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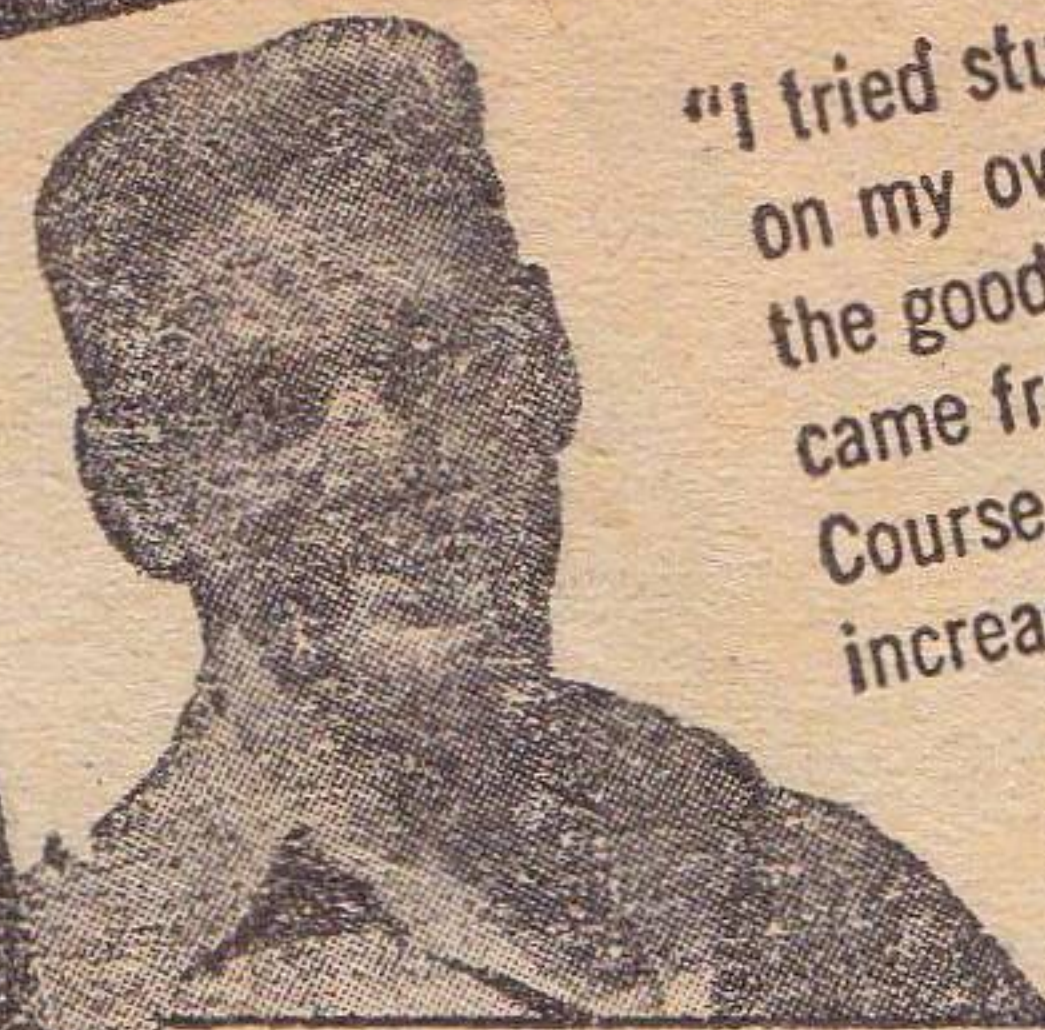
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IDEAL LOVE STORIES

May
1955

ALL STORIES BRAND NEW

Vol. 16
No. 1

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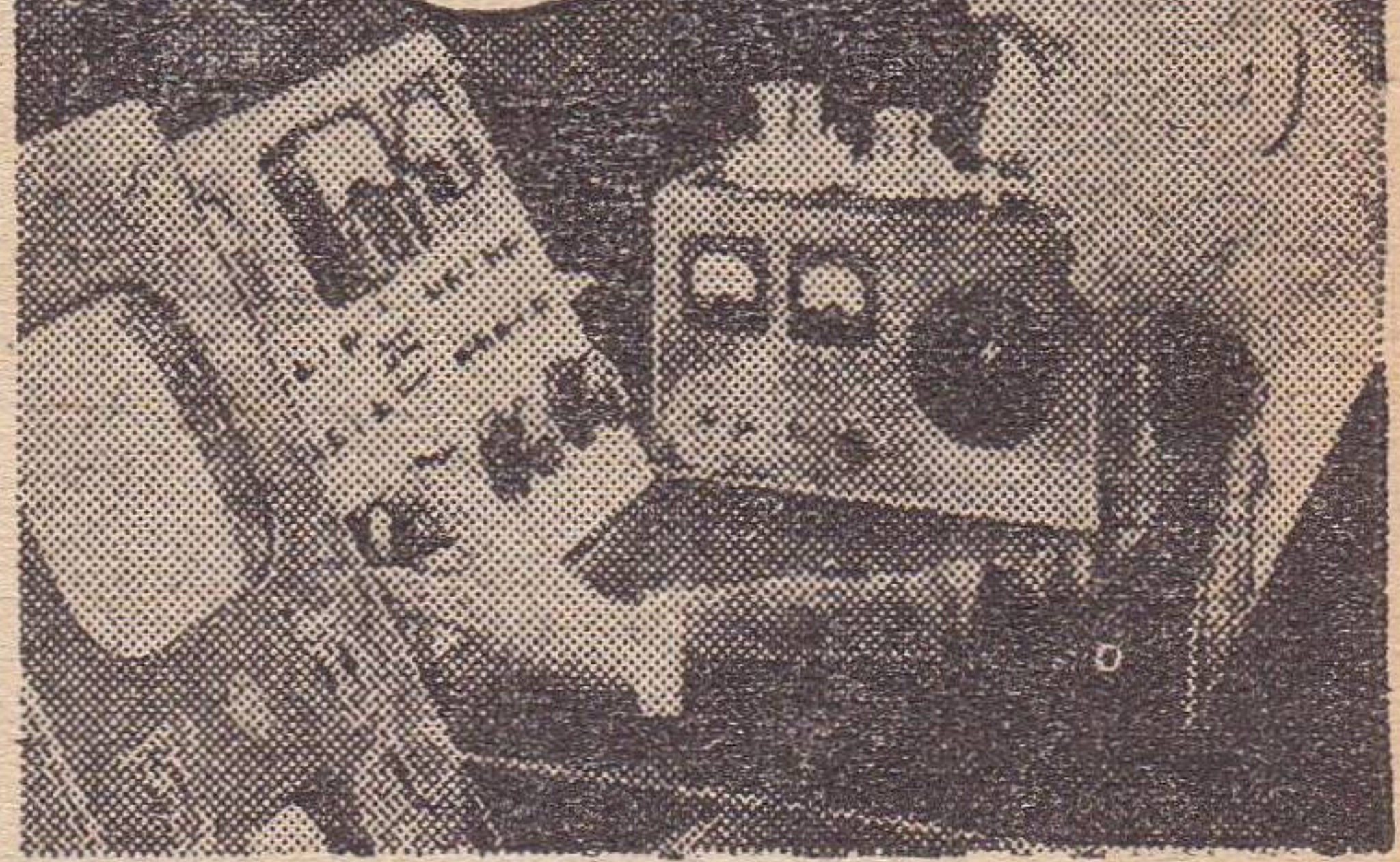
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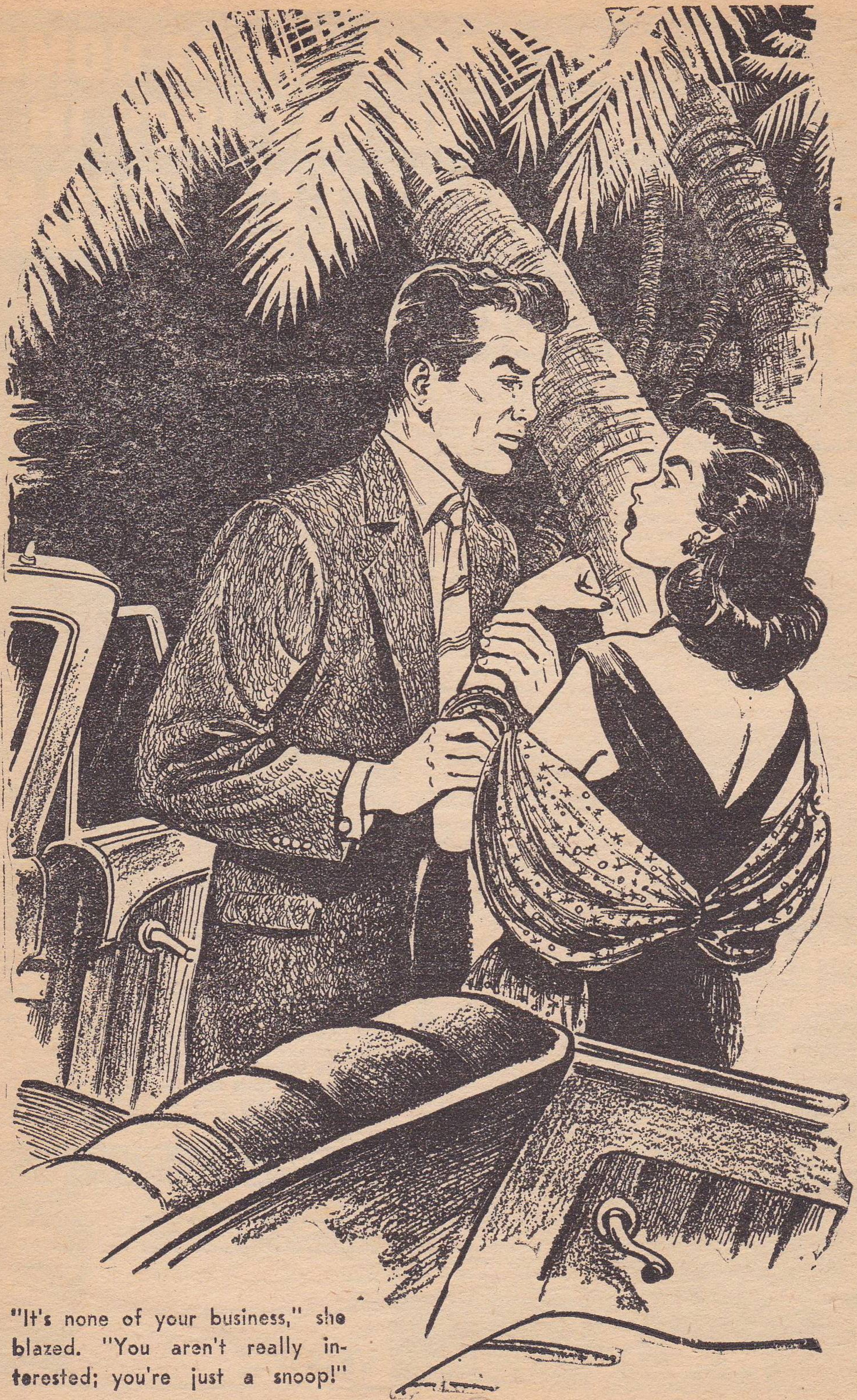
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The ABC's of SERVICING

How to Be a Success in RADIO-TELEVISION



"It's none of your business," she blazed. "You aren't really interested; you're just a snoop!"

As a responsibility, June left much to be desired!

ANGEL WITH STRINGS

Thrilling

Novelette

by **ANN MASON**

BILL MARKHAM drove slowly along the palm-lined street watching for Poinsettia Drive to angle into it. June had given him explicit directions, although she'd ruefully admitted people were always getting lost. Be sure to turn left off the highway, she'd cautioned, or he'd end up in the Pacific Ocean... She wasn't too far wrong.

June had sounded like fun when he'd phoned from his office this morning and he was excited about meeting her. Kip's telegram had started it. A frantic wire, as Kip's always were. He begged Bill to rush to June Adams and keep an eye on her, so no California

wolf could steal her. June had flown home to Santa Monica two days ago after six months in New York, and this time Kip was in love. The real for-keeps kind of love with a preacher and a cluster of orange blossoms. June was Bill's responsibility now and he was to guard her with drawn bayonets and save her for his ever-loving brother, Kip.

A second wire had followed, urging Bill to hurry to June, then the message climbed down to earth enough to add she'd explain about his new contract.

Not only did Bill have a genuine curiosity about this new girl, but he was anxious to hear about his bother,

whom he hadn't seen for over a year. Kip had zoomed to TV stardom almost overnight. He had a natural talent, was a handsome devil and had the great good luck to project gaiety and warmth into living rooms across the nation.

Nothing had come hard for Kip. He began getting jam on his bread at four, by simply flashing his smile. Girls began trailing him in kindergarten and had never stopped. There was nothing smug or conceited about Kip, he just thought life was a hilarious good time, his for the taking. How many times, Bill wondered, had Kip fallen in love—for real?

There was Poinsettia Drive! Bill felt a little the way Columbus must have when he spotted land. June's number turned out to be a neat stucco house with a red tiled roof. The side garden was a mass of color and dwarf palm trees separated the yard from her neighbors.

Before he could lift the knocker the door flew open. And there she was. Spontaneously, she held out her hands. "Bill!" she cried.

"And June!" He smiled warmly and felt a huge weight flit from his heart. This time Kip had hit the jack-pot.

He kept smiling because he felt so doggone happy he couldn't help it. Her living room was bright with flowers, there were white rugs and comfortable chairs, but he was so busy looking at June that all he got out of the room was the general charming effect. Always he'd liked copper hair with those interesting lights and brown velvet eyes.

"Well, Angel, Kip has good taste. He's missing you badly and I can see why."

She smiled. "That's nice for you to say." Then she frankly studied him. "You and Kip aren't much alike."

"No." His eyes twinkled. "I'm the homely Markham."

"Ummmm." She thought about it. "You're the kind of man who intrigues a woman. The more she looks at you the better looking you are."

He liked that and he didn't care if she were buttering up the big brother. June had an open frankness about her and he knew she'd be a hard girl to fool for very long. She'd give honesty and demand it in return. But Kip could measure up.

"A highball or beer?" she asked.

"Beer please. May I help?"

"I think I'll save you for the big jobs." Her grin had a gamin quality.

AFTER SHE'D brought their beer she curled up on the couch and he sat across from her. For a minute they just smiled at each other companionably. Like old friends. It was then he noticed the ceramic beer mug and held it up.

"Nice," he approved.

"Thanks." Then she confided, "I was scared to meet you, Bill. I've heard so much about you from Kip."

He laughed. "Kip gives a build-up. If you two are in love, what are you doing back here. I assume," he added, "you, too, are in love?"

"It's this way," she explained. "I went to New York to visit a college friend and to take an advanced course in ceramics. I have a kiln in the back and I'll make you a lot of mugs." She grinned. "I teach some classes and I sell things too. Anyway, I met Kip on a party. I saw a lot of him between his rehearsals and my course and he finally asked me to marry him." She sounded a little breathless. "Then he had a big contract coming up and lots of work ahead... I had my house and my plans and my work. I decided I'd come West to think about marriage. So, here I am." She leaned back as if she hadn't wanted to explain about Kip and her.

But, Bill thought, he wasn't an outsider. He was Kip's family with a vital interest in this. Whether she liked it or not, he was going to have to ask questions.

"What do you mean, decide about marriage?" he asked.

"Decide if Kip should marry at this stage of his career. If it's best for him, I wouldn't want to take his mind off his work."

"Good lord, Angel," Bill protested. "Having you way out here is more distracting than if you were right there waiting to see him when he could snatch the time. Even if you didn't marry immediately. This way Kip worries a hell of a lot more."

"No Kip won't." There was some subtle change in her voice. "He thinks you're going to keep an eye on me. Naturally, we don't have to tell him you're not." She laughed softly. "I don't need any looking after. I've done fine, just fine—all by myself."

And she probably had. But if he let her follow this line there'd be no excuse for him to watch her for Kip. No one had to tell him that men would flock around her. Unconsciously, Bill assumed his lawyer's patient, reasonable attitude with the most cantankerous client.

"Granted, Angel. Still I should think even an independent spirit like you would like someone to rely on whenever things broke wrong. Someone older, whose judgement you could trust." He grinned. "A lawyer like me, maybe."

"I suspect we more-or-less control our own breaks." She studied him and there was an amused glint in her eyes. "How much older are you than Kip?"

"Six years." He didn't add that worrying through some of Kip's escapades had made him feel a hundred and six. But at last, Kip had fallen in love with exactly the right girl. One who'd keep his feet firmly on the ground. A girl who'd understand that because Kip loved her, none of his flirtations were important. For Kip they were only fun. Gradually, June could make him into a one-girl man.

"Tell me about ceramics," he urged and surprisingly wanted to know. They were suddenly important to him in a curious way.

THERE WAS a sparkle in her eyes and her face glowed with enthusiasm. Her parents had left her the house, she explained and enough money so she could learn to be self-supporting. Children made up most of her classes, though she had a few adults.

"Want to see my studio?" she asked eagerly.

"Of course." He smiled as they both jumped up. "I want to know everything about you."

"I know." Her grin was impish. "To see if I get a passing grade for Kip."

She took him out to a shed beside the garage. There was a large kiln, an enormous table littered with tiny pots of paint, with moulds and finished pieces.

"The children's." She touched one fondly. Then she showed him horses, ashtrays, mugs, vases and plates. "Mine. I'm trying some new designs and a tricky new glaze. These I want to place in the better shops." She crossed her fingers. "I hope."

They went out and sat in the garden. Two ships' lanterns attached to the house gave a pleasant glow. "If you'll come here, knee down and squint, you can catch a glimpse of the ocean streaked with moonlight." After he'd squinted for quite a while, she laughed. "Of course, a heavy imagination does help."

It was a fine evening and they were easy companions. He heard about her family and the plane crash from which they hadn't returned. She heard about his struggle to raise Kip and keep himself in law school. They told anecdotes about Kip and she was as loving and indulgent as he.

Driving back to his apartment on Wilshire Boulevard in Beverly Hills, he was amazed that the evening had passed with such incredible speed. It was one o'clock when he left June's. He liked this girl and found himself singing along with the car radio, off key. Things would be wonderful for Kip.

Well, it wouldn't be a difficult assignment to keep an eye on her. Not difficult at all.

JUNE FLITTED in and out of Bill's thoughts during the following day. He'd been careful in his selection of thank-you flowers, debating between roses, glads and snapdragons. Finally deciding on masses of white violets. For some reason he had trouble with his note and ended up with a trite, "Kip's a lucky one... The brother-in-law."

When he'd just finished a conference with the senior member of his firm, a long distance call came from Kip. He sounded exceptionally gay when he demanded if Bill had met his girl yet?

Bill laughed. "She's wonderful. I can't figure why you let her get away."

"Hey!" Kip shouted. "Don't be that enthusiastic. You're the watch dog." His voice was warm and rich. And fifteen minutes later they hung up. This time Kip was really in love. Bill was glad.

Somehow, this ending made up for the rugged times. A great lad Kip, who'd finally caught himself a great girl.

It was when Bill drove home late that afternoon he decided he'd been stodgy these past weeks. Perhaps he ought to get himself a girl. He grinned. Gail Collins had been out with him two nights ago and they'd danced until nearly dawn. Last weekend there'd been a big houseparty at Santa Barbara and he'd had a lot of fun swimming, playing golf and flirting a little. Yet, he felt stodgy. Probably it was because June and Kip were so much in love. And so young—

The apartment hotel where Bill lived was comfortable and the service excellent. Yet, as he went into it now no one could deny the loneliness. He wished Kip would get a TV show originating in Hollywood because then he wouldn't have to batch it. He stopped short in his wishful thinking. Kip was getting married.

It would be considerate, Bill decided, if he called June and told her about Kip's phone call. She sounded marvelous. After he told her in detail, the idea of a party suddenly seemed excellent and he invited her for Saturday night, offering to introduce her to some friends. Instantly, he knew that was stupid because as a native Californian she'd have all the friends she wanted.

"It would be lovely, Bill." And she sounded like she meant it. "But I was going to phone and thank you for the gorgeous flowers and ask you to a barbecue I'm giving Saturday." There was a kind of breathless catch in her voice. "Please come. I want to show off my brother-in-law. Bring your very best girl."

"I'd like to. Thanks." There wasn't any point explaining that he actually didn't possess any best girl. There hadn't been time for it until Kip settled down finally. "And I'll bring a girl," he promised.

After a second she said, "Bye."

Gail Collins was glad to go with him.

"I'm expiring with vulgar curiosity to see the girl your fickle brother's really in love with." She laughed.

Chapter 2



GAIL WAS still curious when they drove to Santa Monica late Saturday afternoon. "Do you think Kip will be led to the altar this time, darling?" she asked.

"Want to bet? Kip's not a fool, just wait until you see June." Then Bill told Gail a lot about her.

There was no trouble finding Poinsettia Drive this time. The car almost turned itself.

Gail broke a thoughtful silence. "I've never seen you quite as enthusiastic before. I don't think I can wait to see this paragon."

"Your waiting's ended." Bill wondered if he'd made a mistake bringing Gail? She was terribly attractive, a little older and a lot more sophisticated than June. Gail worked in the Publicity Department at one of the major studios and she got around. They'd had fun together and Bill admired her tremendously.

There were other ships' lanterns lit besides the ones the other night and the area around the barbecue pit was bright. June, in blue jeans and a gay shirt, waved a long fork at them as they strolled across the lawn.

"She's cute all right," Gail admitted. "But not quite my type." But she was gracious and charming when June came to them.

"He said he'd bring his best girl. And you're beautiful," June said sincerely and Gail capitulated.

"Can't I help?" Gail asked as if she really meant it and Bill grinned. He knew how much she detested messy work with sputtering steaks and smoke.

There weren't too many other guests for a pleasant party. Just enough. And June was an easy charming hostess who didn't mind in the least having fun herself.

They were just finishing a delicious supper when a long black car tooted and slammed to a stop. Everyone turned and June left them quickly to meet the man coming toward her. He picked her up and kissed her roundly. It didn't take much time for Bill to realize that the man was a lot more than merely interested in June. Not that he blamed him any, but this was what he had to keep an eye on. To drive off the poachers. June must be kept safe for Kip. At the moment she didn't look as if she wanted to be kept safe.

The man was big, broad and fair. His laugh reminded Bill of Kip's and he didn't like that very well. "Eric Granmede," June announced. Eric knew everyone and everyone patently liked him. Even Gail.

The pretty little starlet Bill had been talking to giggled. "He's a go-getter." She glanced slyly at Bill. "Your brother must be some punkins if June's going to turn Eric down for him."

BILL'S SMILE was confident. "He is." He nodded toward Eric. "What's he do?"

"Don't you know?" She was appalled. "Why Eric's father practically owns Granmede Studios. Eric's loaded. You know, race horses, yachts and stuff. Golly, I wish he'd look at me just once the way he does June." Her eyes were moody.

When Eric came over to Bill they shook hands. "I'm warning you, Bill." He was affable about it. "I didn't want June to go back to New York in the first place. I flew there to try to persuade her to come back with us in my plane, but your brother was the stellar attraction." He slipped his arm around June. "But, now she's home. I have the inside track."

June glanced up at Eric. "Don't be silly." She smiled. "Don't pay any attention to him, Bill."

Bill tried to smile back but he was glad when Gail drifted over. Eric could be very heady stuff for any girl, even June. Especially, with Kip three thousand miles away. Later, he'd question Gail about the heir to the Granmede Studio. Bill didn't want to ask June, it would be—well, too brother-in-law-ish. Suddenly he was startled at his reaction. That's what he was, wasn't it? A prospective brother-in-law.

While the others were chatting and Gail had cornered Eric, June took his arm. "Want to dance with me?" she asked and led him inside and snapped on the radio.

But Bill didn't take her in his arms. He looked down into her velvet eyes. "What about Eric?" he asked. The very thing he'd sworn he wouldn't do.

"What about him?" she countered. And her eyes were just as steady on his. There was a soft, exciting light in

them as she put her hand on his arm. "Let's say you think I'm right for Kip. A steadying influence. Isn't that it?" Bill nodded eagerly in agreement. "If I weren't, then you would never want me to marry him, would you?" She was intent about it, but she seemed satisfied when he shook his head no.

"Kip needs understanding, Angel. Someone beautiful and gay, but also steady and wise as an owl."

"Let's dance," she said.

Bill relaxed and thoroughly enjoyed himself. There wasn't anything to worry about. Eric Granmede didn't have a chance. Bill knew he could trust June and her love for Kip.

BUT HE WASN'T quite so sure of that a couple days later when he unfolded the morning paper and poured his coffee. June's picture looked back at him from page 1. She was wearing a swim suit and smiling at a couple of other girls and men, but he saw only her. Then his eyes dropped down to the few lines of copy.

"Gala party aboard Granmede yacht Sunday almost cost the life of June Adams, rumored to be engaged to TV's glamor boy Kip Markham. To win a bet, during the all day fishing party hosted by Granmede's sportsman son, Eric, Junie dove off the yacht to try a Florence Chadwick back to the Yacht Basin. The prize if she made it, a clubhouse box at Santa Anita race track. Junie lost!"

Bill groaned. Kip would blame him for this when he got the word. And he'd get it, Bill didn't make any mistake about that.

Just then Gail phoned. "Read all about it," she carolled like a newsboy calling an extra. "Honestly, Bill!" But there was a hint of envy in her voice.

"I can't talk now. I'll call you this afternoon, honey. I'm late for an appointment." He listened until she hung

up with a faint bang. But he couldn't discuss it now, it would take a minute or two to catch his breath.

There wasn't any use just sitting with cold coffee, not doing anything about it, he finally decided. His usually good humored face settled into stern unfamiliar lines as he reached for the phone again to call June.

It was a little surprising to have her so brightly glad to hear his voice. It was possible she hadn't seen the paper. That was foolish, of course she had. Or if not, a dozen of her friends would have phoned to tell her.

"Can you meet me in town for lunch? I think it's important June." He kept his voice judicious and cool.

"So I'm nobody's angel this morning." She laughed. "I have a class to teach at eleven; so why don't you come here? There's loads to eat." This time she actually giggled. "I have caviar and truffles and a whole enormous basket of goodies from..."

"Don't tell me," he cut in sharply. "Let me guess." After taking a deep breath he forced himself to be calm. "Are you all right?"

"Sure," she sounded surprised. "Why not?"

"I'll be there at twelve-thirty."

Bill was there at twelve-three, after planning carefully what he'd say to her about her escapade.

June was stretched out in a garden chair in the sun. Wearing an off-the-shoulder blouse and a wide skirt, she looked like a demure little girl. But he knew only too well she wasn't, and indignation built up in him.

"Ready with the lecture?" she asked impishly and against his will he felt a smile tugging at his mouth.

Even if he wanted to, he couldn't be heavy-handed in the face of her friendliness. "Look, here, Angel," he said reasonably, "I'm much older than you."

"Eight years," she told him. "Scarcely worth bragging about, is it?"

"I've had a lot more experience than you," he went on with the same sweet reasonableness. "I think I ought to warn you about things. And point out that certain modes of conduct," he wavered and stopped under the diabolical laughter in her eyes.

"Oh, go on," she urged breathlessly.

HE FLUSHED. "I thought you were a fine, sensible girl," he said doggedly. "Now, I wonder if that good sense isn't just a shell you had to grow because you were on your own."

"With no one to guide me," she murmured.

"Yes." He blundered on. "So it's natural enough for you to want to do silly, unthinking things, like that swim. But," he moved another step toward her, "don't you think it would be better for you and for Kip if you stopped going around making a spectacle of yourself?" Bill got no response, but he'd been up against tough juries and he'd learned how to plead his case. "I've heard Eric's pretty spoiled and hasn't much judgment, that he's hurt a number of reputations around here. In all fairness to Kip, should you date him?"

June leaped up and glared at him. Anger brought pink into her cheeks, the sun slanted on her copper hair and Bill began to feel as small as the dwarf palms behind her.

"You're bossy and a snoop," she stormed. "Go way."

But it was she who turned and ran into the house. The door slammed. Bill stood there feeling embarrassed and utterly foolish. Useless too. June simply refused to understand that they both had a responsibility toward Kip.

Well, she might blast him and run, but he couldn't. Slowly, he went into the house after her. He'd never handled a law case as stupidly in his life.

June stood by the fireplace fluffing out her hair. "Don't you *ever* like silly things?" she asked without turning

around. "And don't tell me you're older and have the experience." There was still sharp anger underlying her words. She turned to him. "What does a girl like me have to do to make a man like you like me, if you still follow?" she asked plaintively.

"I like you, Angel." He meant it. "I'm only trying to keep you safe for Kip. For his sake I can't stand by and see you act a crazy."

"Don't you like crazies?" Her eyes twinkled.

He shrugged, then laughed. "All right, so I do. But, June dear, my kid brother's in love with you. For real this time." Bill got a sudden shock. Kip had always had a tendency for flighty girls, but what was June, a two-sided coin? One side sane and steady, the other as irresponsible as Kip? Until Eric leaped into the situation he'd thought her a lovely, beautiful anchor for his brother.

"Please let me take you out to lunch." One thing certain he wasn't going to eat caviar and truffles from any Eric Granmede basket.

WHILE SHE was putting on fresh lipstick, Bill paced. Perhaps this swim thing was merely a flurry and underneath she was as sensible as he'd first thought. Too, maybe this little talk would bear fruit after she'd considered it. He could hope anyhow.

June didn't mention the yachting party, nor did he, through lunch at a pier restaurant. Pleasantly, they went back to their easy companionship of the first night and he found himself telling her things he'd always kept locked in some secret compartment.

Bill's good humor was restored by the time he started home and he realized that June just needed a little practical advice from someone older and more experienced. In fact, that's what she told him before she waved goodbye.

Six telegrams were waiting for Bill at the office and the receptionist said

the New York operator was trying to reach him. Obviously a wire service had carried the party item. And Bill didn't need to open the telegrams to know what they said.

He sent one back to Kip informing him that everything was under control and not to worry.

It was advice Bill didn't expect his brother to take, but it was the best he had to offer. It might have helped if he could relay that June was sorry and ashamed of her frivolous impulse to take the bet. And, much more important, that she didn't actually like Eric Granmede. Bill sighed. As a responsibility, sometimes June left quite a bit to be desired. She wouldn't stay put.

He went home early to catch Kip's live show from New York and was struck again by his talent and ability to project gaiety and warmth right into a living room. Only Bill wondered if he caught a constraint or tension in Kip's work tonight? It worried him. Because his brother was the lad who could blow high, wide and handsome.

It was a pleasure to remember he'd promised Gail he'd phone back. He needed to talk to her and miraculously she was free tonight and would like to do out on the town with him. It was nice taking her around, she knew almost everyone in the movie industry and her barbed witty comments were amusing.

When Bill picked Gail up at her small, beautifully appointed modernistic home on top a Hollywood hill, he kissed her. She protested he'd ruin a girl's makeup, but she didn't really mind. At least, he thought, here was a girl who didn't need advice or help. One who wouldn't worry a man. Still, in all fairness, he admitted ruefully, also he didn't expect to be anyone's anchor.

They were enjoying the Mocambo supper show when she turned to him, eyes serious, and picked up the subject he'd managed to avoid.

"June?" she said.

"I talked to her this noon. She just needs a little guidance."

"What!" Gail cried and actually stared at him.

"Yes, I was surprised too." His voice became gentle. "She's been on her own, depending on herself and it's been pretty rugged. I'm sure she wants me to help her."

Gail raised a perfectly arched eyebrow. After a little she asked casually, "When's Kip coming out?"

"Kip? I don't know. Depends on his contract." Bill looked anxious. "It would be great if he could come now. He could settle all the problems."

"Like Eric?" She smiled. "Just exactly when do Kip and June plan to marry? Do you know, Bill?"

HE LOOKED mildly stunned. "Why, I guess I don't." He thought back quickly to Kip's phone calls and wires. Undying love had been shouted from the housetops and orange blossoms and a preacher, but no actual date for any wedding. Nor had June volunteered that pertinent information. Gail laughed at his dismay and, after a minute, he grinned. It was the first thing that should have been definitely settled.

"You know," Gail said thoughtfully, "I think Kip should fly out."

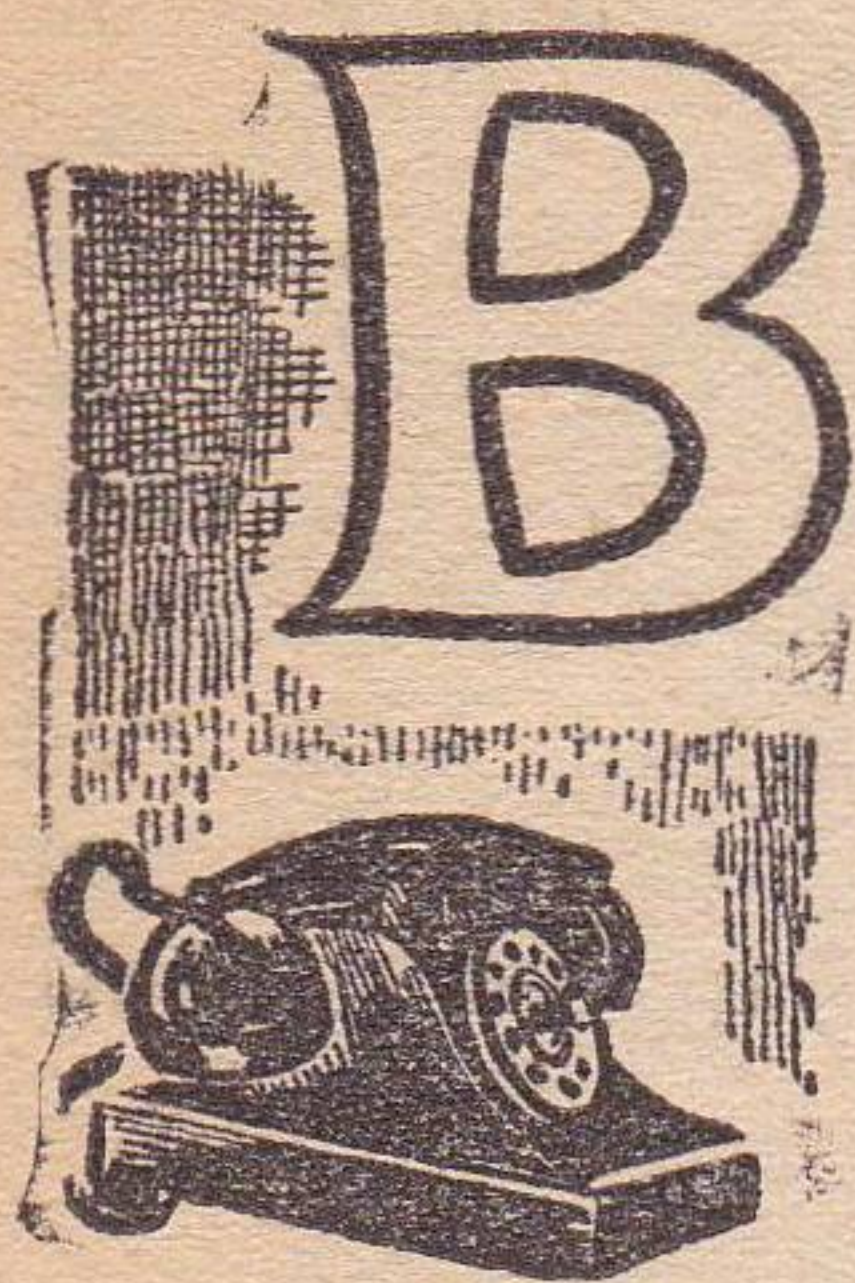
"I only wish he could." Bill sighed.

Friends came to their table and they met others at the bar on the way out. Gail knew everyone and he thought again what an interesting, competent person she was.

It was when he took her home that she said, "Be sure to invite me to the wedding, darling."

Somehow, her attitude seemed a little strange. He thought about it driving home to his apartment, then put it aside. There was enough to worry him without that.

Chapter 3



BILL WAS busy going over briefs the next afternoon when his secretary clicked the intercom. He flipped it and said, "Yes, honey?"

"Miss June Adams would like five minutes if you can spare them." She laughed at his sudden enthusiasm about sending Miss Adams right in.

He shoved back from his desk and strode to the door to open for June. "How nice, Angel." He beamed and held her hand longer than necessary, but she didn't seem to mind.

She looked very attractive in a smart spring suit, ruffly blouse and a slim briefcase under her arm. She sat almost on the edge of the green leather chair across from him.

"I've come for help, like you said," she said solemnly. "I need a lawyer."

Bill felt like rubbing his hands together in satisfaction. This showed his talk had penetrated. In a few minutes, given sufficient encouragement, June would admit she'd been foolish to have taken that bet with Eric and all its attendant publicity.

"You know, Angel, I'd do anything in the world for you." His eyes held hers and he had the queer feeling he got when a cold came on and he couldn't breathe well.

It occurred to him that perhaps his delight in her taking his advice to heart was idiotic. Anyone knows without behavior-lectures when a lawyer is indicated. But he still felt good about things.

"I have two contracts I'd like to have you look over, if you will, Bill, before I sign them." Her smile was utterly trusting and made him feel like the Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court. "You see, I'm trying

to grow up and be sensible so you'll like me." She dropped her eyes demurely to the briefcase on her lap. "Otherwise, I would have gone ahead and signed without advice."

A PUZZLED frown creased his forehead, this didn't sound quite right. Then he reached for the papers. One was a contract in which she agreed to furnish six ceramic horses, brown with black mane and tail, as per sample, to the Winston Gift Shoppe. The second was for two pairs of shocking-pink candle holders to be delivered in two weeks to the Brairly Gift Shoppe.

Bill studied them for a while, color creeping into his face. He wasn't quite a fool and he knew as well as the next one when he was being taken for a ride.

"These are orders not contracts," he said calmly. "And what the hell, Angel?"

"Oh," she smiled. "I just thought I better check with you, that's all. You've had the experience and are older." She got up. "I'll run along and sign them. Thanks and goodbye now." She was gone before he could stop her.

Bill lit a cigarette and sat there smoking. This was her way of paying back for his lecture yesterday. She was cute all right. But just the same he wished for Kip's sake she weren't quite so crazy.

The more he became acquainted with June the less he thought her the ideal girl for Kip. Put the two of them together, shake them well and you could have havoc. Well, about the best he could do was try to keep the Romeos away. That was all Kip asked.

There was a message from Gail asking if he could go to Santa Anita tomorrow afternoon and he had his secretary leave word that he'd pick Gail up for lunch.

It might be fun since his appointment book was clear.

IT WAS A beautiful, sparkling day at the track. The mountain backdrop

was crystal clear and the large acreage of flowers in the oval infield riotous with vivid flamboyant colors. The grandstand was jammed and Gail and Bill slowly made their way up the clubhouse steps, greeting occasional friends. Everyone everywhere was in a holiday mood.

Bill found a deep comfortable chair for Gail and went to the small bar to get scotch and soda. Gail was happy and he smiled indulgently. Walking across to her through the crowd, Bill thought what an excellent wife Gail would make. She entertained elegantly, dressed smartly and took her personal life with a sense of humor. She'd be an asset for any man, even a young lawyer. That idea startled him a little. It was the first time he'd seriously thought about marriage in connection with Gail, she'd always seemed so completely content with her life just as it was. Yet, now that the idea had occurred, it wasn't unpleasant at all.

"Oh." Gail looked up from the racing program. "Eric has a horse running in the fourth. Let's put a huge two dollars on him to win."

"He'll probably jump the fence, throw his jockey and come in last." Bill laughed. "But let's plunge."

They'd started out when they saw Eric across the room hanging possessively onto June's arm. Then June saw them, waved, and they made their way over.

"She gets around." Gail laughed.

"Yes," Bill answered shortly. A fine lot of good his advice had done when his major point had been that she shouldn't date Eric Granmede. He stood waiting for her, feeling like a damn fool.

Everyone was pleasant and natural, except for Bill's stiffness. He knew it and couldn't help it. Gail and June argued nonsense with Eric about his horse, but the best Bill could do was look at June and wish he were a million miles away.

If he felt left out of this gay banter-

ing, it was his own fault. Common sense told him no one could expect June to sit home knitting a fine sock, while Kip was in the East. Slowly Bill began to burn, resenting the position Kip had put him in. Why didn't he make her set a definite date for their marriage? And announce it. Or at least, why didn't Kip come out here and handle the situation himself. It was time Kip became acquainted with June's frivolous side.

BILL GLANCED at her. She was so pretty and pert. Yet maybe, just maybe she wasn't the girl for his brother. She'd fooled him badly that first night. Bill felt old.

One of the more famous syndicated columnists strolled over with his martini. "Statement, Eric?" He patted June's shoulder.

She grinned. "No statement."

"But I need copy," the columnist wailed in mock dismay.

"What do you want me to do?" June asked. "I'll try to oblige."

"No!" The word burst out of Bill before he could stop it. His face crimsoned. June had a way of making him act the fool when she didn't even try.

The columnist raised an amused eyebrow. "Tell you what, Junie." He drew her aside and talked low. She laughed delightedly and he drifted off.

Bill scarcely saw the horses running in the fourth. He tore up his winning ticket on Eric's horse and didn't know it. Even Gail began to resent his lack of attention. It didn't help much when June and the others in Eric's box cheered and whooped like hoodlums when the horse won.

Gail and he left after the sixth race and she was silent on the drive back to Beverly Hills. This was a fine way to treat her, and Bill snapped himself out of it by the time they'd reached her house on the hill.

He turned to her and took her hand between his. "I'm sorry. It's just that Kip has given me the responsibility

of watching out for his interest. For keeping her safe for him."

"Kip," she said dryly, "is a doll." Then she smiled. "Come on in, if you'd like."

"I'd like."

One side of her living room was entirely of glass and they stood together looking down over the hills at Los Angeles sprawled below them. Then he turned and she was in his arms. It was a long, exciting kiss and her arms tightened around his neck.

AFTERWARD, she said, "Let's talk. About us." But first she made him stir up a dry martini and waited until they were both seated on the low wide modernistic divan. "Bill, I have a chance to be transferred to the studio's New York office. It would pay more and I'm considering it." Her eyes were steady on his. "Shall I take it?"

It was about the last thing he'd expected her to say. This put him on the spot and he knew it. If he urged her to stay he'd be definitely committing himself. If he didn't, he'd be losing a dear friend and companion whom he genuinely liked and admired.

"Wouldn't you have to decide that for yourself, Gail?" he asked slowly. "To decide where you'd be happiest?"

"And that's all you can say?" She got up and went quickly to the small bar to refill her glass.

"I'm not sure it is. I don't know. It came at me pretty suddenly." He walked over and gave her a cigarette.

"When do you have to make your decision?"

"Not right away. But soon."

"I don't know quite what I'd do without you, Gail. It's been pretty wonderful having you around." He smiled down at her.

She shrugged. "Let's skip it, Bill. I'll see you through to the bitter finish with June."

It was difficult to know how to take that. No one had to tell him that he

should ask Gail to marry him, but his brother and June had to be settled before he could think of marriage for himself. They both were his responsibility now, just as Kip had always been.

Gail glanced at her watch. "Sorry, darling, I must dress."

At the door he reached for her hand and held it tightly. "I'm the one who's sorry," he said gently.

"Don't be. It's not worth it." Her smile was brittle and a little unconvincing.

After dinner that night Bill decided to talk to Kip and luckily reached him. He was urgent in suggesting Kip fly out for the weekend.

"What's wrong?" There was an edge to Kip's voice. "June's all right, isn't she?"

After Bill had soothed him with assurances that she was physically all right, Kip said, "I can't possibly make California now, Bill. Too much is popping here. Hey, how do you like my gal?" His gay exuberance came zinging over the wires. If he shut his eyes, Bill thought, he'd think Kip was right here beside him.

"Wonderful. But she's a little on the crazy side, isn't she?"

"Are you kidding?" Kip demanded. "June never did a silly thing in her whole life. Don't tell me jumping off Granmede's yacht was any example, because I'm convinced she did that just to get away from Eric's stupid love making. I know the guy."

That seemed to be that and they hung up. But one thing was clear, June had meticulously kept Kip from suspecting her flighty side. It, therefore, figured she knew it wasn't what Kip would want in a wife.

Bill was depressed. It didn't help when he remembered the whispered conversation she'd had with the columnist. The devil only knew what they'd cooked up!

APPREHENSION was still hanging low when Bill opened his newspaper the next morning expecting to see June's gamin smile pop out at him. It didn't. Nor was there anything in the columnist's gossip chatter about her. Bill began to enjoy his eggs and bacon.

Everything was peaceful until he heard from Gail. She'd gone on a party last night, too restless to stay home after her dinner date, and had Bill heard the big gossip?

He shuddered. "What?"

"It's all over town and I'm surprised it didn't catch up with you. Eric and June had themselves a time. And Granmede's heir will catch hell from papa and the Santa Anita stewards." Gail sounded smug. "The fool dared June to ride one of his race horses around the track, that was long after everyone else had gone, except their columnist friend, who shall be nameless."

It took a full minute for Bill to catch his breath again. He felt numb when he thanked her and hung up.

June must have been sitting on top of her phone because she answered blithely on the first ring. "I must talk to you," he said sternly. "It's serious and I'll be there tonight."

"Well, I have a date and..."

"Break it."

After a long pause she said meekly enough, "I'll be waiting."

Well, he'd try just once more to drive a modicum of sense into her head. She must be made to see that Eric was nothing but a promoter of bad publicity, a man who encouraged her to do dangerous things. Bill would remind her again that Kip deserved far better than this from the girl he loved. If he failed, Bill would forget the whole mess and take off for Alaska.

No one could have acted more delighted to see him than June did. And in spite of his firm resolve to beat some sense into her, Bill felt a warm glow. He crushed it and eyed her sententiously.

"Let's go for a drive." He didn't want any interruptions and who knew who'd come pounding on her door.

"The moon's bright," she admitted.

Parked on the beach, the moonlight danced over the ocean and a few palms whispered an accompaniment. They turned so they faced each other in the car.

"It can't go on like this, June," he said quietly and wished he didn't find her attractive and weren't so conscious of her nearness. "Either you want to be a harum-scarum for someone like Eric, or you want to be a sensible..."

"Anchor," she murmured.

"An anchor," he repeated. "My brother needs stability, needs a wife who understands and loves him enough to, well, to expect a few minor escapades. You either cut it off short with Eric, or I'll have to tell Kip he should forget about you. He believes in you with all his heart, he believes you're..."

She opened the car door and started to get out.

"Must you always interfere?" she flung over her shoulder. "You don't really care what I do."

She jumped out and started up the beach toward the highway.

"Wait!" he shouted and tumbled out after her. He caught her and turned her around to face him. "You're wrong, Angel," he said quietly. "Dead wrong."

She looked up into his eyes, her own never wavering. They were misty in the moonlight. Then, abruptly, she reached up and pulled his head down. She kissed him. A light kiss, as soft as a cloud and sweet. It was shattering to him.

A long time afterward he heard himself say, "I'll take you home." It didn't even sound like his voice.

THE IMPACT of June's kiss lasted after he'd left her. He paced his living room, stunned by the sudden realization of what a kiss could do.

Argue, rationalize. Call himself every name in the book. None of it mattered or changed the damning fact. He'd fallen in love with his brother's fiancée. He didn't care if she were crazy or sensible. He wanted to take care of her—always. And knew he'd never have the chance.

"Angel. Angel," he whispered it over and over, his face white. Because she *was* an angel with strings his brother held.

He put his head in his hands. He felt like a Judas. It wasn't anything he'd seen coming, or even suspected. Maybe, because he hadn't wanted to. All his life Kip had trusted Bill. And because he had, he'd put his happiness in Bill's hands.

How much could a man despise himself, Bill wondered. One thing, he'd try not to see June again. And never alone. If he could only get a big law case out of town and run.

He wanted to tell Kip the truth and then bow out. But because Kip wasn't too stable, he knew he didn't dare. Kip might never trust anyone again.

"Hell," Bill groaned. There must be some way out that could save them all and the situation.

Then he thought of Gail. That could be the answer and he'd always be fair to her. Late as it was, he called and when she heard the almost desperate tone in his voice she told him to come right over.

She looked lovely in her white housecoat and Bill stood looking at her for a long time. "Would you marry me, Gail?" he finally asked.

She blinked, then went across the room and took a cigarette out of a crystal box. Her eyes were unfathomable when she turned back. "You're not in love with me, Bill. I know it." She half smiled. "I'm not even sure I believe in romantic love any more. I had it once when I was eighteen and I could never love like that again." He lit her cigarette and her hand touching his was cold. "But I think you and I could

work out a good life together. So, yes, Bill, I'll marry you if you want. I think I'd like to know though, what promoted your sudden change of heart?"

He hesitated. Gail had been around a lot and had learned a good many of the answers, she should understand. And he'd promised himself he'd be fair with her. Before he had a chance to plunge into it she said, "June, isn't it?"

"I'm afraid it might be," he confessed.

"I had a hunch." She half smiled again. "I saw you look at her the night of her barbecue. It's still worth it to me, though, Bill. I'd like a husband like you who wouldn't make too many demands." She reached up and touched his cheek with her fingertips and her hand still felt cold. "I love you, you know, in my own fashion."

He put his hands on her shoulders. "And I love you in mine." And he did. He was inordinately fond of Gail. He kissed her and neither of them made very much of it. Perhaps she'd never know how grateful he was that she understood, and he knew he'd do everything in his power to give her a good life.

"Shall I announce it?" she asked and drew him down on the couch beside her.

"Of course." He was pleased when she leaned her head on his shoulder and he put his arms around her, holding her gently.

"Will you be seeing a lot of June, do you think?" There was no expression in her voice. "I'd like to know that, I think."

His smile twisted. "There's no reason for it now, is there?"

"I wouldn't know, Bill." She stirred in his arms and sat straight as she looked at her watch. "Oh, it is late. Maybe you'd better go home, darling." At the door she laughed, "Do we set a date, or be like June and Kip and let it drift?"

He smiled. She was helping him run away from his feelings for June. She was willing to marry him, knowing how he felt. So from here on she could call the score because that was only right.

"We do what you want," he said.

"Then I'll announce our engagement immediately." She reached up and kissed his cheek. "Goodnight darling."

"Goodnight. You're very wonderful to me," he told her huskily.

Chapter 4



TILL, it was a shock to read the announcement of their engagement in the next morning's paper. Bill stared at the words and they made him feel odd.

Gail must have phoned the press as soon as he'd left, maybe that was why she'd looked at her watch and sent him home.

At the office, congratulations poured in, and the members of the firm and the staff were inclined to make something gala out of it. Bill got a chance to send his secretary out for flowers to be sent to Gail and reminded himself it was customary for the prospective groom to buy an engagement ring.

As the day slowly progressed Bill became increasing irritated by the interruptions. Perhaps, he admitted honestly, because each time his phone buzzed he'd been sure this time it was June. She didn't call. Late in the afternoon he went out to Hillcrest and shot golf.

"Oh, Angel," he said aloud once and was instantly ashamed.

That was over. He'd deliberately cut himself off from her and he'd play it straight with the girl who'd just said she'd marry him. Soon June would work into a good relationship. No one would suspect how he felt.

Bill was feeling fine when he took Gail out to dinner. Engaged or not, her

attitude was exactly the same. It made it easy and he was grateful.

They were aimlessly driving around when she suggested, "Let's ride to June's and tell her the news."

And while his hand may have gripped the wheel harder, he smiled and said, "Sure, honey." June had to be faced and it would be best this way. The fact that June hadn't the slightest idea how he felt about her and wouldn't care if she did, helped a lot.

But the house was dark.

They'd turned back to the highway when Gail asked, "Want to pull off and watch the waves, darling?"

"Of course." He glanced at the beach where he'd parked with June, where she'd told him angrily he always interfered and didn't really care what she did. Where he'd kissed her. He turned to Gail abruptly.

"Mind if we don't stop tonight. I just decided we ought to make plans and I'd like a drink. How about going to your house?"

She seemed to stiffen, but her voice was perfectly calm when she answered, "Oh, let's, darling."

But they didn't. Passing a movie theater they saw there was a sneak preview Gail particularly wanted to catch. Bill never did remember what the picture was about or who was in it.

They stopped in at the Mocambo for a drink and found Gail's boss with a party. He pounced on her because something had just come up that had to be discussed and would take time. She insisted Bill run along and her boss would see her home.

BILL LOOKED haggard the next morning after a sleepless night and about the last person he wanted to see walking into his office was Eric Granmede.

"Hi," Eric said cheerfully. "I'm going to give a party next week for you and Gail. All right?"

Bill groaned. He'd had enough par-

ties to last him a lifetime. Then something suddenly boiled up and exploded. "Why in the hell don't you keep away from June? You know she's in love with my brother." Eric stared in amazement, but rage carried Bill along. "Kip thinks you tried to make love to June and that's why she jumped off your damn boat and furthermore. . . ."

"Hold it," Eric said sharply. "I don't make love to a girl who isn't reciprocal. And I didn't tie June on that horse either and make her ride the track. Or do you think I did."

Bill rubbed his hand wearily across his forehead. He was making an ass of himself and he knew it. He smiled apologetically and offered Eric a cigarette.

"I'm on edge, I guess. Too many late hours for a hard working lawyer." It wasn't much of an explanation, but he couldn't say he'd fallen in love with June himself.

Eric lit his cigarette and watched Bill critically. "I probably won't see much of June now," he said matter-of-factly. Bill perceptibly brightened. He was pleased that she'd decided to follow his advice and stop dating Eric. His pleasure was short lived. It blew up when Eric said, "Doug's back in town."

"Doug? Who's Doug?" Bill shouted.

Eric looked amused. "He's the one who gave June her start in ceramics. He's crazy about her, didn't you know that? He's been up in San Francisco for the last six or eight months, got back yesterday and she broke a date with me for last night." He shook his head. "Doug's quite a boy, believe me. Well, guess I'll creep along." At the door he turned. "Gail's already okayed the party I spoke about. She's a swell girl, Bill. I don't think she deserves to be hurt." The door shut quietly behind him.

Bill stared at it. Losing control for the first time in years, had shown Eric exactly how he felt about June. He'd made it unmistakable. It would be

better if the floor would just open up and let him sink out of sight.

The last thing he wanted was to hurt Gail. He'd see that he never did. But if only June had stayed in New York with Kip. If only he hadn't allowed himself to become emotionally involved. June was lovely and crazy. And kissing her had been the most exciting and wonderful experience of his life.

Bill slammed down the paper weight. Doug! Oh, to hell with it. Fortunately, his secretary clicked and reminded him of a luncheon date at the Hillcrest with Mr. Beamish.

"I have the papers ready," she said. "It'll be a big fee and a juicy case."

He laughed. "All right. And thanks."

IT WAS A satisfactory business lunch and afterwards they played golf. It was exactly what Bill had needed to put him back on an even track again. When he got to Gail's for dinner he was feeling human, his equilibrium completely restored. Though now he was even more ashamed of his outburst with Eric.

Gail was at her amusing best. It was nice dining alone with her, the way it would be a great many nights in the years to come.

It was over coffee before the living room fire that he asked, "Who's Doug? June's friend, a ceramist I think."

Gail screamed. "Is Doug back? Everybody, but everybody knows him. He's simply terrific and the movie colony took him up. He's done fabulous tiles for fireplaces and big scale operations involving trims for swimming pools and patios." She looked thoughtful. "I didn't know he knew June. He could have anyone of a dozen women, but I did hear that he was torching for some student of his."

"Eric mentioned he's back." Bill didn't want to go any further into his meeting with Eric.

She smiled. "He was over last night and we had a long talk. He's nice. Did he tell you about the party for us? To

do all the night spots ending up for breakfast on his yacht? It would be fun," she added wistfully.

"Of course it would," he said heartily. Gail put her hand on his shoulder when she went to answer the phone.

She looked disappointed afterwards. "I'm sorry, darling, but I have to meet my boss for a conference. We have a big publicity job brewing. I hope you don't mind too awfully having a working woman for a wife."

He smiled. "With you, anything goes."

It was nice kissing her goodnight and he wished it might have gone on until everything else was obliterated.

Very much later Bill had finally fallen asleep when he was awakened by the shrill ringing of a bell. Muttering, he reached out for the bedside table.

It was June. And his heart stood still.

"Bill?" Her voice sounded small and far away. "Will you please come for me?"

"Where are you?" he demanded. He thought she sounded scared.

"Hurry please. It's cottage 4 in a motel just south of Laguna." She hung up. He looked at his watch. It was three o'clock.

He pulled on his clothes with the speed of a fireman. He burned up the road, stopping only when a cop tagged him for speeding. A thousand different fears raced through his mind, each one worse than the one before.

When he finally slammed into the driveway and stopped at cottage 4, his mouth was dry. He knew then that if anyone had harmed June he'd kill him.

She opened the door at his first knock. "Darling, what's wrong?" His voice grated. He looked over her head and the cottage was empty. "Are you all right?"

"Of course." She fluffed her hair, left the key on the bureau, then gathered up purse, gloves and briefcase.

ALMOST before he could turn the car around the oval drive, she was asleep. She looked so young and defenseless that Bill's heart almost burst with tenderness. Nothing mattered except that she was safe.

When they reached her house he gathered her up in his arms and carried her to the door. She awakened and handed him the key. Then carefully he laid her down on the living room couch.

"Want to talk about it, Angel?" he asked gently. "It's all right no matter what happened."

"Oh." She smiled. "I had a date tonight."

"With Doug?" he growled.

Her eyes opened wide. "So you know about him?" When he nodded she seemed pleased. "Yes, well, he drove me to the motel because I had an appointment with the owners. They have a gift shop there and want to use some of my things. We talked late and they urged me to stay all night instead of coming home. I did." She smiled again. "When I called you I'd just remembered an early appointment which could really make some money for me. And I need money. I knew I had to get home. You'd promised you'd help me any time, so I called you. Thank you for coming."

He thought about the wild ride he'd taken and thrust it out of his mind. He'd forget it. Her explanation somehow was deflating.

"What about Doug?" He couldn't stop himself from asking.

"What about him? Oh." She burst out laughing. "He went right on to San Diego. He's staying there for a few days, didn't you know? I'd planned to come back this morning by bus, but I would have missed my business date."

After a while he asked, "Angel, is Doug the man you love?"

Bewilderment came into her eyes. Then as she kept looking at him there was a glow in her as though a light had suddenly been turned on.

"I adore Doug," she said it almost gently. "He's helped so very much. In fact, he's just offered me the manager-ship of one of his ceramic shops. Isn't that fabulous? And he'll push my line because he likes it."

Bill ran his hand through his hair. "But Angel, you're getting married. You don't want a job." Then he had to know definitely. "Just exactly when are you getting married? The exact date, I mean."

"What on earth brought that up?"

"Because I'd like to be around for it. You've probably heard Gail and I are getting married and we might be away on our"

"You're what?" She sat up straight.

"Getting married."

She just stared at him. "When I asked you to bring your best girl to my barbecue," she said slowly, "I didn't know you were going to marry her. Why, why didn't you tell me, Bill?" There was shock in her voice and it broke just a little.

"I didn't know it myself, Angel." He was tired. Very tired.

"But why, Bill?"

He shrugged. "We get along. Well, I have to work tomorrow." He took one last long look at her. "Goodnight, Angel. Or good morning." He turned and strode out of the house and didn't answer when he heard her call. If he stayed there any longer he'd tell her why he had to turn the key on the love in his heart.

SLOWLY, he drove by the beach where he'd kissed June. He stopped and stared out at the ocean, pink in the dawn. It was like saying goodbye to a dream.

As Bill smoked cigarette after cigarette, his mind began to function again. You never can run away. Neither far enough, nor fast enough.

He seemed to arrive at Gail's at the oddest hours, but she welcomed him as though he habitually arrived in time for coffee.

"Hello, darling, I'm so glad you've come." She looked at him closely and smiled that half smile of hers. "Come into the kitchen."

The aroma of coffee was good and he sipped the cup she gave him gratefully. He needed something for what he knew he must do.

After a couple of starts he said, "I've been thinking. I know you're not in love with me."

Gail nodded. "And you're in love with June."

He nodded. "Are you sure you want to marry me. Because I'd want it for keeps, no matter who I marry. Are you sure, Gail, you won't really fall in love again someday?"

"I've been thinking too, Bill." She was very serious. "I even talked to Eric. I'm going to take the New York transfer." She smiled a little sadly. "I agreed to marry you because I thought we'd find a good life together. But Eric asked just what you did, just now. What would happen to that life if a man came along I really fell quite madly in love with. I knew then it wasn't good enough for either of us." She put her hand on his arm. "I was going to talk to you about it." She poured another cup of coffee for him. "We'll still be friends. But what about you, Bill?"

"I'll get along."

"That Kip," she said. "Why don't you let him grow up and stand on his own feet? I'm going to give him a piece of my mind when I see him."

Bill smiled. "He'll be all right. He always is. Whoops! Look at the time."

At the door she kissed him and stood there waving until his car disappeared down the hill. Most of all he wanted Gail to find her happiness. . .

BEFORE he went to work Bill had to shower and change. There was something else he had to do too. He caught the elevator up from the garage to his floor.

When he was ready to go to the

office he remembered there were telegraph blanks in his desk. And this wasn't going to be one to give haphazardly over the phone.

I'm sorry Kip but I fell in love with June myself. I am stepping out and wish you both all happiness.

That wasn't any good. He crumpled it and tossed it toward the wastebasket. It missed.

Six blanks later he still didn't have the right one. All he knew was that he had to tell Kip the truth. Gail was right, it was time Kip grew up. But this would hurt him like the devil.

He was still trying to find the right words when he had to answer a knock at the door. June brushed by him.

"It took weeks for the desk clerk to tell me you'd probably come up from the garage. I've been waiting in the lobby." Absently she picked up the crumpled sheet of yellow paper.

Bill just looked at her afraid to trust his own voice. It might crack. It never had before. But it might.

Suddenly her eyes blazed. "What do I have to do, Bill? But first, are you honestly going to marry Gail?"

"No," he said. "We both just decided to call it off."

June shut her eyes for a second. "I've done everything since I met you to show you what I thought of you, short of telling you. You liked me as Kip's wife and I practically stood on my head to show you I wouldn't be any good at it. That I wouldn't be any man's anchor, not when I wanted him to be mine." She sounded very tired. "Eric even tried to help me make

you jealous and interested. I've tried to make you see that a few years isn't what counts. It's what's between two people."

Bill wet his lips, scarcely daring to believe what he was hearing. "But, Angel, what about Kip?"

"He's charming and lovable and about as much husband material as a dodo bird. There were qualities in Kip I loved. And some I didn't even like. Then I met you, Bill." Her eyes held his steadily. "And I knew I could love all of you. Forever and ever. But you!" She looked away from his shining eyes to the crumpled paper she held in her hand. She smoothed it out and read it. "Oh, Bill! Bill!" He'd never heard such joy in anyone's voice before. Then she was close in his arms.

Later she said, "I'll help you write to Kip."

Bill had to answer the door again and he muttered darkly. "Telegram, Mr. Markham," the bellboy told him.

After Bill slit it open he stood looking at the words. Then he grinned one of the widest, happiest ones of his life.

"Angel, listen. *Please square it with June. I have just fallen in love. Honestly it is orange blossoms this time. Thanks for everything. Your everloving brother—Kip'*"

They howled with laughter and June tossed the crumpled paper high into the air.

She ran to him. There'd be orange blossoms for them too. Because now Bill's angel no longer had strings.

THE END

A Delightful Novelette

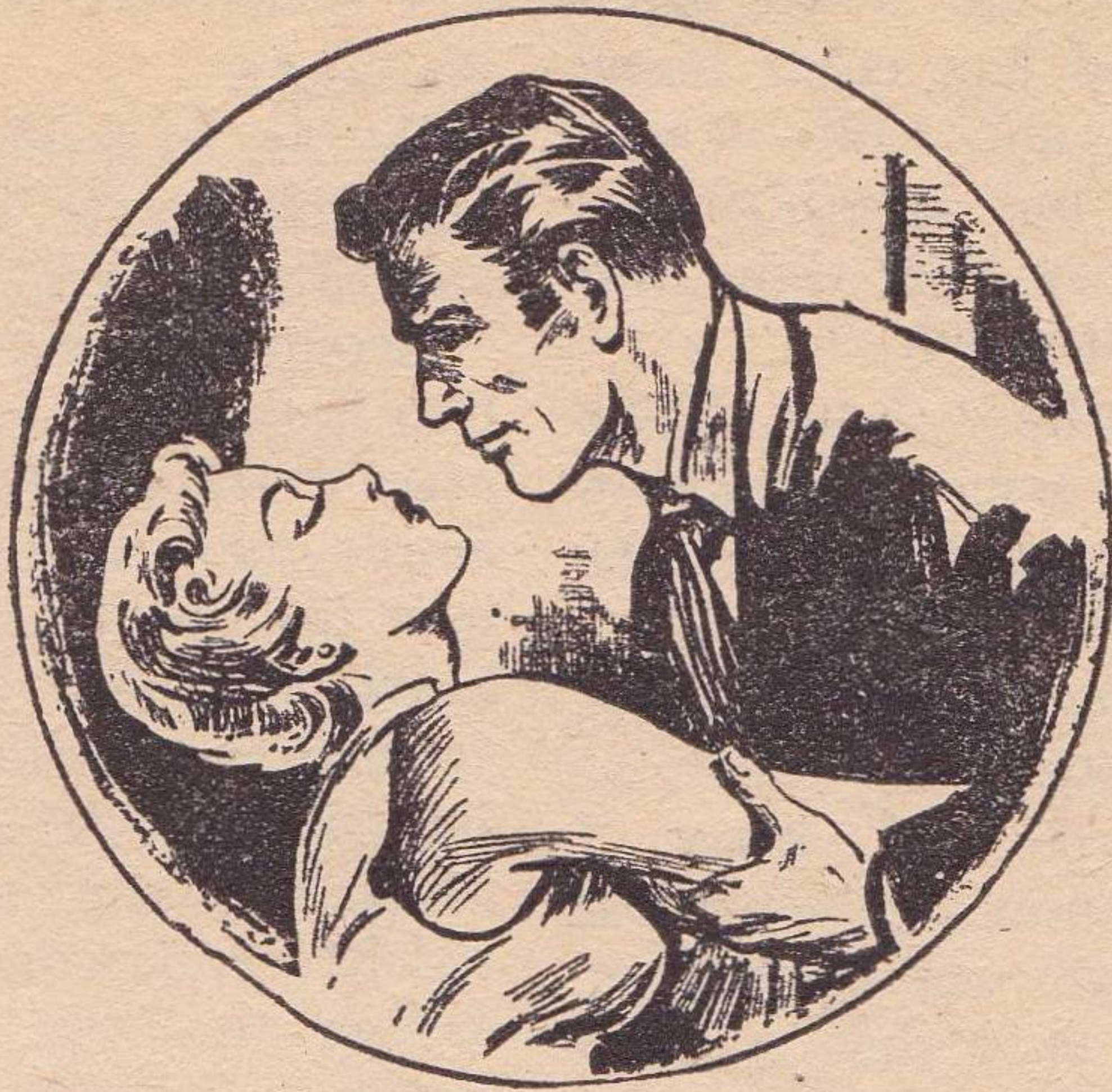
MAN TROUBLE

by Beth Ferguson Mitchell

*is in the
May issue of*

GAY LOVE STORIES

It wasn't at all like the whirlwind courtship Lucy had dreamed about.



CAMPAIGN FOR MARRIAGE

by ROSALIND BURKE

THE TAXI swerved to a stop at the entrance to the dingy railway station. The young woman who stepped out was pretty in a natural, unaffected way, and her trim tailored suit was just right for her slender figure. Her name was Lucy Hopkins, she'd lived in the little town of Ashton all her life, and now, at last, she was leaving it, perhaps for good.

But something else in her manner belied her attempt at an unruffled appearance—a tiny tremor to her lips, and in her deep brown eyes, a look of momentary panic. Instinctively she reached out to grasp the arm of the at-

tractive older woman who was lifting her bags from the cab. "Aunt Tillie, I'm scared," she said in a choked voice. "Am I really doing the right thing?"

Aunt Tillie paid the driver and cast her a comforting grin. "Take it easy, honey. Things'll work out. It just takes nerve."

How much nerve, Lucy wondered. How long would it take her to honestly admit the fact that she was setting forth on a carefully calculated campaign for marriage? She'd certainly thought it over long enough to be used to the idea by now!

As Aunt Tillie checked her bags, she thought back over the talk they'd had, the talk which had set this whole jaunt into motion. She had just come home from her job at the paper mill—it was a nice enough job, but horribly routine—and had put her head right into Aunt Tillie's lap and cried.

"There, there, baby," Aunt Tillie had said. "I haven't seen you take on so since your mother died. What's the trouble?"

"You've always been so good to me, Aunt Tillie," she said, lifting her head and drying her eyes. "I know I shouldn't complain about anything, but I've simply got to get out of Ashton. You know yourself how dull a small mill town can be and everyone knows there's been a scarcity of eligible males here for years. And remember I'm almost twenty-two."

She recalled then how she'd told Aunt Tillie all about it. She had to confide in someone or she'd go crazy. "Aunt Tillie," she said, "where can a smart girl find herself a millionaire?"

Aunt Tillie laughed heartily and then said, "Well, baby, I hear there's plenty of 'em down in Florida. Why not take yourself down there, get a job and see what's cooking?"

Then they both shrieked with laughter and stayed up drinking coffee for hours and making plans. At first it all seemed a bit brazen, but soon it became just like doing business. She was out for big stakes, the sky was the limit, *and here she was this very minute, climbing on the southbound train!*

"So long, Lucy!" Aunt Tillie shrieked. "Happy hunting!"

She waved from the window, blew a kiss, and was on her way.

SHE FELL in love with the Florida beach resort instantly—the pastel-colored houses, the fantastic abundance of flowers, the superb white sand beaches. Splurging, she bought a carefully selected new wardrobe, and

then with the last of her savings, paid a month's advance rent on an attractive apartment in a nice section near the ocean.

So far, so good, she thought, but being broke made her more realistic. She had to get a job, but quick.

Scouting around for the sort of position that would best serve her purpose, after much ad-answering and countless employment agencies, she finally found it at the Coral Arms, a luxurious beach hotel near her apartment. By what seemed a miracle, there was an opening in the hotel gift shop, which was ideal, for the merchandise was exquisite, and from the start she loved selling to such an interesting, well-dressed clientele.

The grounds of the hotel were planted with luxuriant tropical shrubs, and the swimming pool was a perfect gem. A cocktail terrace ran alongside the pool, and this, she found, was a perfect spot for surveying the hotel guests and selecting a likely candidate in her campaign for a wealthy husband.

For occasional laughs there was an awfully cute desk clerk named Cliff Ayres who kept trying to date her. He was red-haired and freckle-faced and looked a lot like Van Johnson. But when he told her he was only working at the hotel part time while he plugged along for a college degree in architecture at night, she eliminated him from her Serious Prospect List, though she couldn't resist letting down her barriers for a soda now and then.

She did not find anyone even near what she was looking for until she spotted Stanley Collier.

One afternoon after work she was sipping a lemonade on the cocktail terrace. She had just finished dodging Cliff, who wanted to take her to the movies, but to dodge Cliff took some hectic doing, and she really needed a cooling drink. In addition, this choice of a beverage made a nice impression on anyone who might be sitting nearby and helped her offset those occasional

agonizing moments when she realized she was acting like a professional gold-digger. And then her eyes popped wider.

A man somewhere in the late thirties magnificently tanned and with dark hair and strikingly handsome features, emerged from the pool. He energetically shook the water from his splendidly built body and then wrapped himself in a brightly-colored beach robe.

She gagged on her lemonade. It was almost as though Aunt Tillie's voice were whispering in her ear, "That's your target for tonight, Lucy!"

It happened quickly, for all the other tables were filled.

"Hello," he said, and then pointed to the chair opposite her. "Do you mind?"

His rich, resonant voice caused a tingling sensation to explode along her spine. "Why, no," she stammered. "Help yourself."

He started to chat politely about the hotel, the pool, and even made a discussion of the climate fascinating. She was relieved to know she hadn't bagged a wolf, and amazed, in fact, that she'd attracted such a perfect gentleman. But fortune was even more generous, for before he left he'd begged her to meet him on the terrace for dinner that night.

Dressing later, she was almost breathless from her incredible luck. He was a New York investment broker, alone on a month's vacation. A bit of discreet checking in the hotel office revealed that if he wasn't a millionaire, he was bound to be pretty close to it. Moreover, the evening was perfect, and she saw him again the following night and all the other nights that week. Everything clicked into place, but soon she found herself wondering if he only considered her a rather attractive girl who made a convenient date for dinner and dancing. He'd often complimented her on her clothes, but he'd never mentioned her nice hazel eyes, or the dark brown hair she groomed so religiously.

IT BECAME a habit for Stan to take her to the Yacht Club for dinner and they'd dance afterwards under the starlight in the patio. But nicest of all, in his beautiful convertible they'd go for long, lovely drives beside the moonlit ocean.

She was relieved to find he didn't go in for wolfish passes. The first night he returned her to the apartment he blew her a kiss as he drove away. And after that it was a goodnight kiss once lightly on the cheek. She decided she liked his impersonal style. And it certainly made things much easier in her campaign.

Things came to a head suddenly about two weeks after they'd met. They were parked at their favorite spot near the beach, when all at once he turned and said, "Lucy, you're quite a girl. You know, I've tried not to, but I guess I've fallen in love with you anyway."

She almost gasped. He'd never been very personal before, and then to just come out with a statement like that! It could more than likely be his usual line, a sort of deliberately delayed action, and he'd start to play his real hand now. Well, this was the game she'd asked for, so she'd better see what cards he held up his sleeve.

Deciding to play it light, she said, "I must be rather fond of you, too. After all, every evening..."

"Oh, I'm a persistent cuss," he said, laughing, and then stopping the car, he took her in his arms and kissed her.

And then, somehow, she knew something was wrong. A girl can tell about a man's kiss. It wasn't a kiss between two lovers at all. It was, well, too polite, too formal. She searched his face, realizing how much older he was than she, and how different the world was in which he moved. His was a social set of proper breeding, impeccable manners. Would a whole lifetime with Stan be like this? Kisses on the forehead, polite flattery, matter of fact relation-

ships as man and wife, but always, always in good taste?

This wasn't at all like the whirlwind courtship she had once dreamed about. Something wasn't right somehow.

"Stan," she asked suddenly, "why've you never married before this? There must have been somebody in your life you cared for, somebody you wanted to marry."

Starting the car again, he gazed straight ahead at the road, his hands gripping tightly to the wheel.

"Yes, there was someone."

From his compressed lips she knew her hunch had been right.

"Sorry, Stan," she said. "I had no right to pry."

"But you did," he said. "You had every right, because I was about to ask you to marry me, and you should know."

She fell back across the red leather upholstery, momentarily experiencing a small sensation of triumph as she realized she had done it. She'd accomplished the goal she had set, surpassing her wildest dreams. He had money as well as distinction. She slipped her arm through his and then looked up at him. She must be dreaming; it wasn't really true!

"I was younger then," he went on. "She was 17, and very lovely. Her name was Celestine. She was blonde and fair and quite romantic. I was a few years older than she was and she used to kid me about being too much on the proper side. Sometimes I thought she was too impractical to ever marry—she was always doing such silly, wild things."

Lucy braced herself against the seat and fumbled with the window.

"**B**UT WE BECAME engaged," he continued. "Our families were close friends—their place was near my aunt's house up in Maine. Then a few weeks before the wedding Celestine insisted on a midnight swim down at the cove. She dared me to race her to the diving pier offshore. She was a brilliant

swimmer but she must have developed a cramp—she called out but I couldn't get there before she went down. I just can't get it out of my mind somehow. You see, I loved her passionately, desperately. Even after all these years, I guess I'm still in love with Celestine."

He was silent a moment and then he took her hand: "All my friends and the family tell me I should get married right away. I know that's what I need. That's really why I came here to Florida. I thought if I met somebody new—damn it, I'm a dope, I guess, telling you all this. But I guess I couldn't expect you or any woman to marry a man still clinging to a ghost like that."

Lucy looked into his dark eyes and saw he was intensely serious and sincere. But somehow she was more confused than ever. She felt sure she could learn to love Stan deeply, but wouldn't she resent the presence of this Celestine in his mind. Was that fair to a marriage? And then she considered her own goal for financial security for the first time in its true light. How unimportant that seemed when the moment came!

The wind was sending little ripples through Stan's perfectly groomed hair. She noticed for the first time the faint grey at his temples, and suddenly she realized how fond of him she really was. But if she accepted him like this, with fondness, not real love, would she be playing the game honest?

It took her only a moment to decide. "Stan, I—I have something I must tell you."

She spilled the whole thing, the real reason she'd come to Florida, the way she'd decided to find a marriage of convenience, the way her search brought about their entire relationship.

"Then you made a very sensible choice," he said, smiling. "I admire your excellent taste."

"You mean you don't feel bitter toward me?"

"Why should I? In a sense, this is an arrangement for me the same as for

you. I'm glad you told me, Lucy. It makes everything easier."

She couldn't say another word. She wanted more than anything to curl up in someone's lap and bawl like a baby. But anything like that would be out of place with Stan. As she glanced out the car window, a heavy cloud passed in front of the moon, and the beach became dark and lonely...

LATER, WHEN Stan finally left her at her doorway, he tilted her chin and kissed her upon the lips. But again there was no real emotion stirring within her; somehow she couldn't respond.

"I wasn't very clear in what I said tonight, Lucy. Maybe I've got my emotions confused. But if you understand any of what I've tried to say, just promise me you'll think it over."

And then he kissed her again on the cheek and walked away.

She slept very little that night, and the next morning she awoke to the ringing of the doorbell. When she went to answer, a messenger boy handed her a huge box of roses. Her fingers fumbled as she opened the envelope and took out the card:

"My dear Lucy—Have to leave for New York at once on urgent business. Returning Friday afternoon. Will hope for your favorable answer then. —All my love, Stan."

She put the flowers in a vase and placed them on her desk before the window. She was sitting there, staring at them, trying to decide what to tell Stan when the phone rang.

"Hello, Lucy?"

Somehow the sound of Cliff Ayres, gay young voice gave her spirits a needed lift. "Sorry to interrupt your beauty sleep on your day off, Lucy, but it's a super day for the beach and swimming. How about it?"

For the first time after Cliff had asked her to go somewhere, she didn't hesitate. Today she needed someone flip and amusing.

"I'd love to, Cliff. Come for me at eleven."

Cliff was prompt. They drove out a few miles beyond the public area to a secluded palm grove where the sandy beach curved around a beautiful little cove. Cliff was in typical high spirits. He made her laugh despite her thoughts occasionally darting back to Stan and his serious proposal. Cliff was more like one of the boys she'd known back in high-school. Compared to Stan, Cliff seemed awfully irresponsible. Still, what reason did she have for pulling Cliff into her romantic tangle? Cliff was out for fun, and that was probably the end of it as far as she or any girl was concerned. Of course, he had his ambition to become an architect, and apparently that was his only real concern at present. Anyway, it was fun to hear him talk so enthusiastically about the houses he was going to build someday.

"All up along that shoreline, Lucy. Just think, my own houses, all facing the sea. You know, I've planned to make beach houses my specialty."

She grinned and threw some sand across his chest. He folded his hands behind his head and squinted at the sun.

"What about marriage, Cliff? Haven't you any special girl you've been holding off until you graduate?"

"Don't guess many girls would want me until I've got both feet on the ground," he said. "Why?"

She laughed. "Oh, maybe I just wondered why you weren't giving me the usual line."

HE DUG his toes deeper into the sand and turned over. "Well, to tell the truth, I haven't tried because it's pretty obvious you're down here after a guy with dough. For instance, the way you're chasing after Stanley Collier."

Her mouth dropped open. "Oh, Cliff! How could you tell?"

She was letting the cat out of the bag, of course, but then she found herself telling him everything, just as she had with Stan, only more. Cliff was a good listener, but when she finished, it seemed there was something beyond mere interest in his eyes, the way he watched her so intently, the way his eyes searched hers until her voice trembled and finally broke.

"You little fool," he said, and then she was in his arms. He held the back of her hair lightly in his fingers, and he moved her head toward his lips. He kissed her in a way she'd always yearned to be kissed, and she found herself completely responsive. Her arms went about him before she realized they were in plain sight of the highway, acting like passionate lovers.

Finally she pulled herself away. He turned his face out toward the water and she stared at his whimsically-shaped profile, seeing him suddenly in a completely new light. Then they both spoke at once.

"Lucy."

"Cliff."

He grabbed her hand in his. "Gee," he said. "What happened to us?"

She pressed his fingers tighter. Something *had* happened; something wonderful. "Oh, Cliff, do you suppose—?"

Then he leaned over and they were kissing again. "Baby, baby..."

Going back to town they were laughing like two kids. She felt really happy, truly happy, for the first time in her life. Could it be that the real thing had happened so quickly this crazy, mixed-up afternoon?

When he said goodbye at her apartment, he took her hand in his and held it tightly for a moment. He looked worried about something. Then he said finally, "Lucy, I'm sorry."

She touched his arm quickly. "Oh, no, Cliff, don't be. I'm glad it happened. I—"

"Cut it, Lucy. What I have to tell you is, well, to put it bluntly, I'm sort of engaged. A girl I met in school.

She's back up north now. She'll come back here after I graduate and then we'll get married."

He might as well have lashed her with a whip. Her throat choked up; she couldn't speak a word.

"Back there on the beach, remember what I said about you and Collier? Well, I meant that. I thought you were just another cute little golddigger. I didn't think you'd care about me seriously, that you were just out for laughs anyway. With this hair and freckles, you know, that's the way they usually take me. But anyway, if Stanley Collier wants to marry you, you've got your meal ticket already sewed up. Besides, he's a pretty nice guy."

She had somehow managed to unlock the door and then she turned again to face him. She had fallen in love with this boy, but she would never, never let him realize how much she'd felt.

"Goodbye, Cliff," was all she said.

INSIDE the apartment, she threw herself on the bed and let the tears come. Later she got up and tried to write a letter to Aunt Tillie, but she soon crumpled up the paper with a surge of hopelessness. How could she admit her failure? Then she glanced across the room at the roses and thought of Stan. How wonderful he'd been, giving her the most luxurious time of her life!

It had made her feel ashamed, horribly ashamed to have let someone else come between them. Still, this thing with Cliff hadn't really developed. Couldn't she simply forget it, go ahead and accept Stan's proposal when he returned? What was the matter with her? Why couldn't she grab hold of her old common sense?

The next few days at work were agony, but somehow she pulled through. She caught occasional glimpses of Cliff at the desk, but she avoided meeting him face to face.

Why, oh, why, had it happened like this? She finally accepted the truth as

she sat alone during her lunch hour one day. She'd fallen in love, completely and madly in love, with Cliff Ayres. And that very day Stan Collier was due back on the four o'clock plane from New York.

She received more flowers from Stan that afternoon. This time, orchids. She almost wept when she opened the box. Orchids were an almost unknown commodity back in Ashton. But they'd be standard equipment if she only consented to become Mrs. Stanley Collier.

Actually it was all too fabulous to completely grasp. But she knew if she married him, there would be even further complications. She would have to work hard to adapt herself to his way of living, his kind of people. Still, she felt fairly confident she could do it, and in accepting him, her campaign would have succeeded in every way. If only she hadn't accepted that beach date with Cliff! How could he have been so mean as to take her heart like that and then throw it back without mercy?

One thing she did know. Another eligible male like Stan wouldn't come her way again in a thousand years. She'd seen enough of the other wealthy men at the hotel: fat, fiftyish, bald. And the girls who chased after them were worse in their desperate way.

All these things pressed against her conscience as she left work that day and walked to her apartment. She freshened up and then took a taxi to the airport, for she had to meet Stan and tell him her decision.

The airport was crowded. A north-bound plane from Miami landed and departed again. She waited in the lounge, impatiently fumbling with her handbag, and then she decided to splurge on a cocktail to try and gain a little courage for what she had to do.

A swarthy man at the next table eyed her brazenly. Then he leaned closer. "You look lonely, baby. Mind if I join you?"

His dark hand slid quickly across

the leather upholstery toward her. She drew back in panicky anger, and then a firm voice spoke beside her, "All right, buddy, cut the comedy. The lady's with me."

"Cliff!"

He sat down quickly beside her as the man made a hasty exit.

"Lucy, I—"

She felt a return of her fury at the way Cliff had treated her. "All right," she said, "you've done your good deed for today. Now if you'll excuse me, I have to meet a plane."

SHE WAS practically running as she left the lounge and hurried down the long runway to the field. The loud speaker overhead was blaring out an announcement: the huge Constellation from New York was arriving. She watched it skim over the field and then descend gently for the landing. In a moment now she would be in Stan's arms. Dear Stan! She didn't love him as completely yet as she should, but she cared for him deeply, and since he probably felt the same about her, somehow it would all work out.

But then Cliff was grasping her elbow. "Lucy, you've got to listen to me. I—I lied the other day. There isn't any other girl and never was. I just fell in love with you somehow before I realized it would upset all your plans and maybe some of mine. So I thought I'd better nip it in the bud before anything happened. But maybe it was too late. Maybe it already happened."

She stopped to look in his eager blue eyes. But the passengers were already descending the plane ramp. There was Stan! She moved forward, but Cliff still held to her arm.

"Lucy, oh, Lucy, honey, I love you so much!"

Stan was reaching for his bags from the flight steward. Standing there on the ramp he presented the very picture of distinction—handsome, well-dressed, smiling. She could be the wife of this man: Mrs. Stanley Collier. No more money worries, no more having to

work. She'd have security, and social position besides. And since she'd told him all about her silly campaign, she'd been fair; she wouldn't be cheating in marrying him.

She turned back to Cliff. "I'm sorry, Cliff. I've made up my mind. I'm going to marry Stan, if he still wants me."

He looked as though he were going to cry. Like a little boy, she thought suddenly, and I've hurt him. It had not occurred to her until this moment that she was not the only one who'd been upset by their sudden falling in love. What he had said about it already having happened may have been true. Could it have been? That they both really knew it, in that first kiss?

"I see," he said. "Well, anyway, I wanted you to know I lied that day. You weren't to blame for what happened. I—I guess you'd better hurry on out there."

And then she was running, running to meet Stan. What she was saying to him hardly made sense, but he would understand later, later she could write him and explain everything, explain why she was hurrying away from him back to the terminal, hurrying toward a broken-down convertible where a red-haired young man with freckles sat forlornly at the wheel, hoping against

hope that she would still come to him.

"Lucy!"

"Cliff, darling..."

And when they kissed again, there was no longer any question about it: it *had* happened—they were meant for each other. She would love Cliff in a way she could never love Stan, and though she might be starting a bit nearer the bottom than she had counted on, Cliff, she knew, would not be near the bottom long. But even while they were, wasn't that where love counted most?

"Cliff," she said suddenly, "after you've built a few houses, would you build one especially for us?"

He grinned and started the motor. "Like to go out now and survey our building site?"

Then they both laughed and in a little while they were standing beside the ocean dunes where their house would someday rise, the same place they'd come swimming that afternoon. As the wind from the sea touched her cheeks she seized Cliff's hand in her own. Though her campaign for marriage had turned out completely different from what she had planned, she knew beyond any doubt that it had turned out pretty wonderfully after all.

THE END

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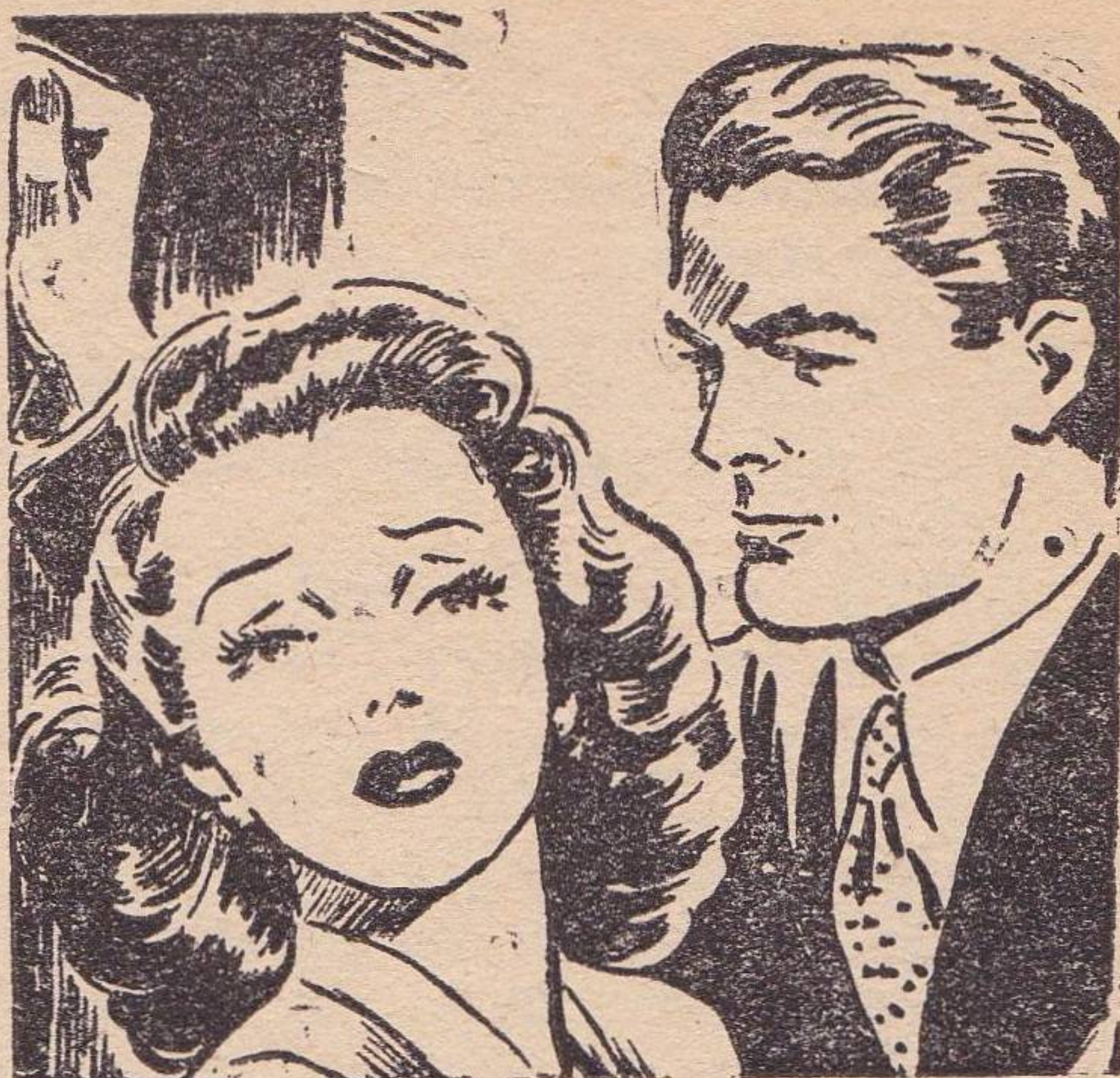
by Margaret Manners

Look for the New 2d issue of

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Patty had not meant to beg for his kiss!



THE WAITING KIND

by Viola Taccone

SOMEHOW, unlikely as it seemed, Patty Lane had been sure that one of these days Bill Channing would stop acting like a boss and get around to using first names. Then they would share a joke or two as they worked around the studio. Then a dinner. And, her breath always caught in her throat at this point, a kiss.

She was willing to wait forever,

though she prayed fervently that it wouldn't take that long. And then, suddenly, after six months of waiting, things began to happen. But in a way Patty had never imagined! One evening, just before closing time, Bill quite simply and concisely informed her that he was selling the studio and moving to San Francisco.

And now, Patty stood facing him in

the half-light of the camera room. Her stricken eyes travelled over his lean, inscrutable face, and it was almost enough to bring tears to her eyes. "Selling the studio?" she echoed dully, "you're moving north?"

He nodded and said impersonally, "Yes. I suppose you'll go back to Los Angeles?"

Patty's shoulders drooped. How could she answer that? She'd had no time to think it over. All that remained for her in L. A. was an aunt who'd finished bringing her up, who'd managed to supply all the financial requirements, but none of the emotional ones. At least in Fresno, she would have a few little memories of love. A childhood with her mother before she'd died when Patty was twelve, and memories of Bill—

She shook her dark head, her bangs giving her an appealing-urchin look. "I don't know. I don't think I'll be going back there. Maybe I'll just get another job here in Fresno."

He shrugged, changing the subject. "Are you doing anything tomorrow night?"

"No! Of course not," Patty said hopefully.

Bill glanced at her. "Well, then, perhaps you can help me take inventory of the frames, equipment and so on. I thought, too, I might remind you to bring a smock."

"All right," Patty murmured, bitterly disappointed. He was going away, right out of her life, and all he could say was, 'bring a smock'. And at a time like this, *she* couldn't say anything at all. Because love had turned out to be something that froze your tongue so you couldn't speak naturally. That clouded your brain with a crazy mixture of both misery and joy until you couldn't even think! Just live in this awful void of hopeless hopes...

PATTY WAS a rather small girl, and she looked even smaller now as she watched Bill walk away and busy him-

self with moving lights and cables against the wall. Her blue eyes, usually wore a solemn look of innocent wisdom, but suddenly they widened as a frightening new thought struck her like a blow!

She hurried through the maze of lights and cables, reaching out impulsively to touch Bill's arm. "Mr. Channing, when—" she blundered, "when are you leaving?"

He straightened at her touch and turned around. A brief expression of surprise crossed his face. "The new owner takes over in a week," he said, as though it were beside the point. His searching appraisal of her face seemed to be more important now.

Patty hastily drew her hand back, her face flaming with humiliation. Her pulses throbbed from the excitement of that brief contact. And though she'd prayed that Bill Channing would one day *really* look at her, she wished now that he would stop!

But he didn't. Instead, he stepped forward, and without warning, his long fingers reached down and tilted her chin upward. He looked deeply into her eyes.

Instinctively Patty knew he was going to kiss her. And though she'd waited six months for that very thing, she found now, oddly enough, that she didn't want it this way. She'd never meant to beg for his kiss!

She wrenched her chin from his hand and backed away. The action seemed to embarrass him. For a moment, they simply stood there, emotion still smouldering in the room.

The tingling of the doorbell snapped the tension like a scissors cutting string. Bill turned toward the reception room, glancing back to say with wry amusement, "Sorry, I didn't gauge the situation correctly."

Patty sank down on a chair, her face flaming, her heart thudding wildly. Snatches of conversation from the reception room began to make sense.

"Still set against buying a new camera?" a gay voice boomed.

Patty blinked her eyes and pulled herself together. It was Vic. Big, beautiful, extroverted Vic—camera salesman extra-ordinaire! Now, why did the wrong people always find you attractive? Vic had called her his little doll the first time he'd come into the studio, months ago. He was always trying to date her. She really should go one of these times. With Vic she could be herself. Laugh, he told she was pretty. But no, she had to be in love with Bill. Tall, lean, inscrutable Bill Channing—who had an impenetrable wall built around himself.

Vic's gay voice reached through the gloom and gave her despair a jolt. "Patty!" he called. "Where are you? Where do you hide her Channing?"

Trying to forget her recent scene with Bill, she got up and walked to the reception room, still flushing slightly.

VIC MERCER was not as tall as Bill, but he had broad shoulders and everything that went with them. He was much handsomer, in a conventional, more superficial way. He had fair, wavy hair, gray eyes and unlimited good humor. Patty knew that he was an incorrigible wolf who fell in love with every pretty girl he saw, but she also had the feeling that he was, in his way, a gentleman. She knew instinctively that he'd let a girl name her own terms. At the sight of Patty his eyes softened.

"Patty, honey," he said, "you know I don't really care whether this character buys a camera or not. It's just an excuse I make up to come see you. Doing anything tonight?"

Patty sighed in mock exasperation. The old routine! Always conscious of Bill, her eyes darted over to him. Back turned, he was looking out the window. The early autumn twilight silhouetted him there like some remote statue. He was ruining her life and he couldn't care less! Pride made her perverse. She

thought spitefully, I might just vary that routine!

Turning back to Vic, she forced a smile. "And if I'm not doing anything tonight?"

"Then we leave pronto for the Adobe Inn and the biggest steaks you ever saw—and the nicest dancing. Then a drive up to Millerton Lake—to sort of get acquainted. Just kidding," he grinned quickly, "about the lake, that is."

Patty laughed and raised a skeptical eyebrow. "I'll bet you were!" she said meaningfully. He made it so impossible to dislike him, even if he was the most obvious kind of wolf. Her eyes darted back to Bill.

TO HER SURPRISE, he'd turned and was glaring at her, absolutely white with anger! Patty stared for an instant, momentarily paralyzed with amazement! She knew he always acted strangely when Vic was around, but she'd always supposed it was because of a personality clash—introvert versus extrovert. But now it seemed entirely personal!

After one more furious look, he turned his back. His anger seemed to hang heavily in the air. Patty didn't know exactly why he should be angry, but the fact that he was, hurt her.

She blinked back the quick tears that stung her eyes. "Sorry, Vic," she said huskily, "some other time."

Vic glanced, eyebrows raised, from Patty to Bill. He shook his head and muttered softly, "Some people have their eyes wide open and can't see a damned thing." The observation was directed to Bill's indifferent back.

"Say, Channing," he boomed suddenly, "I heard from Carol the other day."

Patty tensed. Who was Carol? What was she to Bill? In six whole months, there'd been no sign of any woman whatever in his life!

Bill turned and faced Vic. "So?" he asked belligerently.

A triumphant gleam lit Vic's eyes. It seemed to say, see? I can reach you after all, can't I? He laughed aloud and shrugged. "Just thought I'd mention it."

Vic turned to Patty, charging up the whole room with his vitality. "Come on, Patty, it's six o'clock. I'm taking you home. Or didn't I tell you?"

Too bewildered to protest, Patty got her bag, said goodnight to an obviously upset Bill, and walked out with Vic—her dark blue eyes more solemn than ever. *Who was Carol?*

Vic's car was parked in the railroad station across the street. As he helped Patty in, she glimpsed the streamliner for San Francisco pulling out. In a week Bill would be on that train. Did Carol have anything to do with that?

As Vic drove away, Patty turned to watch the train. It looked so lonely pulling out. Lonely as Patty had been and as she would be again soon...

Patty's father had died before she was born, and her mother when Patty was twelve. She'd left Fresno to live with an aunt in Los Angeles, never feeling wanted, missing her mother terribly. When Patty finished photography school last spring, she'd left the huge, sprawling, lonely city and come back to Fresno, where her only memories of love were.

She'd got off the train at this very station, and wandering outside, she'd glimpsed the little stucco studio across the street. The samples in the window had drawn her like a magnet. They were lovely, living things that elated her—made her curious about who had taken them.

She'd found out all right. And something else, too. That Bill was the most fascinating man she'd ever seen! Tall, lean, graceful. His face, though not conventionally handsome was intriguing. She'd asked for a job and been hired. And each day she'd come to love Bill more. The long hands that could tilt a face, adjust a camera and create such beauty. The humor and tenderness

he showed with children. And then, the long, lonely times when he simply stared out the window or sat at his desk, brooding, lost in a distant world that nobody could reach.

So Patty knew that he was lonely, too. She longed for the day (she'd been so sure it would come!) when he would notice her, *really* notice her, slowly get to love her just a little bit. Then neither of them need ever be lonely again. She would have waited. But now, there wasn't any more time. Just one short week. And what was this strange, new talk of Carol?

ROWS OF old rooming houses were going by. "Vic," Patty asked, "who's Carol? What's she to Bill?"

Vic smiled a secret little smile. "An old flame," he said cryptically.

"Well, does he still love her? Is that what upset him?"

Vic shrugged. "How do I know? He's not the guy to spill his business." He glanced at her soft-eyed. "Honey, let's not talk about him. Not another word. What about dinner tonight? I'm serious."

Patty shook off the frustration of not getting any explanation. She considered his dinner invitation which sounded tempting. Although it was fall, the evening was very warm, one of those last, scorching days before Fresno gave in and admitted that it had a winter, too. The patios in the nightclubs just outside of town would still be open. It would be cool there, and maybe she could forget for a little while that she'd lost Bill without ever having had him at all.

"How about it?" Vic urged, pulling up before the old house in which Patty had an apartment.

She shook her head and smiled bitterly. She'd never forget. "Sorry, Vic," she said, stepping out of the car.

Vic leaned over and caught her arm. "Channing's got a good reason for wrapping his heart in armored plate,"

he said earnestly. "Forget about him. Take it from Vic, baby, life is short."

Patty watched the long, blue convertible pull away, puzzled and annoyed with Vic. He hinted but he didn't tell her anything! Later that evening, she nibbled at a sandwich in the drugstore down the street, alternating between utter despair, and impatience for the morning to come. When it did, she found that she'd beaten Bill to the studio. The first thing that caught her eye was a crumpled up telegram on Bill's desk. It looked oddly out of place among the papers that Patty always kept so tidy.

She walked toward it, wondering when it had arrived, who it was from, when Bill had crumpled it up and left it there. She was still staring when Bill walked in.

Their eyes met and held. Flushing guiltily, she hurried off to the dark-room and began loading film with a vengeance. Her hands trembled so badly that she could hardly be sure where the little notches were, indicating which side was up and which was down. When she finally finished, she took the long way to the camera room, pausing only a second to glance at Bill's desk. The telegram was gone.

Fortunately, she was busy most of the morning, almost too busy to wonder if Bill had heard from Carol too—whoever she was. Patty had just taken a baby's photograph and was having trouble jacking up the camera again when Bill came back from lunch.

"Here, let me do that," he offered.

Patty stepped back and watched him turn the handle with no more success than she'd had. Finally she said idly, "Maybe Vic was right. Maybe you could have used a new camera."

She was totally unprepared for Bill's reaction! "Vic be damned!" he said instantly, giving the handle a vicious twist, almost wrenching the crank from its socket. The film holder that Patty had just used, bounced to the floor with a frightful clatter

Not knowing what else to do, Patty bent to pick it up. She'd never had believed him capable of such a show of emotion! Confused images, words, stabbed her mind. Vic saying, "I heard from Carol the other day." Bill's belligerence. Vic saying, "She was his old flame." And now, numbly she wondered was she Vic's old flame, too? Had he and Bill been rivals?

ANGRY color rose to her cheeks. To her own surprise, she slammed the holder on the camera back and cried, "Why do you pick on Vic? He treats you better than you deserve! You're always rude to him, yet he's good natured about it!" Tears filled her eyes, because she was hurt that Bill's jealousy was for another woman, and because she wasn't saying any of the things she really wanted to say.

Bill drew back, as surprised, apparently, at her outburst as she'd been at his! Recovering, he said more gently, "I'm sorry. But now that you mention it, I did want to talk to you about Vic. Look—why don't you just tell him not to bother you?"

Patty was already a little ashamed of her vehement defense of Vic over a matter that had nothing to do with her. But now she gasped, "Oh, Vic's no bother! Why, he's been very sweet to me!"

"Sweet?" Bill's mouth twisted bitterly. He bent closer to Patty, his eyes burning into hers. "Look, you need some advice. You're young, and very, very nice. Vic's fickle. Insincere. If you have anything to do with him you'll be hurt as you've never been hurt before!"

Patty's heart swelled. Bill really cared what happened to her! He wasn't made of stone. She wanted to tell him that Vic could never, in a million years, hurt her. That only he, Bill, could do that. "You needn't worry about Vic—" she said huskily. Something seemed to be the matter with her voice.

Bill's breath quickened. The brief

emotion that had flared up between them yesterday was building. Bill reached out for her with eager arms and pulled her to him, bending his head until his lips had covered hers.

Patty felt a surge of sweetness such as she had never known. Not even in her most lavish dreams had Bill's kiss been so sweet. Her hands reached up and found his collar and hung on, tight.

But as swiftly as that kiss had begun, it ended. Bill pulled away abruptly and turned his head as though he were listening for something. Then Patty heard it too. The streamliner whistle. A train was coming in.

Bill paled and backed away, looking down at a shaken Patty "I have to meet that train," he said in a low voice, completely devoid of any emotion. "We'll talk about it later."

And Patty watched him walk away from her, his kiss still burning on her mouth, but her heart cold and empty. When he looked back once to say, "Don't forget inventory tonight," she could only nod dumbly.

AFTER THE little bell had tinkled and she knew he was gone, she walked slowly to the front window. She watched him make his way across the street, disappear inside the station. He towered above everyone he passed. Did he look that magnificent to everyone, she wondered. Did he to Carol? For she knew now, with a frightening instinct that it *was* Carol—the girl Vic had called his old flame.

Tears nearly blinded her as she waited for him to come out again. She blinked her eyes and pressed her nose to the window pane, like some forlorn little waif before a candy store. It seemed like an eternity, but finally straggling little groups of people pushed the doors open, and among them was Bill—with a beautiful golden creature beside him.

She was the most beautiful girl Patty had ever seen. Golden hair and skin,

with a beautiful figure encased in a pale yellow sheath of a dress. Patty choked. Bill had been Prince Charming, but that girl, not Patty was the princess. She watched them—Bill's face completely impassive, the golden girl's smiling, upturned, radiating happiness, until they got in Bill's car and drove away.

Somehow, the hours crawled by, and Patty did the necessary work, wondering how she could even still be alive when her heart was broken in a million pieces. Dusk was gathering when the phone rang.

Trembling, she picked it up, sure that Bill was calling to tell her to lock up and go home. But she was mistaken. It was a highly excited Vic.

"Patty!" he almost yelled. "Carol's back! I just saw her and Channing drive past here!"

"I know," Patty said huskily.

"I never thought he'd take her back," Vic said wonderingly. "But if anyone can melt a heart of armored plate, Carol's the gal for the job."

Patty laughed a little crazily. "I suppose now he'll marry her and they'll live happily ever after."

"Marry?" Vic asked. "You mean *remarry!*" He paused. Then, "Look, honey," he said shrewdly, "I'll pick you up for dinner tonight and tell you about it." Another pause. "Take it easy, kid," he added soothingly.

Patty fumbled to replace the phone in the cradle. She cried for fifteen minutes. Cried as she'd never cried in all her life. When there were no more tears left, she went to the rest room and bathed her face in cold water. She looked in the mirror. Her face was red and swollen. A stab of heartache made her gasp for breath. Imagine her having been in competition with that beautiful golden girl. Patty felt as though she, herself, had waited for a train for six months—at the wrong station.

AT TEN minutes of six, Bill came back—alone. Strangely enough,

he looked unhappy too. In spite of everything, Patty could still feel sorry for him. Had he and Carol had an argument already? She had no way of knowing. Their eyes met for an instant, but Patty turned and fled to the dressing room.

At six, Vic burst in like a bulldozer, oblivious to how jarring he was in that atmosphere. "Patty," he called, "the Adobe Inn has two steaks just our size. Come on, I'm starved!"

The sheer force of his personality put life into Patty and she hurried out from the dressing room, hastily shoving lipstick in her purse. "I'm ready, Vic," she said quietly.

"Miss Lane—what about the inventory?" Bill asked in a low voice.

Patty whirled around. He was standing behind the counter, his eyes dark and intense, almost willing her not to go.

"I forgot," Patty murmured, looking appealingly at Vic.

"Really, Channing," Vic said petulantly, "I've been trying for six months to buy her a dinner and when she finally says yes, you tell her she has to work. Can't it wait?"

"No!" Bill snapped, his voice carrying a low undertone of anger, almost of the violence he'd shown this afternoon at the mere mention of Vic's name.

Patty watched him defiantly. She'd thought it was because he was jealous. He'd kissed her as though he really loved her. And then the train whistle had sounded like an ominous warning—and he'd hurried out to meet Carol.

"I'm sorry," she said, her chin raising proudly. "I promised Vic."

"See, Channing?" Vic said smugly, taking her arm. It really *will* have to wait, won't it?" And he hurried her out the door before anyone could have a chance to think things over.

Lost in a kind of numbness, Patty nibbled at her food, unable to really enjoy that the steak was the best, the cool patio lovely. A vague, faraway fear—as though it belonged to someone

else—made her hesitate to remind a reluctant Vic to keep his part of the bargain. To tell her about Bill and Carol.

Vic tried taking her in his arms, gliding her languorously across the dance floor, rubbing his cheek against her soft hair, but still she stayed in a half-trance. He sighed deeply and led her back to the table.

"Okay, baby," he said softly. "I've got a little story to tell, haven't I?"

Fear and interest flickered in Patty's eyes. She nodded, her little mouth pursed in a sort of quiet determination.

"It's like this," Vic said slowly, searching for the right words. "Like I say, they were married once. When it ended, everybody blamed *her*. But I didn't. She's the gayest girl you could ever know. A real looker. Tall, blonde."

Patty nodded. She knew.

"Well, anyway," Vic went on, warming to the subject, "she and Channing were married a week before he went over to Korea I guess she tried for a whole month to be true to him—" he smiled wryly. "But you can't keep a girl like that down! That kind doesn't wait!"

I would have waited, Patty thought miserably. I would have waited forever—

Vic was talking rapidly now, caught up in the story. "Even after she began stepping out, she kept writing that she loved him et cetera. Then she met the guy that made the difference. Within six weeks she was divorced, remarried, and living in L. A. with Channing's successor. Bill simply came home a divorced man."

SILENT tears of sympathy slid down Patty's cheek. Now she understood the look of sadness on Bill's face when he came back to the studio tonight. He had Carol back, but with her a terrible burden, never knowing what whim might move her next.

"How do you know all this?" Patty asked huskily.

Vic shrugged. "Carol and I were pals a few years ago," he said with a far-away look in his eyes, the look of nostalgia for good times since gone. "Whenever we were both between romances we'd get together for a few laughs, a few kicks—" He laughed reminiscently, then looked straight at Patty, his mood shifting.

"That's what I mean," he said feelingly. "everybody blamed *her*. But I don't. Look at it this way. Some people are born to live like each day is their last. They're charged up. Two years is a lifetime to them! Two minutes is a lifetime! A girl like that couldn't wait," he scoffed. "Beautiful, full of life, full of laughs—" His voice trailed off. He wore the smug look of a man who has proved his point.

Patty mentally repeated his last words. Beautiful, full of life, full of laughs—like Vic. She nodded wisely, but her pretty face was very sad. Understandably, Bill would try to keep her from getting involved with Vic. But not because he loved her—as she'd thought for one delirious moment. He'd simply been doing her a kindness. And that kiss? That had been a kindness too. Surely her eyes must have told him how much he meant to her. There was nothing else any man could do under the circumstances. She felt small, shamed—

Vic reached across the table and gripped her wrist, tight. "Patty," he said softly, the light of triumph in his eyes. "Now that you know, you'll drown that torch, won't you? I'll order you a cocktail—"

His eyes searched the room for the waitress, but suddenly they widened, and Patty turned, too, when he choked incredulously, "Channing!"

She gasped, unable to breathe for an instant, as Bill approached their table, his face dark and angry. Vic and Patty simply stared, until he actually spoke, his long hand reaching out for her free wrist. "Come on, we're leaving!"

Vic bristled, "See here, Channing,"

he fumed, "you've got a whole lot of nerve. You ignore her for months, then suddenly elect yourself for her big brother! That isn't what you want, is it, Patty?" he asked, his words carrying a double meaning that Patty caught instantly.

She pulled her wrist free. "No, it isn't!" she said sharply. "Vic's right. You haven't any business here. You belong with Carol."

"That's right," Vic seconded, his eyes blazing. But slowly, very slowly, they narrowed suspiciously. "Hey, where is Carol, anyway?"

"At the Fresno Hotel," Bill said curtly, his eyes never leaving Patty. "Come on," he insisted, "I'm going to take you home!"

Patty felt her face flush with anger, her mouth tighten. It was amazing how interested a person could get over your welfare when it could no longer do you any good. She looked appealingly at Vic. But he could help her not at all. He'd pushed his chair back and was rising.

"Really, Channing," he said again, with a false note of outrage, "you've got a lot of nerve!" He picked up the check. "Go ahead," he said scornfully, "talk to Patty tonight. I'll take her out to finish her dinner tomorrow night."

PATTY watched him walk over to the cashier and out the door, as sure as she'd ever been of anything that he'd be with Carol as fast as his souped-up convertible could get him there. Realizing that people nearby had become aware of their table, she got up to leave. She gave Bill a scathing look. She'd talk to him all right. She could hardly wait to get outside to his car, and when she had, he barely had the motor going before she started!

"You shouldn't have done that!" she blazed. "You had no right to do that! Vic's been sweet to me! You had no right!"

"Of course not," he cut in, catching her anger. "Nothing should stand in the

way of your having a ball. A few laughs, a few kicks," he said viciously, mimicing Vic bitterly.

"He *has* been sweet!" Patty insisted angrily. "Sweeter than you ever could be! He's cheered me up when I've been lonely, made me laugh—" Her voice caught in her throat and only choking sobs came out.

Bill braked to a stop at the side of the road and in a moment his arms were around her, pulling her close. "Patty," he moaned, "why did you have to fall in love with Vic? Why couldn't you have loved me?"

Patty drew back and looked up with streaming eyes, unable to believe what she'd heard. A torrent of words rushed to her lips, but her awareness of his arms around her sharpened, and very wisely, she kept quiet!

"Patty, Patty," he said sadly, "I thought when Carol left me that I could never love anyone again. Then, just a few short months later, you walked in the studio, and I thought surely this soft, sweet girl with the funny lost look in her eyes is different. Patty, please don't cry—"

Man fashion, he didn't know they were tears of happiness!

"Vic told me about Carol," she whispered. "Now you tell me."

He drew away, looking utterly miserable. "The minute I saw you," he said, "I forgot she'd ever existed. All I wanted was for you to stop being so distant. Yet you seemed to get farther away from me all the time. I couldn't stand it any longer. I sold the studio, I had to get away. Last night, when I told you, I thought for a minute that it meant something to you—that you cared. But when I tried to look in your eyes to be sure, you pulled away, like you couldn't stand to have me touch you. Yet with Vic around, you seemed to come alive."

He seemed to be doing six months worth of talking, and Patty, delirious-

ly happy, just listened, delightedly.

He drew a deep, ragged breath and went on. "Then, last night when I was half crazy knowing you were with Vic, I got Carol's wire. She'd divorced her husband. Of all the insane times to decide she wanted to come back to me—as though she could juggle husbands about. Well, I met her this afternoon and sent her packing, like she did me. I'm afraid I wasn't very kind and she made an awful scene, but I was out of my mind with worry about you being in love with Vic."

He gripped her arms. "Patty, I *know* what a man like Vic could do to you. It's always the other one who gets hurt where people like Vic are concerned."

"Bill, why didn't you just tell me you loved me?" Patty asked.

"I was waiting," he said, "waiting for you to at least like me a little bit."

"I was waiting, too," Patty whispered.

His long fingers reached up and tenderly trailed the bangs off her forehead. He looked deeply into her eyes, and found an answer there. Patty's eyes sparkled as though they had been lit by a thousand stars.

For an instant, neither moved and then Bill reached out for her and pulled her close. His mouth brushed her eyes, her neck, her cheek and when it settled finally on her lips it stayed there with a burning fierceness.

Patty knew there were lots of things she should tell him that she should explain, but they had both waited too long already, so she simply gave in completely to the sweetness of his kiss.

Yes, Patty had been sure that one of these days Bill would stop acting like a boss. It hadn't worked out exactly as she had imagined it. But it didn't matter now. For at last she was in Bill's arms for keeps.

THE END

He was all her dreams come true!

Novelette

REACH FOR A SAVAGE MOON

by Christine Young

SUSAN SAW the newspaper announcement and the picture just before the train returning from Florida pulled into the South Station at ten o'clock of a freezing March night. A newsboy had scrambled aboard at Trinity Place and flourished the latest edition. Ten weeks away, and Susan was a little behind on home town news. Not that that mattered too much, nowadays, to Susan, but she had bought the paper and opened it, as if by fate, to the entertainment section, and there it was.

For a moment she stared, her dark eyes wide and startled, all the color suddenly draining from her vivid, sun-tanned young face. The words danced up and down at her dizzily.

"Jonnie Lambert and his band," ran

the blurb, "are packing them in every night now at the *CASINO*, breaking all records. A big triumph for Lambert, who has come a long way in the past year. Bostonians remember him as first clarinetist with Tod Baker and his *SWINGSTERS*—"

Susan didn't read any further, though there was more. A year. Had it been only a year? It seemed like a lifetime! Forever!

"Jonnie!" She stared at his picture. "You're back again!"

All the wonderful, fine calmness that ten weeks by an entrancing blue southern sea had brought to her, abruptly vanished. She drew a sharp breath and whispered, "So you've made it! You've really got there. You've done what you vowed you would. You're a fabulous



"Oh — please — kiss me quickly," she urged him.

success and I haven't known about it. For almost a year I've known nothing about you, where you were, what doing, or—anything!"

For over a year she hadn't been really alive at all.

Susan snatched back that thought, her hands suddenly clenched. This was silly! Jonnie Lambert was nothing to her now. But she picked up the paper again and forced herself to look at his picture. Jonnie! Whose name had once sung like a magic melody through her heart and her brain and her blood. He looked just the same. Gay and debonair and exciting. The same crisp black hair, cut very short to hide the curl he hated. The same alive blue eyes. But about his mouth, she saw now, her heart thudding, there was a difference. A year ago Jonnie's mouth had been young and boyish and happy, curved

to laughter and to tenderness. Now, the lips of this pictured face were twisted in a smile that seemed to mock her. Self-confident, gay enough, but ironic.

"Do I look that way, too, I wonder?" thought Susan, suddenly shivering. In spite of the warmth of the train and her fur coat and the Scotch tweed suit beneath it, she felt cold all over.

Well, it was funny what one brief year could do. A year ago she and Jonnie had been madly in love. They had had faith and hope, in the future, despite what Jonnie himself had considered so many obstacles. They'd had a bright dream in their hearts. But now—well, Jonnie had his success, anyhow, and maybe that was what he had really wanted the most. That, and in the end, incredibly—Anita.

Susan's soft lips tightened. Her mind still veered away fiercely from

that thought, that name. Anita Carroll, the stunning dancer at the nightclub where Jonnie had been playing when he and Susan first met, over a year ago.

For a moment, though, memory swooped back, despite all she could do to stop it. Once again it was that first crazy, wonderful night.

THEY HAD met, she and Jonnie, on a comic note, nothing glamorous at all. Not then. Jonnie had just happened along that rainy night when she had fallen practically flat on her face in a puddle. He had picked her up and tried hard not to laugh. She had taken one look and even in the dim light of a flickering street-lamp she could see that he was terrific. Jonnie had looked back then, and whistled.

"No broken bones?" he had managed, at last, a little breathless.

"Only a broken shoe-heel. But I guess I can manage."

They had waited a breathless moment or two for a cab. On a rainy night, though, cabs always seemed suddenly non-existent. So Jonnie had walked her home, a not too long walking distance, his hand tight on her arm. At her door she had invited him in but he had said, "Can't. I'm sorry. I'm on my way to work."

The place where he was playing then was a small one, unimportant. She had never been there, but he said, suddenly, "Why don't you drop over sometime? We'll play all your request—numbers."

But he had given a little shrug, saying it. His glance was taking in the house where she lived, imposing, handsome, and the uniformed maid who had answered their ring. It wasn't until later, though, that he had told her what he had immediately decided. That she was a cute trick, a honey, but way, way out of his class.

She had hoped furiously, however, that he would call her. He didn't. So

one night, with some of her own friends, and with Van Hilton whom she had known forever, as an escort, she had gone brazenly to the club where he played. He could play like a fool, and Susan had nearly burst with pride in him. Later, he had joined them for a few moments at their table, and under cover of the general conversation, she had said, breathlessly, "Come see me, Jonnie, please? You know where I live."

Jonnie had shaken his dark head, almost rude in his abruptness. But the look in his eyes, eager, blazing, had sent her hopes soaring. For Jonnie Lambert, too, the spark had struck. Susan knew.

There had followed the wonderful time. Because he had come, after all, as she had known in her heart that he would. They fell in love. On the nights that Jonnie had off, they went wining and dining. They drove miles about the countryside in Susan's blue convertible or in Jonnie's old car. They talked for hours... Jonnie was from South Dakota, and twenty-four to her nineteen. He never talked too much about himself, though. About that he seemed to have a modest reluctance. But she could tell that he had had to work hard, always, and had little patience with idlers, or the butterflies of the world.

"And am I a butterfly, Jonnie?" she had asked, sighing.

"Yes. You are. But an irresistible one."

"Well, good! Because I so want to be irresistible to you, darling."

So there had been that, at first. Happiness, gay and lovely. She wasn't sure, even yet, just when the grimness started in. But suddenly there it was, with Jonnie acting moody, restless, and saying, "It's *not* being silly, as you call it, baby, to face facts. I love you, yes, like crazy. But money is important, and, for a man, success. That's what I want and mean to have. I want you,

too. But we've got to wait, Susan. Love alone just isn't enough."

She remembered, now, her answer—the answer she always made to that. "It's enough for *me*, darling. I could be happy anywhere, in any old shack, with you. Oh, Jonnie, don't you see?"

"No. You think that now, but that dizzy scrap of a hat you're wearing represents more money than I make in a week!" he had pointed out. "You were born with a silver spoon in your mouth. I wasn't. And *your* father's daughter can't marry a penniless, second-string musician. But you wait. I'll get there yet!"

So always it came back to that. She was rich, he was poor. She lived in a brownstone mansion, with Florida and Hawaii and Europe at her fingertips, all the things that money could buy. She was expected to make an appropriate marriage, with somebody like—well, Van Hilton. Her family looked coldly at a harum-scarum young musician from a South Dakota farm. And Jonnie was so stubborn and proud. Even with her soft young arms around him, her lips warm and pleading on his, Jonnie had said, a little fiercely, "No—no, darling. We have to wait. Until I can get on my feet and show 'em. If you love me you'll understand."

WELL, SHE had loved him. Susan drew a quivering breath, remembering now. Nobody knew, but herself, how much she had loved him. He was all her dreams come true, the meaning to everything. But she hadn't been able to understand, not quite—about Anita, who was in love with him, too. Even a girl with two heads could tell that. Jonnie himself didn't seem to know it, but he would, given time. And Anita was lovely. A real menace.

So they had quarrelled. Not bad quarrels at first. But somehow the bright, lovely fabric of their love, the breath-taking magic, wasn't quite so bright and shining any more. A hate-

ful, horrid antagonism raised its ugly head. And finally, one night, the worst possible night in the world for ultimatums, Susan knew she couldn't stand it any more.

"If you really *wanted* to marry me, Jonnie, you'd *do* it!" she told him, her eyes flashing. "You wouldn't be such a silly, stubborn mule! I can't bear it, all this crazy false pride. I can't help it if I wasn't born a pauper! I want to share what's mine with you! *Now*, while we're young and terribly in love, Jonnie. Not when we're—old and gray!"

She shouldn't have said that. She knew it instantly by the look that leaped into Jonnie's eyes, and her heart quailed. His voice furious, he retorted, hotly, "So you think it will take me that long, do you—to make the grade?"

That was the night he had lost his job with Tod Baker. The band had folded. Susan hadn't known, but Jonnie told her then. And it was while he was telling her that the phone rang. Anita Carroll, incredibly, demanding, "I'm sorry, but is Jonnie—Jonnie Lambert—there?"

Susan had handed the phone to Jonnie and he had talked in monosyllables, mostly, telling nothing to Susan, who had stalked far across the big living-room. When he hung up, she said, trembling, hardly recognizing her own voice, "She's in love with you, isn't she, Jonnie? You may as well admit it! *She's* the real reason you keep saying we must—wait!"

She remembered now how Jonnie had looked at her, cold and hot, all at once, and meeting that glance her heart had plunged. He said, "She shouldn't have called me here. I'm sorry. She wouldn't have, except that she's pretty worked up tonight, losing her job. We all are. But you wouldn't understand about that, would you, Susan? What it means to be a girl alone, scrambling to make a living. Anita's a

swell kid. I'd give her a boost any time, if I could."

The width of the world seemed suddenly to divide them. More, much more than just another girl. Jonnie said, after a moment, "I'm sorry, Susan. It's just that, no matter what we think, we never will see things the same way, I guess. That old stuff about different sides of the track. You're a wonderful girl, but I guess you'll just never get it through your lovely head that a man just doesn't accept things from a woman, not the material things. He has to go out and fight for them, get them, for her."

The way he might be able to get them for a girl like—Anita.

Staring, stricken, Susan had thought, "He doesn't really love me at all. I just want to help, because I love him. And he thinks I'm just impatient and jealous and arrogant!"

WELL, *IT* was over. No use thinking about it now. Susan jerked her thoughts back to the present. In the end, there had loomed that maddening threat of Anita; glamorous, lovely, who really belonged to Jonnie's world, and could understand him better than she, Susan, ever could. For almost a year she had lived with that thought. And a year was too long for that sort of punishment. If a man's pride outstripped his love, if another girl could come between them, well—so be it. Love wasn't worth the price you paid. She had accepted that now. Or had she?

"I'd better—now!" Susan told herself. "Jonnie's got the success he wanted. And he's got Anita. He wouldn't marry *me*, but he married *her*."

From the West coast there had come that news, by the grapevine.

"Your Jonnie married her, didn't he, darling?" somebody had said. "We saw them in Las Vegas, playing in a honky-tonk out there. Everyone says they're

married. But then, Susan, you would never have been happy, living that life. Just tagging along, all over with a jazz band."

That was all Susan had ever heard, but it had been enough. It was as if Jonnie Lambert had dropped off the earth. She steeled her heart now. She had gone to Europe and tried to forget him, because her parents had urged that. She had come home just long enough to pack up again for Florida. A useless sort of life, oh, yes. But what did it matter? Nothing mattered very much now, without Jonnie.

And now, he was back in town. He had smiled up at her just now from the evening paper. A whale of a big success, on top of the heap, at last. And married to Anita Carroll. She must concentrate on that.

The train gave a jerk and she got to her feet, a little blindly. The paper with Jonnie's picture slid to the floor. She let it stay there.

"It's over," she thought, stonily. "He's married. And in just a minute I'll be all sane and sensible again, with Van."

She had completely forgotten Van, but he would be waiting for her at the train gate, she supposed. She hadn't heard from him in several weeks, which did seem odd, but she had wired him she was arriving, and his huge, square-cut solitaire blazed on her third finger. She was going to marry Van in the spring. Fantastic? Last year Jonnie, this year Van. But then, life seemed to work out in peculiar ways. She had balked so long. All over Europe, in fact. But a girl should marry, and have a family, and Van met all the conventional specifications. He was in love with her, too. Or so, he firmly declared.

Picking up her purse and gloves, Susan headed down the train aisle, a small, golden-headed figure. The train stopped, but by the mirror near the door, she paused for a second to stare at her reflection there. She was so sure

the upheaval inside her must show in her face. It didn't, except for the blazing of her eyes. She looked just a slender, suntanned girl, poised and lovely, and not a bit shattered by a storm of memories.

At the train gate Van stood waiting, tall and dark and attractive.

"Hi, baby!" he said. "You look terrific. All tanned up and everything. How was Miami and all the crowd down there?"

Usually, after a separation, he kissed her, and never mind how many people looked on. Tonight he merely tucked her hand in the crook of his arm as she said, brightly, "Everybody's fine. I went swimming every day, and tuna fishing. And early to bed almost every night." Which was nearly the truth. "How's everything with you?"

"Oh, so-so." He shrugged. "But let's go. Time's a-wasting."

It was good to see him, Susan told herself. Comfortable. She was used to him and he was the kind of husband she needed. Of her own world, anyhow, as Jonnie Lambert would say. Groton and Harvard and tons of background. Not much money. But then, unlike Jonnie, Van had no foolish objections about marrying her, a girl who had.

But there was no leap of the heart. No blazing joy, in meeting him, after weeks apart as there should be for the man a girl was due to marry, come the spring.

"I'll never feel that way again," she told herself, her heart plunging. "Once in a lifetime, that kind of love. Oh, Jonnie—I hate you!"

But she didn't. She was still in love with Jonnie Lambert!

In silence, almost, she listened to Van's running commentary of news as they drove across town in his car. It was warm in the car but she still shivered. She would get hold of herself soon, she hoped. Van would see to that. But suddenly, peering up at him, she noticed something that she hadn't noticed at first. Always, about Van, she

had thought, sighing, "He's so calm and sensible." Pleasure, for Van, centered about good food and plenty of sleep and exercise and no distracting emotional high jinks. Van would never touch the heights and depths of passionate love. Most people, Van often declared, cheerfully, burned themselves up and that was for the birds, damn silly. People with too much imagination suffered, and where was the percentage in that?

BUT TONIGHT, suddenly, there was this strange new look about him. He seemed more alive than usual, there was a hint of suppressed excitement about him, a sort of preoccupation. Unflattering to her, Susan. But somehow intriguing.

"I'm just imagining it!" Susan told herself. "He's just the same, he'll never change. People don't. And someday he'll teach *me* the system—how to be calm and unemotional. Life will be fine then, and peaceful. No Jonnies. No Anitas. Just me and Van, who is through with other girls, now he's finally sure of me."

She was thinking that and trying to be thrilled about it when she noticed something else. They were not heading home.

"Where are we going?" She sat up straight. "You didn't tell me you had made plans for anything. Oh, Van—not tonight. I'm tired."

"Tired? After bed early every night?" He stared at her. "Well, we'll only stay a minute or two. So don't balk. Be good, baby."

The car drew up beside the curb of a brilliantly lighted night spot. A new place to Susan. In the past year, in the brief intervals when she was home, she had avoided night spots. And now she drew a sharp breath. Above the entrance to this one there blazed the words, "*The CASINO*". And underneath, in huge capitals, Jonnie's name.

Staring up at it, Susan stiffened and

heard herself exclaiming, "Oh, no! I can't, I won't, go in there, Van. Please!"

Already though, he was out and opening her door for her. "Come on, stop being stubborn!" he said, impatiently. "The new band here is tops. A must for everyone, to hear it. You used to root for this guy, Lambert, as I remember. And the dancer here is—well!"

Susan flashed a startled look at him. He sounded suddenly so excited and expectant and not a bit like easy-going, cheerful Van. Later, she was to remember that, so well. But now, she had no choice, it seemed. He had remembered that first night when she had made him take her to hear Jonnie play, though he had not known she and Jonnie were ever in love. It had all happened and ended, so swiftly, and Van had been getting home only on weekends then, from a job he had in New York. Nobody knew much, really, about her and Jonnie. It had been fun to keep it to themselves. But now, Van seemed to think this would be a treat for her! Or something. It was the "or something" that puzzled her.

Inside they found the place mobbed. But Van, who had a way with headwaiters, wangled a table, just outside the golden railing that enclosed the gleaming dance floor.

Susan, dazzled, looked around. It was beautiful, spectacular, the *CASINO*, a fitting background for Jonnie's old bright dream of triumph and success. There were waving palms and tiny stars twinkling in a midnight ceiling. There were heaven blue walls, and over the stage there was a fabulous backdrop of the harbor at Rio, lights winking out so glamorously.

Once, Susan remembered suddenly, with a knife twisting in her heart, Jonnie had said, dreamily, "Someday I'll take you to Rio, Susie. That's one place, anyhow, that you've never seen." And she had retorted, "I've nev-

er seen *any* place, not really, Jonnie. All places seem brand, shiny new to me, even Chinatown—seeing it with you!"

It was true, too. But now, anyhow, she was seeing Rio in make believe. And pretty soon she would be seeing Jonnie. Hearing him play again.

Their table was too far away for her to see him yet, though. The dance floor and the dancers, the dazzling spotlight, came between. But he was there somewhere, he had to be. Her heart thudded, almost suffocating her with its hard, uneven beat.

Then suddenly Van was exclaiming, his glance intent and eager, on the dance-floor, "Here she comes! The real star of this show!"

Into the sudden hush that fell over the noisy smoke-filled room, there came the throbbing beat of a rhumba. Into the spotlight there whirled a dazzling figure, tall, willowy, a spurt of flame.

"Is she something, or is she something!" It was Van's stifled voice. He was plainly lost. Susan stared at him, and later, was to remember.

Now she stared back at the dancer. It was Anita, yes. Anita Carroll, or Anita Lambert? And more provocative than ever before. A dancer now as well as a singer. She wore a shimmering gown of golden sequins. Her black hair swung like a cloud about the passionate white flower of her face. A girl to inflame a man, any man, like Van, here. Not just Jonnie.

But she was Jonnie's wife. They were together still. That rumor had been right. Of course.

Chocking suddenly, Susan clutched the edge of the table. "I won't sit here and watch! I don't have to!" she told herself, her eyes ablaze.

She got to her feet. She was being idiotic. But she said to Van, who seemed not to hear at all, "I'm going out for a minute. I'll wait for you down in the lounge, Van."

HE LOOKED up and made a sound but did not try to stop her. She

went through the crowded, bewitched room, and out. If he missed her later and was outraged by her crazy behavior, no matter. She had to get away where she could breathe and think clearly again.

"Jonnie's married to her," she thought, "and she's lovely. He went to bat for her, always. I was such a dope not to have known, all along. They do belong together. But oh, Jonnie—"

The lounge, a lovely place, was almost deserted. There was a fountain there, splashing softly. The management, plainly, knew how to do things up brown. Hurray for Jonnie!

But there, by the splashing fountain, suddenly it happened. Someone spoke and she whirled around.

"Susan!" It was Jonnie himself, towering above her, twin lamps blazing in his eyes. "Yes, it's me, and don't look so startled, Susie!" he was exclaiming, softly. "I'm taking a breather, during this number. But where are *you* headed?"

"No place." She found her voice. It sounded very small and far away and it was speaking the truth, wasn't it? Susan Morton, going no place. Since the last time she had been with Jonnie she had been going no place, hadn't she?

She stared up at Jonnie now and heard him saying, "Did my thoughts bring you here tonight? They must have, Susan." He sounded excited.

"I don't know, Jonnie. What were your thoughts?" she asked.

She looked at him and time dropped away. It was a year ago. She thought, breathlessly, "The clock's turned back. We're just meeting here for a date. Something gay and silly and terrific! In just a minute he'll stoop down and kiss me. Oh, Johnny, do it, do it, quickly! Because the past year has been so darned long!"

Instead he took her arm and drew her toward a more secluded corner. He said, "I've been trying to get in touch with you ever since we hit town, a

week ago. Your house-phone doesn't answer."

"I know. It couldn't. The house has been closed. My family is in Arizona. I've just got back from Florida tonight. I caught a lot of tuna off the Keyes. You would have loved that, Jonnie. But—"

"Stop babbling nonsense, Susan!" Jonnie said, commandingly.

He was right. She was babbling. But what did all this mean? Why had he tried to reach her? And why was he looking at her like this, now? With this heart-stopping light in his eyes and his hand trembling. Could he possibly think she would have anything to say to him now—now he was married to another girl?

"So? Florida?" she heard him saying. "And Arizona." He shrugged a little, added, "Would your mother countenance me now, Susan, do you suppose?"

She couldn't blame him for that. Her heart lurched, remembering that first impossible day when she had taken him home to meet her family.

"Oh? Mr. Lambert?" Her mother's eyebrows went up. "It's very nice to meet you. Susan tells us you play in a night-club band."

She might just as well have said, "So you play a hand-organ? Where is the monkey?"

It had been ghastly and Susan had died a thousand deaths that afternoon. Small wonder Jonnie had felt, with helpless fury, that he was reaching for the moon! For the first time, all in an instant, she saw Jonnie's side of it. No wonder he wanted to talk to her, gloat a little now. It must give him a lot of pleasure to be able to say, in effect, "See? I've made it. I'm practically a second Glenn Miller now."

She found her voice again. "Your band is wonderful. Congratulations, Jonnie," she was saying. "I'm glad, so terribly glad for you. And Anita, she's lovely. You've both reason to be awfully proud."

IF THAT was being noble, generous, to a fault, well, no matter. A strange look glinted in Jonnie's eyes. But when he retorted, it was nothing about Anita.

"Thank you," he said. "But you know something? I've discovered a lot of things this past year. Success, you know, is only comparative. I used to think success and happiness were synonymous."

"And they're not?" She stared up at him, scarcely breathing.

"No." His mouth went grim. "Happiness means a heckuva lot more than that. Like you said, baby, in the beginning. It means sharing. A shack, anything, so long as it's with the right one."

Funny talk for a famous band-leader to his old girl friend, in a night club lounge! Susan gulped. Why was he telling her all this now? It was unthinkable, outrageous. But wonderful! No matter what.

They were staring at each other, breathless, when suddenly Jonnie's face hardened. His glance had gone beyond her. He drew a sharp breath.

"Could this be someone looking for you, Susie?" he asked her, quickly.

She turned. It was Van. Bearing down upon them, a peculiar look on his handsome face. She had forgotten Van completely. And why, why must he come barging in just now?

She heard his voice. "Well, so here you are! I thought you must be sick or something, Susan. Streaking out like that—"

His glance went to Jonnie suddenly. There was an electric silence. Then, "Oh, hello, Lambert," Van said, coloring.

Jonnie nodded, briefly, curtly. For an instant their glances locked. There was hostility, something much deeper, in that glance, Susan could tell. Then Van took her arm.

"The floor show's over. If you like, Susan, we'll shove along now," he said, with a shrug.

It wasn't happening, Susan told herself. Van seemed suddenly an utter stranger. She had never seen this side of him before. Easy-going Van turning abruptly officious, rude, even. And his clasp on her arm was compelling, almost urgent.

"Goodnight, Susan." She heard Jonnie's voice, and turned back.

"I'm home now, to stay, you know," she said, breathless.

"Oh? Well, I'll try again," Jonnie said.

They went out then, she and Van, and got into the car and drove home in stony silence. At her own door, Susan said, at last, "You were rude. Why were you, Van? Of course I know Jonnie Lambert. Besides, it's a free world. I can talk to anybody I please. What's the matter with you tonight, anyhow? You seem so strange and funny."

"Nonsense. But if I was rude, I apologize," Van said. He got out and they went up the steps. At the door he said, "I won't come in tonight. But the Hendersons are back. I checked this morning."

The Hendersons, James and Lucy, were the butler and cook. Susan nodded and looked at Van and thought, "He's just pretending to be concerned about me, jealous. He's covering up something. But what? There's more to all this than I know. But I'll find out!"

She turned a cheek to his goodnight kiss and went in. She was a fool but she couldn't let Van really kiss her, since seeing Jonnie. She knew now, for sure. She was in love with Jonnie still. With every beat of her heart she knew it. And it was all just no use. He was married or wouldn't he have said he wasn't? He had just tried to reach her to drum up business or something, for his new gig. The band.

SHE WAS still in bed the next morning when the phone rang at nine. All night she had not slept, except fitfully. Jonnie's face had haunted her,

his smile, his voice. Not the new, mocking smile, but the old gay smile she used to know so well.

Tossing and turning, she had thought, "You aren't really happy, are you Jonnie—any more than I am. I could tell. Anita hasn't filled the bill. You and I did belong. We were the once-in-a-lifetime for each other, and that's really why you've tried to reach me. Just to say, '*You win, Susan. You were right.*' But it's too late now."

She was thinking that still and feeling tragic about it, when the phone rang. For just an instant hope sent her spirits soaring. But it couldn't, wouldn't be Jonnie. By light of day, he would have got some sense, thought better of it, especially after seeing her with Van.

She lifted the receiver and Jonnie's voice said, "Susan?"

"Yes!" Her heart leaped.

"I want to see you. I must. Could I? Sometime today?" He sounded strange, and very determined.

She hesitated only an instant. Then, "All right," she said.

"It's important. I'll pick you up in my car, around six, tonight is my night off. We'll have dinner some place, like we used to. Though not at the *CASINO*. No busmen's holidays."

Susan hung up, her heart pounding. Dinner together, in one of their old private, special places! She shouldn't have listened, she should have said no, definitely. . . .

"I love him!" she thought, unsteadily. "And he still loves me. But we got—trapped. Lots of people do, I guess. But it can't be wrong to have just today. And if it is, I just don't care!"

She was ready and waiting when he arrived promptly at six. She was wearing a dress he had liked a year ago, a whirling-skirted gold taffeta, wonderful with her tawny hair. Jonnie took one look and whistled.

He was looking mighty terrific himself, and marvellously successful, in

his English topcoat and tweeds. The old Jonnie had gone hatless and shabby. The old Jonnie would have announced, firmly, "We're hoofing it tonight, my cars in hock. Use yours? Nope, Mrs. Astor. You'll walk tonight, and like it."

It had been heavenly. Before all the grimness had set in. Before he had got all gummed up with crazy, mistaken notions about success and making a million and being acceptable to her family.

She wondered if he were remembering, too. He seemed pretty quiet as they started out. His car now was long and sleek and shining. It purred along the city streets and Susan said suddenly, "Oh, Jonnie, did you ever see such a moon!"

It was early, but in the wintry sky up there there was certainly a blazing, savage moon. It shone down into Susan's eyes and Jonnie caught his breath sharply. He reached out and laid his hand over hers.

"Hi, sweet!" he said, in a funny voice. "Like old times, this, yes? It's a wonder to me that you'll speak to me now. I was such a cocky, damned fool and you knew it. But tonight—"

She waited, breathless, but he said no more. The evening stretched ahead. But she knew for sure now that he had something on his mind, besides just a random evening. Something important. It was there behind every word of his, every look.

THEY HAD dinner at a little tucked-away restaurant where they used to go so often. The proprietor remembered them, and beamed. They had martinis, very dry, and steaks smothered in mushrooms, and quantities of steaming hot coffee and a long loaf of crusty French bread. An old battered juke-box in the corner piped forth romantic tunes, and Susan said, suddenly, "That sounds like your band! Is it, Jonnie? Have you been

busy making records—along with all the rest?”

“Oh, yes. I’ve had a run of luck.” He grinned. “Because I was hell-bent to have it. I had to come back and show you, you know.”

But it was more than that. The look in his eyes told her. And now was the time to say, “That’s Anita, your wife, isn’t it—singing on that record. with the band? You’d better tell me, Jonnie, and get things straight between us. I’m engaged, and you’re married...” Now was the time to be honest.

But the words just wouldn’t come. After a while she noticed that he kept glancing at his watch and suddenly he said, “Well, we’d better be on our way. Come on, darling.”

It had just slipped out, of course. Darling. That little word. But it sounded so familiar. Susan’s heart ached. Jonnie’s hand closed again over hers, as they headed out of the city. Where they were going she didn’t know. They had talked about Europe and Florida and L.A. and Jonnie had said, “We’ve covered a lot of territory in one short year, haven’t we, Susan? Yet we still talk the same language. I was a fool to think that could be forgotten. But I’m not a fool any more.”

Susan shivered as she remembered Anita and told herself that she must not see Jonnie again.

“Nothing matters tonight, but this, being with Jonnie!” she insisted stubbornly.

They had driven quite a long ways, the moon shining above them, when suddenly she realized that they were almost at the top of a place called Willow Hill. A place where lovers came to park. A beautiful spot, with the lights of the city sparkling down below.

Jonnie stopped the car. She heard his voice. “I wrote to you, you know, Susan,” he was saying. “Why didn’t you answer? Tell me!”

“You wrote me!” She stared at him. Out of the blue, this! “I never got any letters, Jonnie,” she managed, after a

stunned moment. “They must have got lost. I went to Europe, you know. I’ve been away, mostly.” But she thought, “Somebody *kept* them from me, Jonnie’s letters! Mother, Father, who?”

If they had, it was only in the name of what they felt best for an only daughter. And young Jonnie Lambert, a musician from a South Dakota farm, they had considered not really quite the best. Oh, yes.

She clenched her hands and said, “I can’t believe it. But anyhow, was that the reason you married her? Anita, Jonnie? Oh, don’t look at me like that. News gets around. I heard so little. But I think it’s time now that you told me. Tonight’s been wonderful. But, like you used to say, Jonnie, facts must be faced. A wife’s a pretty important fact, you know. I—I can’t see you again—” She broke off abruptly.

Because suddenly a sound broke the night’s moonlit stillness. A car shot past them. Susan choked back a stifled cry. The car whirled around the curve in the road above them. There was suddenly the screeching of brakes, the sound of glass splintering. And then, a woman’s shrill, horrible scream.

It was Van’s car! She would know it anywhere. Her heart stood still. “It’s crashed down the cliff!” she whispered, frozen.

“No!” She heard Jonnie’s voice. He was opening the door, leaping out. “Stay where you are, Susan!” It was a command, sharp, compelling. But she paid no attention.

“I’m coming with you!” she cried.

SHE SCRAMBLED after him, up the road, to the curve above. Van and a woman. A woman whose screams still split the evening stillness.

They rounded the curve, and suddenly the woman wasn’t screaming any more. But there was the car, overturned. Van’s car. It had just escaped hurtling down the cliff.

Susan stood quite still and frozen. She heard Jonnie calling, “Hello,

there!" sharply. And a figure loomed up in the eerie white moonlight. A tall, familiar figure, staggering a little, stunned. Van.

"You all right?" It was Jonnie's voice.

"Yes, but—" Van turned to bend over the other figure imprisoned there. He stooped and began drawing it out. Who was she, thought Susan, trembling. She looked at Jonnie. But before he spoke, she knew.

"It's Anita!" he said. "Go back to the car, Susan. You can't do any good here. Go on! Wait there. I'll be with you in a minute."

Anita! But how did he know? Susan stared at him. She choked suddenly, and then, because she had no strength for protest, she did as he told her. She went back down the hill and climbed into the car to wait. Her hands were shaking. She could scarcely breathe. Van and Anita, Jonnie's wife. He hadn't said, had he, that she wasn't that?

She remembered again the way he and Van had glared at each other last night, and the way Van had insisted, so determinedly, on going to the *CASINO*. How obsessed and strange he had looked when Anita had whirled out upon the dance-floor there. He had seemed so familiar with the whole performance. It all added up now.

She was sitting there, cold and unbelievably still, when she heard running footsteps. Jonnie.

"Is she—dead?" Susan found her voice.

He shook his head and jumped in behind the wheel. "No, and we'll drive up and pick them up, run them back to town. Her pulse is okay. She's coming around. But I don't guess she'll be doing much dancing for a while."

He sounded grim, but not, somehow, like an outraged husband. Susan stared at him in the darkness, but there was no time to say anything more.

They made the top of the hill and Van lifted Anita in. Van who said,

briefly, in a stranger's voice, seeing her, "Hello, Susan." And no more. But after all, what more could he say?

They headed back to town, nobody speaking. Except just once, when Jonnie said, shortly, "You'd better get her to a hospital, Hilton, and check up, to make sure. We'll take care of your car, and the rest."

"Thanks," Van said.

AND NOW what, thought Susan. She was still wondering that as they left the hospital, leaving Van and Anita there. An Anita who still wasn't talking, or even walking. Her ankle, they had waited long enough to learn, was broken, a double fracture. Poor Anita. Such bad news for a dancer. But then, she had Van. And they were lucky to be alive!

And now, suddenly, Jonnie was speaking. Susan looked at him, still feeling sure this was all a nightmare, just a dream. He said, "Well, shall I tell you the rest about all this now? Guess I'd better."

"Yes. If you know the rest, Jonnie," she echoed him.

He stopped the car and all traffic stopped behind them. Suddenly he reached out and pulled her to him. "You don't seem to be minding too much, Susan!" he said, roughly. "About all this, Anita and your handsome fiance. Oh, yes, I know he was that. I've been checking."

Susan stared up at him. "You mean, you didn't marry—Anita?" Her heart thudded.

"Of course not." So it had all been just a rumor.

"But I heard—I thought—"

"Well, stop it!" He caught her close and his lips came down on hers. He kissed her long and hard. Her arms around him, Susan kissed him back. Time stopped. Life stopped.

Then, holding her off, Jonnie said, a blazing light in his eyes, "It's time we got things straight, really straight, isn't it, darling?"

She nodded. So he told her.

"When I took off for the Coast," he said, with a sigh, "well, you know why I did. Because we were battling so, and I couldn't take that any more. Being near you, wanting you, Susan, and quarrelling with you all the time, not being able to make you really happy, or myself. I thought that maybe alone, a long ways off, I could get going again somehow. And then come back and show you that I did have what it—takes. I hoped you'd wait—"

"But I hated you for that! Oh, Jonnie—men are so stupid!" It was a helpless wail.

But he ploughed on. "Men figure things different from women, that's all," he explained. "But get this straight. I did *not* go with just Anita. She did leave for the Coast when I did, along with all the rest of our old band. We've worked together in several places, and given each other a boost, sure, when we could. But that's all it's ever been and all it ever could be. Because it so happens that I'm in love with you. I always have been. I always will be. And I hope it means something to you, sweet—does it?"

"Oh, Jonnie, you dope! Yes!" Susan wept.

Time stopped again while he kissed her. It was silly to be crying. "But it's just because I'm so happy!" she whispered, against his lips. "I have to get used to the feeling. But oh, Jonnie, you took such a chance!"

They came back to earth after a while. She heard Jonnie saying, cocking an ear, "Hey—what's all this racket behind us?"

"Just the traffic!" Susan's laughter suddenly bubbled. "Oh, darling, we're gumming up the city. We'd better get going!" But suddenly she added, "Just one thing more. Why did you take me up there tonight, Jonnie? To Willow Hill? Did you know they would be there? You must have. Things like that just don't happen!"

"YES, I KNEW," he said. "I remembered Hilton from that first night you all came into the club, a year ago. Anita wasn't there that night. But I remembered *him*. When he began showing up at the *CASINO* lately, chasing her—well, naturally I noticed. And she's crazy about him. She still uses me as a sort of wailing wall, or something." He shrugged. "She told me about their nightly rendezvous after her dance-numbers. But he was engaged to a local deb, she said. I told her she was wasting her time, but she wouldn't listen. Then you showed up with him, last night. It was quite a shock."

"Oh, Jonnie, it must have been! Though didn't she tell you the local deb's name?" Susan stared, incredulously.

"No, because she didn't know it. He wouldn't tell her and there hadn't been time for her to find out. But anyhow, I knew you had to know about it, and this way it saved a lot of talking. I wasn't sure how you felt, though I was pretty sure, when you looked at me last night, all startled and breathless-like. I knew then that those letters I wrote you never reached you. I knew we had to get this mess straightened out. So I figured it this way. Though I hadn't counted on an accident!"

He kissed her again, with tenderness this time. "We've licked it, Susan—our jinx. Just tell me one thing. Would you still share a shack and a sandwich with me? You might have to, you know, though I can talk turkey to your family right now. But this might not last. In the music game it's all a gamble."

"Stop talking like crazy, Jonnie!" she said.

For just a moment she thought of Van, not that he mattered. But she thought, "I'm glad, for him. He knows now, like I do, that just being comfortable, and a little in love, isn't enough. He'll be happy with Anita. Because they've got the real thing, now. Like Jonnie and me."

Behind them a car, an avalanche of cars, honked again, angrily. The moon blazed savagely over the river, with a tiny star at its tip. The world was a marvelous place. A year, a long empty, lonely, awful year, was over, and things like false pride and misunderstandings and jealousy. She and Jonnie were back together. And this time for keeps.

Above the noisy honking of the cars

she could hear his heart pounding against her heart, she could feel it.

"I love you, Jonnie!" she whispered. "And I don't care if we *are* gumming up the whole darned city!"

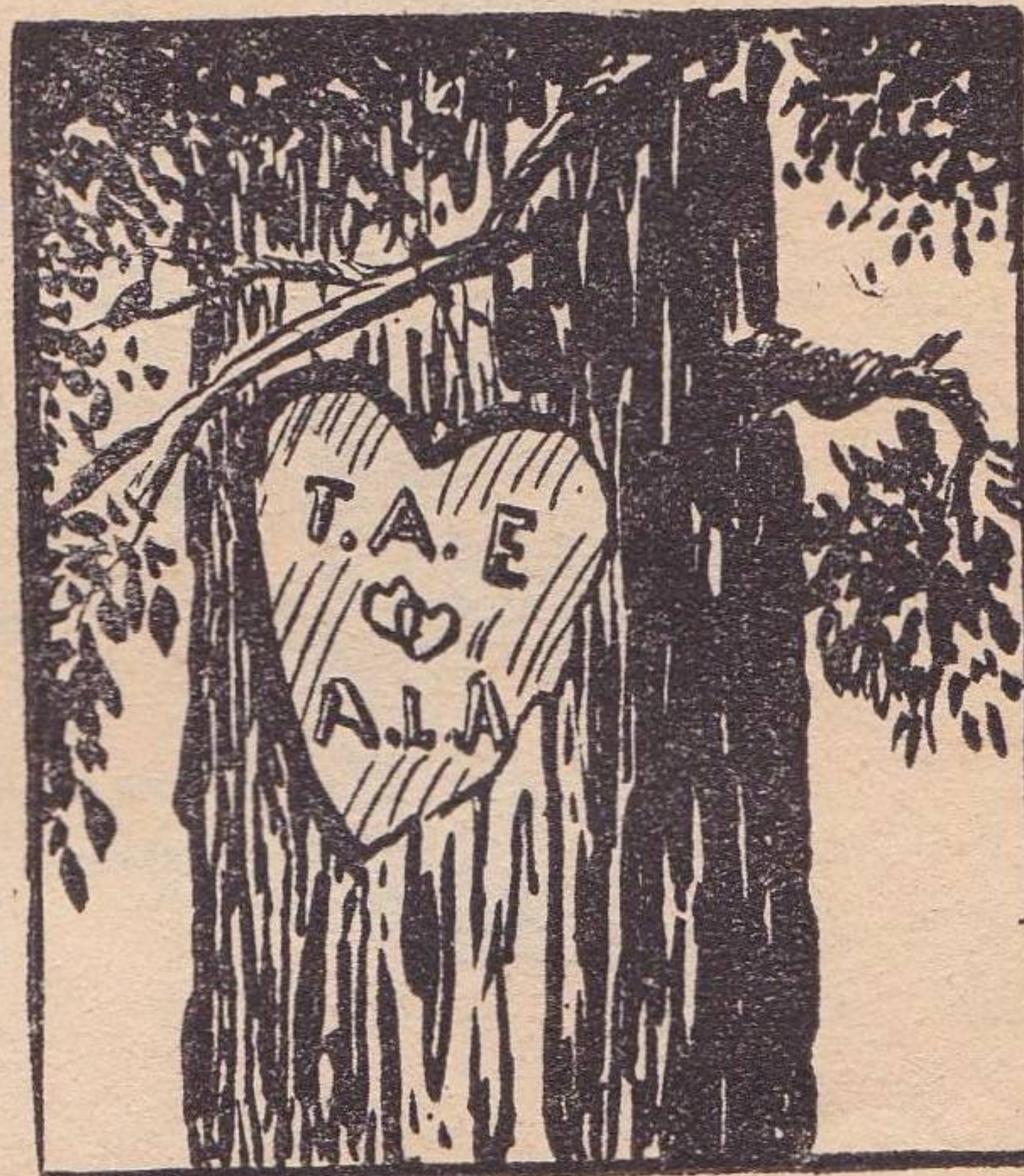
"Neither do I!" But he started the car. One hand on hers still he said, "Here we go, darling! And believe me, I love you, too!"

THE END

Home Road



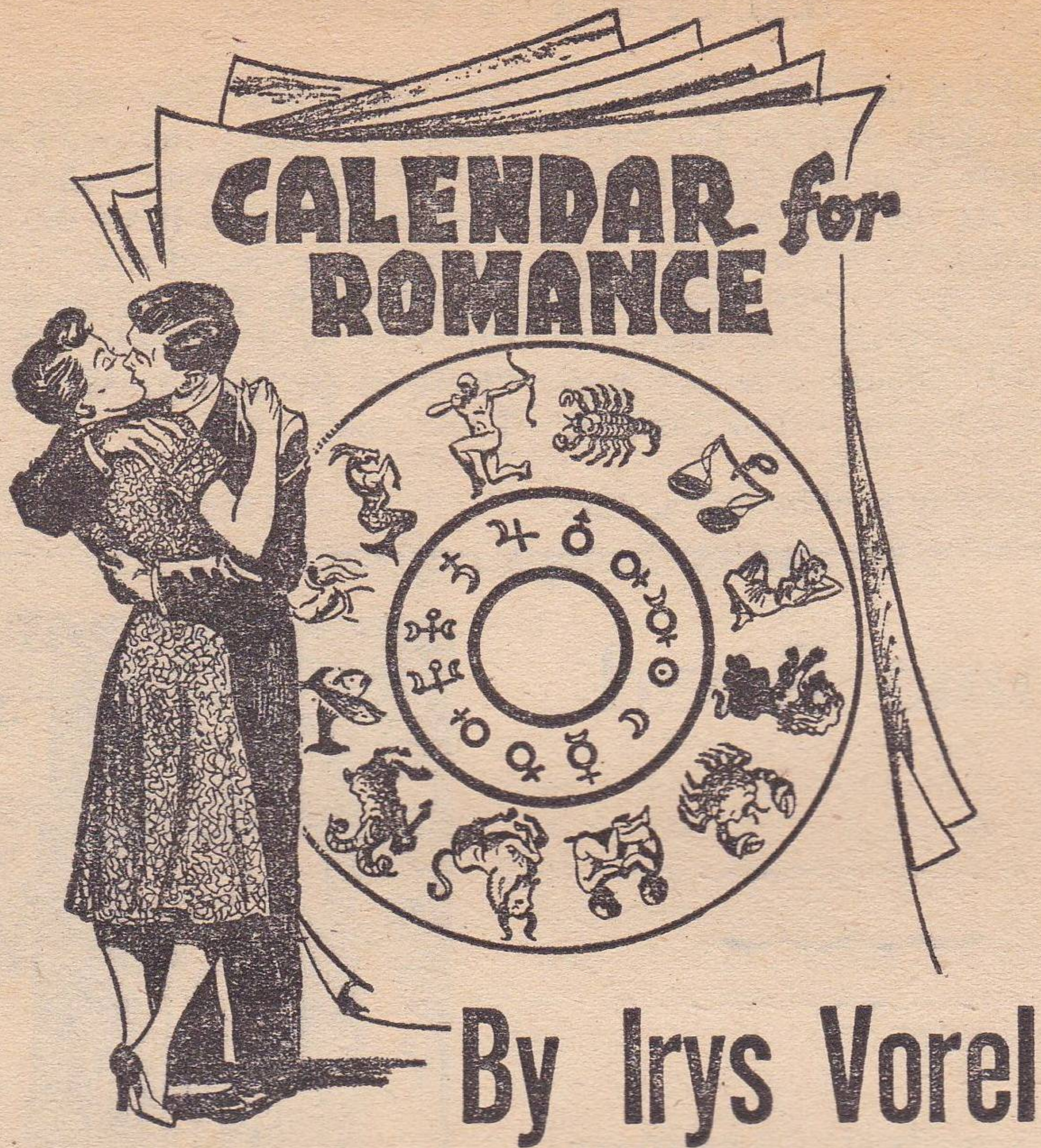
by Anobel Armour



Hand locked in hand, we go again
Down roads we walked together
Through blossom time or in the rain
Or in the snow-starred weather.

And I know joy to have you back
To share each lovely season
For my heart has been numb with lack
And loneliness past reason.

Now each day will be like a song
Without a note of sorrow
For us, with roads to walk along,
Tomorrow — and tomorrow!



By Irys Vorel

THE FOLLOWING *Planetary Indications* are a road map for your decisions and actions. Use initiative when you are in harmony with the cosmic tide. But when your romantic calendar registers unfavorable aspects you had better apply the law of avoidance.

Aries

(March 21 to April 20)

The man in your life may be out of sorts, irritable and overly critical during the first two weeks of March. Be tolerant of his thrift complex and sympathetic toward his depressed moods. Don't let confusion over detail and problems dim your charm. After March 17 your Love Calendar should register "Fair and Warmer" and you may glow with your usual sparkle and

sex appeal. Note April 7 to 21, when a new friendship may enter your life. A good period to catch up with your neglected correspondence. —Plan gay parties with young folks from April 11th on to end of the month.

Your best days by the Moon's sign:
 March: 1, 2, 5, 6, 9 (p.m.) 10, 11, 14 (p.m.) 15, 16 19 (p.m.) 20, 21, 24, 25, 28, 29. April: 1, 2, 6, 7, 11, 12, 15 (p.m.) 16, 17, 20, 21, 24, 25, 28 (p.m.) 29, 30.

Taurus

(April 21 to May 21)

Your reckless mood might invite trouble (March 1st to 17th). So do not flirt unless you're prepared for consequences. Your mind may be churning with romantic ideas—fine, if

you don't put them in writing. March 29 to April 10 finds the red torch Mars flickering ominously in the sky. You may be on the warpath or may encounter trouble-makers with limited patience. April, from the 11th on, is splendid for amorous reconciliations and for affable tactics. A love proposition from an elder, or superior, may surprise you. A strange meeting may occur while travelling.

Your best days by the Moon's sign:
March: 3, 4, 7, 8, 9 (a.m.) 12, 13, 17, 18, 22, 23, 26, 27, 30, 31. *April:* 3 (p.m.) 4, 5, 8, 9, 10 (a.m.) 13, 14, 15 (a.m.) 18, 19, 22, 23, 26, 27, 28 (a.m.)

Gemini

(May 22 to June 21)

Dual rays prevail to stimulate your charm and your bubbling humor. Your powers of expression are scintillating now. Note March 1st to 29th as propitious for using your personality to advantage in private life and in business. Money aspects are best between March 15th and April 17; slow investments, tangible assets and long term agreements are to the fore. April 1st to 6th, inclusive, call for restraint with the written word. You may find yourself full of exuberance and amorous notions between April 10th to 20th: courtship, flirtations, gay parties—yes, elopements, honeymoons and second honeymoons—are on the celestial program.

Your best days by the Moon's sign:
March: 1, 2, 5, 6, 9 (p.m.) 10, 11, 14 (p.m.) 15, 16, 19 (p.m.) 20, 21, 24, 25, 28, 29. *April:* 1, 2, 3 (a.m.) 6, 7, 10 (p.m.) 11, 12, 15 (p.m.) 16, 17, 20, 21, 24, 25, 28 (p.m.) 29, 30.

Cancer

(June 22 to July 23)

Are you unusually dynamic, restless, filled with a wild desire to succeed? Seek advice from level-headed friends

before you put your daring ideas into motion. Should your heart be overflowing with erratic feelings—overly warm one minute and frigid and standoffish the next—don't be alarmed, for it is the normal reaction to unduly potent planetary stimuli now, your money aspects should be good all of March and April, and lucky breaks may agreeably surprise you. But keep hands on pursestrings and don't stumble into the inkwell between April 7 and 21st. Your sex appeal should be extra potent all of March up to April 10th and a new sparkling romance may enter your life. You may feel quite 'special' and would love to have your friends tell you so.

Your best days by the Moon's sign:
March: 3, 4, 7, 8, 9 (a.m.) 12, 13, 17, 18, 22, 23, 26, 27, 30, 31. *April:* 3 (p.m.) 4, 5, 8, 9, 10 (a.m.) 13, 14, 15 (a.m.) 18, 19, 22, 23, 26, 27, 28 (a.m.)

Leo

(July 24 to August 28)

It is quite possible that March will mark an important romantic occasion for you to the adage of new loves for old. You may have amorous proposals from two sources. But if you desire to 'hold on' to established attachments and friendships, stars advise you that you do not cross bridges between March 1st and April 10th. Keep tongue in cheek then and hold your temper. Marriage aspects are favorably stimulated between March 5th and 29th. Select a good day by the Moon's sign for your nuptials. Reconciliations also are then favored. Excellent for correspondence, signatures, literary and mental pursuits: April 7 to 21. The period between April 11 and 30th indicates increased personal magnetism and is propitious for asking favors, raise in salary or job advancement.

Your best days by the Moon's sign:
March: 1, 2, 5, 6, 9 (p.m.) 10, 11, 14 (p.m.) 15, 16, 19 (p.m.) 20, 21, 24, 25, 28, 29. *April:* 1, 2, 3 (a.m.) 6, 7, 10 (p.m.) 11, 12, 15 (p.m.) 16, 17, 20, 21, 24, 25, 28 (p.m.) 29, 30.

Virgo*(August 24 to
September 23)*

Splendid for going after 'whom' you want is the period between March 1st and April 10th. He may be that man in uniform, one with a promising job in the government or with a large company. Get important matters settled between March 18th and April 5th with special attention to partnerships, teamwork, all associations. Get him to pop the question. Courtship, engagements—even ringing wedding bells—are propitious between March 30th and April 24th. Also good for that 'extra' pre-Easter charity drive. Note April 11 to 30 as precarious for money splurging. Quite critical too for ironing out your grievances. Financial interests are best attended to between March 18th and end of April.

Your best days by the Moon's sign:
March: 3, 4, 7, 8, 12, 13, 17, 18, 22, 23, 26, 27, 30, 31. *April:* 3 (p.m.) 4, 5, 8, 9, 10 (a.m.) 13, 14, 15 (a.m.) 18, 19, 22, 23, 26, 27, 28 (a.m.)

Libra*(September 24 to
October 22)*

What you may crave no more than anything else is sympathetic understanding, so turn to serious, intelligent persons who show intimate interest in your problems. The flatterer should be taken with a grain of salt—you may need a friend more than a sweetheart. Disappointments or oppositions of the past few weeks should suddenly develop into gratifying activities. Note in this respect the weeks between March 5th to 29th as extremely favorable for amorous attachments, reconciliations and engagements. Money aspects are not particularly encouraging between March 21st and April 15th. Don't take chances with your *cash* dollars. A new romance, a sudden and pleasant journey and unexpected surprises loom between April 11th to 30th. Use initia-

tive then to further social and romantic interests.

Your best days by the Moon's sign:
March: 1, 2, 5, 6, 9 (p.m.) 10, 11, 14 (p.m.) 15, 16, 19 (p.m.) 20, 21, 24, 25, 28, 29. *April:* 1, 2, 6, 7, 10 (p.m.) 11, 12, 15 (p.m.) 16, 17, 20, 21, 24, 25, 28 (p.m.) 29, 30.

Scorpio*(October 23 to
November 21)*

Nothing like a good break—so plan worthwhile activities for this period. Many of you may decide to accept that ardent suitor or even to get married. You may form new desirable and inspiring alliances. But always bear in mind: your present actions may have far-reaching effects, and your foolish pranks are bound to be followed by unpleasant repercussions. Don't rush in where angels fear to tread. Also choose wisely. He may be a good investment rather than a bargain buy. Your best days for attention to practical job and money matters should be March 18th to April 6th. April 1st to 24th is propitious for romance, courtship and reconciliations. Family matters are favorably indicated between March 15th and end of April.

Your best days by the Moon's sign:
March: 3, 4, 7, 8, 12, 13, 17, 18, 22, 23, 26, 27, 30, 31. *April:* 3 (p.m.) 4, 5, 8, 9, 10 (a.m.) 13, 14, 15 (a.m.) 18, 19, 22, 23, 26, 27, 28 (a.m.)

Sagittarius*(November 12 to
December 21)*

Private agreements, especially romantic ones, can now be made, and they may alter your future destiny. For March is especially propitious for the intimacy in your life (between 1st and 29th). To boot, the first part of March (up to the 17th) favors penning heart effusions. Be careful though not to put foolish sentiments on paper, or when affixing your signature between March 18th and April 6th. Lovers' quarrels may mar the holiday pe-

riod, (April 2nd to 24th). Be conciliatory and diplomatic, should your heart interest go on a tangeant. Serious friction may result from obdurate argumentativeness (April 11 to 30). Better let logic rule the day, and put your private feelings temporarily on the top shelf. Be impersonal this month (April). Best days for job and financial affairs: April 7 to 21.

Your best days by the Moon's sign:
 March: 1, 2, 5, 6, 9 (p.m.) 10, 11, 14 (p.m.) 15, 16, 19 (p.m.) 20, 21, 24, 25, 28, 29. April: 1, 2, 3 (a.m.) 6, 7, 10 (p.m.) 11, 12, 15 (p.m.) 16, 17, 20, 21 24, 25, 28 (p.m.) 29, 30.

Capricorn

(December 22 to January 19)

BUSINESS—in capital letters please!—is to the fore between March 1st and April 10th. Co-operation from all and sundry (the boy-friend) is on the agenda throughout April and March. Now's the time to get down to brass tacks. Long range interests, slow investments and tangible assets are favorably indicated for you January-born Capricornian. Love has its inning for all between March 29th and April 24th, and the holiday period promises to be a jolly one. Friendly tactics should then bring results. Hold out the olive branch. Social and romantic affairs, and family matters are then to the

fore. A newcomer may loom on Love's horizon between March 18th and April 30th. Follow through on all contacts. Hold back the impulsive pen: April 7 to 21. Don't give that Johnny the gate just then.

Your best days by the Moon's sign:
 March: 3, 4, 7, 8, 9 (a.m.) 12, 13, 17, 18, 22, 23, 26, 27, 30, 31. April: 3 (p.m.) 4, 5, 8, 9, 10 (a.m.) 13, 14, 15 (a.m.) 18, 19, 22, 23, 26, 27, 28 (a.m.)

Aquarius

(January 20 to February 19)

Wow! Such super-duper Love Stars! Note March 1st to 29th when joy, fun-having and general good fortune should cross Love's horizon. March is favorably stimulated for what ails your 'heart interest'. So kiss and make up. The careerist should put her best foot forward, all of March—and again between April 7 and 21st. Fine for public appearances, but also for asking favors and soliciting interviews. Let on you'd like to be advanced in your place of work. There's a slightly disturbing under-current though (from Mars) between March 1st and April 10th and aggression and standing pat on your rights will get you nowhere. Show kindly understanding and let *him* know you are the gentle, sympathetic au-

(turn to page 71)

New Love Stories of The Old West

PRAIRIE JEZEBEL

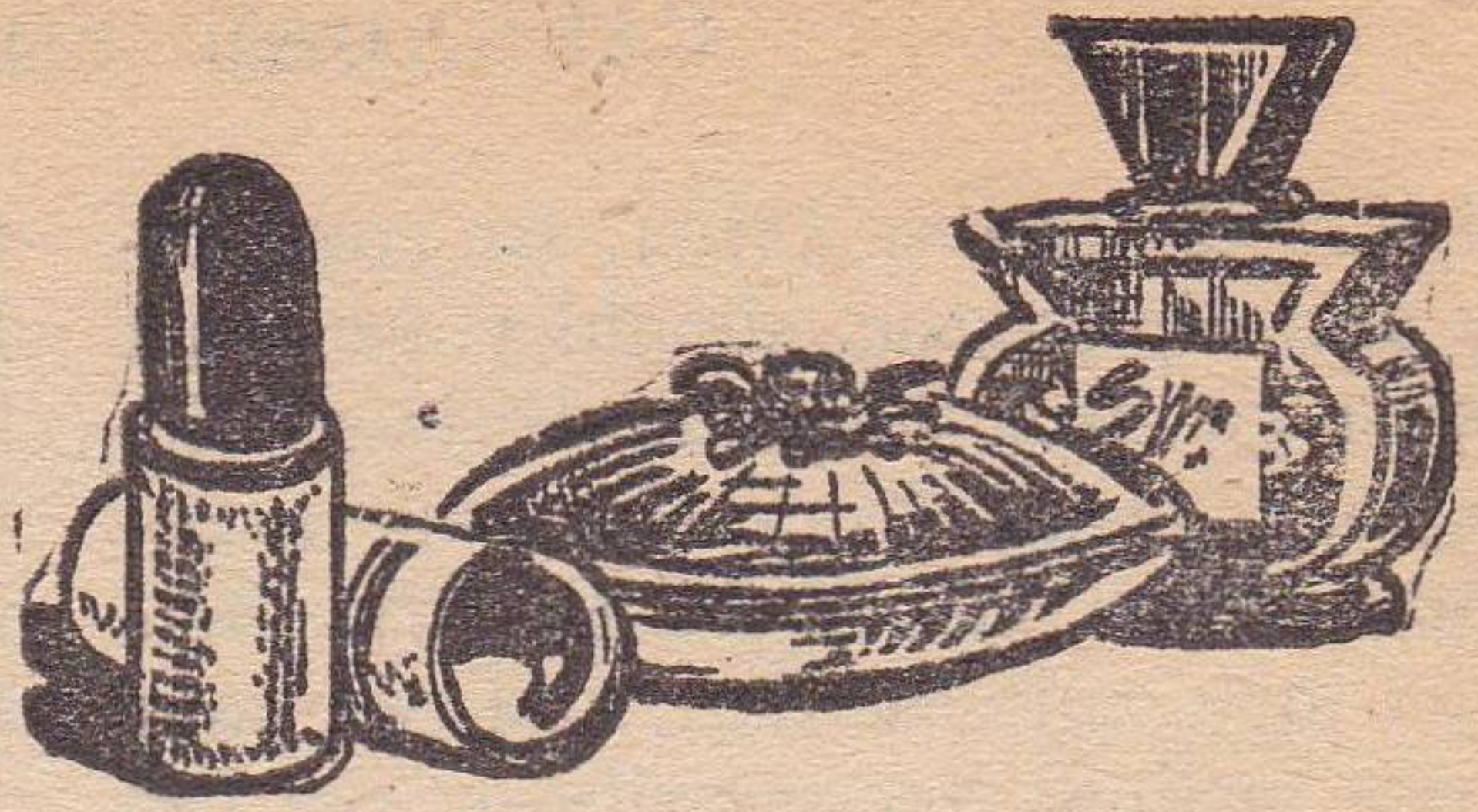
by Francis Flick

OUTLAW LOVE TRAIL

by Bess Rogers

These and others are in the May

REAL WESTERN ROMANCES



All the sensible talk in the world couldn't
change Lise's mind.

THE GENTLE DECEIT

by Phyllis Speshock

LISE BARRETT had just crossed the street from her small but exclusive cafe, the best in Middleton, on her way to make the morning's deposit in the bank, when suddenly Jimmy Richards stepped out of his uncle's newspaper office and, with a look of determination confronted her.

"Good morning," he said with a definite firmness of purpose. "Lovely morning, isn't it?"

Lise raised her brows questioningly

and moved slightly backward. "Why, yes."

"I'm glad you think so," he said without flinching. "Just the sort of day on which to tell you I love you."

It took her a few seconds to grasp his words and then she said faintly, "What?"

"I said," he repeated staunchly, "I love you. I want to marry you."

Well, now, Jimmy Richards was accepted locally as a sort of happy-go-lucky roving reporter temporarily situ-

ated with his uncle on the Middleton Gazette. He was around twenty-four or five. He'd either worked in or tramped through nearly every state in the Union, and he was one of those extremists who would eventually die a pauper or make a million overnight.

Lise had always viewed him somewhat maternally. Perhaps she could better say that she "tolerated" him. She had danced with him a few times at a country club dance. She had talked to him over a cup of coffee when he stopped in at the restaurant. She believed, if she could remember correctly, she might even have played a rubber of bridge with him. But that was as far as it had ever gone, and that was as far as she ever wanted it to go. Although she had heard several other girls whisper about him, refer to him as "that *doll*—" she realized full well that their goals in life were entirely opposite and for that reason dismissed him.

This morning, however, he would not be dismissed.

"You're out of your mind," she said simply, and attempted to pass him and go on to the bank.

"I'm in love," he said, stepping directly in front of her, hampering her passing. "I've been in love with you for months. Why else do you suppose I hang around this jerk-water village, mmm?"

Lise attempted to pass on the other side, but again he stepped in front of her and stopped her cold. With exasperation, she looked up into his brown eyes and tried reasoning.

"No, look," she said sensibly, "no sane man stops a girl in the middle of Main street at ten o'clock in the morning and proposes marriage! Not even a man as crazy as you!"

"Oh," he said. "So you've been listening to tales about me, huh?"

"Nothing of the sort! After all, two people who move in the same social circle—"

"Then you admit we have something in common."

Lise sighed impatiently. "I admit nothing! You are behaving like an utter lunatic and unless you let me get to the bank and—"

"And Ben Hagan?" he asked innocently. "Everyone says that eventually, unless I rescue you, you'll marry that old duffer."

"Ben is no old duffer!" she defended angrily.

JIMMY RICHARDS shrugged those football shoulders and grinned. "It's all in how you look at it," he said congenially. "He's thirteen years older than you, and you're just twenty-two, so looking at it the way any other twenty-two-year-old girl would look at it—"

Lise drew herself up. "Mr. Richards," she said crisply. "I have work to do. I have to get to the bank. Ben Hagan is no business of yours. His relationship to me is even less your business, so if you'll excuse me—"

She attempted passing again, but he would not let her. "I wouldn't rush you," he said generously, "only I haven't got the time now to stay here and play games with you. You see, I've accepted a position on the staff of a magazine whose editorial offices are in New York and I have to leave in a few days, so I can't woo you properly."

"*Can't woo me prop*—" she gasped. "Why, of all the—"

"I know what you're going to say," he offered apologetically. "You're going to say, 'Why, of all the heels! I wouldn't marry you if you were the last man on earth, Jimmy Richards! I hate you!' Only—" he added, "I'm going to make you prove that."

It was so outlandish, Lise was still not certain she was hearing correctly. "You're going to what?"

"Well, at least," he said with a shrug, "make you prove that you don't, or *couldn't* love me."

"I haven't the faintest notion what

you're talking about. I realize you are a nut and, as such—"

"I'm talking about," he explained, "a kiss."

Lise was having the most awful time keeping her mouth closed and an intelligent expression on her face. "A what?"

"Kiss," he said simply. "You are outraged. You think I'm crazy. But no matter what you think I still love you and if you are going to refuse to marry me, you should at least back up your dislike with a little proof. In other words, come into the office a minute and kiss me."

Lise backed away. "You're out of your mind," she whispered.

"With love," he added gently. "It isn't so crazy, Lise. Honest it isn't. I love you and I'll be leaving soon and I can't wait for all the usual things to happen—first date—first kiss—logical comparison between Ben and me. So I'm doing it point blank. I know you think I'm nuts, but I love you, that's all. You're angry now and insulted and about to say no just out of first impulse. That wouldn't be fair to either of us. All I'm asking is that you back up your obvious refusal to marry me with a kiss. Prove to me you *don't* love me and never will and we'll forget it ever happened."

"I certainly will not!"

"You're being unfair," he said, "to both of us. To yourself because you're in such a rut with Ben Hagan you might pass love up and never know it. And to me because I'll be leaving in a few days and might never see you again and go on half my life thinking what I'd missed."

"I owe you nothing!"

"That's where you're wrong. You owe me at least a kiss just for loving you. After all—"

LISE ATTEMPTED to pass him again, but again he stepped in front of her. She glanced across the street and saw a man turn to stare at

them curiously and she felt her face turn warm.

"You are determined to go through with this?" she asked in a subdued whisper.

"I am," he said. "Even if we have to stand here all day."

"And—if I go into the office with you—if I kiss you and nothing happens—"

He shrugged. "Well, then I'll have to agree with you. You hate me, and you never want to see me again. But if something *does* happen, if fireworks start and lights go off and on—"

Lise compressed her mouth with dignity. "Nothing will," she said emphatically. "But since you are being so infernally insistent and since I have a hard day's work ahead of me and since a simple little kiss will prove my point and you'll go away—"

She turned and walked into the newspaper office. Jimmy followed directly behind her.

"Right back here," he said, opening a door for her. "Not a soul in sight."

Lise went into the deserted office and then hesitated. Jimmy reached for her and turned her about to face him. Suddenly he was just a nice guy with a soft look in his brown eyes and tenderness about his mouth.

"Lise," he whispered. "Lise, *I do love you—*"

It frightened her a little when he said it that way. She was a big sensible girl who owned a thriving little restaurant business and had a kid sister to get through college. . . .

She tried to compose herself. "The kiss—" she murmured and stood on tip-toe and pecked him on the mouth.

"There!" she said. "Nothing happened!"

But he caught her arm when she attempted to rush out past him and he pulled her around in front of him and looked down at her. "That wasn't fair," he said quietly. "A bargain is a bargain and in order to prove your point

you've got to go halfway. You've got to give a kiss a chance—"

He drew her gently close to him then and closed his arms about her with slow deliberation. Lise felt a moment of panic. Then his mouth covered hers, gently at first—but only at first.... Her eyes closed and her hands tightened on his suit coat.

"Lise—Lise-baby—" he whispered when he lifted his head.

It took her a moment to get her bearings, but then she pulled away.

Jimmy looked downright surprised. "You love me—" he pointed out.

"No such thing!" she said hastily. "Biological urge or some darn thing! I'm going to marry Ben Hagan someday—just like you said—"

"But you *do* love me!" he insisted. "The way you kissed me—"

"I don't know you from Adam! I'm not the sort of girl who—"

"Well, all right, then," he agreed logically. "You could love me. Is it fair to marry somebody else when you love me? Or are on the verge of loving me?"

"I'm not on the verge of anything at all," she said evenly, "unless it could be losing my mind. Ben and I have gone together for years."

"You were a baby when you met him and got into a rut and don't know the difference—"

"We have the same things in common," she went on, ignoring his interruption. "We like the same books, and the same music—"

"Sure," he said rudely. "Golf every Sunday, bridge every Wednesday. To bed at nine. Up at seven—oh, Judas, Lise! Can't you see what'll happen to you? You'll be *his* age! You'll never know love—that—*companionship* or friendship or whatever it is, is no substitute for the real thing—"

Lise's chin went up a trifle. "It's sensible," she said. "It's secure and peaceful. Ben's my sort of man!"

"SENSIBLE!" he snorted. "The sensible love, huh? That's even

less sense than you think I make! Love is something you *feel*, Lise! It's a thing of the heart—not the head! You've been searching security so long—for yourself and Betty Ann—oh, don't look surprised," he explained. "I've met Betty Ann, too, and she's a nice kid—more sense than you have even if she is your baby sister. That's the whole thing. You've mothered her ever since your folks were killed and you're getting to think like Ben Hagan—"

"I'm sorry," Lise said. "But all the talk in the world won't change my mind."

"But the kiss proved it!" he insisted. "You agreed—"

Lise's blue eyes looked into his directly. "I agreed to kiss you," she said simply. "Nothing more. Even if the kiss was molten lava, I wouldn't change my mind. Your life and mine would never meet, even if I wanted to give you the benefit of the doubt. I'll stay here in Middleton. I'll run my cafe. I'll live in the house where I was born, and one day maybe I will marry Ben. Until then—nothing's going to change my mind. Maybe your kind of love has to skyrocket and come from the heart. Mine comes from a knowledge of compatibility and similar tastes. All the more reason why we'd better just drop the discussion right here and now and pretend it never happened."

She left the office then and Jimmy did not attempt to follow her. She tried to forget the baffled, hurt expression in those brown eyes, tried to tell herself he was an idiot and she was just as bad for agreeing to such an outrage.

By the time she reached the bank she had nearly regained her composure, and smiled, she hoped, quite normally at Ben behind the teller's window.

"Hello, Lise," he said kindly, and for the first time she noticed that the gray at his temples denoted age as well as dignity....

"Hello, Ben."

"Golf Sunday, Lise?" he asked.

Golf every Sunday, bridge every Wednesday

She hated herself for hesitating, and when she replied, it was with emphasis.

"Of course, Ben—golf Sunday—"

"Fine," he said, handing her back her bank book. "Pick you up at one."

"One—" she repeated vaguely and walked out of the bank, careful to cross the street directly so that it was not necessary to pass the Gazette again.

She went into the back of her restaurant to check the luncheon menu and supervise the salads, and that was when Betty Ann, her twenty-year-old kid sister, home from college for the weekend, perched on a high stool and queried her.

"I saw you talking to that cute Jimmy Richards—" she began, plucking an olive from an open jar, her blue eyes sweeping Lise. "How come? I always thought you and Ben—"

"You thought right the first time," Lise said a little coldly. "Ben and I."

"But the way Jimmy Richards was looking at you—"

Lise scanned her sister's gold-and-ivory cherub face. "My, what big eyes you have—" she murmured.

"Not only that," said Betty Ann, ignoring her remark, "but he wouldn't let you pass him and finally you went into the Gazette—"

Lise looked up from scanning the menu and her face flushed. She did not trouble to answer.

"If it were me—or is it I?—I'd prefer Jimmy to Ben. Jimmy's got more—oh, I don't know—oomph, I guess."

"Stop eating olives," Lise said maternally. "You'll make yourself sick."

Betty Ann studied her sister's face. "Aren't you going to tell me about it?" she asked innocently.

"There's nothing to tell," Lise said crisply, brushing past her curious ward. "You've been seeing too many movies, I think. Too much romance on the brain."

LUNCHEON rush began and Lise assured herself she was too busy to allow her thoughts to loiter on Jimmy Richards, but Jimmy Richards obviously had other intentions. He came in just about the same time Ben Hagan crossed from the bank and perched beside him at the counter opposite the booths in the less formal side of the cafe.

Betty Ann handed them both their menus, but Lise happened to be at the coffee urn directly behind her sister, her back to the men and heard every word of the conversation. It was Jimmy who ordered first.

"A ham and cheese on rye," he said, "with dill pickles and mustard. French fried potatoes. Mincemeat pie with ice cream and coffee."

Lise raised her brows slightly. Ben Hagan shuddered aloud.

"Lord," he said. "Make mine a couple of graham crackers and a glass of milk. Nervous stomach—"

Lise turned away from the coffee, but, in turning, her eyes suddenly met Jimmy's and his were saying, "See? See what you're in for? Never a youthful moment!"

She hated him for that bold look! She hated him more for setting up such a comparison! He did it deliberately—only, he had ordered first so how could he—?

Lise's eyes swept up to Ben's and she smiled gently. Poor dear. He *needed* her. . . .

After about an hour, the crowd thinned out, Ben departed, but Jimmy still sat at the counter, and Lise hated him for that, too. What made her even madder was that Betty Ann leaned on her elbows and encouraged the radical.

"Well," she heard Betty Ann confide just as she came up to them on her way to the kitchen, "if it's a tossup between you and Ben, I'm for you."

Jimmy chuckled. "Thanks," he said, "but it probably won't do much good."

Lise gave Betty Ann a stern look, but Betty Ann did not move a muscle.

"You see," she went on, "Lise gave

up her own chance at college and went right to work in the cafe when she left high school. She's been so busy mothering me she just forgot what it feels like to be young, and she's never been in love, I'm sure." Betty Ann's eyes went up to Lise's daringly, and the elder set down the tray of dishes and faced the two of them.

"But," she said coldly, "I supposed an experienced creature like you knows all the ropes?"

"Of course," said Betty Ann innocently. "I love Tommy Nason. I've loved him since crib days. You know that."

"Oh," Lise said, her eyes scolding her sister. "It's all right for *you* to love someone for years, but not for me, huh?"

"That's different," Betty Ann insisted. "Tommy's my age."

"Age has nothing to do with emotion!" Lise said impatiently. "And furthermore, both of you are behaving like children at the moment. Openly discussing my affairs before me will not do a thing for either of you!" She snatched the dishes up in her arms and started through the kitchen doorway, but Jimmy climbed off the stool and caught her arm and turned her around to face him.

"What's so wrong with me?" he asked. "Does it mean I'm any less sincere because I haven't got the next couple of generations to do things right? Look at Betty Ann and Tommy. Do you doubt that they love each other, young or not?"

Lise sighed. "Of course I don't doubt it. I heartily approve of it. They're two nice kids, and I personally will stand up and cheer at their wedding, but that has nothing whatever to do with you!"

JIMMY pushed her slightly backward against the casing and leaned over to her, the tray of dishes between them.

"Lise-baby, all I'm trying to point out is that love happens when and

where it happens. Darling, you couldn't have kissed me the way you did—" His voice dwindled in a whisper and Lise flushed and hoped to high heaven Betty Ann hadn't heard.

"And all I'm trying to tell you," she insisted firmly, "is that love isn't enough—even if I loved you, which I most assuredly do not. I'm telling you that people have to have something in common—the way Ben and I have. I'm trying to tell you that even if I got goose bumps when you walked through a room—which I don't—I still wouldn't marry you and fly to the moon. I'm a person with roots and I'm going to marry a person with roots. That's all there is to it. Now unhand me."

It was Jimmy's turn to sigh. "Nothing will change your mind? Nothing will make you realize love is basis enough and the other things will come in time?"

"Nothing," she said firmly. "No one but a fool would marry for love alone, besides which I do *not* love you."

"Well, then," he said, "you won't mind my kissing you again, will you? If nothing could swerve you anyway—"

He leaned across the tray of dishes and pressed his mouth to hers and Lise wriggled angrily. Her hands were full, her back was against the casing, what could she do? He kissed her as if his life depended on it, and then he moved his lips across to her ear where he whispered urgently, "*Judas, I love you—*"

Betty Ann giggled delightedly. Lise jerked her face away and felt like crying. She'd never been so humiliated in her life!

"You ought to be shot at sunrise!" she grated harshly.

Jimmy grunted happily and rubbed the tip of her nose with his own. "You'd miss me—" he assured her in a gentle whisper. "Your darn right you would—"

He left then and when Betty Ann

breezed through the kitchen door and opened her mouth to chirp, Lise looked up grumpily and said, "Be still, will you? I've heard enough from the small fry for one day."

THAT EVENING Ben came over and settled himself comfortably in the big chair. "Read to me, Lise," he said. "You read so beautifully—"

Lise picked up a volume of poetry and began to read softly as she had done so many, many other evenings. Quiet, happy, contented evenings. Something Betty Ann and Jimmy would never fathom. A deep peace that came with complete maturity and mutual understanding and appreciation.

She looked up from the book only once and that was when Betty Ann left for a dance, her laughter tinkling, her arm tight around Tommy Nason's.... She hesitated then and Ben stirred slightly.

"These young men," Ben sighed. "All Adam's Apple and ears—"

For the first time in years, Lise shook her head in disagreement. "I wouldn't say that exactly, Ben. I'll admit there was a time when Tommy struck me pretty much that way, but not any more. Tommy's twenty-one now, Ben. He's filled out and muscular. He's ready to take his place in his father's business. He's a man now, Ben, and he'll be a good husband to Betty Ann—"

Ben shook his head. "I suppose you're right, Lise, but the younger generation runs too wild for me. No appreciation for the finer things."

Again Lise disagreed. "Oh, I don't know. Take this poetry I'm reading you. Betty Ann studied it in college. She can quote from memory about half the stuff in this book. Their emotions are deep, Ben. They're sincere kids as a whole."

Ben chuckled paternally. "Next you'll be telling me Jimmy Richards won't be having an ulcer one of these days from eating such concoctions as

ham and cheese on rye with dill pickles and mustard!"

"He won't have!" she started to say. "He won't have an ulcer for years, if at all, because he treats his body like a magnificent machine. He eats when he's hungry. He sleeps when he's tired—just like any healthy animal. He exerts enough energy to wear off such concoctions—" But, of course, she could not say such a thing. She would not have admitted it even to herself if it had not simply popped into her mind.... She would not think of hurting Ben by such a comparison!

Still, in the wee hours of the morning, she was wide awake. She lay there looking out at the moon filtering through her curtain and streaming shamelessly into her room. She heard Betty Ann come home. Heard the soft giggling in the downstairs hallway, and then the gentle hush, when Tommy kissed her....

Lise turned over angrily and stuck her head beneath the pillows. But she could not blot out her thoughts by blotting out the moonlight and the beauty of young love. Had Jimmy been at the dance? Was he gay and young and full of exuberance? Oh, what difference did it make! The sooner he left town, the better! For all of them....

Still....

And now she got out of bed and stood at her window and looked at that wicked moonlight. She had found herself protecting Ben tonight. Oh, what Jimmy Richards would say to that! He would snort like a young colt and declare, "Pity is not love, Lise Barrett! You do not base even the most sensible of marriages upon pity!"

But of course Johnny would be wrong. That was juvenile thinking. Love *was* pity—compassion, understanding another's faults and living with them....

Jimmy Richards would disagree with that, too, wouldn't he? He would say, "Oh, no! Lise, my dear, love is blind!

In the eye of the beholder, the beloved has no faults—”

Well, blast Jimmy Richards! She ought to be ashamed of herself for letting such a radical influence her thoughts in the least! Ben it was and Ben it would remain!

SHE PLAYED golf with Ben the next day, but after the first nine holes Ben sighed and said, “Let’s call it a day, shall we, Lise? I’m a little bushed. Too much worry at the bank, I guess—”

“Of course, Ben,” she agreed. “I’m a little bushed myself.” *What with lying awake half the night....*

Ben dropped her off in front of the house and when she went inside she hesitated and heard laughter and banter and clinking glasses from the vicinity of the living room. It took her a few minutes to recognize the voices, but then she knew that there were two—Betty Ann’s and Jimmy Richards’....

Well, what right had he to come barging into her very home? She stalked angrily to the living room and stood in the doorway. She got there in time to hear Jimmy say, “Look at this place! Drawn shades and antiques! No place at all for a beautiful, twenty-two-year-old doll! If Lise were mine, I’d take her away from this historic tomb! Old Ben Hagan will just move in with her and never stir a muscle! If Lise were mine, I’d take her to New York with me! I’d get her a cute little apartment in Manhattan, maybe—right up under the stars where she belongs! If Lise were mine—”

She’d heard just about all she could stomach. “Well, I’m not yours!” she grated angrily. “*And I never will be!* Now stop behaving like an idiot, or else do it somewhere else! I’m sick and tired of your impossible schemes and your idiotic dreams! Now get out of my house and don’t come back! Nobody asked you to look at antiques and

drawn shades! If you don’t like it, there’s the door. Just open it and keep right on—walking!”

She whirled away, so angry she was weeping, and stumbled toward the stairway to go to her room, Betty Ann’s ashen face swimming before her eyes, Jimmy’s stark, white look, his lips tightening....

Lise never made it to her room. Her hand reached out and grasped the bannister, but then Jimmy came out of the living room in a furious half-trot, caught her other wrist, whirled her away from the bottom steps and into his arms and bent her backward against him until the very breath was smothered out of her lungs. She tried to call out for Betty Ann, not that it would have done any good, but Jimmy silenced her parted lips by crushing his own against them, and Lise’s hands went up to his shoulders and her fingers buried themselves in his lapels and tightened until they trembled.

“You idiot!” he whispered between clenched teeth, his lips still against hers. “You damned little idiot! I don’t know why I bother to love you—”

HE KISSED her until Lise wept silently, the tears streaming down her face, her dark hair disheveled, her blue eyes closed. Then he released her roughly and she fell back against the bannister and slid to a sitting position on the bottom step. Jimmy stood above her and glowered.

“Run to Ben Hagan!” he hissed. “Tell me you love him! Base your marriage on compatability and a few months from now you’ll wake up and realize that nothing else matters but love—and it’ll be too late!”

Lise looked up at him through a blur of tears. “*Get out!*” she screamed harshly. “Your kind of love plays on false emotion and biological urge! It isn’t love at all—it’s—”

But he was already gone, and now Betty Ann stood above her with a

look of stark realization on her pale, young face.

"You love him, Lise!" she whispered. "Why, you're absolutely crazy about the guy."

Lise got to her feet and tried to recapture some shred of dignity. "I wouldn't marry him—" she said, "if I died tomorrow! Love isn't enough to base a marriage on. You need similar interests—you need—" *But she had admitted even to herself that she loved him!*

"Those things come—" Betty Ann whispered in a strangely mature tone. "Given time, anyone can establish similar interests—"

Lise's chin tilted upward. "I don't have to establish them," she said coldly. "Ben and I already have them—"

Betty Ann shook her head. "Jimmy's leaving tomorrow, Lise," she whispered. "You might never see him again, but if you hurry—"

"Don't be absurd!" Lise said coldly, and now she was herself again.

BETTY ANN left that night to go back to school, a forty mile drive, and Lise told herself everything was normal again. Ben came over later in the evening and they played a couple of games of cribbage. When he left he kissed her gently on the forehead, and for some astounding reason, Lise found herself comparing that kiss with the kisses she remembered her father bestowing. They were amazingly alike!

Could it be that was why Ben meant so very much to her? He symbolized the security she had known in her own father?

"Ben—" she said suddenly, reaching out a hand to his sleeve. "Ben, we've accepted the fact that we would be married as soon as Betty Ann's married to Tommy and the path is clear—"

Ben turned in the vestibule and looked at her questioningly. "Why, yes, Lise—"

"Ben," she said abruptly, "Ben, do you *love* me? I mean—"

Ben looked at first surprised and then he chuckled and came back inside and laid his hat on an end table. "If you mean, dear, do I feel about you the way Tommy feels about Betty Ann, the answer is no. What I feel about you is—well, a steadier sort of love—a solid relationship. Nothing flighty and passionate."

Lise's hand went to her throat. "You were married before, Ben—" A subject she never, out of good taste, broached with him before.

Ben raised his brows now. "Yes, I was. Cora died, as you know, a few years after we were married."

Lise swallowed and plunged on. "Ben, I don't mean to prod, but suddenly this is very important to me. Did you love Cora in the same way you love me?"

He looked startled. "Why, no, as a matter of fact, I didn't. That love was—well, I suppose the sort Betty Ann and Tommy share—full of youth and energy and exuberance. You know how it is, Lise. The world at your feet and stars in your eyes."

Lise sat down and clenched her hands in her lap. "No, Ben," she said quietly. "I *don't* know how it is. The world at your feet and stars in your eyes—"

Ben sat beside her suddenly. "Well, my dear, if you are implying that I do not love you—"

"*Do* you, Ben? *Do* you? Ever since I've been old enough for love, I've been responsible for Betty Ann. I fell into a sort of pattern with you and now—"

"I see," he said gently. "You feel that in marrying an old duffer like me you're missing something, is that it? Well, let me assure you, Lise, that all loves eventually simmer down to what we know now—the mature love—"

"But if I start out that way, I miss the rest!"

"Well, you aren't missing much—"

"Ben," she suggested softly, "do I

remind you of Cora? Did you start a love with her and you wish to complete it with me? Am I a substitute for someone who is unavailable?"

"Why, Lise! I'm very fond of you."

"I believe you, Ben," she said softly, and now her hand went over his as it had so many times before. "I truly believe you. You are so fond of me that you would rob me of youth!"

"Oh, it isn't your fault!" she added quickly. "It's my fault, too, for running for cover like a wounded animal the minute I'm on my own two feet with a little responsibility thrust my way!"

Ben stood up and drew her to her feet. "Are you saying you don't want to marry me?" he asked gently.

Lise inclined her head. "I don't know, Ben. I honestly don't know. I'm so mixed up, I don't know *what* I want any more. Maybe I want to marry you and go on just the way things are. Maybe—" she added softly, turning away from him, looking up at the drawn shade, drawn to keep the carpet from fading. "Maybe I want to fly to the moon—or—go to a little apartment in Manhattan—"

"Lise," he said gently. "All of us have doubts at the very last minute. Betty Ann will soon be marrying Tommy, so I can understand your doubts. Take an aspirin, dear, and go to bed. You'll feel fine tomorrow."

HE KISSED her cheek and left. Maybe he was right. A few fiery kisses and she was ready to throw away years of plans? No. No, Ben was right. It was all right for movies and books, but in everyday life....

She did as he told her. She took an aspirin and went to bed.

But it wasn't that easy. She could still see Betty Ann's strangely mature face, still hear her say, "You may never see him again, but if you hurry—"

After an hour's tossing, she got up and pulled her robe around her. Maybe some hot milk would do the trick....

It was while she was heating the milk that the front door rattled and when she opened it, Betty Ann stood there and behind her, Jimmy Richards. Lise's hand went to her throat. There was no youthful gaiety in either of their faces.

"I came back to pack a few things—" Betty Ann said lamely, stepping into the house. "I'm going back to college, but—I'm going to keep right on traveling from there—"

Jimmy said nothing at all, just looked at her.

"What are you talking about?" Lise asked in a whisper.

"About love," Betty Ann said, "and about security. I'm not going to marry Tommy. I'm going to marry Professor Bilinski. Rudolph Bilinski—my English professor."

Lise took a step backward and reached out for a chair.

"You're talking like a lunatic," she said quietly, hoping her voice held the maternal tone she always applied to Betty Ann's pranks. "You love Tommy, so why marry Professor something-or-other? What's it all about?"

Betty Ann sighed. "I got to thinking about what you've always said was right—you know, security. Rudolph Bilinski can give me that. He's all through what Tommy will have to go through. He's settled, established—twelve years older than I—and he's fond of me—"

Lise shook her head disbelievingly. "Is this some kind of prank? Are you behind this?" And her eyes went up to Jimmy's.

He shook his head. "I'm not," he said quietly. "Betty Ann came over and got me to back her up, I guess. She's planning to elope with Bilinski and she thought I might go along as a witness."

Lise was suddenly on her feet. "You mean—this is on the up-and-up? You seriously intend to run off with a man almost twice your age? Simply because he's established?"

Betty Ann nodded unhappily. "It's the right thing, isn't it?"

"But—you love Tommy! You admit you love Tommy—"

"Sure," the blonde little sister admitted. "But what of it? We'd have to struggle for years, we'd probably argue and have an awful time getting adjusted. Tommy's been talking crazy lately—about setting up a business or taking a job away from Middleton—If I married Professor Bilinski—well, he has a home in a town I'm used to—not so many miles away. He's nice and quiet and he'd sort of tolerate me—tantrums and youthful things—you know."

At first, Lise was sure it was some sort of prank, but now she was sure it was not. Betty Ann's face was too white, her talk too serious.

Lise stepped close to her and placed firm hands on her shoulders. "*You cannot marry a man you don't love!*" she said emphatically. "I don't care if it means all the security in the world! Has it occurred to you that he has already lived through the love you are experiencing with Tommy? Has it occurred to you that you'll spend the rest of your evenings reading Chaucer or some equivalent?"

BETTY ANN glanced over her shoulder at Jimmy who looked at the floor. "But," she said, "I'll be secure. We enjoy the same things. We'd be compatible."

"You'd be crazy!" Lise corrected. "Tommy's the boy for you! What if you do have a few struggles and some adjustments to make and an occasional battle? Eventually you'll see eye to eye—eventually—" She stopped short when she saw the smile tug at the corners of her sister's pink mouth. What stunned her even more were her own words! *Eventually you'll see eye to eye*....

Her eyes went to Jimmy's and he was grinning broadly!

"Then," Betty Ann asked innocent-

ly, "you do believe love is the important thing, after all? You do believe that love is enough on which to base a marriage and the other things—the things that make a marriage work—will come later?"

Lise's hands dropped away from her sister's shoulders and she backed away. Her mouth opened in anger. *It was a prank, after all!* A prank Betty Ann and Jimmy had cooked up to make her admit her own incorrect logic! Love was all that really mattered....

Betty Ann burst out laughing and Lise's face flooded crimson. Jimmy's eyes studied hers and she sensed his sudden fear that she would blow up at him and his love once again. Maybe that was what she should do. Only—they were right, and now she knew it. All that mattered was love. The rest would come later. If you started out with all the rest but without love, you would fail. Love was the mean proportional. Love was the yardstick with which to measure faults and impatience. Seasoned by love, the worst of all marriages had a chance....

Lise felt that urge to blow up at them. She felt that urge to smirk and say, "You're not so smart, you two! I already found out what you're trying to prove earlier in the evening when I talked to Ben. I already found out, but I didn't know how to go about it—how to run to Jimmy like a simpering heroine in a cheap movie and beg for another chance—"

Yes, she could have done that. She could have made them feel pretty silly and take credit for her discoveries herself. She could have, but she didn't. She didn't for the simple reason that here were the two people who loved her more than anyone else in the world. Loved her so much they'd pull any crazy act to make her see things their way—the right way. They'd make complete fools of themselves to save her happiness and to offer her another

chance even when she'd proven herself unworthy.

Lise felt such a swell of emotion as she had never before experienced. She felt tears spring into her eyes and felt a great lump in her throat.

Here's where I start being young, she told herself. Here's where I start making the first adjustment, pretending that they convinced me. The darlings mustn't ever know the difference....

Ben would call it juvenile. Lise called it love—the beginnings of a new kind of life—a happy life and not merely a contented one.

Aloud she said, her voice shaky, "Imagine me in an apartment in Manhattan—"

That was all she had to say. Her apologies, her explanations, were not

necessary—because they loved her. They accepted her as she was, ready to make their own adjustments to suit her.

"Lise—" Jimmy said, reaching for her, cradling her close against him. "I just couldn't go away without you—"

Lise smiled through her tears, smiled at Betty Ann across Jimmy's shoulder. "I guess you made me eat my words about love—" A deceit, to be sure. But such a gentle deceit for such a good purpose.

"We had to show you the right way—" Betty Ann said apologetically.

"Of course," Lise said gently. "Of course you did—"

Jimmy kissed her then and that very first adjustment on the road to compatibility had been made.

THE END

CALENDAR FOR ROMANCE

(continued from page 59)

dience he needs. A newcomer may pop into your heart-picture between April 11 and 30th.

Your best days by the Moon's sign:
 March: 1, 2, 5, 6, 9 (p.m.) 10, 11, 14 (p.m.) 15, 16, 19 (p.m.) 20, 21, 24, 25, 28, 29. April: 1, 2, 6, 7, 10 (p.m.) 11, 12, 15 (p.m.) 16, 17, 20, 21, 24, 25, 28 (p.m.) 29, 30.

Pisces

(February 20 to March 20)

There's a pot-o'-gold at the end of the rainbow (up to March 29th) so why not reach for it, and attend to business? Salesmanship, scientific pursuits, journalism, handling career-matters publicity-wise—all job conditions are on the celestial program between March 1st and April 10th. Branch out. Put your best foot forward. Yes, love, too, looms in *BIG letters* between March 29th and April 24th, when the Love Star Venus is transitting your

sunsign Pisces. What a wonderful time for romantic and social as well as artistic aspirations, and for waltzing down the aisle to the tune of wedding bells. Admiration and magnetic appeal may enhance possible journeys. Then why not plan a honeymoon, or second honeymoon? Yes, friendships and amorous ventures should get off to a promising start now. But—cross crossings cautiously (arguments, we mean) between April 11th and 30th.

Your best days by the Moon's sign:
 March: 3, 4, 7, 8, 12, 13, 17, 18, 22, 23, 26, 27, 30, 31. April: 3 (p.m.) 4, 5, 8, 9, 10 (a.m.) 13, 14, 15 (a.m.) 18, 19, 22, 23, 26, 27, 28 (a.m.)

The above planetary indications are based upon your birthday and month and are general in nature. If conflicting aspects operate in your personal horoscope these indications may be somewhat mitigated or contradicted.

THE END

Gail loved Steve too much to hurt him, but she couldn't help her wayward heart.

HE'D NEVER FORGIVE HER

Exciting

Novelette

by **Kate Tempest**



GAIL JENNINGS adjusted her dark glasses with the fantastically broad heavy tortoise shell frames, which she didn't need at all. Or did she? But she felt pretty silly wearing them at midnight.

The waves slapped against the sides of the *S. S. Union* as she tried to adjust the unfamiliar hairpins in the small, unbecoming golden knot at the back of her head. If there'd been any time at all she would have bought a false switch to make a kind of chignon. But there hadn't been. Not with this ship sailing tonight.

Gail stared into the dressing table mirror in the bedroom of her luxurious suite on the Sun Deck. "Ug," she muttered and tied a drab mustard colored scarf around her neck.

This was the bitter end. No girl in her right mind would deliberately al-

low herself to look like this. There was something positively indecent about it. She shoved the beautiful Arden cosmetic box aside as if it were the devil tempting her.

Abruptly she got up. When a girl didn't make the most of her natural honey colored hair, or her gentian blue eyes with a touch of mascara and eye-shadow, when she let her lips look pale and utterly dreadful, that girl must be dedicated to a cause.

And Gail was.

She threw the miserable looking borrowed tweed coat over her shoulders and went out on deck. No one was in sight and she drew in a breath of vast relief. It had paid to come aboard this early.

A deck steward came and after glancing at her in some shock, took her to one of the deck chairs belonging to her suite and tucked a blanket around her.

Gail lay back. From somewhere she heard gay laughter and her eyes, behind the dark glasses, darted around



It was a dirty trick
to play on Steve....

apprehensively. Steve would be coming up the gangway any second, if he weren't already on board. He was the ship reporter for the *New York Morning Blade* and it was his job to interview the celebrities on outgoing and incoming liners.

She'd been afraid to stay in her own suite because that was one of the first places Steve would make a dash for. According to the passenger list Rip Wallace, Gail's boss, would be there. And Rip was news because he was A & R, Artist and Repertoire chief for Apex Records. When no one answered Steve's knock he'd assume that Rip was roaming around.

One thing was certain, Steve mustn't know she was on board. He'd never

forgive her. He'd believe she'd somehow master-minded the whole plot because Chris Jeffers was sailing tonight.

Actually she hadn't known a thing about it until after seven o'clock tonight when Rip, rushed to the hospital for an emergency appendectomy, had still managed to phone her to take his place on the *S. S. Union*. "Keep your eye on Chris," he gasped. "Let him walk away from his contract with us and I'll personally cut out your heart." He'd given her further instructions and fortunately her passport was in order and an hour later a messenger had arrived at her apartment with a big envelope bulging with money and tickets.

Gail's eyes narrowed when practically a procession came down the deck and other passengers moved out of the way. It was the amazingly beautiful Beverly Blair, loaded down with orchids; the number one pinup, the glamour star of Maxwell Studios sailing for a picture in Rome. Her entourage included photographers, reporters, admirers and—Chris Jeffers.

"Oh," Gail moaned as she thought about her own appearance and pulled the mustard colored scarf up around her chin.

IT DIDN'T do much good to decide that Beverly Blair was beautiful in a sulky, voluptuous way and that she'd be fat in a few more years. Right now she had enough to distract Chris who was the most valuable property Apex Recording had ever had. Suddenly Gail felt scared and completely inadequate in this serious situation. Rip was trusting her to make sure Chris returned immediately to fulfill his contract and didn't stay in Rome and marry Beverly.

She watched them crowd into the luxurious suite next to hers, rather Rip's. She heard Beverly's low haunting laughter, then champagne corks popping and stewards scurrying in and out.

At that moment Steve's tall lean figure purposefully strode toward the gayety as he expertly dodged groups of passengers and their guests. For an instant he glanced in Beverly's open doorway, smiling his half-cynical, half-amused little smile Gail loved. Then he pounded on Rip's door, just as she'd known he would. Getting no answer, he lit a cigarette and looked up and down the deck with his special frown of puzzlement.

Gail tucked her chin deeper into the scarf and turned up the collar of her topcoat.

"Pardon me," Steve said at her shoulder. "Have you seen a small real nervous man come out here?"

She shook her head and mumbled, "No."

Steve patted her shoulder. "Have a good trip, honey," he told her pleasantly as if he didn't believe a muffled mummy ever could. He pushed his way into the crowd jamming Beverly's cabin.

Gail sniffed angrily. Why, that big hearted man! Giving a break to a dowdy girl! Then she wished guiltily that Steve were half as exciting to her as Chris was.

The crowd grew happier and louder and Gail began to feel wistful because she couldn't join them. If they knew she was Rip's personal secretary they'd welcome her because Rip was that important. But she couldn't even go back to her cabin until the "All Ashore" sounded and Steve got off the ship.

Unexpectedly, Chris stepped through the doorway and strolled over to the rail at the foot of Gail's deck chair. She felt a little silly when her heart started doing acrobatics. Chris wasn't only handsome, he possessed an easy, devastating charm and when he sang his voice made females from fifteen to a hundred and five want to coo. Or maybe swoon. His baritone voice had that intimate quality that made each girl feel as if he were singing just to her.

He stood now leaning on the rail watching the milling crowd on the New York dock waving, shouting messages through their cupped hands, or just looking wildly for someone at the rail. It had been *Skyline of New York* that was Chris' first gold record, a million sales for him and Apex. Rip had taken an unknown baritone in California, recorded him there in Apex' Hollywood office and zoomed him to fame.

Steve joined Chris and she huddled. "Chris." Steve lit a cigarette. "Is it true you're going to stay in Rome and marry Beverly? The rumor's all over New York." Steve's voice was low pitched and Gail caught herself starting to lean forward for the answer.

Chris shrugged. "No comment."

"What about your Apex contract. My girl says you have some recording dates," Steve persisted and watched him.

"To hell with them. Rip's a slave driver." Chris' firm chin jutted out pugnaciously. "I'll do as I please."

Steve laughed. "Maybe you don't know that Rip's sailing tonight too."

"Yipe!" Chris jumped and looked around frantically as if he expected to find the little man behind him.

Gail almost giggled when Steve pointed to her door. "That's the great man's lair."

"See you." Chris ducked into Beverly's.

FOR A MINUTE Steve grinned, then he strode to Gail's cabin and began to pound the door. It was then the first "all ashore" gong sounded. Steve hesitated, then hurried away.

When she decided it was safe, Gail got up and went to the rail to watch for Steve in the crowd below. Guests, photographers and reporters were jammed around the gangway and just as the last "all ashore" was blown, Steve started down it. He stood on the dock, his eyes searching for a glimpse of Rip.

So suddenly that Gail caught her breath, Chris was standing beside her. He stared at her. "Take that horrible thing off," he ordered and tugged at her scarf. She was glad for the dark glasses when she obeyed. "Drop it. Please." She let it flutter toward the dock. "Now." Then Chris took off her glasses. They stood looking at each other as the tugs tooted and the big liner moved slowly away from her berth and out into the Hudson River.

Steve was shouting and when they looked at him jumping up and down like a madman, she knew he recognized her and waved. His hat was pushed back, his face was red with frustrated anger.

Chris chuckled. "Steve's about to

burst. I wouldn't tell him what he wanted to know."

Gail decided not to explain anything. It could ruin her plans.

Without warning Chris turned her toward him and studied her. "There's something refreshingly wholesome about you. Stay the way you are. Without paint and mascara." He wheeled and walked away.

She almost ran into her bedroom and looked at herself. Unpainted and wholesome, it was enough to make a girl scream. Her lovely mouth tightened. Well, this masquerade had only been for Steve's benefit until he could get off the ship and she wouldn't stay a frump like this for any man. Or would she?

As she undressed she still thought about it. She kept thinking about Chris and what he'd said as she brushed her beautiful shining honey hair. And with a sad little sigh she knew she'd do almost anything Chris wanted. Besides, it could work to her advantage.

IT HAD started weeks ago really. She'd worked for Rip for six months and stayed in the New York office when he made his periodic trips to Hollywood. She could still vividly remember Rip's enthusiasm when he returned and did nothing but talk about the handsome young talent he'd discovered in an obscure night spot in the Valley. Then she'd heard Chris Jeffers' first record, *Skyline of New York*, and gone slightly insane herself.

Skyline had caught fast and Rip had rushed back to California to have Chris cut eight more sides, songs which just suited him. Gail had played them over and over, accompanying him on her piano where she spent her available free hours trying to turn out salable melodies and lyrics. She loved Chris' timing and his phrasing and the timbre of his voice. After he'd hit solidly her own ambition soared. And with it a dream. Someday she'd write something he'd sing.

Gail wasn't stupid and she knew she wasn't quite good enough yet. Secretly she'd taken some of her songs to publishers without success. These days they sat back waiting for the record companies to put songs across. Gail knew that, but she still had to try. Finally in desperation, she'd taken a few to Rip who'd been singularly kind. "Not commercial enough yet," he'd told her. She smiled sadly. She remembered the radio program *Is It a Hit Or a Miss?* And knew hers were misses—so far.

Gail had studied music and composition at home and had come to New York from the South, believing she might be good enough to play the piano in some minor night spots. Very quickly she'd been disillusioned, even though she'd been better-than-good by her hometown standards. There'd been only one practical thing to do, and finally she landed a job in Rip's office as his personal secretary, grateful that her knowledge of music had been one of the major contributory factors.

- 2 -



STEVE popped into her life five months ago when she'd met Rip's ship returning from a Bermuda trip, Rip never flew. Steve had been fun and he'd shown her a charming half-hidden New York that

she never would have discovered without him. For the last months they'd been constant companions. It had been wonderful and Steve filled a lonely spot when the hometown boy had stopped writing after she'd phoned him in a fit of despondency that she'd never be a success. It hadn't broken her heart, but it had left a sad, lonely void.

Steve had been urging marriage, but

she'd insisted she had to try to accomplish something on her own and he'd understood. "Pride," he'd smiled his particular little smile, "causes havoc, honey. Sometimes heartache. Don't want the hometown to bite the dust too much, we could grow old and gray."

But gradually he'd lost his sense of humor. After he'd come to her apartment night after night and caught her each time playing Chris' records, he finally reached his boiling point. Grimly, he stalked to the machine, stopped it and cracked the record into a dozen pieces.

"I can stand anything, Gail, except your acting like a possessed bobby soxer. Demented." He thrust his fingers back through his dark curly hair. "How can a man compete with a voice?"

They said a lot of things that night each had later wanted to forget. They'd ended up in each other's arms. But she hadn't mentioned Chris Jeffers since. She'd quietly gone on trying to write a song for a hit, not a miss.

Then two days ago Chris had strode into Apex New York office. He was big, virile and handsome and he looked slightly like a dark thundercloud too. Even when he'd nodded unseeing in her general direction, the air had remained high-voltage. He demanded that he see Rip alone and she'd quietly left the office. Every girl that worked for Apex found some excuse to be in the reception room and when Chris stormed out, it had looked like a delegation.

Gail found Rip pacing the carpet. "Chris is in love," Rip yelled. "With that dumb Beverly Blair. She's sailing for Italy on the *Union* and that stupid singer's going along." Rip took a powder for his ulcers. "He has to marry her or slit his throat and if he does marry her she'll smash his heart. He needs this extra time to persuade her and to hell with recording dates."

"But couldn't you make him cut the

records and then fly to Rome?" Gail asked soothingly.

"No!" Rip screamed. "Beverly Blair with a five-divorce record behind her, is nothing for a nice young boy. But does that dumb singer believe it? The divorces are just bad publicity, he says, just jealousy. I tell him go check it in Reno and Mexico City and he sneers." Rip tore at his thinning hair. "That witch could ruin him. So, I'll stop it." He almost jerked the telephone wires out when he grabbed it and ordered a suite on the *S.S. Union*.

NOW, WITH the lapping of the water and the gentle motion of the liner, Gail switched off the bed lamp and hoped she'd go right to sleep. It seemed almost as if Fate had taken a hand in this because here she was and poor Rip was in the hospital. Chris hadn't glanced at her when he'd stalked into Rip's office. *Somehow, she had to get him away from Beverly, out of his daze and back to New York.*

Gail's eyes narrowed as she stared into the darkness. Chris said he liked her unpainted and wholesome. She shuddered. And if she kept up this sickening disguise Beverly would give her one disdainful look and know she was beneath competition. But that might be strategic. Gail might gain a certain advantage.

"Oh, my," she whispered to the darkness.

She began to feel more guilty about Steve too. Probably he'd never forgive her for making this trip. Nor would he believe it was entirely for Apex, remembering too clearly those nights when he'd caught her playing Chris' records over and over. Tomorrow she'd phone Steve at his office and make him go to see Rip for the explanation.

At least the motion of the ship began to lull her to sleep, but she knew the difficult problems would be there in the morning.

IT WAS EARLY the next morning with the sun glistening on the water when Gail, wearing a blue skirt and cashmere sweaters, her hair still neat in that hideous knot and with no makeup whatsoever, stepped on deck. She caught her breath sharply, her eyes widening in shocked despair. Steve was sprawled in her deck chair.

There wasn't the slightest using trying to sneak back into her cabin so she said a weak, "Hello."

He sprang to his feet, a strange expression on his face as he looked at her. Without a word he took the key out of her hand and unlocked the door of her suite. He waited until she walked back in. The color whipped her face and she felt more guilty and ashamed. Last night had been the time to explain everything to Steve.

"Don't you think you'd better fix your hair and your face before promenading? I mean, you look like the devil."

Gail was stymied. Probably she could make him understand that she'd let herself look like this last night because she didn't want a fight with him, but how could she explain why she kept it up now?

"How did you get here?" she parried. "The last time I saw you you were doing an Indian war dance with rude gestures on the dock."

Anger tightened his face. "You ought to know me better than to think I'd let you sail without telling me why. Sneaky was the word for it, Gail. I deserved better than that from you."

"I'm sorry," she said.

"Oh, sure. But you were shaking hands with yourself on the dirtiest trick of the week until you came out and saw me." He lit a cigarette. "Now, to answer your question. I phoned my boss and inveigled him into letting me make the trip across so I can do a day-by-day on the romance between Chris and Beverly. I came out on the boat that picks up the pilot." He looked too pleased with him-

self for Gail's comfort. "The boss found my passport in my desk and sent one of the boys in a wild dash with that and money. I'll fly back to New York as soon as we dock." He smiled for the first time. "I'm glad there's a men's shop on board." He snubbed out his cigarette. "Suppose you explain why you're here in Rip's place and why you didn't tell me."

She explained exactly what happened and he snorted.

"That's dandy. I think you maneuvered the whole thing so you could moon over Chris the way you mooned over his records." Anger flared into Steve's eyes.

It kindled a fire in Gail's. "And I suppose I personally gave Rip an appendicitis? Aren't you being slightly absurd?"

"No, I'm not. So maybe Rip's side hurt, he's a nervous little man and you could convince him easily that he must rush to the nearest hospital." He glanced around the opulent living room. "You got yourself a fine set-up. I'll wait on deck while you fix your hair and do something to your face. Maybe the breeze will blow out my temper." He moved over to her and put his hands on her shoulders. "Be sensible, Gail. I won't let you make a ninny of yourself when you're *my* girl. Bev and Chris all tied up in shiny bright ribbons. Remember he's gone so overboard for her that the fool's willing to break his contract with Apex." His face softened. "And I love you."

SHE STILL stood there after he'd left. It would be nice if someone would tell her what to do. If she did as Steve wanted and tried to make herself presentable she'd be just another reasonably beautiful girl trying to compete with the glamorous movie star with whom Chris was in love. She wouldn't stand a chance, not that he'd ever fall in love with her, but she *had* attracted him by having her face scrubbed. Which was about the most

unexpected thing that had ever happened to her and one of the most exciting—with or without makeup.

It was important that she persuade Steve not to mention to Chris that she was really here as Rip's representative. It might take quite a bit of doing and Steve wouldn't be pleased that she still looked as she did. After a long sigh, she stepped out on deck.

Steve was leaning on the rail staring down into the water. Just as she started to him Chris called, "Hello there." His smile was warm and charming. "I knew you'd be up this early and I've come to take you for a walk before breakfast. Beverly," his voice grew tender, "never gets up before noon."

Steve turned and looked at them for a long moment. He walked over slowly, that puzzled frown on his rugged face.

"You're in New York." Chris smiled.

"Maybe I'm a sea gull." Steve smiled back. "The paper's giving me a free ride to report your daily romance with the nation's pinup girl."

"Not so loud," Chris hushed him and glared at the door of Gail's cabin. She smiled. "That's mine."

"Yours!" he shouted and turned to Steve. "Why you hound. You told me it was Rip's."

Steve shrugged. "That's what the passenger list says. He had intended sailing, but he's in the hospital so my girl, who works for him, got orders to . . ." He winced when Gail surreptitiously kicked his shin.

"Come on, Chris," she said gaily and tucked her hand under his arm. "Let's take that walk. I know Steve will excuse us." She expected Steve to protest furiously, or at least join them, but when he didn't do either it made her a little angry.

They walked companionably around the almost deserted deck. The sky was very blue and there was a sparkle in the early morning air. They

didn't talk, they just walked briskly.

After a while Chris looked down at her. "You're wonderful. I knew you wouldn't cackle. A man needs a friend like you, Gail."

It wasn't much of a compliment since the last thing she wanted was to be this man's pen pal. Yet, amazingly, she felt wonderful. If she could keep Steve from exploding while she managed to keep Chris' interested approval, it might be worth it. Her job wasn't easy. Short of shanghaiing Chris she had no idea how she could get him to leave Beverly once the ship docked and fly back with them to New York. Steve wasn't any easy problem either.

"Let's pick up Steve," she suggested, which partly assuaged her conscience.

But Steve was no longer sitting in one of the deck chairs in front of her suite. They turned and started back down the deck again.

"Where did you know him?" Chris asked.

"I was meeting a friend coming in from Bermuda and there Steve was. We've had fun together." They'd had at least that and it was all true, except she didn't mention the friend's name nor that Steve wanted to marry her.

"He's great." Chris was enthusiastic. "He's never published anything he's been told off the record. You instinctively trust him." Suddenly he laughed. "The guy had me really scared last night though. He told me Rip Wallace, A & R, chief at Apex Records was in your cabin."

"Oh?" She got a sound of innocent bewilderment into it and hated herself. She liked this man too much not to tell him the truth. She'd never wanted to be honest so much with anyone. But if she were, then he'd despise her for trying to deceive him deliberately. Right now she'd happily give up her job, and for a second she almost disliked Rip for making her come.

A Thrilling Tale of
Romance

THE WIFE RAIDER

by Phyllis Speshock

*Our Regular Horoscope
Department*

YOUR LOVE HOROSCOPE

by Irys Vorel

*These and many
others are in the
April....*



TODAY'S LOVE STORIES

“WHY DIDN'T you want to see Mr. Wallace?” She felt worse after she'd asked it. All she could do was to play it quietly, if Steve would let her, and hope for the breaks.

Chris explained what Rip had done for him and then added sheepishly, “I shouldn't have sailed last night. I owe everything to him and he thinks I've let him down. But I owe something to myself too.” His eyes were bright when he looked at Gail. “I love Beverly. I have to have her. Nothing else seems to matter very much except our marriage.”

“And Beverly?” There was a funny frog in her throat suddenly and she cleared it.

“I'm sure she feels the same, though she won't admit it. Poor darling, she's had a tragic time with the men she's loved. Not one of them has deserved her.”

Well, Gail thought, in five tries she should have come up with someone fairly decent!

They walked for a while before Gail got up nerve enough to ask, “But won't you need your contract with Apex? I mean won't you need a lot of money for Beverly?”

His face looked strained. “I've been thinking about that. Yes, I will. I'll work it out when I get her. First things first.” Suddenly he put his hand on her arm and stopped her. There was a glow in him. “You can help me. I know Bev will like you and she might confide in you if you're as friendly to her as you've been to me. You two will be friends and you might give me a hint about, well, if she loves me, just a little.”

Gail realized she was looking blank because she was not only stunned but speechless. Chris was the first man she'd ever known who'd begged her to find out if another girl loved him. *That's what looking like this did to a girl.*

She smiled. Beverly, from the looks

of her and her reputation wouldn't be a good friend with any girl. In fact, Gail doubted if Beverly even knew there were other women in the world. Her entire interest was centered solely in herself, of that Gail felt sure.

- 3 -



HEY WANDERED inside now and into the lounge where there was a piano. Gail was instantly drawn to it and knew Chris was smiling indulgently.

“You play?” he asked politely.

“A little.” She sat down, ran a long glissando and decided on the spur of the moment to play one of her own melodies. She choose a ballad, hoping he'd like it well enough to hum along. Chris listened, leaning against the grand and she watched him lose interest. She knew, as Rip had told her, that it was a miss. So she varied the rhythm pattern and segued into *Skyline*. He brightened and started singing along softly.

Gail was thrilled. Here she was, actually playing for Chris Jeffers, bright new star of Apex. She forgot Steve and Beverly. For these precious minutes she could pretend, couldn't she?

A loud voice cut through the lovely dream. They both turned almost guiltily. Beverly was angry as she came over to them, followed by Steve.

“I thought you'd wait for me, Chris.” Her luminous eyes were accusing. “If it hadn't been for this nice Steve phoning me for a news story, I wouldn't have known where you were.” She surveyed Gail coldly and dismissed her, then slipped her hand under Chris' arm and smiled up into his eyes.

“I didn't think you'd be up until noon, darling. Let's walk a little.” He'd forgotten Gail and something in her heart cracked.

For a moment she sat staring down at her hands clasped in her lap. It wasn't just that she'd loved his voice. She was sure now. She loved Chris.

"You look like a slightly ill duck," Steve commented. "It isn't part of your job to be this personally interested in Chris. Besides, Bev Blair has him all ready for delivery. And you should look at yourself." He pulled out a cigarette disgustedly. "How a beautiful girl can allow herself to look like you is beyond me."

"This was a chance to make him listen to some of my songs," she flared. "Until you came dragging her along."

"I'm a boy scout and that was my good deed." He smiled. "What did Chris think of your little numbers?"

"Nothing," she snapped honestly.

Almost tenderly he put his arm around her shoulders. "You're pretty wonderful, honey," he said. "Come on to breakfast. There's nothing a cup of coffee won't help."

Just before they entered the dining salon he asked hopefully. "Don't you want to fix up?"

"No," she said crossly. "And please don't tell Chris I work for Rip. Or you'll ruin everything."

Steve merely raised an eyebrow. The steward had changed her seating for a table along the side of the big room for two. Steve smiled at her contentedly. "I knew we wanted to be together," he told her.

She noticed Beverly and Chris sitting at the Captain's table with other celebrities.

Breakfast wasn't very happy for Gail and she found herself looking at Chris as much as she dared. Steve finally noticed it and his nice mouth settled into a firm hard line. They drank their second cup of coffee in silence.

They walked back to her cabin in silence. "I'm coming in, Gail," he said. "I've things to say."

He jumped ship, seeking adventure and the glory of being the first human being to land on an unknown planet. Then the glamor wore off, a cocky kid grew up fast, to become a man making his

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HE TOOK a long time lighting his cigarette and almost let the match burn his fingers. His face was grim.

"I won't play games, Gail. You love me or you don't. If you do, then the Captain will marry us today. You can go on with your music, honey." His love for her shone in his eyes. He took her in his arms and kissed her.

She shut her eyes and prayed to feel something of the old magic. But she felt nothing. Steve, whom she cared for so much, was just another man kissing her, a stranger. He dropped his arms and his face was white.

"I've never been jealous before, Gail. I never thought I would be jealous. Love, I believed, was built on mutual trust as well as enchantment. Now, I'm jealous of Chris, ridiculous though that is. Jealous of a voice." He made no effort to hide his bitterness. "Chris doesn't care for you, Gail. How could he when he doesn't even know you very well, hasn't even an idea of how beautiful you are? Besides, he's completely crazy about that doll." Steve started out of the room, then turned toward her again. "I'm jealous of the thoughts and dreams you waste on a—voice."

"Chris is a lot more than that, Steve," She spoke very low and when she saw him stiffen she was sorry.

"So that's the way it is. Nice knowing you, Gail. I'll get to work."

"Steve," she cried. "Just because I've been crazy about Chris since I first heard him sing *Skyline* isn't any reason why we can't be friends?"

"Ho?" He closed the door softly behind him.

She ran across the room and jerked it open. She couldn't let Steve go like this. She'd loved him too much to hurt him. Somehow, he had to understand she couldn't help her wayward heart.

"Steve," she called. "Wait, please." Just as she reached him Chris and Beverly came down the deck, arm in arm.

Chris introduced the two girls and Beverly gave her the same disinterested

look she had in the lounge and dismissed her. And Gail hated the amusement in Steve's eyes when her face burned.

It didn't help much when Steve began flattering Beverly outrageously and she lapped it up in the tradition of a cat with cream. She agreed with surprising alacrity when Steve suggested he interview her alone and she smiled tantalizingly at Chris, who looked fatuous. She had superb technique, Gail admitted. Then she nearly blew up. Just look at the three of them. Chris was absurd and Beverly too flagrant. As for Steve, he was strickly disgusting.

"I'm going swimming," Gail said over her shoulder and made herself walk with dignity back to her suite.

"Me too," Chris called. "I'll meet you at the indoor pool."

WHEN GAIL stood on the diving board, her figure tall and slim and lovely in the rather daring black swim-suit, she was glad she hadn't been able to borrow a freak suit circa 1900. Below, at the pool's edge Chris stood watching and she thought she heard him whistle softly. She jack knifed, to cut the water cleanly and swim to the end of the pool. Chris pulled her out and found her robe, his eyes alit with admiration.

"Up on that board you were the most beautiful thing I ever saw," he said huskily and his hand wasn't quite steady when he lit her cigarette.

She smiled at him. Stretched out in a deck chair she started to pull off her cap and suddenly realized that a riot of sunny hair would tumble out and she'd be just another pretty girl to him.

He leaned toward her and his eyes held hers. "You're lovely," he said. And her heart behaved strangely.

He leaned back in his chair, consciously making an effort to get away from what might be a dangerous subject. "The Captain's asked me to sing

[Turn To Page 84]

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at his party the last night out. I've agreed, of course, and I want you to accompany me. Will you, Gail?"

"I'd simply love it." Excitement sparked in her eyes.

"Beverly's going to do a monologue or two." He smiled happily. "And maybe just maybe, she and I'll have an announcement to make for Steve's paper."

Gail felt as though she'd been dropped out of a jet. "Oh, no," she said.

"No what?" he asked curiously.

"You mustn't marry Beverly now." The words burst out of her.

He looked startled and then annoyed and Gail wished she had dropped out of that jet. Well, she'd done it. From the sudden curious expression on his face he'd decided that she was so crazy about him herself she didn't want him to marry Beverly. Gail got up and walked away from the pool, forgetting she'd come here to swim.

In the corridor leading from the pool, Chris caught her. He unceremoniously pulled her into his arms and his mouth was warm and eager against hers. For a moment she forgot he loved someone else and her arms tightened around his neck as she kissed him back. There was a stunned expression in his eyes when she drew away and ran.

This wasn't what she'd planned. Steve had been right. If she fell in love with Chris it could only break her own heart.

When she passed Beverly's suite she heard Steve's delighted laughter and then Beverly's sultry echo. It was quite an accomplishment to get that into laughter. Gail was furious. Steve certainly had made a rapid recovery from his hurt jealousy. And when she needed him most to advise her about Chris and his glorious kiss, Steve was absorbed in Beverly Blair. And liking it.

SHE LOCKED her door firmly. There were things she must think

out. Chris must be confident that she'd fallen in love with him, and whether she had or not was beside the point. She couldn't let Rip and her job down. He hadn't sent her on this trip for romance, but for serious business. Chris Jeffers must return to New York on the first available plane to cut records he'd contracted for—it was that simple. And that complex.

Probably the best thing to do was what Chris suggested, try to get on amiable terms with Beverly and find out how she really felt about Chris. She was uncomfortably sure that if she didn't, Chris would be certain Gail was crazy about him. She brushed her hair and stared back at the mirror. Maybe she was, even if he couldn't love her.

After she dressed she ordered lunch in her living room and brooded. Not even Steve had bothered to find out why she hadn't come down for lunch. He couldn't have missed the fact that she wasn't there since they occupied the same table for two.

It was late afternoon when Gail decided to see what she could accomplish with Beverly. Gay laughter burst out through Beverly's open door and Gail paused for a second to watch the party. There were a dozen people, including Chris and Gail backed away unobtrusively.

The lounge where she and Chris had been this morning was practically empty, most of the passengers were either taking a siesta on deck, playing bridge or having early cocktails. One older man glanced up from his book and smiled vaguely.

"Will the piano disturb you?" She smiled.

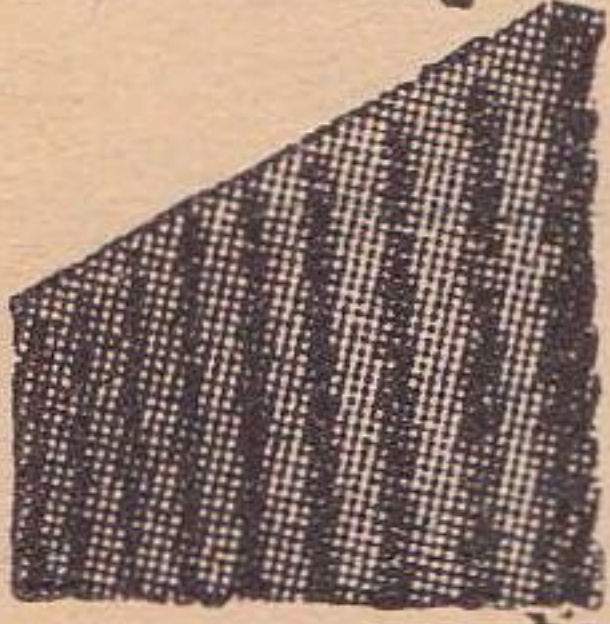
"No indeed. Like it." He became emerged again in his book.

She played idly and suddenly realized one strain kept repeating itself in her improvisations. She listened to it, trying it in variations until she had one that excited her. It gave her a new

[Turn To Page 86]

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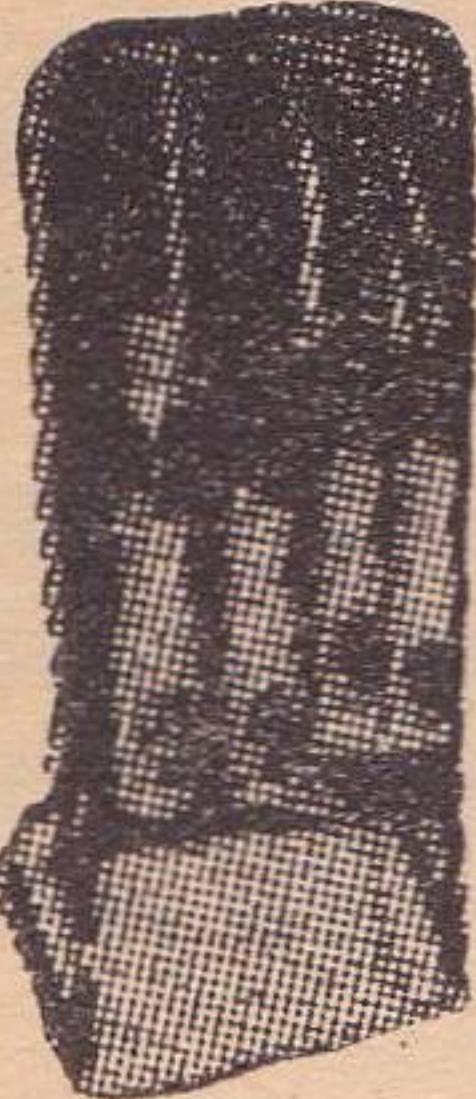


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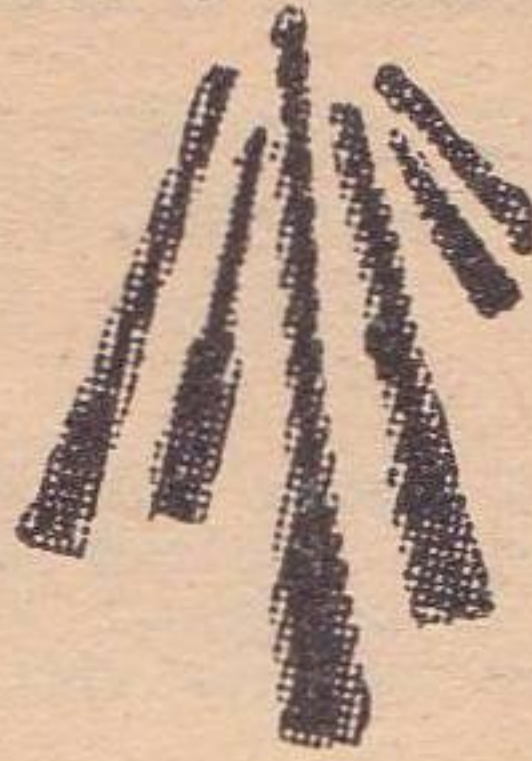
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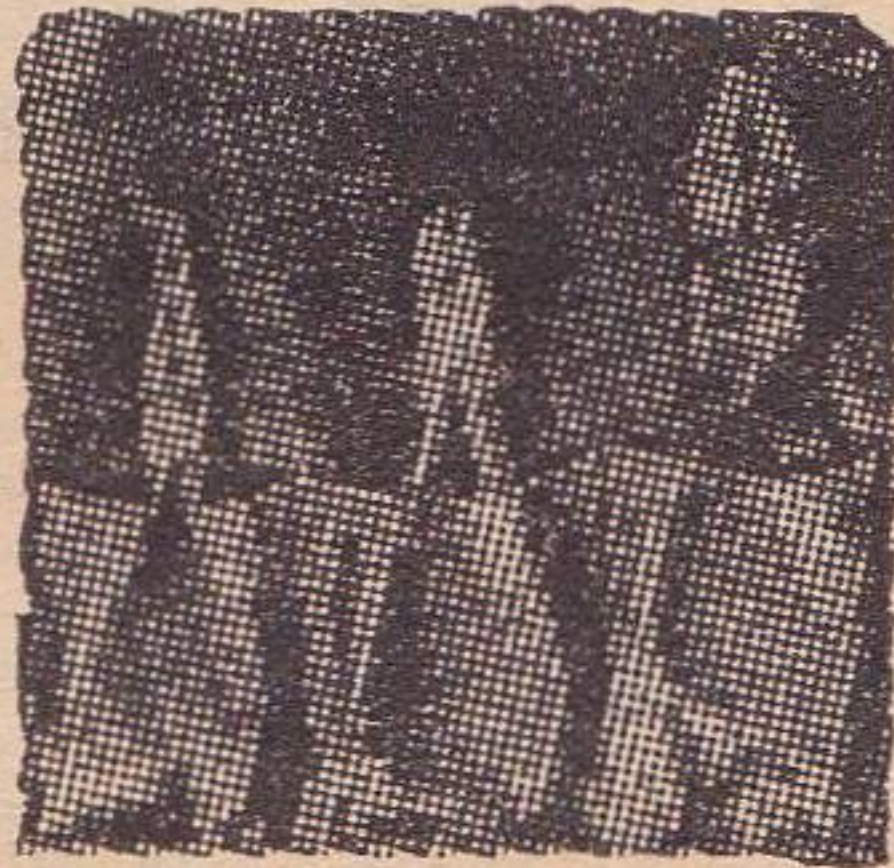
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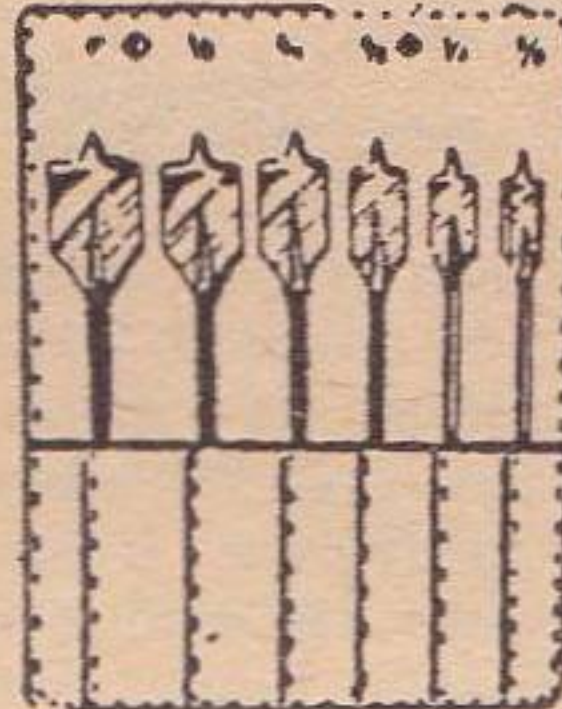
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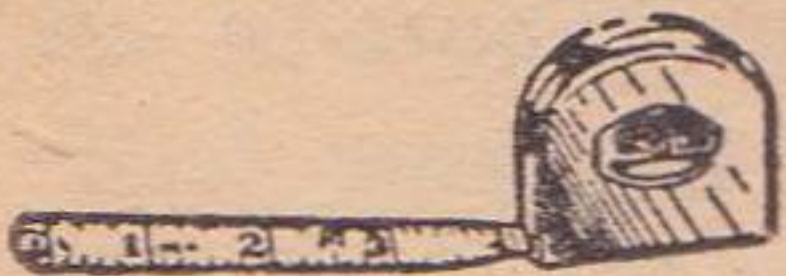
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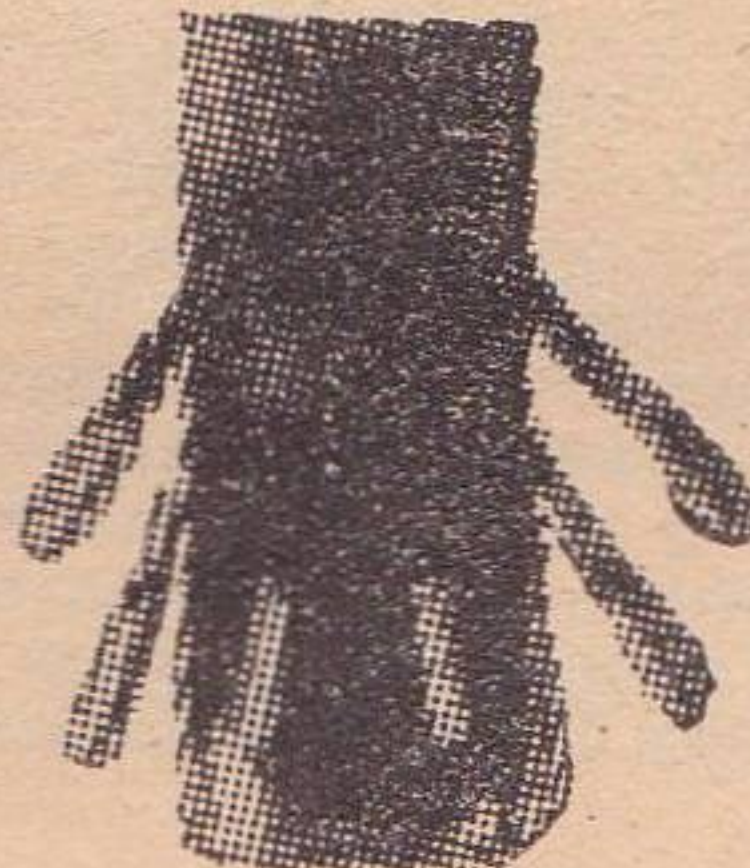
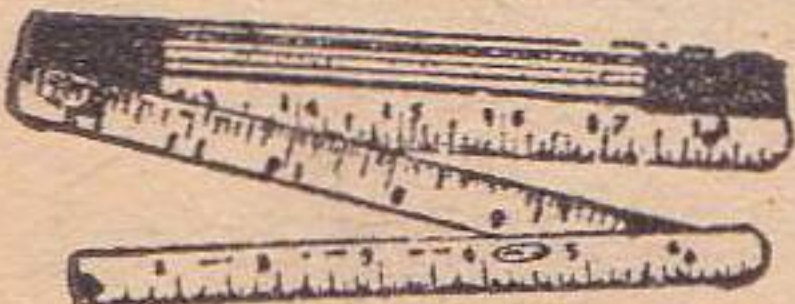
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IDEAL LOVE STORIES

strange kind of inner glow and Gail knew she had something. She laughed softly because she felt so wonderful.

Persistently she developed the theme, oblivious to her surroundings. She jumped when someone touched her shoulder and whirled around on the bench. It was Chris who stood behind her.

"Play it straight through," he ordered and there was excitement in his eyes.

"Is it any good?" Her voice was shaky.

He nodded. "Can you write lyrics too?"

"Sometimes."

Then Chris reminded her of something no one had taken the trouble to point out before, not even Rip, something she'd forgotten. "Words, Gail, must be simple so people will want to sing them, not just listen to them like they do with smart special material suitable for night club performances. Remember Irving Berlin and you can't go wrong. Now, play it again."

SHE DID and he hummed along. When he finished his hands were strong on her shoulders. "If you can get the right lyrics you've got yourself what they call a money song—maybe." His chuckle was warm. "There're an awful lot of maybes in the song business. Anyway, work like the devil and if you can't come up with decent lyrics I'll find you the best lyricist when I get back to New York."

The excitement that raced through her was like champagne. "You really mean that, don't you?"

"Hell, yes." He laughed as he pulled her to her feet and it was glorious because he shared her excitement. "We'll break it in at the Captain's party." He held her hand as they walked back to her suite.

Inside, he closed the door and looked at her for a long time. It had been bad

[Turn To Page 88]

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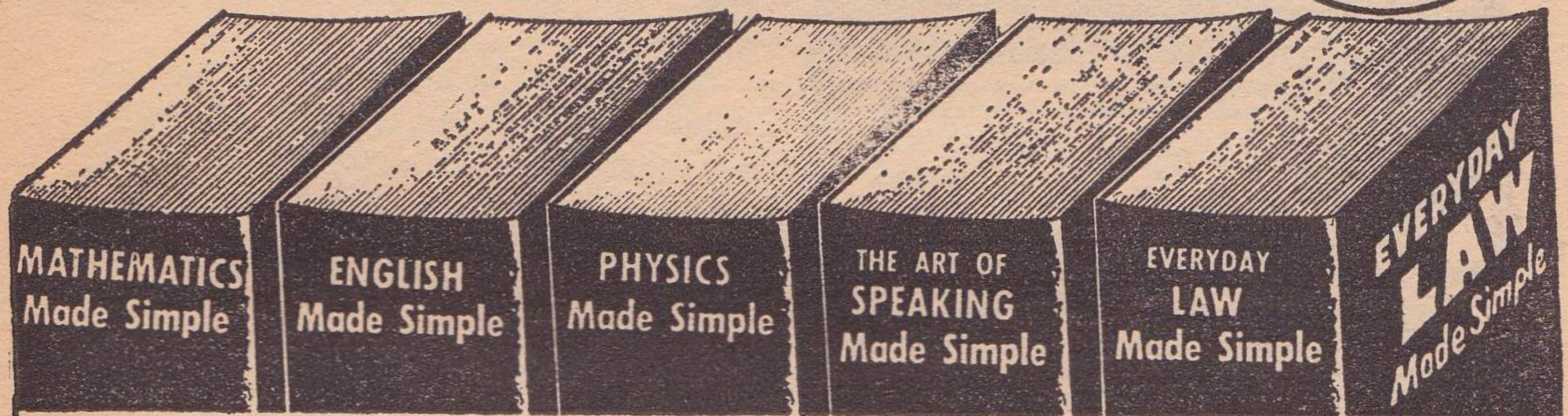
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IDEAL LOVE STORIES

enough before, without her hair at its best and without makeup, now it was tragic.

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She thought he was going to take her in his arms and they'd kiss again while her heart spun like a top. Breathlessly, she waited. But he didn't. He moved over to the coffee table and took a cigarette out of a box, and when he spoke his voice wasn't quite steady. "Work hard, Gail. The minute you think you've got lyrics, let me know."

"Thanks," she said softly.

After he'd gone she tried to think of words to fit the tune, but all that filled her mind and heart was Chris. Try as she would the best she could get was that Chris rhymed with kiss.

- 4 -



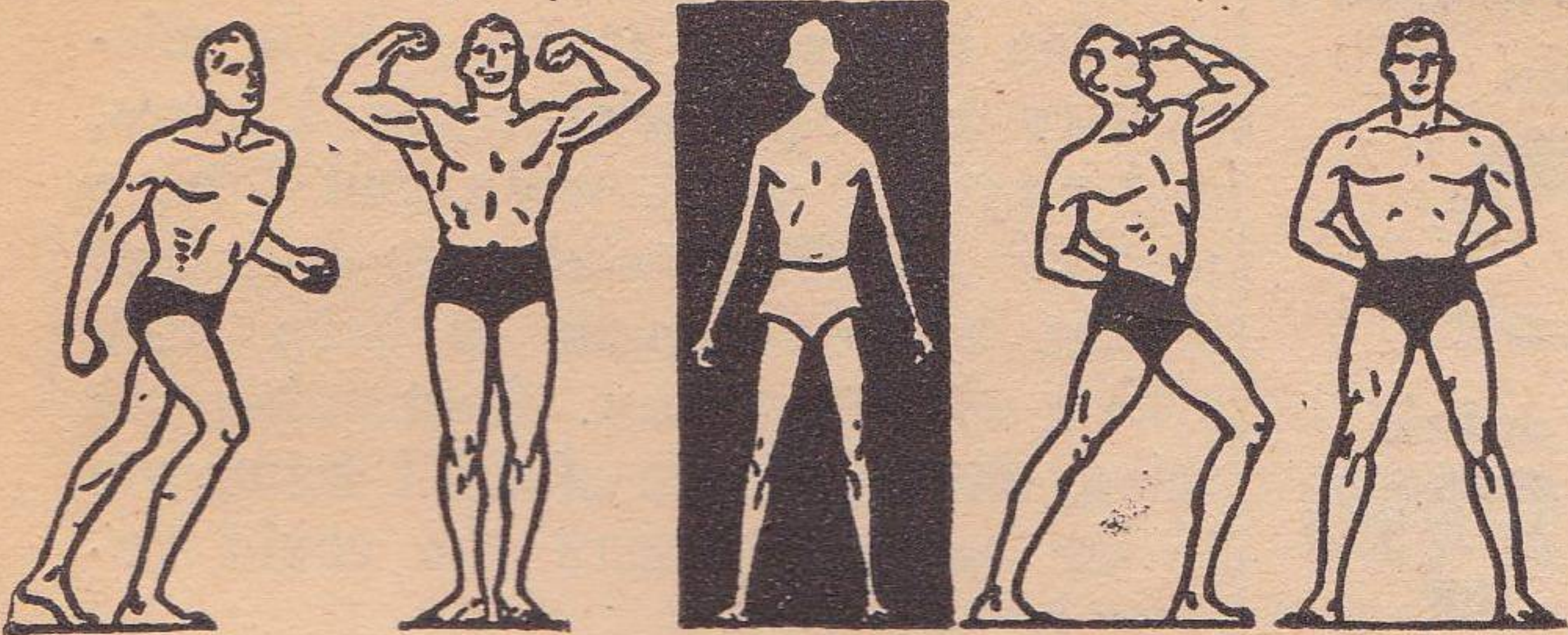
I WAS nearly seven when Steve knocked on Gail's door. He looked unusually attractive in his new dinner jacket and his smile was the little half-cynical, half-amused one she'd always loved.

"I came to gather you for a cocktail before dinner." He gave no indication that he'd noticed she wasn't wearing a dinner dress.

"I've a headache." She sounded stiff because she was still angry because he'd ignored her. But because she

[Turn To Page 90]

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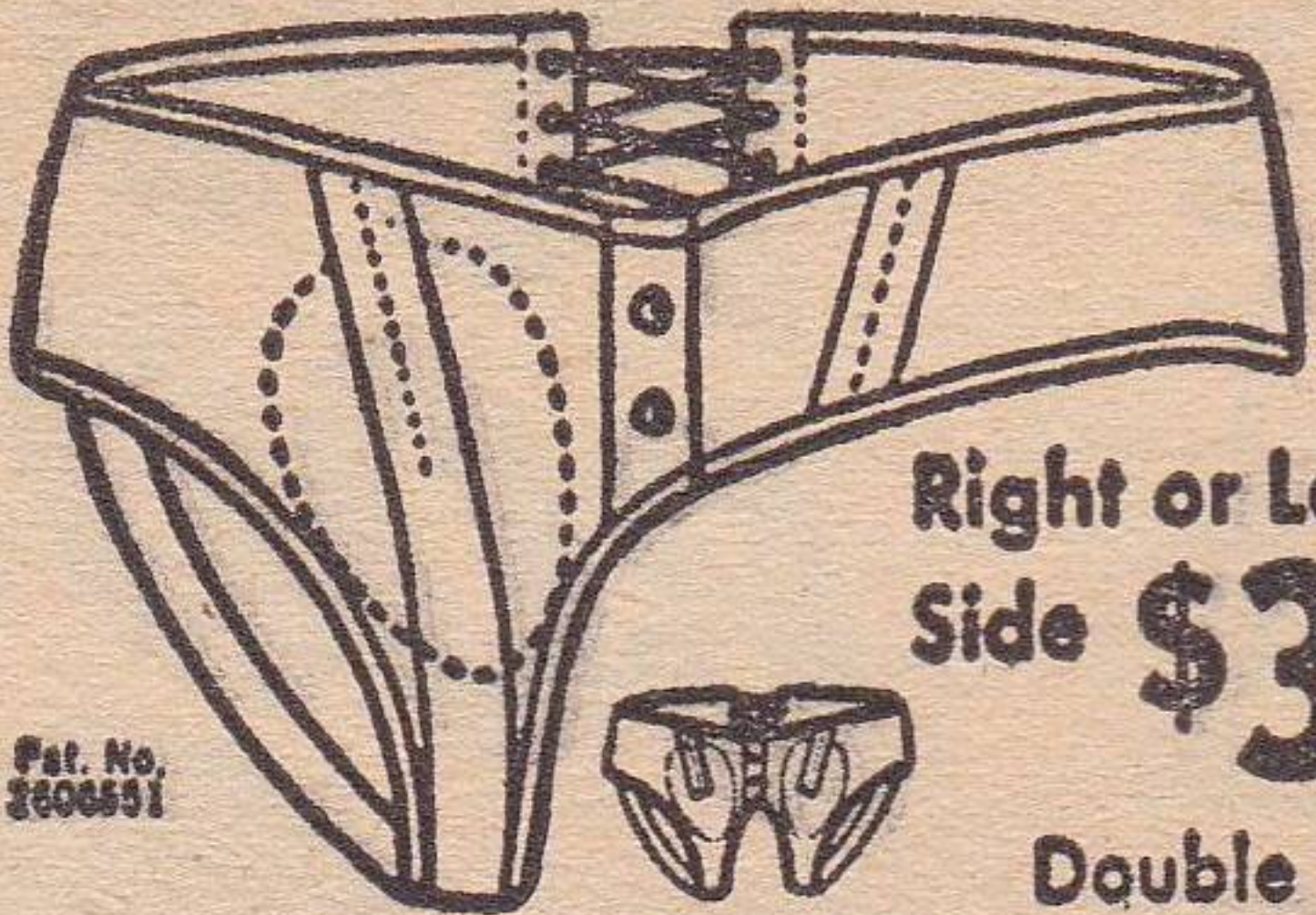
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IDEAL LOVE STORIES

couldn't help it, she asked, "Where have you been all day?"

He smiled again, though his eyes held no laughter. "Doing a little missionary work, pet. I'm a fool, I guess, and maybe it won't work, but I have to try." He didn't elaborate and Gail almost bit her tongue to keep from asking what he meant. "Remember one thing, darling. Most of all I want you to be happy." Before she could answer he was gone.

After she'd ordered dinner a steward brought her a great bowl of red roses. The small envelope he gave her was heavy and when she opened it she found a key and a note from Chris.

*"I talked to the Captain," he wrote, "and he's put a piano in one of the small card rooms for you. Here's the key. The roses are luck for a wonderful girl.
Chris."*

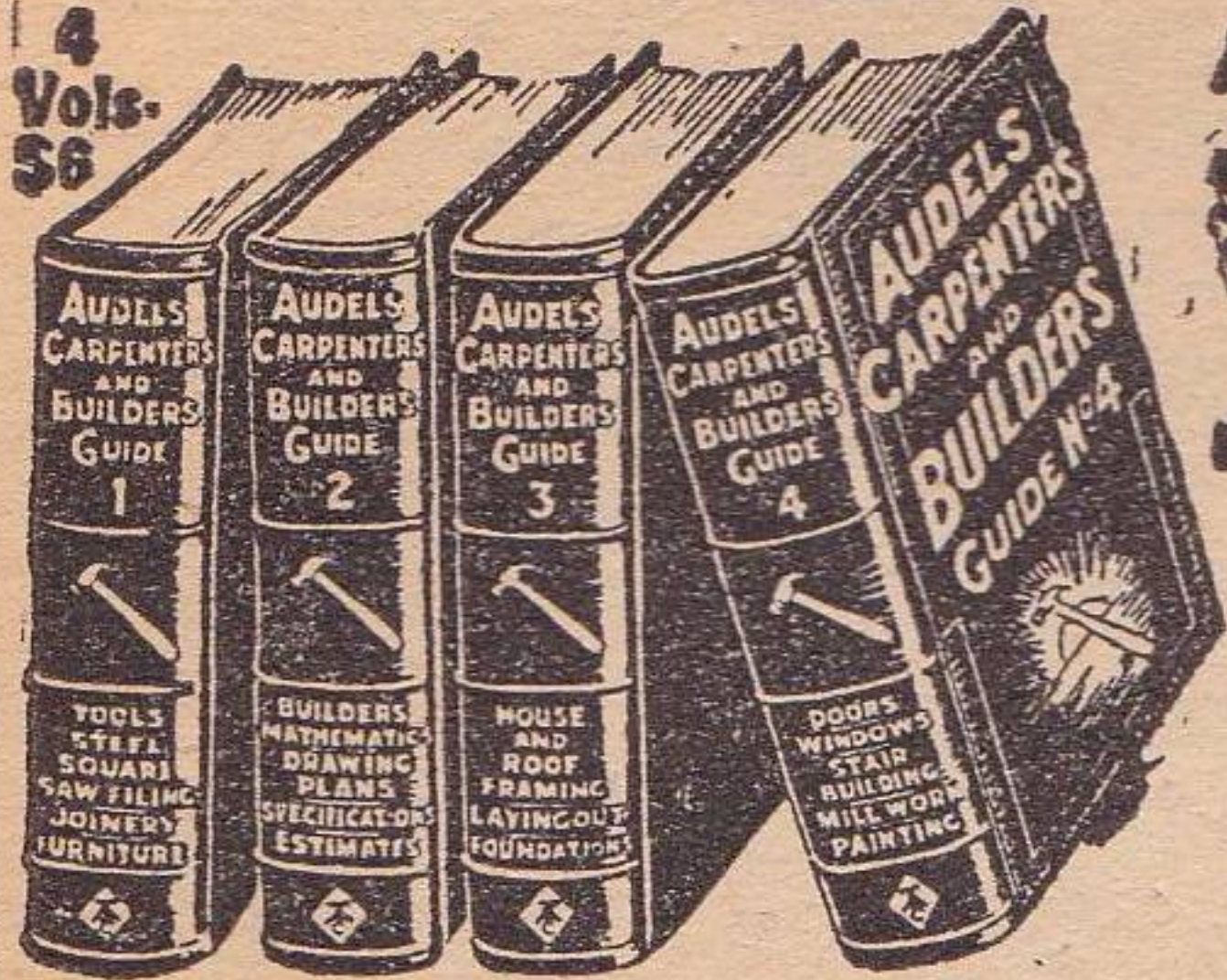
It couldn't matter if she let herself be ecstatically happy for this one night out of her life, because of Chris' thought of her. He'd realized she couldn't hope to write lyrics without a piano and she couldn't annoy lounge passengers by the endless repetitions of the melody as words either fit or didn't. Happiness seemed to take away what little appetite she had and she wished she'd dressed and gone to dinner with Steve. Thinking of him brought a warm feeling because she knew Steve did want her happiness.

On impulse she pushed aside her table and rushed into the bedroom to dress. It was difficult to have to select a drab, uninteresting little blue number she'd borrowed, but she grimly put it on and touched her face with powder and the faintest suggestion of pale pink lipstick. If Steve lingered over cocktails she'd just about catch him beginning the first course as he ate alone at their table. She'd explain she

[Turn To Page 92]

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IDEAL LOVE STORIES

persisted in looking like a frump because Chris liked it as a change from calculated glamour.

She paused in the entrance of the dining salon. Steve wasn't sitting at their small table. Then she saw him and drew in a sharp breath. He was at the Captain's table talking animatedly to Beverly and Chris. She just didn't run back to her suite. A question kept jabbing at her, repeating itself over and over. Could Steve have succumbed to Beverly's charms too?

After she stood at the table in her living room and picked at a little food, Gail found her stewardess who showed her the way to the card room. It was midnight when she wearily returned and went to bed.

Nothing had gone right. She knew, with sickening reality, that she couldn't take advantage of this opportunity Chris had given her. The dream that someday he'd sing a song of hers would never be fulfilled. She wasn't good enough.

As she crawled into bed, tired and discouraged, she longed to talk to Steve and have him comfort her.

THE NEXT days were endless and even more frustrating. No words fitted. Over and over she played the melody until she was too tired to care. She saw little of either Chris or Steve. Chris because he knew she wasn't ready for him, but that didn't explain Steve. Unless he'd fallen in love with Beverly and forgotten he'd ever cared for a girl named Gail.

Then it was the morning of the Captain's party and Gail still didn't have a ghost of an idea that was worth anything. She'd been working at the piano since seven o'clock and she fought to keep back the tears that blurred her eyes.

"Hello," Chris said coming into the room and she bit her lip.

"I can't do it," she wailed in despair.
"I can't do it."

HE'D NEVER FORGIVE HER

Gently he took her in his arms and held her for a moment. He released her so abruptly that she looked at him, startled. His face was drawn and there was a kind of misery in his eyes.

"I've been doing a lot of thinking. About us, darling." He cleared his throat. "About how wonderful it would be to love a girl whose interests were the same as mine, who's absorbed in music the way I am. And whose success will be as great in her field. That would be my idea of love and happiness."

Her eyes widened. She smiled broadly for the first time in days. "Chris!" she cried. "You said it. You gave it to me. *My Idea of Love*. Go way."

He grinned and pulled up a chair. "Let me help."

And he did amazingly. They forgot lunch. They forgot everything. It was late afternoon when, flushed, breathless and bone tired, they sat back and beamed at each other. It could only happen like this once, she knew. There'd be other times with other songs she knew couldn't miss, but never like this first time when she knew it was a hit.

Without asking Chris about it, Gail jumped up and went to the phone, she called Steve's cabin.

"Hey," Chris protested. "Why him?"

She smiled. "Steve suffered through the horrors, he should hear something decent." She explained over the phone and he was there so fast she thought he must have flown.

"Sit down and listen," she told him.

"And tell the truth?" He smiled. He listened to Chris sing *My Idea of Love* and when it was finished his face was grim. His voice was carefully controlled when he spoke. "You've got a hit and you've reached your goal, honey. I guess I didn't have to do that missionary work after all. It looks like you won't need me from here on in." He leaned down and brushed her lips lightly. "That's for luck."



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IDEAL LOVE STORIES

After Steve left, she turned to Chris, her eyes puzzled. His weren't, they were burning brightly as he lifted her up and pulled her hungrily into his arms. "I love you. We're going to be big successes together."

"But Beverly," she protested.

"No Beverly. I thought I was in love with a gorgeous dream. I'm not. I'm going to fly right back to New York to fulfill my contract with Apex and I'll do something about you and this song." His arms tightened. "Darling, will you fly back with me instead of touring the continent or whatever you were going to do?"

Gail could feel herself freezing inside. He still didn't know she worked for Rip because Steve hadn't told. Even when he'd been jealous for that little while, Steve still hadn't told.

Rip would be proud of her because she would have accomplished what he'd sent her to do. But the trouble was she'd accomplished it in a totally unexpected way. Chris had just discovered that he loved her, it was too soon to tell him the truth. He might be so angry that he'd believe he'd been tricked and that she didn't love him. Later, on the plane she'd hold his hand and explain. Steve would be there to help. Gail buried her face against Chris' shoulder. Later, it would be all right because he'd know she loved him.

THAT NIGHT when Gail skirted the enormous salon where the entertainment was about to start, the place was packed with beautifully gowned women and white shirt fronts. Gail hadn't gone down to dinner, avoiding the gala festivities because she was too nervous and neither Chris nor Steve had insisted after one look at her white face.

Tonight she wore her loveliest dress, an ice blue satin which was strapless, its full skirt sprinkled with sequins. Her golden hair shone and her makeup

[Turn To Page 96]

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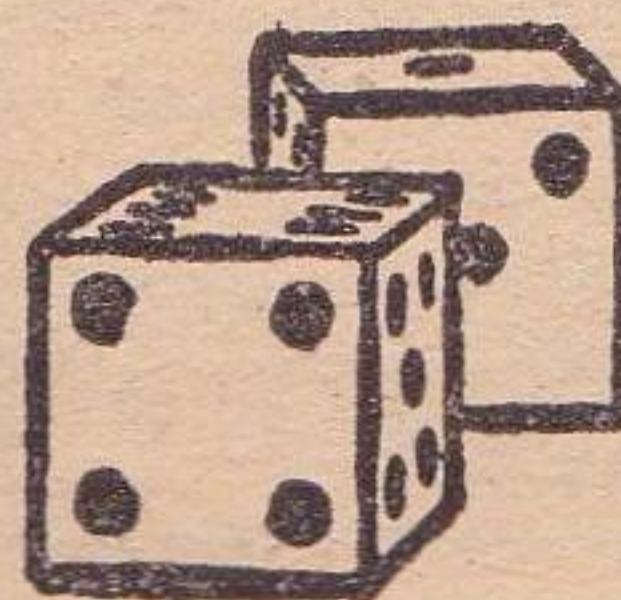
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was perfection. For the first time since the midnight sailing, Gail recognized herself and it gave her poise. She walked directly to the little room at the back of the salon reserved for the performers, from it was a door opening directly on the stage. Steve, Beverly and Chris were there and all of them stared at her, Beverly with positive dislike.

Steve smiled. "You're just on time. Thank heaven you put on makeup and look human again."

Chris' eyes were incredulous, she could feel him figuratively shaking his head and looking again. There was an enormous burst of applause and Chris fussed with his tie. "We're on first, Gail." He held the door open.

She had a moment of sheer panic and glanced back at Steve who circled his thumb and forefinger. For that one second all the love he had for her was there in his eyes. She caught her breath as she walked on stage.

It was a blur. Then she found herself playing while Chris sang song after song. And then hers. It was heady stuff when people wildly applauded. It was the thrill of her life as Chris led her forward and introduced her.

"This is Gail's first song and you people are the first to hear it," he said proudly. And that brought down the house again.

In a delicious daze they went into the little room again and something tightened in her when she noticed that Steve had gone. Chris reached for her hand as Beverly Blair pushed by them to go on stage. Chris tried to draw her into his arms, but she moved back.

"When do we do your second set of songs?" she asked.

"Half an hour. Want to go out on deck for air?" He smiled indulgently.

"Not now. There's something important I have to do." He looked sulky

[Turn To Page 98]



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when she hurried out of the room.

OUTSIDE, she asked a steward if he'd seen Mr. Steve Curtis and he told her Mr. Curtis had gone down to his cabin on B deck.

There was something she had to tell Steve and knew it was probably much too late. The elevator moved at a snail's pace, but it got there eventually. The operator took a century to open the doors.

Finally she found Steve's cabin and knocked frantically. Then he stood there. "Where's the fire?" he asked.

"In my heart, I guess." Her eyes were steady on his. "I know you won't care now, but please listen to me. When I was playing my song and Chris was singing it, I realized that it wasn't Chris the *man* I loved, it was his voice and the dream that he might sing a song I composed. I wanted to be good enough for that. But it wasn't love. Not the kind that's built on mutual trust and enchantment, like you once said."

He smiled. "My missionary work," he said slowly, "may have been all to the good after all. I spent hours talking to Beverly and she decided I was right. She could do much better in

Italy without any attachments—namely Chris. I thought I was doing it for you, because I knew he was falling in love with you."

Steve's arms were strong, yet gentle. "Chris will love many times before he finds the right girl," she said with rare perception. "Before he's ready to find her. He says he'll record my song and it'll be a hit and that we'll turn out more and more."

"He'll find his own girl," Steve agreed. "Right now he's up on cloud nine because his own success is just starting. When he settles down he'll start looking with his heart for that girl."

"You'll have to help. He doesn't know I work for Rip. He'll never forgive me!"

Steve smiled. "I think when we're all on the plane that he'll be even a little relieved. He's scared about walking out on Rip. I think, too, he knows he's not ready for love."

Gail looked at him and smiled. "I love you," she said.

Steve kissed her very satisfactorily.

THE END

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and was proud of him,
there was no peace for*



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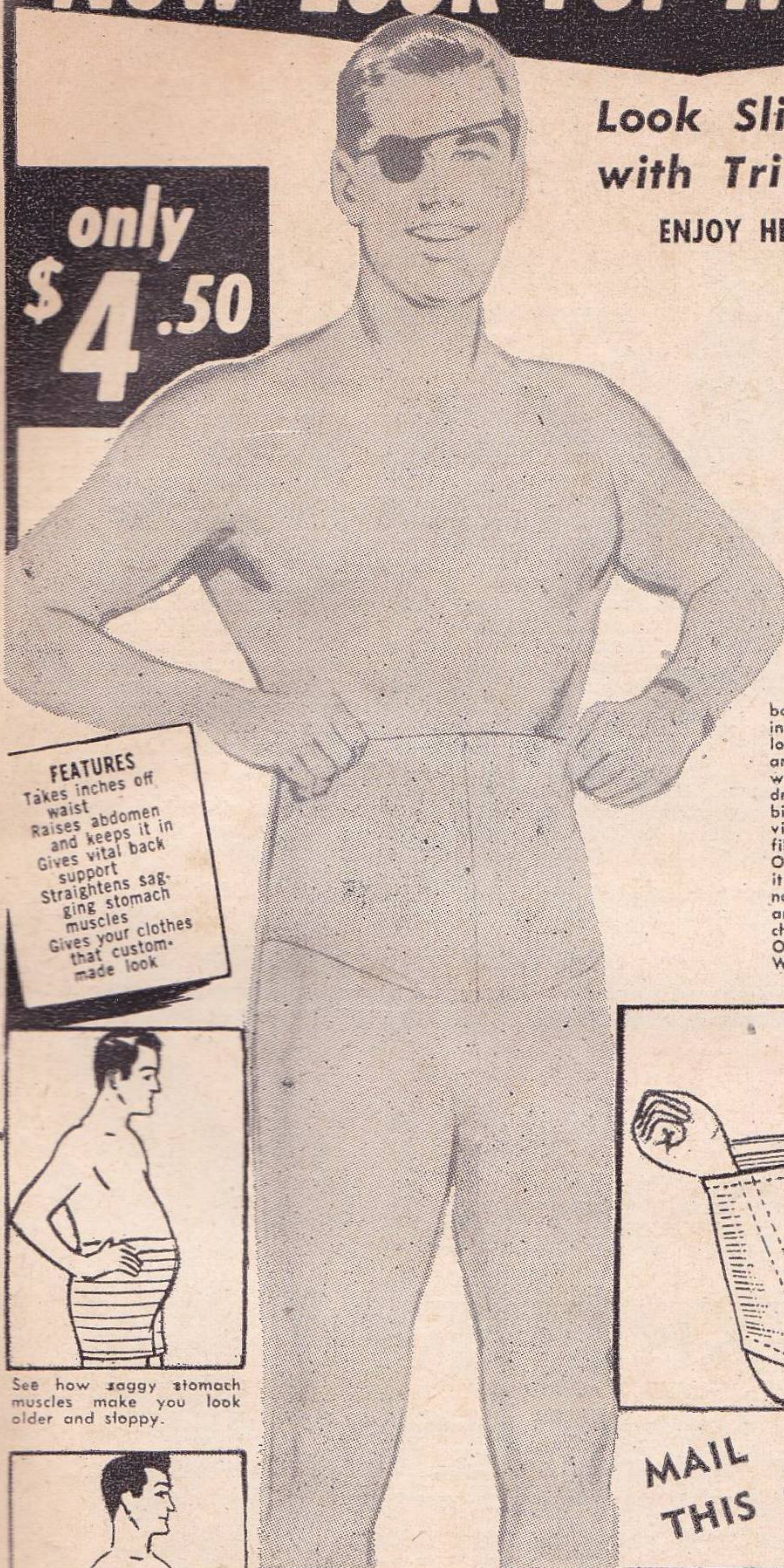
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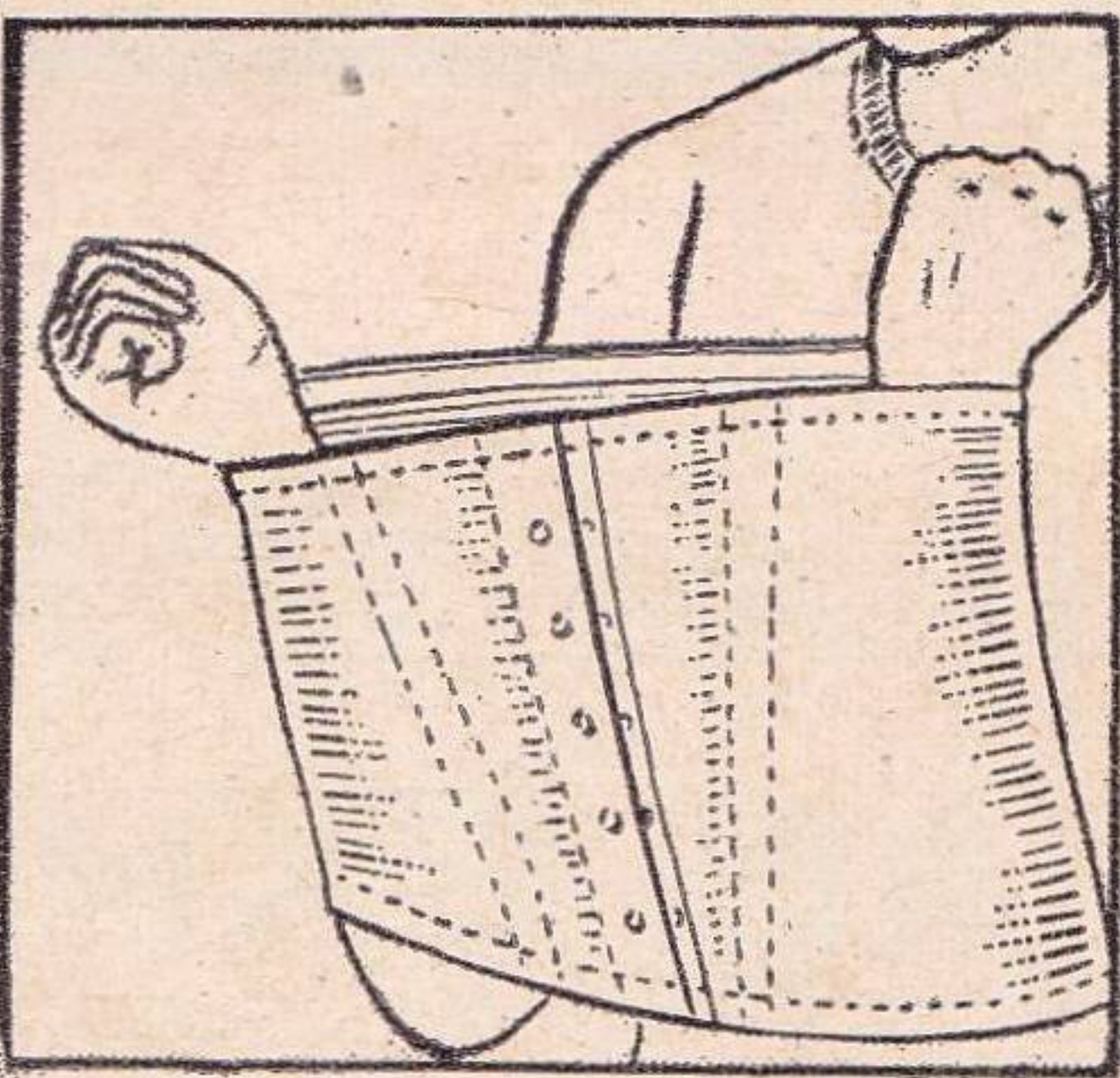


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