go down his spine.

It was true that he'd been very attentive and that every date with Tish had ended with a good night kiss, but he had kept those kisses casual. He couldn't let Tish mean too much to him.

"People sure like to gossip, don't they?" he said uneasily. "What did you tell them?"

Her blue eyes met his. "The only thing I could, Harry. I told them money and success seem more important to you than anything else. I told them that a girl would be foolish to take you seriously."

Harry winced. She was much too perceptive. Maybe he should have explained the situation to Tish at the very beginning, but you just don't tell a girl that you're not eligible as a husband.

"Listen, Tish, I came from a poor family and I've had to fight every inch of the way. I'm going to the top but it's got to be alone. It's rough enough without dragging some poor gal along with me. When I make the grade, I'll feel differently. Then it will be time to think about marriage."

"A girl could grow old waiting for you, couldn't she, Harry?" she said levelly. "Marriage is like two people building a house together. If you can't share all the headaches and satisfactions as you go along, the final result won't mean anything."

"It doesn't always work that way," he heard himself arguing. "Why, look at the folks we know. There are four men in our firm. Two of them are married—Tom Ryan and Les Hodge. Paul Evans and I are single and we're the only ones who spark the business. Louise Ryan is always miserable because so much money goes back into the company fund and Doris Hodge spends every cent Les gets

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He only had to reach out and she'd be in his arms.



his hands on. Those girls aren't happy, Tish."

"Even so, they're in love. That means a lot. And Harry, please don't be alarmed by all this." Tish smiled slowly. "I really have no designs on you, my pet."

He hoped not! He didn't want to hurt her.

"There's another angle, too," he said a little desperately. "This building business is risky, and if I got married now, I'd be afraid to take chances. I'd have to play it safe and there's no future to that."

She looked at him in that direct way of hers. "And so to avoid entanglements, you keep your kisses casual, Harry?" she asked softly. "It's all right as long as a gal is forewarned?"

He was conscious of the flush that spread over his face. "Tish, please!" he moaned. "Don't make me feel like a heel!"

Tish shook her head. "I just feel sorry for what you're doing to yourself, Harry. Suppose some day you do decide to get married. Can you imagine what it would be like to be your wife?"

HARRY'S MOUTH TIGHTENED. "I'm the ogre type, is that it?"

"Oh, not quite that," she assured him blithely. "You'd be a very nice husband when you had the time, but other things would come first. Love would be way down on the list. I think any wife of yours would wind up a neglected Ophelia with faded flowers in her old permanent."

"Okay, have your little joke!" Harry muttered. "That's a woman for you—She can't appreciate a man who's thinking of her welfare."

Tish smiled. "Women are strange creatures, Harry, almost as strange as men. And now I really think you should take me home. It's getting late."

It wasn't late at all and they both knew it. Obviously, Tish wanted to be rid of him. And there was no use trying to make her understand how he felt about all this. There was a tilt to her chin and a look in her eye that told him she wouldn't even listen. Harry felt strangely disturbed and annoyed all at the same time. They'd been getting along so well, and now this had to happen!

They scarcely spoke driving to Tish's apartment. Maybe it was because Harry didn't know how to talk to her any more. They had once been friends, but now they were like strangers.

"Paul Evans doesn't feel the way you do," Tish said suddenly, as if Paul had been on her mind all the time.

He felt his hands tightening on the wheel. "You've been seeing Paul? I didn't know." And yet, why shouldn't she date Paul or anyone else she liked.

"Yes, I go out with him every now and then. Paul's ambitious but he'd still like to be married."

Harry said nothing. After all, Paul was not only the architect for the organization, but a close friend. Harry had met him while they were in Korea and talked him into settling in Montridge as a partner. There was nothing wrong with Paul. He had brains and plenty of charm, but, somehow, Harry had never thought of him for Tish.

A few moments later, he was opening the car door for Tish. Then, as he'd done so many times before, he walked with her through the courtyard to the private entrance of her apartment. All of a sudden the thought struck him that he might be seeing her home for the last time.

"Tish, I hope we can still be friends," he told her. But he couldn't say any more.

"Of course, Harry." Her tone was very gentle, a little amused. "A girl should always be friends with her boss, don't you think?"

He stared at the pale blur of her face there in the darkness. "You sure know how to torture a guy!" he growled. Almost without thinking, he reached out and jerked her into his arms. Then his lips were on hers in a long, fierce kiss that stirred like wine in his blood. He hadn't meant to kiss her with such fervor and he was ashamed of himself.

"Sorry, Tish, that doesn't solve anything for us," he said shakily.

For a moment she was very straight and quiet. "Then we'll both have to make very sure it doesn't happen again," she said. And, without another word, she unlocked the door and disappeared inside . . .

It was a long time before Jimmy went to bed that night. He paced the floor of his apartment, smoking endless cigarettes. He couldn't help the way he felt about love and marriage now, and if Tish had an ounce of understanding, she'd realize that his was the sensible, practical way. He'd seen too many divorces that had their roots in hardship and insecurity. But Tish had stardust in her eyes and couldn't wait for any man!

MONDAY MORNING, before going to the office, Harry drove over to the small hillside tract the company had just opened. Two houses were already under construction and he wanted to check their progress.

He wasn't surprised to find Paul Evans there, too, the usual roll of blueprints under his arm. Paul was a slender, handsome young man, not as tall as Harry, with light wavy hair and brown eyes. He lit a cigarette as Harry walked over to him.

"Hi, I'm glad you showed up. I checked on that property just a block from the bus line and the Montridge shopping district. It's owned by a man named Frank Crowder. He lives in the city, but when I called his home, his daughter said he was away and wouldn't be back for two weeks."

"Frank Crowder?" Harry frowned in thought. "I've heard he's a wealthy real estate promoter with a reputation for stubbornness. He's hung onto that property for years, Paul. Suppose he won't agree to our offer?"

"He's got to and I won't take no for an answer! I've got some ideas for one and two-story duplexes for that property that are terrific. They'll be very modern and different, and with proper landscaping the tract will be sensational."

"And your reputation as an architect will be made," Harry mused. "Well, Crowder may not want to sell, so don't set your heart on anything." Somehow, he wasn't feeling enthusiastic.

Paul stared at him. "What's eating you, Harry boy? You're the last person in the world to throw cold water on deals like this." He hesitated and then asked curiously, "You didn't have a falling out with Tish by any chance?"

Harry stiffened. "Why should we? Tish and I are just friends."

"Just friends?" Paul echoed, and an excitement that Harry didn't like came into his eyes. "You mean, you're not going to propose?"

Harry resisted an impulse to tell him this was none of his business. "I'm not in a position to propose to any girl right now, and neither are you, I might add!" He was more fierce than he'd intended.

Paul smiled twistedly. "You mean, you're the noble type. I'm not, Harry. Tish is the kind of girl you don't let escape. She knows how I feel about her and now that the field is clear, I'm really going to rush her off her feet."

"Do what you like," Harry growled. "Tish knows what she wants, I guess."

And, apparently, Tish did. For in the week that followed she had lunch with Paul every day and Harry knew they were seeing each other evenings. Obviously, there was no time or room in her life for anyone but Paul now, so Harry didn't bother asking her out again. After all, he had his pride. He could only stand by helplessly watching Paul win Tish, and tell himself that he didn't care.

And then, the next Saturday night, he ran into them at a dance at the Montridge Country Club. Someone had sold him two tickets, so needing a date, Harry had asked Peg Hastings, a pretty little blonde he'd known for years. Peg was nice enough but he found himself getting bored with her nervous small talk. And when Tish came in with Paul, looking more beautiful than he'd ever seen her, he felt worse than ever.

A little later, the two couples met and Harry asked to exchange partners. When the music began again, he guided Tish away quickly. Tish was very soft in his arms and Harry felt curiously unhappy.

"You and Paul seem to be hitting it off nicely," he observed wryly.

Tish looked up at him and smiled. "Is that bad? Paul is really a wonderful person."

"Wonderful enough to marry?" he heard himself asking.

Tish didn't hesitate. "I think so, Harry. A girl simply couldn't go wrong with Paul."

"Maybe this is just an infatuation that will blow over," he said hopefully. He wished he hadn't, for Tish grew rigid in his arms.

"The way you figure all your romances, Harry?" she asked indignantly. "You play it safe, so that you won't get involved!"

"For Pete's sake, Tish, I'm no wolf on the prowl!" he snapped.

"Maybe you just come in a different package," Tish informed him.

The music had ended and they stood there, glaring at each other. Then Paul came to claim Tish, and Harry was left with Peg and a curious feeling of emptiness and frustration came over him.

"Peg, let's go some place else," he muttered. "This floor is too darn crowded for comfort!"

THE NEXT WEEK was a bewildering one for Harry, driven as he was by some inner restlessness. He stayed away from the of-

face as much as possible, spending his time on the hillside tract. Previously, he'd had a wonderful disposition, but now, without intending to be, he was a little gruff and impatient with the construction crew. The men, puzzled by the change in him, decided he was sick, and good-naturedly advised him to see a doctor.

But he didn't need a doctor. He didn't need anything or anyone. He was playing it smart, and falling in love simply wasn't in the cards. As for Tish, she didn't care about him anyway, so there was no point in thinking about her. When he was ready, there would be plenty of girls to marry. But, of course, the problem would be to find one as lovely as Tish.

Finally on Friday morning, Doris Hodge phoned that she was giving a little party the next night.

"I'm just having our own gang, Harry, and I want you to be sure to come and bring a date. For Paul's sake it's very important that you show up."

"What's with Paul?" he wanted to know.

"You'll see," she said mysteriously. "Just be here."

So Harry asked Rita Robbins to go with him. She was an attractive redhead he used to date before Tish had come into the picture. Rita always went out of her way to be tempting, and, in the past, Harry had found her rather intriguing. But that night, as he drove to the party with Rita nestled very close to him, he realized that she really hadn't a great deal to her.

The gang was all there by the time they arrived—Les Hodge, a short, stocky young man, and Doris, his plump, pretty and frivolous wife. Tom Ryan, a tall sober person with prematurely gray hair, and Louise with her usual look of dissatisfaction. And Tish was there with Paul! She looked radiant, her blue eyes sparkling bright. She nodded to Harry and smiled enigmatically when he introduced Rita.

Les brought in a brimming punch bowl, filled the cups and, over the chatter, Harry heard Doris say excitedly, "Listen! This is a surprise announcement party! Tish and Paul are engaged to be married! Show them your ring, honey."

Tish thrust out her hand and Harry found his eyes riveted to the blue white solitaire on her finger. And as he stared, he felt his heart turning to hard, cold ice.

"Tish, you're going to be married?" he demanded stupidly and his voice seemed to come from a great distance.

Tish looked at him and he heard her laugh shakily. "That's the general idea, Harry. Lots of girls are doing it these days, you know."

He managed a smile that almost cracked his face. "Well, congratulations, you two! Lots of happiness!"

Paul came over and slapped him on the back. "The wedding is going to be in a month, and you're elected to be best man. How do you like that?"

He didn't like it. He wanted to tell Paul he had no right to marry Tish now when the company was getting on its feet. Tish deserved something better even if she were a headstrong, impractical girl. But, after all, what she did with her life was no concern of his now.

"Sure, I'll be best man. Why not?" he asked with forced cheerfulness. "To the bride and groom!" And with Tish watching him, he drained his cup with a flourish. If she thought he was hurt, he would show her just how indifferent he could be.

Harry was in a daze for the rest of the evening. He joined in the general chatter without knowing what he was saying, and he even managed to laugh at the right times. But he couldn't keep his eyes from Tish and Paul. There was no denying they seemed to be in love. They were holding hands all the time, and, once he saw them kiss with a swift fervor that twisted his heart. He looked away quickly, and turned his attention to Rita.

But she was no help. She flirted with Les and Tom while their wives watched indignantly. The girls were obviously jealous, Harry realized sharply, so maybe Tish had been right about Doris and Louise really being in love with their husbands!

Harry went over to Rita, took a firm grip on her arm, and muttered. "You've had enough party, and I'm taking you home!"

Rita pouted at him. "What's the matter? You used to be fun, but tonight—"

"You'd better get your wrap," he cut in quickly. "I'm tired, that's all."

Paul came over to him then. "I wanted to tell you before you leave that Crowder is back and I'm driving into the city tomorrow. I'll go straight to his house and if I don't swing the deal, I'll stay at the Biltmore. I won't leave until he agrees to sell."

Paul had one very characteristic trait. When he went out for something he wanted, nothing could sidetrack him. He'd wanted Tish and now she was his. His duplexes would be built on Crowder's property, too.

"Well, good luck, Paul!" Harry held out his hand. "And congratulations again on the engagement." He was surprised he could hold his voice so even.

WHEN HE SAID good night to Tish, they were alone in the kitchen, but she was remote as a star.

"I'm sure you'll be very happy with Paul, Tish," he murmured, but the words seemed to slide back into his throat and choke him.

Tish was filling a sandwich tray and, for a moment, he thought he saw her hand tremble. When she looked up, there was an expression in her eyes that bewildered him.

"Harry, what's going to happen to you and these girls you know? How many hearts are you going to break, not caring?"

Harry felt his nails bite into the flesh of his palms. "I have more important things to do than to spend my time breaking female hearts!" His voice was hoarse, drowned by some inner emotion he couldn't define.

Tish shook her head. "You would have broken mine if I'd let you, Harry," she said softly. "But I didn't!"

He stared at her, his senses reeling a little. He had only to reach out and she'd be in his arms—this girl who was marrying his friend.

"Good night!" he said abruptly and turned away. It was better to go now before it was too late, before he said or did something he would regret for the rest of his life . . .

Unfortunately, Harry knew that he would have no excuse for staying away from the office that next week. His desk was piled high with mail and he was behind on his book-keeping. Paul was in the city. Les and Tom, who were in charge of purchasing materials, had to be out at the tract every day, so Harry knew that he would be alone with Tish. There was no escape.

Monday morning, painfully aware of the queer tension between them, he dictated some letters to her, trying to keep from staring at the pretty dark head across the desk from him.

"Harry, I'll be quitting my job after I marry Paul," she said suddenly. "You'll want to find another girl, won't you?"

"What?" He felt his heart cringe at the

thought. "Oh, sure, and, by the way, let me know if Paul phones in."

But Paul didn't phone that day, or the day after, or the day after that. And Harry, puzzled himself, saw the growing anxiety in Tish's eyes. By Friday she seemed frantic.

"He hasn't even called me in the evenings, Harry. Maybe Paul didn't reach the city. It's a fifty mile trip and he might have had an accident."

"We would have been notified by now, so I'm sure he's okay," he said soothingly. "I'll call the Biltmore now and leave a message if he's not in."

But Paul wasn't registered at the hotel nor at several others that Harry phoned. He found himself groping for some explanation.

"He may have rented a room some place, Tish, to cut expenses. And he's probably got his hands full trying to make Crowder sell. Maybe he's wining and dining the old boy, and that's keeping him busy."

"It's not very flattering to be engaged to a man who forgets you the first time you're separated," Tish said stubbornly.

"He hasn't forgotten you, Tish!" he said softly. "How could he when you're the most precious girl on earth." Harry broke off, realizing that he'd gone too far.

Her gaze flew to his face, but he couldn't read her expression. He only knew that Tish was looking at him as if she'd never seen him before.

"Oh, Harry, I'm so mixed up now!"

He felt terribly shaken. But he knew that her tears were for Paul and not for him. And, suddenly, he hated this thoughtless man who made a girl like Tish cry.

"I could call Crowder but there's a chance Paul is there now and it might be embarrassing for him to talk over the phone. I'll drive into the city right now, Tish, and find Paul, while you hold down the office."

Tish smiled tremulously. "It's funny but I hate to see you go. Thanks very much. You know, you're really a very nice guy."

Then, quite suddenly, Tish got up and came over to his chair. As she leaned down, her lips brushed his cheek and then she was gone. Harry's pulses pounded crazily and his heart filled with a sense of utter desolation.

THE FIFTY MILES to the city passed much too quickly for him, because every mile meant he was closer to Paul's perfectly logical

(Continued on page 108)



Mrs. Beauchamp pulled in the welcome mat, ignoring Nick completely. "Felicity, Henry wants you to phone him," she said pointedly.



By
Muriel Edgerton

*It takes a milkman to know Grade A love—
especially when it's for a half-pint girl.*

NICHOLAS TRENT FORREST III happily drove his rattling old car along the wet downtown streets. The rain pelted against the windshield, seeping through here and there. A few drops trickled down the back of his neck from the leaky roof. He was wearing a battered felt hat, a blue pullover sweater with a hole in one elbow, and brown slacks. His face was pleasant

but undistinguished except for the merry blue of his eyes and the freckles across his nose. He was just an ordinary guy, whistling tunelessly, but it was a novel and delightful sensation.

The gutters ran wide with water, spreading out into the street, because when it rained in southern California it made up for all the months of sunshine. It was six o'clock and

quite dark, and people were huddled on the corners, waiting for buses.

It's wonderful, Nick thought, and jerked the car forward as the light flashed green. Nobody knows me, nobody bothers me. He felt a small spot of loneliness, but it didn't amount to much when he remembered Forrestville and the girls who had descended upon him with all their feminine tricks.

As he shuddered at the memory, his eye caught a very small, very wet figure teetering on the curb. He was past the congested area and she stood there quite alone, looking absurdly helpless. His foot found the brake and he creaked to a stop.

She had dark eyes, wide like a baby's, and her dark hair was drenched. She was wearing a bright yellow wool suit and high heeled sandals.

This morning, he thought, she must have been glamorous, but now, she's a drenched bit of lost sunshine. He rather liked that description—a drenched bit of lost sunshine. He opened the car door, poked his freckles and his blue eyes outside and grinned at her.

"It's drier in here," he suggested. "And I'm going your way."

She stared at him with dark baby-wide eyes and then she looked down at her yellow suit. Nick looked, too, and suddenly he realized that even the smartest girls didn't wear their skirts so short. And the sleeves were riding her slender little arms, too. Quite definitely the material was not pre-shrunk.

"I don't know you," she said.

"Another five minutes and you won't know that suit, either. Hop in."

She made up her mind in a hurry. With a soft moan of anguish she was beside him, dripping and sodden. The car roared, back-fired once, and took off.

"The roof leaks a bit," Nick said, rather stupidly.

"What's a leak," the girl said. "I've been drowned."

She turned her head, looked up at him, and smiled. Nick's hands froze on the wheel and his heart turned over and over. Her smile was the loveliest thing he had ever seen. It reached down all through him painting his freckles with pink and leaving him light-headed.

"WHAT'S YOUR NAME?" she was asking. "And how did you know you were going my way? I never saw you before."

He stammered a little because something strange was happening to Nicholas Trent Forrest III, who had left a small town where he had lived all his life, to get away from the girls who had pursued him and his money. It was mostly his money, he felt that had made him so attractive, his major's Air Forces uniform had helped too. Usually he was a modest, rather shy young man, but he had an inner core of hardness that had driven him to this city. He wanted to go to a place where no one knew him, where he would get by on his freckles, his smile and his own brains, or not at all.

So now he stammered a little. "Name's Forrest. Nick Forrest."

"How do you do," the girl said primly. "And my name is Felicity Beauchamp."

Nick repeated it. "Felicity Beauchamp."

"My father is French and my mother is Polish. My sister's name is Honore and the boys, the twins, are Pat and Mike. And now, of course, we're all Americans."

Nick blinked his eyes a couple of times and then looked at her quickly. She was perfectly serious, staring down at her poor little suit, trying to tug the skirt down over her knees. It was a futile effort and she gave up, folding her hands in her lap.

"Which way?" Nick said, all choked up with the tremendous thing that was happening to him.

"Straight out about two miles." She looked at him directly, with that childlike quality that left him weak. "We live on top of a hill. It's rather wacky. We're not at all like other people."

"No," Nick said in a hushed voice, "I can see that."

It was indeed a hill, he thought, as the car finally eased to a stop—a good hill for goats. There were no other houses around, and the rickety wooden steps went straight up into the black. Far above them, there was a blurred glow of light.

"Oh dear," Felicity said, pointing to a car parked in front of them. It was a long expensive custom-built job. "Henry is here."

"Henry?"

"Henry Osborn." That amazing smile touched him again. "Henry is nice and Mother adores him."

She gathered up her sodden purse, took a deep breath and stepped out of the car. "It was sweet of you to drive me home, Nick. Thanks a million."

Nick was standing beside her. He had found her and he couldn't let her go. He said, "Those stairs don't look safe to me. They're all wet and slippery."

And then he did a bold thing, for him. But then, Nick had never fallen in love before. He picked her up in his arms and started up the steps.

"Put me down," Felicity said, but even Nick could tell she didn't mean it. She squirmed a little and her hair dripped in his eyes and he stumbled.

He stood still, the rain trickling down his neck. "You see what happens?" he said severely. "Now keep quiet. You're wet enough without tramping up these steps. How many?"

"Ninety-seven," she said. "I count them twice a day."

"No wonder you're so skinny."

"Im not."

And it was true, she wasn't. She was just right, just perfect. Nick trudged up the steps and after a while he felt her arm around his neck and her little dark head against his shoulder. When he reached the top, he turned around and started down again.

Felicity's head jerked up. "What on earth?"

"I like it," he said.

But she made him stop and carry her up the porch steps. Felicity took her arm from around his neck, reached down and opened the door. Nick stood there, holding her. The light hit him in the face and for a minute he couldn't see anything.

A voice said, "Come in, come in, just don't stand there."

An another voice said, "Goodness, who's Felicity brought home this time?"

Felicity nudged him with her elbow and Nick set her down, carefully, as though she were one of the Ming vases back in his house in Forrestville. When he straightened up, he looked around him, and Felicity introduced him to the family, and to Henry.

Nick looked at each of them in turn, smiling his rather shy smile, his blue eyes naive. He was intrigued. Here was the most deliriously wacky assortment of humans he had ever seen.

Felicity's father was sitting in an old sagging easy chair, with his feet on a wooden box. There was a bath towel wrapped around his head and he was drinking soda pop from the bottle. He had dark eyes like Felicity,

only they seemed so tired and a little baffled.

The twins, Pat and Mike, were about nine, and they were throwing a rubber ball to an enormous dog of uncertain lineage. He leaped over tables, knocking things haywire, and the twins leaped after him. The rest of the family ignored the noise and confusion.

And then there was Honore, Felicity's sister. If Nick hadn't seen Felicity first, he would have held his breath, looking at her. She was blonde and beautiful, but she didn't have her sister's little-girl appeal. Her eyes were deep blue and she was wearing black velvet lounging pajamas. Honore was a model in a swank dress shop.

And then, of course, there was Felicity's mother. Nick looked at her, and behind the naive blue of his eyes, was the knowledge, sudden and sure, that here would be his trouble. It was in the set of her chin, in the alert tilt of her head, in the rather wintry smile she bestowed upon him. And then she turned back to Henry Osborn, and Nick recognized the look for sure. He's seen it on the faces of mothers back home and he didn't care for it.

So he looked at Henry, too. He saw a good-looking young man who stared back at him coldly. All of a sudden Nick was conscious of the hole in his sweater.

THEY ALL PEERED AT NICK for a minute and then they all started talking again. Mr. Beauchamp said to a twin. "Pat, bring me another pop." Honore said, "And so I simply walked off the floor. No one can insult me and get away with it." Mrs. Beauchamp said, "You didn't throw anything, did you, dear?"

The telephone rang and the dog knocked it off the stand with his tail, in passing. Mike laughed and Honore rushed for it as it clattered to the floor, screaming at Mike, "That's my date, you moron."

Pat, balancing a bottle of pop on his head, grinned. "Honore's mad. That's good, good, good. Now we'll see some fun. Kick him, Honore, kick him in the shins hard, like last time."

Felicity said, "Hello, Henry," in a small shy voice.

Henry touched her shoulder possessively. "You're soaking. Go right up and change." His fingers recoiled from the feel of the wet shrinking suit. "Cheap material, Felicity. It never pays."

"Yes, Henry."

"And hurry. We're going out for dinner."

Oh no, thought Nick. She isn't like that. She can't be. Not just because he has money. Maybe he's a better man than I am, but not because of his money. We'll fight it out, man to man.

Mrs. Beauchamp said to Nick, "I'm sure it was very kind of you to bring Felicity home. If Henry had known— What happened to your share-the-ride car?"

"Fat tire," Felicity said after a little pause, heading for the stairs. She turned, came back to Nick, and again that smile of hers knocked him almost senseless.

"Thank you, Nick. I hope I'll see you again some time."

"You will," he assured her.

She pattered away, dripping at every step. Mrs. Beauchamp was not through with him, however.

"Do you live near or around here, Mr. Forest?"

He waved a hand vaguely and then he sneezed. "Not far."

"You work in town?"

Nick stirred his brain with a mental finger. Things were coming a bit fast for him. "I work for a dairy."

That was true, in a way. His money, piling up for three generations, came from dairy herds.

Mrs. Beauchamp gave him a chilly eye. "Not milking the cows?"

Pat came in on the deal. "I milked a cow once. It kicked me."

"That will do," Mrs. Beauchamp said. Her voice was icy.

Honore was carrying on a romantic low-voiced conversation. Once in a while she would cup her hand over the phone and scream, "Will you people please pipe down?"

Nick said, "No, I don't milk the cows. I really have a good job. I drive a delivery truck."

Henry said, "I'm sure that is a worthy, necessary job. Someone has to deliver the milk."

"How right you are," Nick murmured. "And you can make quite a lot of money, too. It's on commission, you see, depending on how many customers you get."

Mr. Beauchamp said, "Mike, get Nick a bottle of pop. He's all cold and wet."

Nick looked at him. The bath towel had slipped down over one eye, giving him a

rakish air. The visible eye winked at Nick, and then closed.

Honore set the phone down, and raised her voice. "Felicity, I'm wearing your gold mesh cap tonight."

From upstairs somewhere came Felicity's sweet childlike little voice. "All right, hon-e-y. I'll wear your green sheer."

Honore started for the stairs. "Oh no you don't." She took the steps two at a time.

Nick looked around him. No one seemed to consider any of this unusual. Perhaps families all behaved this way. Somewhere an alarm clock went off and the twins said, in unison, "Time to feed the goldfish." They disappeared.

Mr. Beauchamp said, without opening his eyes, "Sit down, Nick."

Nick wanted to stay and yet he didn't. He wanted to see Felicity again, but she was going out with Henry. He sat down on the nearest chair and immediately a leg gave way. He picked himself up, embarrassed, but no one paid any attention.

Henry was saying, "Where was I when they came in?"

Mrs. Beauchamp said, "You were telling us about your summer place in Oregon."

"Oh, yes," Henry said. He leaned against the doorjamb, knowing better than to trust the chairs. "It's a rather modest place, about twenty acres. We just use it for a month a year."

Nick listened and then he stopped listening. He hated Henry and his loathsome money and his pride of possession and Mrs. Beauchamp for eating it up. He thought I could do that too, but I won't. I'm in love with Felicity, and even so I won't do it. I'm a milkman, and if that isn't good enough, then I'll lose her graciously.

After a while there was a knock on the door and there stood three young men. They were looking for Honore. Mr. Beauchamp gave them each a bottle of pop, which they sniffed hopefully, and drank politely. Honore yelled down that she couldn't see them tonight, because she had a date. Henry kept on talking to Mrs. Beauchamp while the young men went away, and a suave, wiry young man walked in, shaking the rain from his hat.

"I'm here, angel," he called, and Honore swept down the stairs. She was really something to look at, now that she was organized for the evening. Even Henry stopped talking

LET ME CALL YOU BABY

to look at her. She ran her fingers across his face and murmured, "You'll make just the sweetest brother-in-law," and dashed out the door, followed by the suave young man.

Nick's blood froze in his arteries. So it had gone that far. He looked at Felicity's father, who shrugged hopelessly.

Bless you, thought Nick, reaching for his hat. Suddenly he couldn't take it, seeing Felicity going out with Henry. He said good night and he noticed that Mrs. Beauchamp didn't ask him to come again.

CHAPTER TWO

Happy With You

THE NEXT DAY Nick did three things. First he thought about Felicity and love at first sight. Then he pondered about all the girls he had known at home who couldn't jolt his heart. Next he got a job driving a milk truck. He was a stubborn young man and he would make his white lie the truth.

His salary was low, and in the beginning he had to ride with an experienced man until he learned what he had to do. But it was a job, and somehow he got a kick out of it. Back home, his affairs ran along whether he was there or not. Now he was on his own.

That night after work at a quarter to six, he waited in his car on the corner where he had found Felicity. And after a while she came. It wasn't raining tonight and Nick thought, *She's the loveliest thing in all the world.*

Her eyes got big when she saw him. He opened the door for her, and she said, "Oh Nick!" Then she smiled at him.

"Darling," Nick said. "Darling."

They sat in the car, looking at each other, and he took hold of her soft little hands and held them tight. He forgot about Henry, her fantastic family, and the milk truck.

Her voice was breathless, and so were her eyes. "Nick, what is it? Are we crazy?"

"It's love," he told her.

"But we only met last night."

"Doesn't matter. It's in the stars. Felicity, I love you. Marry me."

It didn't surprise him that he, Nicholas Forrest, who had been brought up to weigh emotions and causes and reasons was desperately

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in love. Of course he had been expected to marry a girl from Forrestville, someone who had lived there for years, whose family had lived there for generations, but now he couldn't. His heart told him this was right and that was all there was to it.

So he said, "I love you, Felicity," and he took her in his arms and kissed her. Her lips were soft and sweet, and her kiss was magic.

It was Felicity who broke the magic spell. She pulled away from him and she was crying.

"Oh Nick. I love you, too. I do, I do. But it isn't any good."

"Why isn't it any good?"

She huddled in her corner and her mouth was shaking. "Drive me home, Nick. I can't see you any more."

He started the car and it jerked forward.

"Tell me about it," he said gently.

"I don't want to talk about it."

"Tell me." This time he wasn't gentle.

"Well, Daddy isn't strong enough to work. He's a veteran of the first war. Honore worked till I was through high school. She still works as a model but her money goes for dramatic lessons. The twins aren't old enough to work yet."

She looked at him and her eyes were pitiful. "Mother works too, dressmaking at home, but she can't carry it alone. Oh, Nick, don't you see?"

He saw quite a lot and what he saw made him angry. He could feel his face grow hot. "And Henry? The wealthy, handsome Henry?"

Felicity cried harder. "Mother adores him. And I—well, I like him all right, only he's always talking about what he has. It was all right, until you came along. Why did you have to come along?"

I could tell her, he thought, but I won't. It's got to be this way or not at all.

"We'll work it out somehow," he said. "Let me do the worrying."

"It's not fair, Nick. You're young. You're just starting. I won't let you be saddled with my troubles. Go away, Nick. Go away."

"I won't go away. You know that." Something hit him. "How old are you, Felicity?"

"Seventeen."

That means family permission, he thought, and it was hard to hold on to his resolve. But he did, because it was awfully important to his pride.

They rattled along and after a while she

stopped crying. He put his arm around her and she snuggled against him, little and sweet.

When they pulled up at the foot of the steps, Nick said, "Darling, leave it all to me." He had no idea what he could do, but something would break. It had to. "We'll go dancing tonight, and forget everything and everyone but us." He touched his necktie self-consciously. "I'm really dressed up tonight. Do you like my suit?"

Felicity looked at his clothes, her dark eyes vague. "You look wonderful," she said. But then you looked wonderful last night, too.

"You darling," he said, and kissed her again.

Then he carried her up the steps and into the house.

Mrs. Beauchamp pulled in the welcome mat, ignoring him completely. "Henry wants you to phone him," she told Felicity curtly. "Right away!"

Nick set her down and she smoothed out a wrinkle in her skirt. "I'm going out with Nick," she said, in that soft little voice.

"Call Henry."

"Yes, Mother."

Nick's heart sank. Perhaps she was just a puff of cloud, who could be blown here and there. Perhaps she didn't mean what she said.

He stood there, his hands shoved deep in his pockets, and she picked up the phone and dialed. He listened to her voice and it was so soft and sweet that for a minute the words didn't make sense to him. Then he grinned, and expanded his chest.

She was awfully sorry, she told Henry, but she was busy tonight.

When she set the phone down her mother said, "That's enough nonsense, Felicity. I forbid you—"

From across the room, her father waved a pop bottle. His voice was quiet and Nick realized that he and Felicity had the only two quiet voices in the family. "Leave my baby alone," he said. "If she wants to go out with Nick, she goes out with Nick."

Mrs. Beauchamp stared at him. "But—"

"That is all," he said. "I have spoken." He leaned his head back and closed his eyes.

Felicity came up close to Nick. "Can't we go now? I mean, do I look all right? We don't want to go any place fancy, do we?"

Mrs. Beauchamp sniffed. "You'll be lucky if you get a hot dog, going out with him."

A tremendous roar nearly knocked Nick

LET ME CALL YOU BABY

off his feet. It was Mr. Beauchamp. "Quiet!"
 "Come on," Felicity said, tugging at Nick's sleeve. "Come on."

GOING DOWN THE STEPS, she said, "They fight, terribly. I can't bear it, because I love them. And this time it's my fault. I'm selfish, Nick, and wicked."

He wanted to say what he thought of her mother, but of course that was out. He admitted to himself that perhaps she was only fighting for her family, the only way she knew.

"How long has your father been ill?"

"Ever since I can remember."

They looked at each other and Nick felt like a heel.

"Listen," he said. "I can help out. Your mother's had a rough time of it. I don't blame you for wanting to do your part and then some. But the worst is over, sweet. We'll be married and I'll help out."

Felicity patted his arm. "Oh Nick, you're a darling, but I won't let you do it."

"Where do you work?"

"Wynne's a small specialty shop."

"How much do you make?"

"Twenty-four dollars a week."

He tried not to wince. All his life, money had meant little. It was always there. Now he was learning the pitiful, agonizing urgency of money, enough to pay rent and buy food.

"We can do it," he said. "I'll be making forty, maybe sixty, in just a little while. We can give them twenty out of that and still get by."

"That will leave us forty. Oh, Nick, we could do it. I know where there's a little apartment . . ."

The brightness went out of her face suddenly and she turned her head away. "No," she said. "I won't do it. It's not fair."

He took hold of her shoulders and swung her around to face him. "You mean you don't love me enough, is that it? You'd rather have luxury and Henry?"

Her eyes flamed into quick anger and she seemed about six inches taller, glaring up at him, her mouth tight. "That's not true. And you know it. I love you too much, that's what."

They were the most wonderful words he had ever heard. *All my life I'll remember this moment. I'm not worth it, but she*

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loves me, a guy who drives a milk truck.

She said, "And Mother will never give her permission. Oh Nick, what are we going to do?"

He folded her in his arms, his lips against her dusky hair. "I told you, darling. Let me do the worrying. Let's go dancing now and pretend that money grows like weeds."

They started down the steps again and Honore was dashing up, two at a time. She's always in a rush, Nick thought. She pulled up short, staring at Nick in the dark. He couldn't see her face very well, but he was conscious of a scent of perfume.

"Where's Henry?" she demanded.

Felicity said, "I have a date with Nick."

"I see. Not giving Henry the brush, are you, baby?"

Nick could feel Felicity stiffen against his arm. "And what if I am? Is it your business?"

Honore laughed, a gay husky chuckle, but she didn't answer. All she said was, "And all that money, too. You're awfully impractical."

Nick said, "This reads like an old melodrama. I'm getting sick of it."

He felt Honore's fingers flick the tip of his left ear. "Oh, you're precious, Nick, simply imperishably precious. I adore you, honestly I do."

"Furthermore," Nick said, "I wish you'd all stop calling Felicity a baby."

"Why Nick," Felicity said.

"Why Nick!" Honore said slowly, thoughtfully. Then she dashed up the stairs . . .

It was a lovely evening, a wonderful evening of stardust and moon-dreams. *She loves me*, he kept telling himself, *she loves me*. If his conscience touched him once in a while, he stifled it. It would be something to cherish all of his life, the knowledge that Felicity loved him because he was he. There were no strings attached.

In a bright flash, he knew that she would like it better this way too, when she knew. There would be no confused emotions, no love tangled with custom-built cars and summers in Oregon. There would just be love between a boy and a girl, with their future in their hands and their hearts high as their hopes.

They did not talk of marriage or jobs or her mother that evening. Felicity wouldn't let Nick take her to the more expensive places. She was happy just being with him,

and he loved her so much that it was almost painful.

He took her home before twelve because she had to work the next day. Of course he had to start out on his milk route while it was still dark, but he didn't think about that. He felt as though he would never sleep again, or need to. He felt wonderful.

He carried her up the steps again and into the house. For once it was quiet and for a minute he thought no one was in the living room. But then he saw Honore, sitting on the floor, holding the phone. As he closed the door, she started talking. He didn't want to listen, but when Honore talked, you couldn't help hearing. At least, not when she was angry. And she was angry now.

Felicity stood beside him, her hand in his, and Honore ignored them. She was talking to the suave young man, Tony, and her words were red-hot and flame-tipped. When she had finished, she set the phone down and clambered to her feet, shaking out the folds of her red chiffon formal.

She looked at Nick and Felicity. "He stood me up," she said. "No man stands me up and gets away with it."

Nick thought, something strange is going on. The words are all right, but Honore's not really as angry as she pretends. But he couldn't be bothered thinking about such trivia.

Honore stomped off and Nick put his arms around Felicity and kissed her good night. "I'll pick you up at the store tomorrow," he said. "Thanks for . . . heaven."

CHAPTER THREE

Perfect Ending

WHEN HE PULLED UP in front of Wynne's Specialty Shop, it was five minutes to six. He slid out of the car and walked into the store. There was no one around but he heard a noise in the rear. It was a scuffling noise, and then he heard a girl's voice. It sounded frightened. It was Felicity's voice!

Nick moved fast, in long loping strides, and then his hand was a fist, and it landed flush on a man's jaw.

"Oh, Nick darling," Felicity said, burying her face against his shoulder.

LET ME CALL YOU BABY

"Come on."

He led her outside, and helped her in the car. She went to pieces then, very quietly.

They were several blocks away before he asked, "Is that rat your boss?"

"Yes. I've always managed to keep out of his way till today."

Nick's fingers jerked on the wheel and he felt as though he were choking. "We're getting married, but quick!" he said. "You're not working any more."

"Yes, Nick."

He looked at her and then he remembered. They would need her family's permission. He set his jaw. He would tell them the truth, if he had to. He was sure of Felicity's love now, and that was all that mattered.

But deep inside him, was a little prick of stubbornness, of pride. He wanted to get by on his own; he wanted to convince Mrs. Beauchamp that he was solid, worthy enough to take care of Felicity.

Anger was still hot against his throat as he walked into the house. Part of his anger was directed to her mother. Felicity was only a youngster, really, and her mother should have checked on her boss.

So he walked into the room wanting to protect her, to take care of her for always. There was no tact left in him, nothing but the deep urgency to marry her, right away, now.

Mercifully the twins were not there. Mr. Beauchamp was in his usual chair, with his bottles of pop, looking as though he had not moved for hours. Mrs. Beauchamp came in from the kitchen.

Nick said flatly, "I want to marry Felicity. I'm going to marry Felicity."

Mrs. Beauchamp stared at him. "She's only seventeen," she said coldly. "She doesn't love you. Besides you're not making enough money, and I forbid it."

Felicity took her hand out of his, stepped up close to her mother. Her mouth shook and then it steadied, and her hands were rolled into small determined fists.

"I love him," she said distinctly. "I love him terribly, Mother. Maybe I am only seventeen but I know I love him. I'm not a child."

Her mother's face whitened. "Then you should know that you'd still be working if you married Nick. Drudging and slaving in some little hole—"

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"That's different," Felicity said. "And it wouldn't be drudgery, married to Nick. It would be heaven."

Nick's heart almost burst. He said, "I can take care of her, Mrs. Beauchamp. The money angle doesn't count. I can take care of her and we can help here too."

Mrs. Beauchamp said, in a tired voice, "I want the best for her."

Felicity flared. "Nick is the best, the best in all the world."

Nick squared his shoulders. He was trying to tell them but they wouldn't listen to him. Across the room, there was a movement. Mr. Beauchamp unwound the bath towel from his head, set down his pop bottle, and got to his feet.

He said, "Baby, if Nick is what you want, you shall have him. He's a good boy." He looked at them all and they all stared back at him. He said, "I will go to work."

Mrs. Beauchamp looked as though she had seen a ghost and Felicity said, "Daddy darling, of course you'll do nothing of the kind. Nick has it all figured out."

Mr. Beauchamp straightened up and Nick thought that he looked healthy enough.

"I had a position offered to me yesterday," he said, in a dignified voice, "as night watchman at the brass works. I can sit and drink pop there as well as I can here."

Mrs. Beauchamp walked over to him and touched his arm. Her face was soft for once, and her eyes were shining. Her husband's fingers found hers.

"I've been a heel," he said softly. All his pretense was gone now. "And you helped me to be that way. I've loafed around, letting you and the girls support me. Sure, I was shell-shocked, but that was a long time ago. Maybe I'm not as good as other men, but I can hold down a watchman's job." He looked at Nick. "I had forgotten the pride a man has in taking care of his women. Thanks, boy."

Nick swallowed a couple of times. He had more money than he could spend in a lifetime and he wanted to tell them, but somehow he couldn't do it, not right now. This was Mr. Beauchamp's moment, and all kinds of lovely emotions were stirring and coming to life in the shabby room.

THERE WAS A VOICE from the foot of the stairs. They all turned and Honore stood there so beautiful it hurt your throat

to look at her. She looked glamorous, and she was expensively clothed, but her voice was down to earth.

"Atta boy, Pop," she said, and ran over to kiss him.

A horn sounded from the street far below the steps and Felicity said, "That's Henry's car. Oh dear."

Honore grinned at her. "It's for me, infant. Henry's arches are flat, so this once I'll go down alone. He'll need his arches before this evening is over."

Mrs. Beauchamp said, "But I don't understand. Henry was so in love with Felicity."

Honore touched her bright hair with long fingers. "Did you think I'd let Henry get out of the family? Don't be ridiculous, Mother."

She headed for the door. Then she poked her head in again, and beckoned to Nick.

Nick closed the door behind him, trying to see her face in the dark. "Honore, this isn't necessary. I've been trying to tell the truth to someone, anyone who would listen."

She wasn't paying any attention to what he was saying. Nobody would listen to him.

"Nick, I think you're sweet. And Felicity deserves to have what she wants. We've all taken advantage of her good nature for years. We're a wacky family but we wake up, once in a while."

"But Henry—"

"Henry," Honore said firmly, "is my dish from now on." Her voice changed. "You see, Nick, Felicity loves deeply, from her toes to the top of her head. Money doesn't matter to her. She's a dreamer and a sweet baby and I adore her."

She threw out her hands in a quick gesture. "While I thought she was interested in Henry, it was 'Keep off the grass.' At least I'm that loyal. But now—well, I can love too, Nick. And you can bet I fall quicker when there's luxury thrown in."

"And Henry—" Nick was dazed, tongue-tied by all the upheavals.

"Henry hasn't a chance, Nick. And you know, he's rather sweet, at that."

There in the dark, they grinned at each other, suddenly.

All at once Nick thought about the girls back home. They weren't like Honore. She was honest about what she wanted, and she'd live up to her part of the bargain, too. She would really love Henry, despite his money. She was wise and too sophisticated, but she had a wide streak of honor.

LET ME CALL YOU BABY

All at once he felt warm. From a bad situation, everything had been transformed. He could have Felicity, Honore could have what she wanted, Mr. Beauchamp had won back his self respect, and perhaps even Mrs. Beauchamp could gather up her pride and begin feeling like a real person again, now that her life would be a little more secure. He looked down at Honore, a wide grin spreading over his freckled face. Yes, things were fine now.

"Good luck," he said, and leaned over to kiss her cheek.

"You'll do all right," she told him. "And you certainly brought this family out of its rut. Take good care of the baby."

This time he didn't resent the word. Somehow everything was wonderful. He watched her running down the steps and he could see the lights of Henry's car waiting far below. Then he turned and went back into the house.

Mrs. Beauchamp and Felicity had brought in cider and cookies and Mr. Beauchamp was striding around the room, his chest expanded.

"It's a very responsible job," he was saying. "I'll carry a revolver."

Nick looked at Mrs. Beauchamp and she was wiping the back of her hand across her eyes, but her mouth was smiling.

Then he looked at Felicity and she set down the plate of cookies and walked into his arms.

As he gathered her close to him, he knew that all his dreams were finally coming true. Life was real and perfect.

"Oh, Nick," she said. "Oh Nick, darling. Is it too late to look at that little apartment I was telling you about?"

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(Continued from page 35)

able, putting the finishing touches on a new coiffure. It was an upsweep this time and it altered her enormously, calling attention to her fragile cheekbones and smooth throat. The collar of her white pleated shirt was starched and starched, and her navy slacks were so starkly simple that you knew they must be expensive.

Maggie, agog from her ride with Jimmy, perched on the bed. If she couldn't rejoice for herself, she could at least rejoice for June. Or so she tried to believe.

"I saw him," she said. "Saw him in the drug store."

June brightened. "Saw who? Mac?"

"Mac? Who's he?"

"Why, the ensign, the red-headed ensign! You know who that ensign is, don't you?"

"No, I—"

June placed thin, veinless hands on her shiny hair. "He's Herb MacGruder, that's who he is. You've heard of MacGruder zippers, haven't you?"

"You mean—"

"When Mac gets out of the Navy, he'll go on with his father. Someday, he'll take his father's place. Someday, he'll own MacGruder zippers!"

This, Maggie thought, was the end. For as long as she could remember, June had been a sort of shining symbol, a china princess, to whom every knight would pledge his love. But here she was, talking excitedly about a noisy, undisciplined young man. Why, it couldn't be! These two had no more in common than an Italian oil painting and a slogan scribbled on a back fence.

Maggie found herself whispering. "June, you don't mean to tell me—"

At mid-point, she abandoned the remark. One look at June, and she realized the girl was beyond saving. Since last night, she had undergone an almost chemical change. With vistas of affluence before her, she had hardened and matured—her green eyes had become cold and inflexible. No longer was she the china princess, but a war-like queen, preparing to annex a kingdom.

So Maggie, infinitely saddened, spoke of other things. "It wasn't Mac I met, it was Jimmy."

June made a face. "Oh! Him!"

"He's going to call you, June, about twelve o'clock. I think he said. He has the afternoon off, and he probably wants to go swimming

or do something else that will be fun."

"Well, he's not going to swim with me."

Maggie felt as if she had been slapped. Jimmy, as far as she was concerned, was as perfect as it was possible for a young man to be. It stung her to realize that June disagreed with her idea of perfection.

"But June!" she cried. "Don't you want to see him at all?"

June seemed annoyed. "No."

"But his looks, his charm—"

At this, June laughed out loud. Then, as if suddenly remembering that it might not be polite to express herself so frankly, she swallowed her laugh. But it lingered on her face in the form of a broad smile.

"Maggie," she said, "do you mean it?"

"Mean what?"

"Do you really think he's good-looking? Jimmy?"

"Why, I— Don't you?"

"Maggie, really!"

June said no more. After a brief, inquisitive look at Maggie, she turned back to the mirror, to continue arranging her hair.

The room was deadly silent, and Maggie, choking a little, was somehow able to see Jimmy Stockman as June did, and as the rest of the world probably did. No, he wasn't really good-looking. His forehead was too broad, and his jaw was too long and thin for good looks. Was he really charming? Well, he'd never dominate a formal dinner and he'd never bring a lagging party back to life. He wasn't exhibitionist enough for that.

What was he, then?

**T**HE PHONE RANG. As the first, sharp peal died away, Maggie became aware of the moisture in her palms, of the thumping of her heart. In fact, everything within her was going at top speed. Jimmy, she cried silently. I don't care what she says about you. Even if it's true, I don't! You're my kind of guy, Jimmy.

The phone rang a second time. June, with the chill, unshakeable calm of an empress, pointed across the room with her hairbrush.

"Answer that, Maggie."

With her throat straining with sobs she could never release, Maggie approached the telephone. She lifted the receiver from its cradle, but she didn't put it to her ear. First, she had to get control of her voice. But presently, she said what she supposed she had to.

"Hello?"

## A MAN FOR MAGGIE

Jimmy sounded very near, as if he were in the next room. "Who's this? Maggie?"

"Who else? How are you, Jimmy?"

"All set to go swimming. Now all I need is a pretty girl I can duck."

She smiled, weakly. "Well, if you're going to go around ducking girls—"

"Oh, and I've got a camera. It's a Reflex that the folks gave me for my birthday. I've never used it. I'm not even sure how to load it. Think you can tell me?"

She gasped. "Me?"

"You're coming to the beach, aren't you?"

Dear Jimmy. So he wanted her to tag along again as she'd done the evening before, and innumerable evenings before that.

It was time, she decided, that she gave him the bad news. "Jimmy, June can't go."

"How's that again?"

"I've been trying to tell you that she's tied up this afternoon."

She expected him to groan at that. But he burst out laughing instead.

"Maggie! Who said anything about June? It's you I want to see!"

She paused and stared at the receiver, as if it could help her understand what he had said.

"Oh," he said, "now I get it! I said I'd call when June woke up, didn't I? And you thought I was calling to talk to her!" His laughter was softer now, teasing her affectionately. "I didn't mean I wanted to speak to her, Maggie. I meant I didn't want to call while she was sleeping. I didn't want to get her mad at you."

Joyous tears sprang to Maggie's eyes.

"Jimmy," she said. "Jimmy—"

"Why, Maggie, you crazy kid. I wanted to be with you last night, too, only I wasn't sure you wanted me for an escort. Will you be my girl at the beach this afternoon?"

"Well," she said, "will you promise not to duck me?"

He chuckled. "If you'll teach me something about photography."

"I will!"

"I'll be a slow pupil, mind you. It may take the rest of week to learn to click the shutter. I may even have to look you up when you go back home."

Maggie felt like a peeress of the realm.

"Jimmy," she said, "you won't pass the course until you give me a picture of a red-eyed vireo!"

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(Continued from page 55)

say would make things right. Nothing could proceed until Sara walked. Only then would Joe come back to Karen.

"Karen!"

**S**UDDENLY APPREHENSIVE, Sara screamed the name again, but there was no reply except her own scared voice echoing back at her. The deathly quiet of the apartment struck her like a blow in the face. Panicky, she called again, wheeling her chair toward the bedroom door. It was shut but unlocked.

At first she thought Karen had fallen into a natural sleep, and was starting to close the door without disturbing her. Then she saw the sedative bottle that Bill had brought that morning. It was empty!

That awful moment of finding Karen made Sara realize that her sister was transformed and completely different. Thoughts that would have taken hours, now flashed through Sara's mind in seconds. Karen had said Bill loved Sara, yet she had made no attempt to take *him* from her. The old Karen would have had no qualms about that. And the old Karen would never have shed a tear over any man. Let alone this!

For the first time in her life, Karen was truly in love. If Sara had only known! If she had only known!

Staring down at Karen, so white, so still, so immovable, she promised barely above a whisper, "If you'll live, I'll get Joe back for you. I'll walk. I'll do anything! If you'll only live!"

How long had it been since she took the sedative? Sara had no clear idea of how long she had sat in the other room staring out the window into the blackness.

"Don't let it be too late! Don't let it be too late!" Forgetting, she tried to rise to her feet. Bill! She had to call Bill. He could save Karen. Bill could do anything.

But Sara's unused muscles gave way, and she crumpled to the floor. She couldn't get back into the wheel chair. And almost sobbing in her despair, she dragged herself to the phone table, pulling the phone down by the cord.

Bill didn't take time to ask questions. He was there almost before she finished calling Joe.

Lifting Sara back into her chair, Bill began to work on Karen's limp form. Finally as Joe

came in, Karen revived and they made lots of coffee for her to drink.

Morning was coming before they knew they had won. Sara watched Bill checking her sister's pulse as he finally let her sink into deep, but safe, sleep. As she watched him, Sara wondered how she could have been so blind. Even Karen had seen he loved her. The only thing Karen had missed was the thing Sara hadn't known herself, because she was too busy brooding over Joe.

Joe had been romance, Joe had been wonderful—the closest thing to love she had ever known. But Bill was the real thing!

Calling into the bedroom, Sara made up a white lie while she waited for Joe to reach her. "I walked tonight," she told him. "I walked to the phone."

Joe's grin wobbled, then steadied. "Thank God for that," he said simply.

Then touching her shoulder for a moment, he went back to Karen.

Bill heard her tell Joe. He came into the living room, closing the door behind him.

"That wasn't strictly the truth," he said, "considering where I found you when I came in. But soon it will be."

Then he started to leave. "She'll be all right now," he said. "Joe's going to stay with her for a while. And you, Sara, you'll be all right now, too. It may take a little time, but your walking is only a matter of practice, now that you want to. You won't be needing me."

"I'll always need you!" she blurted out. "Bill, I've been blind. With Joe, it wasn't really love. It was wounded vanity, hurt pride. Karen had always taken my beaux since kindergarten. I liked Joe a lot. I still do, but I don't . . ."

A girl couldn't say more. Not without saying, I love you, Bill!

Bill's eyes lit up. He said simply, "I've waited a long time to hear you say something like that. Too long."

And then he was leaning over, trying his best to take her in his arms and kiss her.

Holding on to him, Sara pulled herself up. With grim determination, she took one step forward into his arms.

"The first step," he said happily, and kissed her, long and sweetly. "It's taken a lot of will power on my part to wait for you to take a step toward me," he said adoringly.

"I could walk a hundred miles," she answered softly, "but this is as far as I want to go at the moment."



## Come Into the Kitchen With the Authors!

(Continued from page 65)

- 1 hard cooked egg
- 2 tablespoons chopped almonds
- lettuce and romaine leaves
- 1 teaspoon capers
- several pitted black olives, salt, pepper,
- celery seed to taste, mayonnaise
- heart of 1 bunch of celery

Dice the celery heart and add to chicken. Add egg, coarsely chopped and olives cut in pieces. Season to taste with the salt, pepper, lemon juice (you may not want to use all of the 2 tablespoons) and celery seed. Mix in capers and enough mayonnaise to lightly bind all together but go easy on it, so you can taste more chicken than dressing. Keep chilled until serving time, then place on lettuce and sprinkle with chopped almonds.

Some other recipes that you might find interesting are:

### AVOCADO ICE CREAM

- 1 cup milk
- ¼ cup sugar
- ½ cup heavy cream
- 2 avocados
- 1 egg
- 1 teaspoon salt
- juice of 1 lemon (about 3 tablespoons)
- ½ cup pistachio nuts

Combine milk, egg, salt and sugar in top of double boiler. Heat to scalding point. Remove from heat; cool. Add cream and lemon juice. Peel and mash avocados; add to mixture with chopped nuts. Blend well. Place in freezer tray of refrigerator. Turn control to coldest degree. When set, remove and whip smooth. Return to freezer unit and freeze until firm.

### RICE APRICOT PUDDING

- ½ cup dried apricots
- ¼ cup sugar
- 20 marshmallows
- ¼ cup honey
- 3 cups cooked rice
- 1 cup whipping cream

Soak apricots overnight in water to cover. Cook slowly in same water until tender. Add honey and sugar to taste. Arrange a layer of hot rice in a buttered baking dish. Cover with a layer of apricots sprinkled with quartered marshmallows. Let brown in a 400 degree oven. Top with a second layer of rice, apricots and marshmallows. Let brown again. May be served hot or cold with cream.

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*(Continued from page 63)*

he completed his job and fell to the ground. He wasn't hurt. He had lost his grip near the bottom of the pole, but Terry was so frightened she almost screamed. As she stood there watching, she realized that if he had been hurt, or had fallen against the teeth of the angry rocks, she would have died too. She loved him beyond all things.

She wanted to fling herself into his arms, but instead she mustered up the strength to run to the house. She was exhausted physically and emotionally. Watching Rush in his dangerous mission had taken too much out of her.

Her sobs came all at once, but when Rush came in, dripping wet, she had control of herself, and was making some coffee in the kitchen.

He looked in, and again she wanted to tell him how she felt. She wanted to tell him that life without him would be as bleak and cold as this awful night. But she was afraid. She had forfeited her right to him, and she was deliberately forfeiting her right to stay here with him. She'd failed utterly to be a mature, understanding wife, and above all else, she had forgotten how to be cheerful.

The coffee was ready and she poured a cup and put it on the kitchen table. Rush had gone upstairs.

She went to the foot of the stairs and called, "Come have a cup of hot coffee."

He came to the head of the stairs. As he looked down at her she thought his face seemed older than it had this morning. "You're all wet," he called. "Where have you been?"

"I was out watching you." She hadn't realized she still had her raincoat on.

He came downstairs. "What do you want to do, get killed?" he yelled. "That's a vicious wind. You could have been blown down on the rocks!"

She looked up into his eyes. "So could you!" she cried, and returned to the kitchen.

He followed her out and sat down at the table. "Aren't you going to have coffee?" he asked.

She poured herself a cup and sat down facing him. But he got up and came over to her, gently taking off her dripping coat.

She didn't want the coffee because she was beginning to feel awfully dizzy. Rush seemed to be swaying back and forth and then he seemed to be going around in circles.

The next thing she knew she was on the sofa in the living room and Rush was bending over her looking very worried.

"What happened?" she asked.

He sat down beside her. "You fainted."

"Oh." She still felt far away and very weak.

"Maybe I'd better phone headquarters and have them send a helicopter for you tomorrow?"

"No. I'll be all right."

"I shouldn't have brought you out here. It's too rough a life for you."

"I'm sorry Sue didn't marry you. I was second choice anyway," she said.

"Who said you were second choice?"

"Sue as much as said so."

His lips tightened. "Then she's given you and everybody else here the wrong impression. Sue and I were friends. We lived next door to each other and went to the same school, and our families were always throwing us at each other. But I never thought of her that way. She was a good kid and lots of fun, and maybe she'd have married me if I'd asked her. But I didn't ask her. Believe me, taking Bing home for a visit wasn't any accident. I was hoping they'd like each other because I wanted out."

He was looking into her eyes now and his face was very close. Her heart began to pound.

"I played the field, like all fellows do, but I never found a girl I could love until one morning when I got lost in the fog in San Francisco." He smiled a little now. "It was the darndest thing," he said. "I turned a corner and fell over the cutest girl and the biggest dog I'd ever seen."

Tears were sliding down Terry's cheeks. She put her hands up and cupped Rush's face.

"I'm so glad," she said shakily. "I'd hate to think our baby's father didn't love me and only me."

Rush's eyes opened in startled surprise. Then he grinned. "You mean it? About the baby?"

"I think so."

Then they were clinging together. The foghorn was still moaning, the light was still swinging round and round, the wind was howling, the rain still washing the island. But none of it mattered any more. Nor would any of it ever matter again. Together she and Rush could lick the world and the elements.

## MISS MENAGERIE

(Continued from page 83)

Phil will go home and do a little wondering."

"Pooh!" Marta said.

"Pooh to you!" her father answered.  
"Look at your dogs!"

Their ears were pricked at the sound of a car motor being turned off out in front. Tentatively, Carmel and Shorts got up on their haunches. Their tongues lolled expectantly. Aussie, apparently tired of it all, gave Marta's ear a brief nibble, said, "Silly people!" and flew across the room, looking for his cage.

Mr. Stoner gripped his cane. "I'll go get it."

"No, I—"

The chimes sounded and Marta went to the door. The dogs jumped against it as she opened it. Phil Brown stood there.

"I came back," he said sheepishly. He peered at Marta. "Rosalie lied to me. She raved all the way home. It seems someone owes her fifty dollars for a ruined dress. She hates dogs because they shed and scratch and are messy. Birds are dirty too, and are related to reptiles, and— Oh, I just want to forget it. But I did come back to apologize. Aren't you going to ask me in?" He sounded hurt.

So, of course, she asked him in. Carmel and Shorts were pretending that they hadn't seen him for at least six months.


Phil spoke to them in a voice of authority. "Down, you two!" They couldn't believe their canine ears. "Down!" Phil repeated, and they retired to a corner, flopping down, heads on paws, eyes bright and intent. "I have to kiss my girl," Phil told them.

He looked down at Marta. "You are my girl, aren't you?"

She nodded, so happy that she couldn't speak when he took her into his arms.

Maybe in time to come she would tell Phil what she had done to win him. But there was no need for it now—not when he looked at her so adoringly, and held her so tightly.

In the studio where Mr. Stoner had gone to get Aussie's cage, that elderly gentleman cocked his ear toward the hall leading to the living room. There had been a murmur of voices, but now, there was nothing but silence. To Aussie, perched on his shoulder, Mr. Stoner said softly, "Looks like we might be having a wedding soon. What do you think, Aussie?"

And the parakeet whistled gaily. 

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*(Continued from page 89)*

explanation. Several times he almost found himself wishing that he wouldn't find Tish's future husband.

The Crowder home was in an old but exclusive neighborhood. It was a two story Colonial place that had an air of grandeur.

When Harry rang the doorbell, a slight, middle-aged woman in a maid's uniform answered.

"I'm Harry Reece," he told the woman. "And I'm trying to get in touch with my friend, Paul Evans. I thought perhaps Mr. Crowder could tell me where I might find him."

"Mr. Crowder isn't in at the moment, but Mr. Evans is here. He's been a house guest."

"A house guest?" Harry echoed.

The garrulous maid shrugged. "It's Miss Barbara's doings. She took quite a fancy to this Mr. Evans, and her father never crosses her in anything. I'll take you to them if you like."

Harry followed her through a large, luxuriously furnished living room to a smaller door off it. It was an elaborate study with oak paneling and shelf upon shelf of books.

"There they are in the loveseat," the woman whispered with a giggle.

Harry's eyes bulged, for, at that moment, Paul had a stunning blonde in his arms and was kissing her as if she were the only girl in the world.

Chilled and sickened, Harry turned to the grinning maid. "Will you ask Mr. Evans to come here please? I'd like to talk to him privately."

A moment later when he was pacing the living room Paul joined him. Harry noticed that he had a look of annoyance on his handsome face.

"Hello, Harry. What are you doing here?"

Harry glowered at him. "I can just see what happened, Paul, and it's not a pretty picture. You wanted this deal to go through, and when you met the daughter, you decided things would be easier if you turned on the charm! While you've been making love to this girl, Tish has been worrying about you!"

Paul shrugged. "You might as well hear the truth. From the first moment I met Barbara, I knew this was the real thing. Besides, she can do more for me than Tish ever could. Barbara and I have fallen for each other so it's just one of those things!"

"You're crazy!" Harry shouted. "Have you forgotten that Tish is in love with you and expects to marry you? You're not going to break her heart, Paul! I won't let you!"

Paul's brown eyes narrowed. "You're pretty concerned over Tish, aren't you? The night we announced our engagement, you acted queer. Maybe that will be my excuse to Tish. I decided it wasn't fair to take her away from you after all!"

Harry stared at him. He stepped toward Paul, his hands clenched. "You aren't thinking of anyone but yourself!" Then his fist came up, connected with Paul's jaw in a stunning blow that sent him sprawling.

**D**RIVING BACK, Harry felt physically sick. What was he going to tell Tish? How could he spare her the terrible hurt of knowing that the man she loved was unfaithful?

And, thinking of her dark loveliness, Harry's hands clenched on the wheel. What kind of an emotional coward was he anyway? Was he afraid of himself? Did he have so little confidence that he thought he had to be successful before any girl would really love him and stay married to him? And, more important, why did he have so little trust?

His feet dragged as he walked into the office. Tish looked up at him and, to his surprise, he saw no anxiety in her blue eyes now. It was as if she'd found some answers for herself. She stood up and came to him.

"Is Paul all right?" she asked.

He nodded. "Yes, but, Tish, I have something to tell you," he said miserably.

"Harry, before you do, I want to tell you that I've been sitting here, thinking. I know I can't go through with it. I'm engaged to Paul but the awful thing is that I'm sure now that I don't love him and never will. You see, I liked him very much, and because he's such a fine person, I knew he'd make any girl a wonderful husband."

Harry couldn't breathe. There was a pounding in his head and he could even hear bells ringing. "Tish, do you know what you're saying? Because if you do, it's going to be like a reprieve for me. I almost lost you, Tish, and I've died a thousand deaths."

She stared at him. "But, Harry, aren't you forgetting you aren't the marrying kind."

Blindly, he reached out for her, and gathered her close. "Tish, honey, I've been a fool. I'm an idiot for thinking that ambition could

## WHEN KISSES ARE CASUAL

be more important than love. I've been in love with you, Tish, from the beginning, but I thought I had to wait. Now nothing's important but you and me!"

She clung to him and there were tears of happiness in her eyes. "Oh, darling, it's been that way with me, too. But what will we tell Paul?"

"Paul knows," he murmured. "That's what I wanted to tell you. He knows that you and I mean everything to each other. Oh, Tish, if you'll marry me, I promise that you'll never be that deserted Ophelia you were talking about!"

"I've waited so long to hear you say that," she sighed. "Say it again so I can be sure."

"I love you," he whispered. And then, Harry was kissing her, and the hunger, the waiting, the compromises with love were over. For better or for worse, they would always have each other.

## HELPFULLY YOURS

(Continued from page 12)

of the flat button type, instead of the elaborately designed or dangling type.

Dear Miss Sara:

Since my mother-in-law lives out of town, and is coming to visit us for the first time, I am having a tea party to have her meet my friends. How shall I introduce her?

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It isn't wrong to introduce her as your mother-in-law, but it's much nicer to introduce her as "John's mother." A woman is always happier being unknown as a mother rather than somebody's mother-in-law.

Dear Miss Sara:

It gets cold at nights in the country, and so I've gotten an eiderdown quilt. I haven't washed it yet, and I want to know the best way to tackle that chore.

Mrs. Amy B.

Whip up warm water soapsuds in your bathtub, since you'll need a large area for washing the quilt. Squeeze the quilt through the soapsuds, between your hands. Repeat this in a second tubful of warm soapsuds. Then fill the tub with clear water, and rinse the quilt well, squeezing the excess moisture out between your hands. Hang the quilt in the shade. While it's drying, shake it often.

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## FIFTEEN LOVE STORIES

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Dear Miss Sara:

My husband works hard all day. Some evenings I invite a girl friend for dinner or bridge. Now I wonder is it necessary for him to take her home, since we don't have a car? She can get home in twenty minutes on the bus, and it stops right at the corner of her home. One of my friends says my husband is no gentleman if he doesn't accompany her.

Ruth F. T.

Your friend is an adult, and can see herself home safely. Your tired husband shouldn't be forced to act as an escort. If she were old or helpless, then of course it would be a nice gesture if he did. Both you and your husband, could walk her to the bus stop to see that she got aboard safely, or could put her into a taxi. Your husband's duty as a host to your single girl friends should not include wishes that aren't valid.

Dear Miss Sara:

My aunt just gave us a lovely old drop-leaf table, which opens up into a square. We have no place for it, but we could use a coffee table in our living room. Is it all right to saw off the legs of this table and use it as a coffee table? I'm not sure about being able to keep the drop-leaves on it.

Barbara K.

Of course, it's all right to use a table with sawed-down legs in your living room. It will be a handsome coffee table, and its leaves will come in handy when refreshments are being served to guests.

Dear Miss Sara:

One of my prized wedding gifts is an electric blanket. Some say to wash it, some say to do anything but. What do you say?

Marie M. G.

It depends on the blanket. Follow directions on the manufacturer's label. If you don't have it, write to the manufacturer and ask for directions. I'm sorry I cannot give you specific help on this.

## STOP-AND-GO HEAR!

(Continued from page 71)

merely glanced at a lamp-post, for all the recognition she had given him.

Rod stared at the car until it was out of sight. So he had received a cold shoulder from two school teachers in a half hour's time! But his police-trained intuition quickly overcame his resentment. Something was out of key. Miss Digby wasn't angry at all when she left the other day. She was rather friendly, in fact. Why would she look right through him today, as if he wasn't there?

A possible answer flashed through his mind and the thought staggered him. He looked wildly around. Steven Spack was just driving away from the drug store. Rod whistled and brought him to a stop.

"Look here, Owens—" Steven sputtered.

"Shut up," Rod snapped. "Drive north. I want to take another look at that last car."

"Owens, I don't know what your scheme is, but—"

Rod drew his pistol. "Move over, Steven."

Miss Digby's car was far ahead. Ignoring Steven's outraged cries, Rod pursued her at high speed, blasting a right-of-way with the horn. As they neared the dilapidated sedan, a male face pecked out the rear window and disappeared.

"Get down, Steven," Rod ordered. "They may start shooting."

He was right. A man, using a gun as a club, broke through the rear window of Miss Digby's car. A moment later the windshield cracked in front of Rod.

"Shoot, you fool," Steven shouted.

"I can't. I'd hit Miss Digby."

In a burst of speed, Rod pulled alongside the old car and blocked its way. That was contrary to all police safety procedures, but the manual didn't ever mention elderly ladies being forced to drive get-away cars.

Then he was in the road, sheltered somewhat by the rear fender of Steven's car, and trading shots with two men—the two escaped criminal. They had been hiding on the floor of Miss Digby's car.

He saw one of the men suddenly clutch at his right shoulder and the gun drop from his hand. A bullet glanced off the metal close to him and whined like an angry bee. Rod took careful aim at the other man, and squeezed gently on the trigger of his gun.

As the revolver jumped in his hand, something hit his stomach hard like a fist. For

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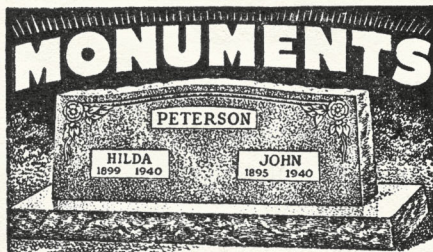
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## FIFTEEN LOVE STORIES

an instant he was sick. Then the gunman in front of him blurred. In the split second before blackness engulfed him, Rod wondered if this was the end of everything.

**WHEN HE REGAINED** consciousness, Rod was in a hospital room. For a time he was content simply to lie there and watch the nurse move about. But his young strength quickly asserted itself and in a matter of hours he was demanding food and wanting to sit up.

The chief of police came in with the newspapers and called him a hero. Rod learned he had disabled both the criminals, and they had been captured. When the chief left, the nurse told him Cindy was waiting.

The hot anger was gone, but Rod had no desire to dislodge the icy resentment that gripped him.

"No," he said. "I don't want to see her. Tell her I wasn't trying to prove anything. I was just doing my job." And it was his job, he thought, with a feeling of satisfaction. He liked it and he had proved his right to be called a guardian of the people.

Miss Digby came in. "I stayed until you were strong enough, so I could thank you for saving my life. You did, you know. They were planning to kill me and run the car into the Gulf."

Rod mumbled something, too embarrassed to speak coherently.

"You have great courage, young man, but you're also a fool."

Rod blinked and stared at her.

"There's a lovely girl out there," she continued, "eating her heart out. She told me she's been wrong and knows it. Now don't you be wrong too."

Rod turned his face away. "I'm sorry, Miss Digby. That's a personal matter."

"Fiddlesticks," she snorted.

After she had gone and the hospital settled for the night, Rod had a moment of doubt. Perhaps he was letting his pride run away with him. Then he remembered Cindy's scathing statement, and resentment bubbled up all over again . . .

The next day the chief came back. "Doc tells me you're well enough for a little ceremony," he said. "There are some people here who want to tell you how they feel."

He signalled the nurse. In trooped a dozen second-grade children. Behind them, smiling



## STOP-AND-GO HEART

shyly, but lovingly at Rod, was Cindy.

Anger rose within him. He had refused to see Cindy and she'd tricked him. But was it anger that was making his pulses race so, or was it something else?

In a soft voice, Cindy began to read from a scroll. "On behalf of the citizens of Coquina Beach and its children . . . your chosen profession . . . devotion to duty . . . outstanding courage . . ." He didn't hear all the words because he was watching her face while his heart pounded wildly.

The ceremony was finished and he shook hands with each of the awed, admiring children. Hesitantly Cindy extended her hand and Rod held it. He looked at the youngsters dawdling near the door.

"Scram," he said kindly. "Miss Ware and I have something to talk over."

He smiled sweetly at the children who stared in wonder. He waved to them as they left the room. Then he turned to look at Cindy with adoration.

He pulled her down beside him. "I always said those kids weren't big enough to appreciate you."

"Nor I you," Cindy said softly. "I've been so wrong, Rod, but now I understand. You're proud of your work, and I'm proud of you. I wouldn't want you to change, ever. Although, when they thought you might not live, I—I—"

Her eyes welled with tears and she had to turn away while she dabbed them with her handkerchief.

"Tell me," Rod asked, "did those occupational tests tell you how I'd be as a husband?"

"Perfect," she murmured, her voice trembling. "Absolutely perfect."

She leaned down and kissed him tenderly, being careful not to press against his wound. Her warm, loving lips set fire to him, and he fiercely pulled her to him. Suppose it did hurt his stomach. It hurt good, didn't it? *WOW*

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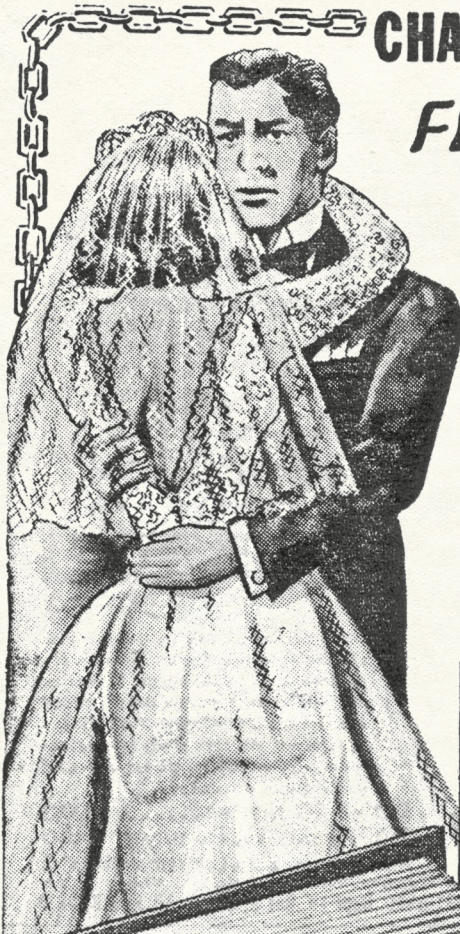
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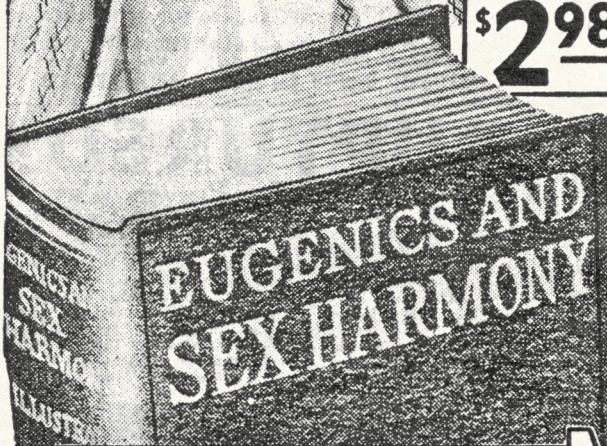
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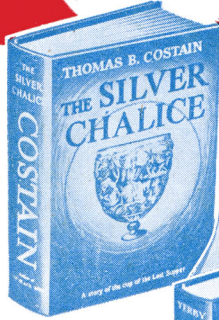
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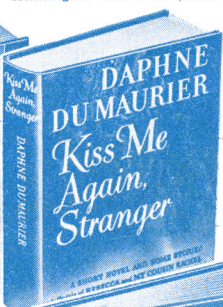
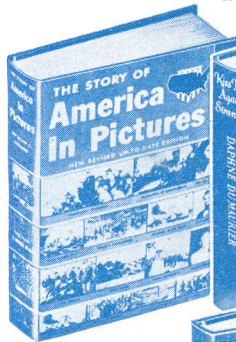
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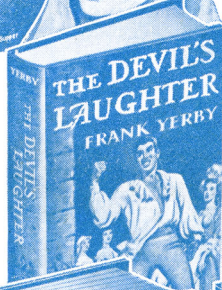


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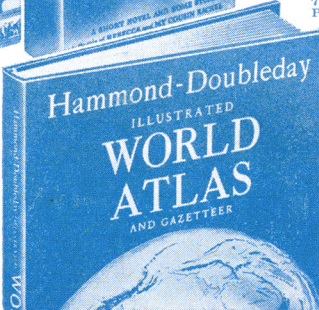


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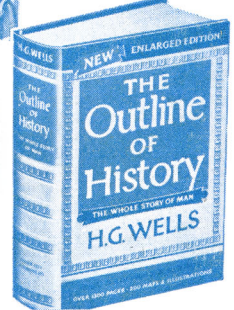
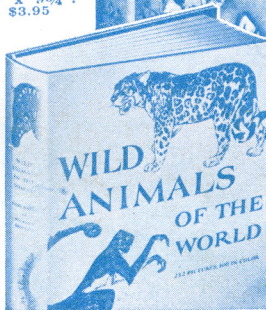
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