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**COUNTESS CARESSES**  
*and other  
peppy stories*



Waldo  
Bennett

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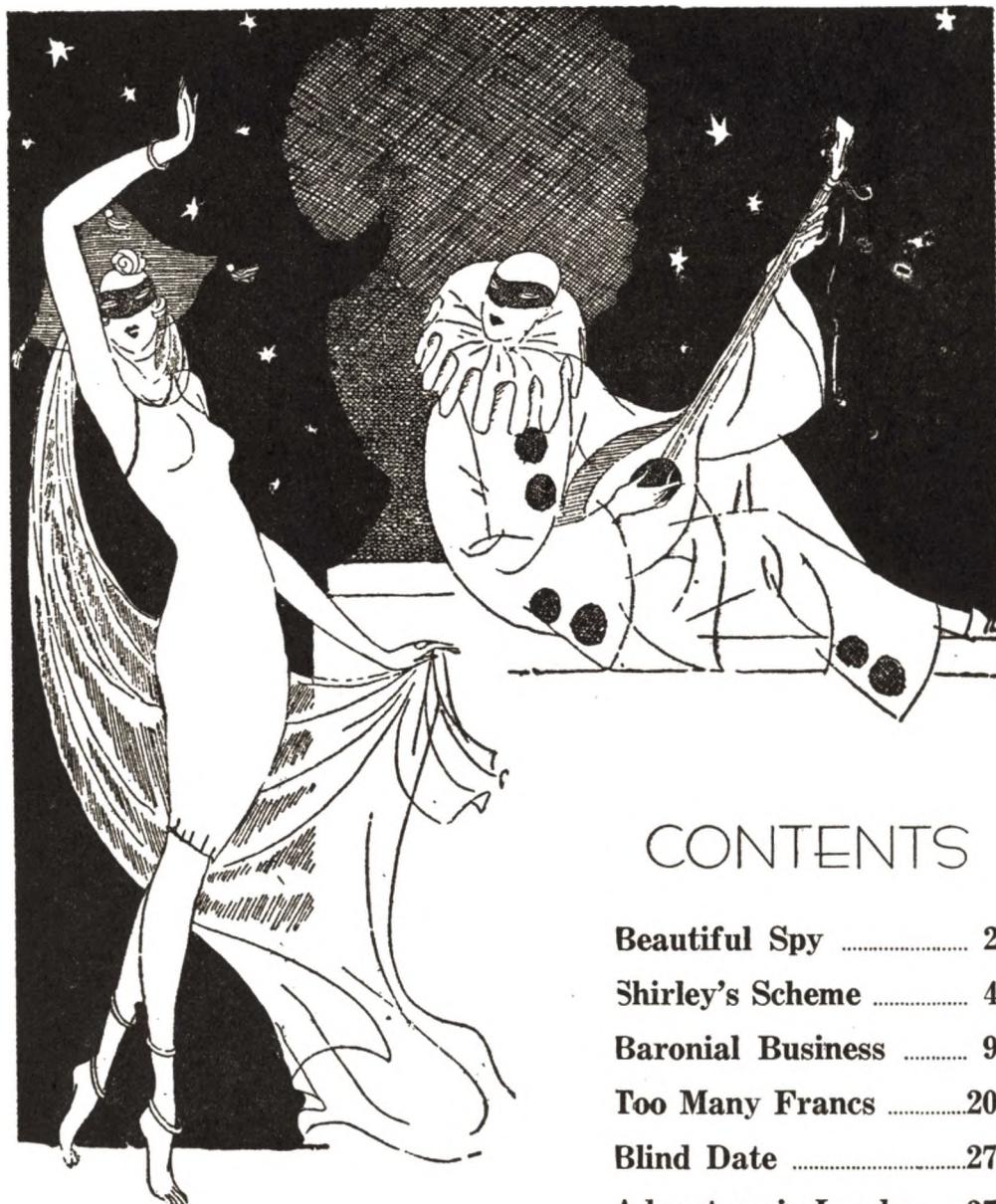


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# BEAUTIFUL SPY

By MARGARET KEARNS

**T**HE INMATES OF THE BOARDING House had always been curious about Petronella Parker.

Miss Ellen MacPherson was quite sure that she was "no better than she should be."

Her sister Amelia agreed, and asserted that no one with that particular colour of hair could possibly be respectable.

Mrs. Benjamin, the widow, was doubtful, but reserved her decision.

Colonel Blackie thought that she seemed a bright little thing, and his son Gerald considered her a damned good sport.

The Misses Malory who kept the Boarding House said very little, because she paid the rent of her bed-sitting-room regularly, and gave very little trouble; and Olive, the overworked little housemaid, frankly adored her, because she passed on her hats, frocks and even furs in the most lavish manner, and often gave her money to go to the movies.

Petronella had a job, but no one knew where or what it was, and no one liked to ask outright, although everyone had tried indirectly to get to know.

But Petronella Parker talked very little, but she was certainly easy on the eye, with her perfect figure, curving exactly where it should curve.

She had a perfect oval face, azure blue

eyes, and hair the colour of bracken when it is just turning under the cold autumn sun.

She never sat in the lounge discussing the events of the day with the other inmates, although she always wished them a cheery "Good morning" at breakfast, and a genial "Good night" if she ever happened to meet them late at night, which was seldom, because they had generally been asleep for a couple of hours when she slipped quietly upstairs to bed.

\* \* \*

NOT A SOUL COULD HONESTLY say anything really bad about Petronella, except that she was mysterious, if merely being mysterious could be described as being bad.

But one morning when Olive took up her early tea, she could get no reply to her repeated knocking.

She even tried the door, but it was locked.

Putting down the tea tray, she had dashed down to acquaint the Misses Mallory with the news that something had happened to Miss Petronella Parker.

In less than five minutes nine people were grouped outside Miss Parker's door in varying stages of dress and undress.

Miss Ellen MacPherson had forgotten to remove the curlers on one side of her grizzled head.

Colonel Blackie had obviously forgotten to replace his lower dentures.

**Miss Parker Was the Mystery Woman of the Boarding House—It Was Whispered She Was a Spy.**

Mrs. Benjamin was minus eyebrows, and looked strange and flaccid in the half light.

Only Gerald looked superb in a printed silk dressing-gown worthy of a film star.

There was much conjecturing. The youngest Miss Mallory hinted suicide and fancied that she detected a smell of gas.

Mrs. Benjamin went a step further and

suggested murder, having tried one eye at the keyhole, she had discovered that there was no key, and therefore the door must have been locked from the outside.

Amelia MacPherson declared that when passing the room two nights before she had distinctly heard a sob, and the eldest Miss Mallory suddenly recollected that a dark, foreign-looking man had visited Miss Parker twice during the previous week, and had come away looking sullen, and even ferocious.

Other keys were tried, but to no avail.

"Better burst open the door," suggested Mrs. Benjamin, who had once had a maid who gassed herself. "And you'd better have a policeman in at it, otherwise one of us will be suspected of doing the dirty work," she added grimly.

"She may have been shot as a spy!" suggested Gerald, suddenly finding his voice, and rather fancying the idea of telling his friends of his acquaintance with the beautiful dead spy.

"Time enough to fetch a policeman when we've found out what's wrong," said Colonel Blackie, ignoring his son's gentle murmurings.

"Now then you people stand back!" And with a mighty heave he launched his shoulder at the door.

\* \* \*

**THE WOMEN HELD THEIR BREATH.** Some covered their eyes. Olive, anticipating the worst, and fearing to find a room swimming in blood, uttered a shriek and fled down the passage.

The door splintered. The Colonel rubbed his shoulder, and a low voice behind them said: "I wonder if my tea's quite cold? I'm so sorry to have disturbed you. I've been covering a party at Lady Hemlock's, and it finished so late, or rather so early, that I had my breakfast at a coffee-stall, and I stupidly took my key with me, and"—turning to the dark, foreign-looking young man who had followed her up—"my brother will send a carpenter in at once to repair the damage."

THE END



A dark, foreign-looking man visited the mysterious Miss Parker twice during the previous week.

# SHIRLEY'S SCHEME

By LARRY McBRIEN

**S**HIRLEY WAS ONE of those rarities: a beautiful girl with brains. And like most girls with brains, she knew what she wanted. And one item she certainly was not hankering for was Mr. Claude Fulton.

Which indisputable fact was rather rough on Claude, for, all in all, he was a harmless, susceptible young man, slow on reasoning properly, and seriously afflicted with the state of being in love with Shirley.

And Shirley, rapidly gaining recognition with her art work in New York, decided that on this day she would put her message across with emphasis, equal to a billboard with giant figures planked square before Mr. Fulton's timid eyes. The words, uttered over a luncheon table after another wearying proposal from Claude, were, to be exact: "I'm sorry, Claude, but I do not love you. I've tried and tried and tried to give you the idea without telling you so bluntly, but you've just simply forced me to it."

Which had the effect of making Claude swallow, smile wanly and force speech out of a cramped throat. "What's—what's the matter . . . with me?"

The question rubbed the wrong way on an 'already irritated Shirley. "What's the matter with you? . . . what's the matter with you?" she repeated, as if to be sure she had heard aright. "I'll tell you," she began. "You're a nice young man but you are not my type. You have loads of money, Claude, I know. But you're short on brains; you're short on many things. I want a clever man 'when I marry—clever, spontaneous, active. He must be the commanding type yet gentle. And you? You know what you are? I'll tell you. You're a soft, easy-going, easily-duped, unambitious person. . . .' Some girls, perhaps, could love you. But not me. Now, do we understand each other?"

"In—time maybe you—you could like me if—"

"There are no if's about it."

"Shirley, 'you know I love you. I—'

"Please," she requested impatiently, "do not mention the word love—you make it sound like a commodity. You feel sorry for yourself. You—really, you exhaust my patience. Why don't you make up 'your mind not to see me again?'"

**She Was Going to Teach the Dope a Lesson and Prove that She Wasn't What He Thought She Was.**



"You dirty scoundrel!" he shouted, and swung a fist into Fred's face.

He tried to hold some ground. "May I explain?" he pleaded.

She threw up her hands, then interlocked her fingers—as if restraining them from an inclination to reach out and hit him. "Go ahead—you will, anyway," she said, scraping her upper teeth on her lower lip.

"You're such a beautiful girl—and intelligent," he lauded. "Beauty and brains. Is it any wonder I love you? I—I can't help myself. You're different too, from most girls. Not only because of your brains and beauty, 'but—but—'" he faltered; then, as if summoning quick courage, he finished

hurriedly: "—you're one of the few good girls left."

"Good girls left!" she gasped with astonishment. "You mean, I take it, I'm—what shall I say? . . . one of the few innocent girls left. Is that it?"

"A—a—yes," he stammered.

She smiled with amusement. "How do you know?"

"Shirley!" his voice was remonstrating, "aren't you being . . . crude?"

"Claude," she mimicked his remonstrating tone, "you do recognize crudeness, don't you? Why don't you recognize everything I say to you?"

"I'll never give up."

"Never?"

"Never."

"Claude—why on earth aren't you reasonable? You'll hate me when you get over this silly crush."

"Hate? How could I ever but love—"

"Please, please." She stood up. "Let's go."

He stood up. "I'm dropping in tomorrow night."

"I'm busy tomorrow night."

"I'll only stay a short while."

"That makes no difference. I'll be busy and you're positively not wanted."

"Some day you'll change your mind."

"Claude . . . I guess the only thing for you is chloroform."

\* \* \* \*

SHIRLEY KNEW that he would drop in the following night. It was his nature. Somehow he never considered the inconvenience and embarrassment his unwanted presence caused her. She was fed up, disgusted, intensely exasperated with him.

Something had to be done. And Shirley proposed to do something.

She called Phyllis Colton, an intimate friend. "Phyllis, darling, you simply have to do me a favor. That is, you and Fred."

"Me and Fred?" Fred was Phyllis's fiance. "What is it—a matter of life and death, or do you want a drink?"

"This is really serious. It's about Claude Fulton. He—"

"Is that pest still bothering you?"

"Yes—and how! And I've got to get rid of him once and for all time . . . This is what I want you to do. I've thought it over carefully. Claude is going to drop in tomorrow night—uninvited, of course. And, for your information—don't laugh—he considers me the purest and most refined young woman in captivity . . . So! Tomorrow night, when he calls, I want him to walk in on me apparently intoxicated and your sweet boy friend being very successful in his endeavors to make love to me!"

"Shirley, you don't meant it?"

"I most certainly do. It'll be a farce, but he'll never see through it. And, lest you worry, darling, about your Fred, you may hide behind something and take in the scene. And when Claude beholds me indulging in a necking party his illusions will be shattered, and I'll not be further annoyed by his annoying presence. What do you say?"

"Sounds great. I'll see Fred."

\* \* \* \*

THE SCENE WAS minutely prepared. One dim light burned in the living room of the studio. Shirley dishevelled her hair and placed bottles and cocktail glasses on a prominent table, while Fred, a hesitant party to the scheme, pulled out his tie and pushed his hair over his eyes. Phyllis, after inspecting various views from places of concealment, decided that the bedroom door, slightly ajar, would afford the best observation point.

In due time, Claude's recognizable footsteps sounded down the corridor, followed by a ringing of the bell. Shirley assumed a reclining position on the sofa and, as



Shirley called her friend. "Phyllis darling," she said, "you have to do me a favor. When Claude comes here tomorrow I want him to find me in the arms of your boy friend."

Fred took a stance beside her, she called out in a simulated huskiness, "Come in."

Claude opened the door to behold her flinging her arms about Fred and kissing him with vulgar passion.

"Shirley!" he cried.

The supposedly surprised Fred got up

and stared at him menacingly—or, at least, with what he thought was a menacing look.

Shirley shoved herself up and laughed as she believed a drunken girl laughed.

"Lo, Claude . . . when I says come in I—I didn't t'ink was you. Expectin' boy with some gin. See? What you mean bust-

in' in my private 'arty like dis?" She put her arms around Fred's neck and pulled him down beside her on the sofa.

Claude stepped over like a man in a hurry to save a life and released Shirley's arms with a vigorous jerk. He glared furiously at Fred. "You dirty scoundrel! Leading this girl on like this!" His face twisted. "You—you—I" he grabbed the surprised Fred and swung a fist in his face. Fred reclined—this time on the floor, while Phyllis choked a horrified "Oh!" from her bedroom lookout.

Shirley was gaping as if stunned to immobility. Claude knelt beside her. "You poor girl, Shirley. I know you're good at heart. I can overlook anything. This doesn't make any difference to me, Shirley. Now, don't let it worry you, dear."

Whereupon Shirley, finding her scheme reduced to ashes of failure, finding her co-conspirator disabled, went hot with rage. She got up from the sofa, stared wildly for a fraction of a moment at the young man before her, and then, without further ceremony, swung her right with all the strength she could concentrate in it.

\* \* \* \*

BODILY THE BLOW was moderate, but mentally it jarred Mr. Claude Fulton

like a major earthquake. His angel on a drunken necking spree! With the nobility of a martyr he forgives her. Forgives her, and—blasphemy!—she smacks him in the face.

A silence loaded with tenseness ensued.

The muscles in Claude's face twitched, although his body was rigid. It seemed as if his face were waiting for a metamorphosis that was taking place in his body to reach his countenance. Apparently it arrived. With amazing coolness he said: "Shirley, you are not good."

She remained silent, her expression a haughty smirk.

He turned and went out the door.

"That's that!" Shirley breathed a sigh of relief as the door closed behind him. "He's gone . . . at last, and for good. And he'll never, never bother me again, thank heaven!"

But she didn't know her Claude.

An hour later a messenger boy arrived. The message was from Claude, and it read:

"I always wanted to be near you because I loved you for your goodness. Now I'll begin to love you for your badness. I'll be over tomorrow night, Shirley—with a bottle of the best!"

— THE END —





# BARONIAL BUSINESS

By RAE L. D. REID

**G**ERRY LEE STOOD there against Deborah Cathan's distempered green wall for a long time, hands in his pockets, trying to get hold of himself and to figure things out. It was hard to think clearly when an alcoholic aura hung over the room like a tangible thing; it was almost impossible to think when the radio was blasting out a swing tune and fifty or more voices were whispering or sighing or chattering and Deborah, in a long white dress, cut very low, too low—sleek and golden and sure of herself—was huddled off in that dark corner on a sofa with Baron Hans Von Wyck!

Deborah didn't belong in dark corners on sofas with anyone but him, Gerry Lee! Deborah had no business smiling up into Hans Von Wyck's beady black eyes like that! In short, the whole blonde loveliness

of Deborah Cathan belonged to Gerry Lee. That bright mouth was his for kissing, those glamorous curves were his to admire, that shining golden hair was made for the sole purpose of bringing his hands to life when they touched it.

And there she sat now, his Deborah Cathan! That golden head was on Hans Von Wyck's shoulder, that delicious throbbing form was pressed close against Hans Von Wyck's starched bosom.

There was nothing about Deborah Cathan's languid, lovely body to show that she didn't like Hans Von Wyck, that she was not happy and that just last night she had cuddled up in Gerry's arms, her golden head on his shoulder.

She had said, "Gerry, darling, I have to marry the Baron. Mother wants me to. Mother would die if she lost this chance to

**The Baron Was Smooth and the Women Fell for Him  
Like a Ton of Bricks—He Broke Up One Affair and Started a Chain of Events—Then . . .**

have a Baroness in the family! I couldn't let her down. But Gerry, darling, whenever he kisses me I'll pretend it's you. I'll close my eyes and say to myself 'This is Gerry loving me—my darling Gerry!' and it won't be too awful for me. You'll always be in my mind and heart, Gerry, even if another man is claiming me!"

\* \* \* \*

GERRY HAD RANTED and argued and cajoled. He had stalked up and down his living room, furious from the six foot crown of his sandy head down to his number eleven shoes. What was he going to do about it? He didn't have anybody he could pretend with while Deborah was pretending with the Baron.

And furthermore, he didn't think it was possible to neck one person and fool yourself into believing it was another. Besides, this wasn't the dark ages where mothers could arrange marriages and enforce them. Deborah had only to take off that clinging green satin negligee and get into her coat suit and dash off to Rockville with him and marry him.

What if her mother did turn red, white and blue all over! After all, she'd recover. Deborah wouldn't be marrying a handsome young garbage man. She'd be Mrs. Gerald Lee, the wife of a well-to-do illustrator with a future.

What if Mrs. Cathan did take Deborah out of her will, disinherit her? Ten million dollars was okay but after all you could only wear just so many clothes, go to so many places and eat just three meals a day and he, Gerald Lee, could give her all that!

He could give her love, too—good old American love!—which was a darned sight more important than the hand-kissing, waist bowing, dowry-demanding type that the Baron offered in exchange for his title!

But in the end his ranting and arguing



Deborah clung to the tall, dark Baron.

and cajoling had come to nothing. Deborah had held out her soft white arms. Her red mouth against his cheek had whispered, "Oh, Gerry—my poor, precious Gerry!"

Her fingers had stroked his cheeks, her lips had danced like butterflies over his hair. And he had groaned deep in his throat, had forgotten the Baron for one brief moment of pure rapture.

He had found himself feeling that there was something sad and beautiful in Deborah's submission to her mother's tyranny; something tragic and sacrificial in all that golden loveliness of hers wasted on a brute who made her flesh crawl with loathing.

He had promised, with Deborah's quivering red mouth under his, that he would not make any trouble about her breaking their engagement. He would have promised almost anything in that expectant moment; he had been so deliriously happy—so hopelessly confused!

\* \* \* \*

BUT GERRY WASN'T confused now. There was nothing sad nor beautiful nor tragic about Deborah's submission. And looking at her there on that shadowy sofa

with the tall, dark Baron, Gerry knew that Deborah's flesh wasn't crawling with loathing. He knew, too, in a sickening flash that he had been given the run-around: Deborah was just as keen on being a Baroness as her mother was to have her be one; Deborah wasn't pretending anything! Deborah, even in her most amorous moments, had never clung to him like that . . .

"Just look what they're making in Germany nowadays!" said a soft, strained voice at Gerry's side.

Gerry looked down into Amy Martin's heart-shaped face. He had to smile despite the seething, boiling jealousy of his blood. Everyone smiled at Amy. Amy was pretty and young and voluptuously small. Her eyes were vividly blue beneath the heavy foliage of her black lashes, the cupid's bow of her sensuous young mouth corresponded to the dip of a heart and her purplish-black hair delightfully accentuated the heart-shapedness of her face.

There was a time when Gerry, admiring the beauty of Amy's lively body and her shapely legs and her pretty face, had thought he could have loved Amy Martin—if Deborah hadn't come into his life and spoiled all other women for him.

Gerry said, as lightly as he could, "Hi, Amy. How's tricks? Everything going well for you in that newspaper job of yours?"

He saw then that Amy wasn't smiling as usual. Amy's small mouth was grim, her eyes angry.

She said, evenly, "Damn him! Damn him to hell! It's the first time since I was fourteen that any damned man's beaten me to getting through—and it had to be an European!"

Gerry's eyes widened. "You mean—you're gone on the Baron, too?"

Amy said, "Is there any dame in Rensville who isn't nuts about him, from Deborah right straight on down to the chin-

less little manicurist who does his nails twice a week! Why, ever since that guy started the practice of medicine in this burg there isn't a gal in town who hasn't developed heart palpitation or house-maid's knee or something! Anything for an excuse to get into his office and . . . " Suddenly Amy's blue eyes narrowed, her hands went into fists at her sides. "Look at em! Just look at 'em!"

Gerry swung his eyes back to Deborah and the doctor-Baron. He could hardly see them now, for they seemed to melt into shadows. Gerry could only see the tips of their toes. But that was enough.

\* \* \* \*

HE HEARD AMY catch her breath as she watched. Gerry wasn't used to bared emotions. Amy's, when she had any, were always decently veiled. He thought, "She must be awful crazy about him. Poor kid—poor me!"

And then Amy said, miserably, "You don't have to dance with me or ply me with drinks or even talk with me. Just take me outside and lose me. I've had all I can bear!"

Gerry obeyed reluctantly. Amy mumbled angrily to herself as she led him firmly toward the lily pond where there was a darkened bench. Amy sat down on it, her toes tapping out a nervous staccato on the ground. Gerry reached out awkwardly and gave her a comforting pat on her shoulder. Amy rallied.

"You're sweet, Gerry," she said. "Long before this somebody should have organized an expedition to take you away from that blonde menace before she dragged you into heart-break. I hate her for the way she's used you and run you around and now—jilted you. And I hate him for those slick kisses and that line he strung me and those dollar marks shining in his eyes. If I'd had Deborah's dough it would have



Suddenly Amy's blue eyes narrowed. "Look at 'em!" she muttered. "Just look at 'em!"

been a different story, you can bet!"

Amy bit her lips, furiously. "You know what you ought to do, Gerry? You ought to go back to them right now and knock that Baron for a loop and then drag Deborah around by the hair while you tell her where she gets off!"

Truer words had never been spoken, it seemed to Gerry. And then the moon emerged from behind a cloud, revealing Amy's lovely little face. Awed, Gerry watched the miracle that the moonlight wrought.

"Gosh!" he said, "you're pretty, Amy!" And he reached respectfully for her hand and started to kiss it. But Amy snatched it from him in a fury.

"If you want to kiss me, kiss me!" she said, quickly.

\* \* \* \*

AS A MATTER of plain fact, she kissed him; though, of course, if she had given him time he'd have kissed her first. Priority didn't matter, though. Gerry was shaken by what Amy had said, by the way she looked in the moonlight. It was the

first time he had ever kissed her and he got an unexpected kick out of her so close to him and the softness of her and the sweetness of her lips.

He drew back from her, amazed. He said, "Gosh!"

Amy's face was close to his. "Don't look so surprised," she said, huskily. "This is perfectly normal. We're two healthy, attractive young people. We're hurt and we're lonely and we—we need each other!"

She stopped speaking then. Her eyes searched his. His heart was beating furiously now and he had a weakness in his knees that was strange and puzzling. After all, he loved Deborah; he had never loved anyone but Deborah. Amy didn't mean anything to him . . . he didn't mean anything to her . . .

"Well?" said Amy, in a choky voice.

There was no doubt about who kissed whom first this time. Gerry grabbed both of Amy's arms by the elbows. He drew her up to him. His mouth found hers, slowly, deliberately—he kissed her wildly.

Amy went limp in his embrace. She was like a flower that had wilted under the hot rays of the sun. But as his mouth clung to her lips, life flowed back into her veins. She lost her limpness, her lips came alive under his kisses, her arms twined close around his shoulder and trembled there.

With a little gasp she pulled out of his embrace. "Oh, Gerry," she whispered, "oh, Gerry!" She caught his hand then, and held it tightly. Then she flung her arms around his neck again and said, "Gerry, we've found a way—to forget. We do—need each other!"

She was right. They did need each other. They needed lots of moments like this so they could forget. They were both going to have bad moments when they got around to realizing what Deborah and the Baron had done to them; when they finally realiz-

ed they had lost them for keeps.

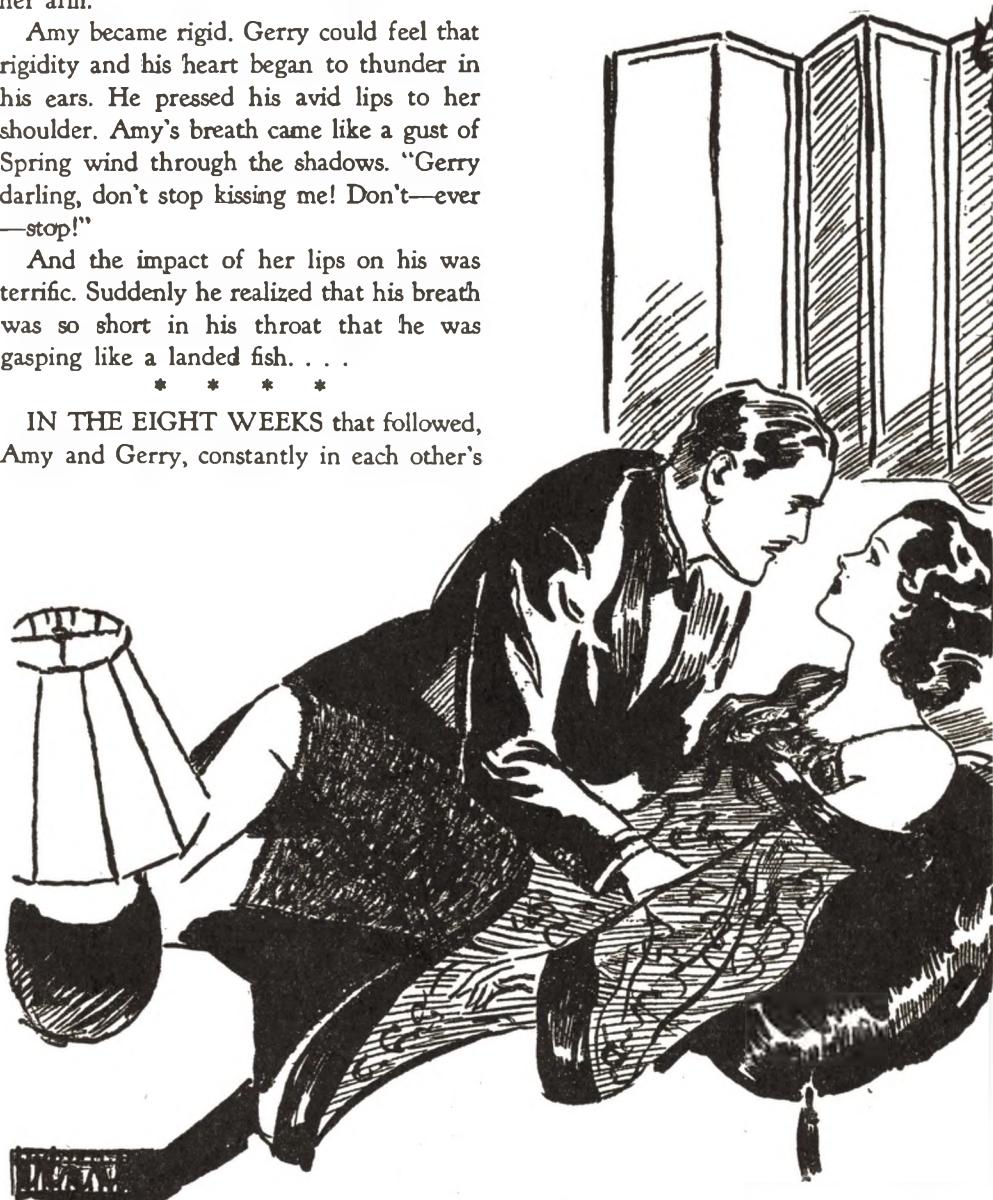
But now Gerry thought of nothing but Amy's quivering mouth, the whiteness of her skin, the deliciousness of her kisses. He caught her hand, put it to his lips and started a series of little kisses that went up her arm.

Amy became rigid. Gerry could feel that rigidity and his heart began to thunder in his ears. He pressed his avid lips to her shoulder. Amy's breath came like a gust of Spring wind through the shadows. "Gerry darling, don't stop kissing me! Don't—ever—stop!"

And the impact of her lips on his was terrific. Suddenly he realized that his breath was so short in his throat that he was gasping like a landed fish. . . .

\* \* \* \*

IN THE EIGHT WEEKS that followed, Amy and Gerry, constantly in each other's



Through the window Gerry could see them. He could hear the Baron saying, "It is a good thing that you mama and papa are in Florida this week."

society, did everything they knew to forget. They danced, they played golf, they spent long, forgetful evenings wrapped in each other's arms. Gerry still felt sort of numb with hurt and disillusionment, he guessed. And it was going to be all the harder, he supposed, when Deborah and the Baron were actually married. While she was still Miss Cathan there was still hope. He told Amy that and Amy's eyes widened, she bit her full, lower lip.

"Yeah, while there's life, there's hope," she said bitterly.

But there came a time when Gerry felt he had to see Deborah again. Amy had been on an assignment all evening at her paper. He had called her a dozen times and had not been able to locate her. And so he had stopped in at a cocktail lounge alone, had tried to drown his thoughts in liquor. But the more he tried not to think of Deborah, the more maddening became his desire to see her once more, to be near her.

He walked to the Cathan estate. He kept hoping that his blood would cool, that he wouldn't do anything foolish, that once near Deborah he wouldn't break down all that indifference that he and Amy had so carefully constructed between them. He came up on the porch of the enormous mansion, stood irresolute, undecided whether or not to ring the bell. And then he heard voices from within the darkened drawing-room; Deborah's voice—the Baron's.

Gerry stepped to the window, pressed his face against the pane. They didn't see him. They were too busy, too fascinated with each other. Deborah was wearing something white and fragile. She was lounging on the sofa, her golden head in Hans' lap. His fingers, those long, slim, expert fingers, were caressing her head. Gerry's blood boiled.

"Hans!" whispered Deborah, eyes closed.

"Deborah!" Hans cried, covering that

hand with moist, fast kisses. "It is so beautiful that you have suddenly come to love me like this. I have had to be so careful. Like a bashful lover. Afraid of frightening my little sweet! And now, so suddenly, and so exquisitely, she comes fluttering to me. Mine—all mine. A deliciousness that I cannot take!"

Gerry bit his lips until they bled. "What a line!" he snorted to himself. "What a foul, lousy line!"

"But—I—I love you, Hans," said Deborah, and her arms went around his shoulders. But Hans did not accept the invitation. He went on caressing her head.

"And I love you, my little bird," Hans said. "It is good that your mama and papa are in Florida this week. There are things I cannot say to you when there are people around. Oh, I am not such a slow lover as you probably think, my little bird. All the things I would say and do I cannot for one reason. A reason that is of the greatest embarrassment to me. I am not a poor man nor a fortune hunter, my Deborah. It is only that, pending the readjustment of the largest aviation plant in Europe, of which I am the largest shareholder, I am temporarily tied up financially.

"If it had not been for that, my sweet, Hans would not be the patient, unaccepting lover he has been. He would not have held out time and again against all this beauty you have so sweetly offered him. You see, my little bird, a man accustomed to financial plenty does not like to feel himself even temporarily embarrassed with the woman he loves. If I had money, I would fly away with you, my little bird!"

Gerry saw Deborah's glowing face and heard her murmur: "Hans, I have money, lots of money!" Her tongue moistened her lips. "In my own name, too!"

"Hush, my sweet, you mustn't tempt Hans. I love you so. I could not take a

penny from you, my little bird, even if it would only be temporary!"

"You must!" Deborah cried.

Hans put the back of his hand against the lids of his eyes. He groaned. "All right, then. But it must be business-like. I will give you securities worth ten times what you advance me. Ten times the twenty-five thousand dollars of your negotiable securities. Ah, my sweet, I will pay you back not only with money interest but with that other interest that comes straight from the soul of a man who is so terribly much in

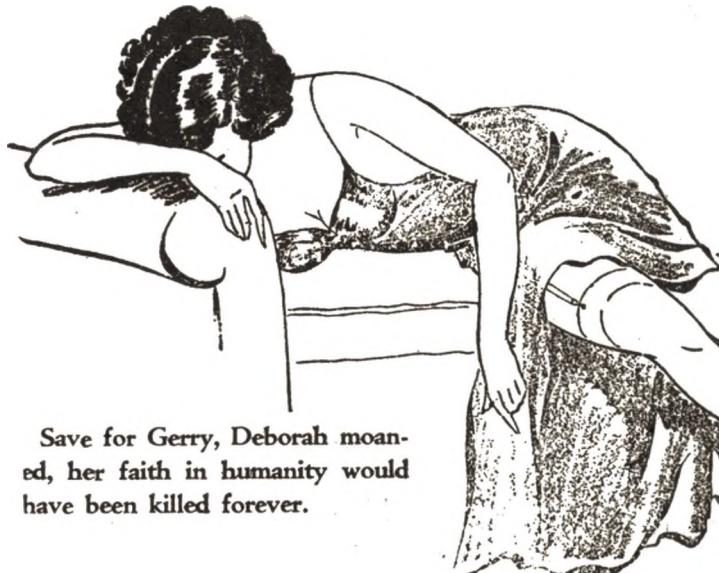
mediately."

"The world can wait, my little sweet! I shrink from display, from big goings-on. I want you all to myself at first. Away from here. Alone!"

Deborah nodded. "Anything you say, Hans," she whispered. "Oh, anything!"

\* \* \* \*

HANS WAS CRUSHING her to him then. He was no longer a stupid lover or a slow one. He was crying out against Deborah's lips, "I feel faint with this—Oh, my sweet—my sweet!"



Save for Gerry, Deborah moaned, her faith in humanity would have been killed forever.

love! You will bring the securities to me tomorrow night. I will give you a paper on ten-percent interest. But not one must know, my sweet. I could not stand the humiliation of having people know that my little bird who loves me helped me with anything so earthy and as detestable as money. All right, then tomorrow night we will go away!"

"To be married?"

"To be married, my sweet—what else would I offer you?"

"But, Hans, let's be married here. I feel so proud. I want the world to know im-

Gerry's fists gnarled at his sides. "I'll kill him!" he snorted to himself. And he started toward the opening in the French window. But a small cool hand caught his arm. "Control yourself, big boy!" said the voice.

Gerry swung around. Amy smiled up at him. "Fancy meeting you here," she said.

Gerry said, "I thought you were on an assignment. That's what the night editor told me."

"I was," said Amy. "But when I was through I—I got a hankering to look my love over again. I thought he'd be here. He



"If you want to kiss me—then kiss me!" she said, quickly.

was." And then she touched Gerry's arm, lightly. "Gerry," she said, softly, "do you still care so terribly? Do you?"

Gerry said, "Yes. I still care. It's driving me nuts. I—I wanted to kill that guy.

Or at least bash his square head in for him!"

Amy said, "Gerry, why not admit defeat? Why not—give up? They're crazy about each other. You heard them. You ought to know—now!"

Gerry said, "Yeah, I guess you're right." And then he said, on a wild impulse, "Amy, will you marry me? Tomorrow night. When Deborah is marrying the Baron?"

For a moment Amy didn't say anything. Then she looked up into his eyes; she smiled. "Okay feller. If you still want me tomorrow night! After all, you're in love with Deborah—and I—I still love that hand-kissing German, damn it all!"

\* \* \* \*

THE NEXT MORNING Gerry tried to work on his illustrations, he tried to eat something, he tried desperately not to think. Tonight Deborah would be Hans' wife; she would be legally his—and all hope would be gone. He slammed down his paint brushes, looked miserably at the picture he was doing of Deborah from memory and threw a velvet cloth over it.

With a groan he picked up the *Rensville Morning Star* and suddenly his eyes began to bulge. On the front page there was a picture of Deborah and of Hans. There was a story that told all about the big wedding that would take place at the Cathan estate tonight.

So Deborah had finally talked him out of a secret wedding. She would be married right here in town, with fan-fare, with trumpets blowing. It was almost more than Gerry could stand. He strode to the telephone, was about to lift the receiver off the hook to ask Amy to marry him instantly, to go away somewhere with him so he'd miss all that was said and written about Deborah's wedding.

But just as he was about to pick up the receiver, the telephone rang. It was Deborah and he knew right away that she'd been crying. "Gerry," she said, tragically, "can you come to me right away?"

"But, Deborah . . ."

"Oh, Gerry, are you going to fail me, too?"

"Too," said Gerry dumbly. But his heart began to pump. Then he said "Gee, no. Of course not. I'll be right over."

He went out and got in his car and drove like mad through the city. Deborah met him at the door. "Oh, Gerry, Gerry!" she cried out. "I knew I could count on you!"

Gerry took her hand respectfully, but she drew it away. "No, no, Gerry," she said. "Not my hand. Take my lips—quickly! Gerry, I'm yours—for always—and always. . . ."

\* \* \* \*

HER ARMS WENT around his shoulders. Gerry's world rocked on its foundations! Deborah!—kissing him! Wanting him back for always! He stood there trembling, waiting to fall to pieces with joy, with rapture.

For two months now, ever since Deborah had broken their engagement, he had stayed awake nights wondering what it would be like to hold Deborah against him again, to feel her lips clinging to his. And now he knew. He felt suddenly cold, a little sick. And he backed away from her grasping fingers.

"But listen, Deborah. The Baron . . ."

"He's gone," cried Deborah. "I called his office this morning . . . to tell him I was bringing over some securities he wanted. The nurse there said he had read the morning paper, had packed immediately and had left. By plane. Bag and baggage. He didn't even leave an address. I don't understand it Gerry. And who put that article in the paper? Could that have made Hans angry? He wanted a secret marriage. He wanted me to go away with him, to stay secretly married—for ages. Oh, I hate him, Gerry, I hate him. And when he comes back—if he ever does come back—

I want him to find me married to you! I'll show him! Oh, Gerry, never breathe his name to me again. I loathe him!"

Gerry's senses reeled. Here was Deborah throwing herself at him, begging him to marry her. And he didn't want her. He wanted Amy! And suddenly, a horrible thought came to him. The Baron was gone. Had he taken Amy with him? Had he realized that Amy was more important to him than Deborah or money or anything?

Gerry hardly felt it when Deborah sank gracefully down on the sofa, clinging to his hand. He hardly heard her crying out that the Baron had deceived her, tricked her, deluded her. Save for Gerry, Deborah moaned, her faith in humanity would have been killed forever.

In a sort of daze Gerry went on thinking about Amy. He did nothing about the lips that were straining up to his mouth.

\* \* \* \*

"BUT NOTHING matters," Deborah was cooing, "except that I have realized the truth in time—thanks to his perfidy and the lucky chance that revealed it to me! Whoever put that article in the paper saved me from a man who is probably—crazy! Only a crazy man could have walked out on me—and twenty-five thousand dollars!"

But now Gerry's senses had collected. He sprang off the sofa and started for the door. Amy! Where was Amy! Deborah raced after him.

"Gerry!" she cried. "You can't do this to me!" But Gerry, with a powerful back sweep of his arm, pushed her off, and dashed on his way.

\* \* \* \*

AMY WAS IN her office. A small, lovely, dark little Amy with a heart-shaped face. She was chewing thoughtfully on the end of a pencil when Gerry burst into her



The Baron was no longer a stupid lover or a slow one.

office. She looked up at him, smiled a little.

"Well, lambie pie," she said, "I had a hunch and it sure worked. Now calm down until you hear me through—and don't explode—please! You see, I felt Hans Von Wyck was a phoney. My newspaper nose scented it out, I guess. Anyhow, with the Morning Star behind me I found out that he has a wife in New York, that he had served two terms for bigamy, that he starts up practice in various cities as a doctor on forged credentials, gets a rich patient, pulls that aviation gag, takes the gal and her dough to another city and either lives with her in one of his secret marriages or leaves her—or both!"

"Nice guy, all right. I would have exposed him in The Morning Star today but I thought the publicity would chase him out of town anyway which it did and that Deborah would be spared too much humiliation. Not that she deserved it. But after all, I didn't want you to have too much damaged goods on your hands when you took her back. . . . "

Gerry was swallowing hard. "Amy, you mean you never loved that bogus Baron."

"I'll say I didn't. I never even had a date with him! That phoney, spatted, hand-

kissing 'Baron'—ugh!" And then Amy said, evenly, too carefully, "Well, I hope you and Deborah will be very happy, Gerry."

Gerry said, "Amy, I just came from Deborah. She wanted to marry me right away. This morning. But, Amy—Amy, darling. . . ."

Amy jumped up from behind her desk. Gerry saw that her whole body was trembling, that her hands were shaking absurdly. She said, "Gerry, you don't mean. . . ."

\* \* \* \*

SHE COULDN'T SAY any more. Gerry had slammed the door shut behind him, and with one long powerful stride he had snatched Amy from behind the desk. He had her in his arms and he was kissing her like a wild man. He was gasping for his breath, panting, nearly out of his head with this exquisite miracle.

And then Amy pushed back in his arms. "By golly," she said, in a choky voice, "everything sure comes to him who waits."

I've been waiting for something like this for three years, Gerald Lee. Ever since I first met you. And Gerry, I wasn't play-acting that night on the bench. I wasn't play-acting at any time—not where loving you was involved. Oh, Gerry!"

Gerry had her in his arms now, was carrying her swiftly and breathlessly across the room. "This small talk," he whispered through an ardent laugh, "can wait, my little bird!"

"Don't you 'my little bird' me, Gerald Lee!"

"I won't," laughed Gerry. "There's not going to be even a dash of Europe in this love-making. It is going to be one hundred percent American—and—" His voice choked off. With a groan of delight his mouth fastened down on hers.

THE END



# TOO MANY FRANCS

By SANDRA SYLVESTRE

**I**T WAS WHOLL FANTASTIC. It was incredible. Fifi Garronne was thoroughly upset and vexed. The moment Pierre Frolette was announced she darted from her boudoir to confront him, completely oblivious to the fact that she was clad only in a light gym suit.

An hour before, the bank had telephoned her and notified her that her account was overdrawn—unbelievably overdrawn. When she protested the impossibility of such a condition, they had volunteered to send Pierre Frolette to her apartment with documentary proof.

Now he had arrived; and Fifi faced him. "So!" she began aciduously. "You have the audacity to show your face here in my home, hein?"

That was another ironic thing to say. Because Pierre's face was quite worth showing. It was rugged, masculine and youthful. And besides, why shouldn't he show it?

His startled eyes traversed the luscious curves that were on display before him. There was no doubt about

it; Fifi possessed the most glorious figure in the world.

Added to which her features were adorably piquant and her hair flaming red. No wonder Pierre's heart began to turn somersaults as he gazed at her!

"Mais—but why should you be angry with me, Fifi?" he said gently.

\* \* \*

SHE DID NOT RESENT his use of her given name. After all, she had known him for years; ever since she was a little girl. They'd practically grown up together in Paris. And for the past several years he had been employed by the bank which administered her estate.

So she took no umbrage when he called her Fifi; but she most emphatically did blow up when she thought of his bank claiming that she was overdrawn.

"The idea!" she flung at him. "Just because you people make a mistake, you think to lay the blame upon me—and to balance your books by debiting my account! I shall not stand for it!"

**Fifi Was Indignant when the Handsome Bank Representative Came to See Her—Fifty Thousand Francs was a Lot of Money.**

He smiled pleasantly and took her by the hand. "Un moment, Fifi. Suppose you relax and allow me to explain the matter."

"I need no explanations! I demand that your error be certified immediately!"

"If there has been an error, it was yours cherie! not ours." He opened his brief-case. "Let me show you—"

"I do not care to see it" she stamped her tiny foot.

His eyes narrowed. He was only two years older than she; but he now assumed a grave, paternal air. "I insist that you pay attention," he told her evenly.

"Non!"

"Then I shall force you to look!" he said unexpectedly.

Whereupon he seized her around the waist and deliberately pressed her to the divan. He bounced her most ungallantly against the cushions and held her there for an imperious second.

\* \* \*

"SO," SHE GASPED at his effrontery. And strangely enough, a secret tingle skittered through her when he placed his hands upon her shoulder. He had never touched her before; and she was a little amazed at her own reaction. She resented the thrill that coursed through her veins. She decided to get thoroughly angry.

"How d-dare you!" she panted.

He smiled again.

"Forgive me. But this is a business matter of the utmost importance. I



She drew back out of his encircling arms. "I—I must leave," she said.

---

insist that you give heed." Then he perched himself alongside her, drew some cancelled vouchers from his brief-case, and spread them on his lap. In doing so, his fingers accidentally brushed her and again she experienced that queer, electrical tingle.

Once more she was vexed. But this time, her vexation arose from a different cause. Pierre was not even

looking at her. His attention was riveted upon the checks he had on display. What sort of person was he? His refusal to stare at her blandishments gave her a curious feeling of resentment.

A perfectly healthy resentment; because she knew she was attractive. Many men had looked admiringly at her when she was wearing far more raiment than now. Why, therefore, was Pierre so unnoticing?

She dismissed the matter and glanced down at the checks he was showing to her. He was saying: "Now, here is the one which wrecked your account. Perceive; it is for fifty thousand francs. Ma foi! What on earth possessed you to pay out such a huge sum? What did you purchase with it?"

She drew a sharp breath. "Fifty thousand francs? It is a forgery!" Then she examined her own signature and realized that it was quite genuine. A cold chill scurried down her spine.

"Why — why that check has been raised! It was originally for only fifty francs!"

Immediately Pierre sat bolt upright. He looked at the voucher. "Hmmm. Made to the order of one Raoul LeDeux. It would seem that he is a crook, hein?"

Fifi sprang to her feet. She trembled with indignation. "How dare you say a thing like that! Raoul is the man I'm going to marry! I merely loaned him fifty francs one day when he found himself temporarily out of funds. He has since repaid the loan! He would not stoop to so low as to raise my check."

"Mais—but here is the evidence."

Her blue eyes sparked fire. "Raoul is not guilty; He must have cashed it at some store, where the proprietor later raised the amount by adding those zeros! Come; we shall see about this immediatement!"

Pierre bowed. "As you wish, Fifi."

She flounced into her boudoir and donned a frock. Was he not a childhood friend? And moreover, had he not shown complete lack of interest a moment ago?

She was inwardly fuming because he was ignoring her almost completely instead of being intensely interested in her. And he was whistling!

That angered her to fury. She called out to him. "Pierre, come in here and hook my dress for me!"

He obeyed. But he paid her no petty compliments, nor did he try to steal a kiss. His lack of interest was beyond belief!

\* \* \*

LATER IN A TAXI, he said: "Tell me, Fifi— are you realy in love with this Raoul LeDeux?"

"Mais certainement! Have I not said that I plan to become his wife?"

"And you are quite sure his intentions are honorable? You believe him to be honest?"

"In every respect!" she retorted. Then she made a mental vow to prove just how much she did love Raoul. She would show Pierre a thing or two . . . !

But the queer part was that she really wasn't sure of her affection for Raoul LeDeux. True, his amorous technique left little to be desired. But did she really and truly care for him,



"So!" she snapped. "You have the audacity to show your face here in my home, Hein?"

or was it merely a passing infatuation? And for that matter, was Raoul really honest — or had he actually raised that check?

They reached Raoul's apartment. Raoul admitted them, his eyebrows raising interrogatively and a faint flush darkening his cheeks as he opened the door. "Why — why, Fifi!" he exclaimed.

She rushed into his arms and welded herself ardently against him, her crimson lips parted for his kiss. He responded with a little less ardor than she had anticipated; he seemed a bit uneasy.

But the effect of her frank display

of love-making was quite apparent on Pierre Frolette. He blushed when he saw the way in which Fifi wiggled in Raoul's embrace. He seemed decidedly upset by it.

THEN FIFI DISENGAGED herself from Raoul's arms.

"Permit me to introduce Monsieur Frolette from the bank," she said. Then: "He has discovered that one of my checks has been raised. A check which I made out to you, mon cher Raoul.

"It is a lie!" Raoul exclaimed, much too quickly.

Pierre held out the voucher. "See for yourself."

"Someone else raised it, then! I did not!" Raoul said.

Fifi smiled triumphantly. "There! you see, Pierre? I told you that my Raoul was completely innocent. Now do you believe?"

"Oui," Pierre nodded slowly. "The entire matter is an error, I suppose. Well, I must be going. Adieu." He turned and stalked out.

Alone with Raoul, Fifi lost her smile. "Raoul—are you really innocent?"

"Mais—but of course! How could you suspect me of such a thing?" He gathered her once more into his arms and commenced to kiss her ardently.

Curiously, Fifi found no pleasure in his amorous manifestation. She drew back out of his encircling arms.

"I—I must leave," she said. "I have a few errands to do."

He insisted upon kissing her, hotly and hungrily.

"I do not want you to go!" he said as he tried to draw her toward the easy chair at the other end of the room.

Now, she had been in that chair before; not once, but many times. But this time, she had a feeling that the thrills were all gone, never more to be regained. She could not quite understand it. But it was true nevertheless. So she pulled away. "N-not now," she whispered.

"Perhaps . . . some other time . . ." Then she ran from the apartment before he could restrain her.

\* \* \* \*

WHEN SHE REACHED her own flat, the telephone was ringing. It was the bank calling her. A smooth voice said: "Mille pardons, Mademoiselle Garronne, we have discovered a bookkeeping error in your account. A deposit of fifty thousand francs was made several days ago to cover that check. Please accept our sincerest apologies."

"It is quite all right," she answered. But a vast bewilderment was in her mind. How on earth could such a deposit have been made? It was even more fantastic than her own fifty thousand franc check. The entire affair made no sense at all!

The more she thought about it the more determined she became to ferret out the real truth. Some deep-seated feminine intuition began to tell her that Raoul LeDeux was at the bottom of the matter. The way he had acted — his furtive manner and his uneasy air — indicated something decidedly wrong. Fifi made up her mind to confront him and force the truth from him; make him explain exactly what had happened.

So she sallied forth once more to his apartment.

His front door was open, and she started to enter without knocking.

Then she froze. She heard Pierre Frolette's voice saying: "I know that you raised that check, Monsieur Le-Deux."

"If you are so sure, why did you not have me arrested?" Raoul sneered.

"Because I love Fifi with all my heart. And since she loves you, I could not bear to make her unhappy

by unmasking you as a thief."

"Oui? You are most kind."

"I am more than that. I am being generous with you. I have deposited fifty thousand francs of my own money to Fifi's account, in order to make the check good. I dated the deposit a week back. So everything is adjusted. And now, Monsieur, you are going to promise me that you will turn over a new leaf. You will be strictly honest from now on. Otherwise, I shall beat le diable out of you!!"



"Doesn't it matter?" she demanded. "Oh, look at me!" she ordered.

FIFI WAITED TO HEAR no more. She burst into the room. "So that is the way of it!" she cried out as she stared icily at Raoul. "You really did raise that check! You — you crook! I never want to see you again! T-take me home, Pierre!"

Raoul started to protest, but apparently thought better of it. He shrugged and sauntered away. He probably realized that he had overreached himself; that he had killed the goose of the golden eggs...

Meanwhile, Pierre took Fifi downstairs to her cab. He went to her apartment with her. In her living room, he shook his head sadly.

"I am sorry that you had to learn Raoul's true character. I had hoped to reform him, so that you could be happy with him. Helas . . . perhaps it is better this way. Your broken heart will mend in time."

"I have no broken heart!" she stormed. "I hate that man! I realize, now, that I never did really love him." Then she stole toward Pierre.

"T-tell me . . . why did you deposit that money to my account and try to cover up Raoul's crookedness?"

"I have already explained. I wanted to reform him, so that you could be happy with him."

"Oui. I understand that. But why were you so interested in my happiness?"

"Because—because . . . Well, it doesn't matter," he equivocated.

"Oh, does it not? Look at me," she commanded.

\* \* \*

HE OBEYED—and groaned weakly, "Fifi — please — why make it so tough for me?"

She pirouetted before him. "Do

you think me attractive?"

"You are tres Charmante — exquise — adorable—"

"That is what I wished to know." Her heart was thumping thunderously. "You are in love with me. That is why you wished to make me happy with Raoul."

"Oui. It is true. I have always loved you. . . ."

"Then why have you hesitated to tell me?"

"Because I—I was afraid you could not reciprocate."

Her eyes sparkled. "You might at least find out before you jump to conclusions."

He stared. "Do you mean—do you mean that you might learn to —care for me a little?"

She sighed. "You are the most stupid man I have ever met. You even fail to kiss me when you have the opportunity — when a mere gesture might—Oh, le diable! Get out! You make me tired!"

"I do, do I?" he said dangerously. He was beginning to understand that a bit of caveman tactics might be in order. He raised his voice. "Come here! At once! Do you hear me?"

"I w-won't!"

"Non? We shall see about that!" And he repeated his masterful performance of earlier that afternoon. He grabbed her. He slammed her down against the cushions of the chaise-longue. He pulled her cuddly form into his strong muscular arms.

"Pierre . . . Pierre, mon cher . . . it has taken us both so long to realize!" She whispered as her arms stole about his neck.

"Oui. But from now on, there will be nothing but . . . this, ma petite!"

— The End —

# BLIND DATE

By JOYCE LATTIMORE

**T**HIS DATE Jim Baker-Nevins had come to keep was, in his estimation, not only blind, it was cockeyed. In this day and age, elder brothers, Baker-Nevins scions notwithstanding, didn't thrust themselves and their mother's brides into their younger brothers' love offairs.

What if young Michael did want to marry a shopgirl? You couldn't tell one nowadays from a deb anyway. And judging from those who had served him from behind store counters, they were certainly a better mannered lot than the majority of society girls he knew.

But you could not argue with the Mater. In her opinion this affair was but another of Michael's wild escapades, and Jim, as usual, had been despatched to unravel any compromising entanglements.

Mike had threatened them with mayhem, mutilation and murder if they interfered in this case. But it had not fazed their mother who had manoeuvred Michael out of town, and phoned the girl for an appointment.

And now here was Jim anxiously pacing the sidewalk in front of the florist's shop where she was employed, fondly imagining his jaw to be set in grim lines, his blue eyes to be keen,

steely and skeptical, in obedience to his mother's admonition to be forbidding, firm and final. Actually he looked the very apprehensive if handsome young man that he was. He sincerely wished the evening was a thing of the past.

He had, of course, only his mother's mental image of the girl he had come to meet. A grasping blonde and hard as nails. With this picture in mind, Jim got the shock of his life, when the shop door opened and Janet Orscutt stood before him.

Her eyes, large, dark and far from hard, rested questioningly on his. The window light shafted down upon her so Jim got a full breathtaking view, from the foolish little brown velvet excuse-for-a-hat perched forward on her golden froth of curls, to the trim, toeless brown suede excuse-for-shoes on her shapely little feet.

As she waited for him to speak, there was taut alertness in each lovely curve of her body, softly outlined by the gold embroidered brown wool dress she was wearing. She looked like a dainty gold and brown butterfly poised for flight.

\* \* \*

THE ALOOFLY PATRONIZING words he had been rehearsing stuck in his throat. His tongue, when he

**Family Tradition Told Him His Brother Must Not Be  
Allowed to Marry the Shopgirl—Pretty Though She Was.**

could give it speech, felt strangely thick.

"Miss Orcutt? I'm Jim Baker-Nevins," was all he could manage. But he smiled at her, a smile that burst in warm radiance of its own volition, from the very pit of his heart. A smile connoting a most abject worship of her beauty.

Taken a little off guard by this unexpected warmth, Janet smiled in response and held out her small, brown-gloved hand. Jim clasped it eagerly

"This joint holds fond memories for me," she said, "It's here I picked up your brother."



and forgot to give it back.

"It was aw-awfully good of you to ag-agree to see me," he stammered. "You m-must think it ch-cheeky of me, I'm sure."

At his words Janet's faculties stiffened to attention again. Firmly she withdrew her hand.

"It's okay by me, Big Boy," she said pertly. "A girl has to expect her in-laws to give her the once over. Mike tells me you had him shanghaied to China last time he wanted to marry a working girl."

She rolled here eyes and sidled up to him. "So I gotta make a hit with you. Ain't it the truth, Big Boy?"

\* \* \*

JIM RECOILED LIKE a startled stag from the jarring colloquialisms, the hard nasal twang of her voice, in such complete contrast to her appearance. The effect was the same as if someone had attempted to jitter-swing an opera. His mother had been right, as usual. Only a hard-boiled female could have a voice like that. Still, she certainly was a beautiful eyeful.

"Well?" she asked brusquely, "Do we stand here gaping or do we feed our faces?"

"I beg your pardon," he murmured, flushing, and turned to hail a cab. "Where would you like to go?"

"Oh, to some big jazzy place where we c'n dance. I'm tired of the spoony hole and corner joints Michael takes me to, even if they do specialize on the eats."

"It's no doubt because he wants to be alone with you," Jim observed helping her into the cab.

She simpered unbecomingly. "Well, naturally. And the feeling's mutual, because we're sweethearts. But with

you I want plenty of light and music and a crowd."

"How about the La Paloma?" Jim asked stiffly.

He would have socked any one who might suggest that the emotion he felt at her words was just plain, gooseberry-green jealousy.

"The La Paloma's swell." She approved, and averted her head to look out of the window. Jim feasted his eyes on the lovely line of her chin and throat, on the dazzling skin, the exact cream-white of his treasured Celadon vases. She had full lips, he noted, soft and provocative, and of the same wild-rose tint as his porcelain Sung flower bowl.

"Oh, look!" she suddenly exclaimed, clutching his arm eagerly and thereby causing a detour of Jim's circulation. The cab had stopped for the traffic signal and she had spied a coat in one of the town's smartest shops. "That's the real McCoy," she breathed awesomely. "Chinchilla, and I betcha it's worth all of twenty thousand berries or more."

"That," she sighed sappily, "is the kind of souvenir Mike'll buy me when we're married. I priced one o' them coats the day after Mike proposed. My girl friend Molly married a big shot, too. She's always boasting about her mink. But I say phooey on mink. Every Tom, Dick and Harry's woman owns one. Me, I run to real class. The best or nothing. Otherwise I'd just as soon stay single."

"It's a major consideration I take it? In the scheme of love and marriage, etc.?" Jim asked coldly, doffing his hat mentally to his mother's superior wisdom.

"Why not?" Janet asked hotly. "If you happen to fall for a rich guy. The

Baker-Nevins are extra special people ain't they? Why shouldn't I plan to do 'em justice? I want Michael to be proud of his wife."

\* \* \*

JIM FELT A SOMEWHAT contemptuous pity for his gullible young brother. The girl was so obvious. But she was no mean mercenary. His mother's bribe of a few thousand dollars wasn't going to buy Mike's freedom from this entanglement. It required finesse to handle her and clever strategy to convince Mike of her unworthiness.

It was at this moment Jim had his inspiration. He had suddenly hit upon a definite plan of action. He would make love to her himself! He would convince her that Mike's allowance did not run to Chinchilla wraps. That he, Jim, as the eldest and heir to the Baker-Nevins' fortune would be the bigger catch.

It should not be difficult, and the prospect of making love to her was by no means obnoxious.

"I'd do more than that for my kid brother," he mentally avowed, actually believing himself on the verge of a noble sacrifice.

"Here we are!" he said gaily, as the car stopped before the pretentious restaurant, complete with major domo, obsequious head waiters, a circular bar, two swing orchestras and a five dollar cover charge. Jim heard her sigh as, tingling from the contact of her satiny elbow, he steered her into the place.

"This joint holds fond memories for me," she said. "It's here I picked up your bother."

Jim was shocked in spite of himself. "A pick-up was he?"

"Yeah—a literal one. He'd fallen

under his table plastered to the ears. —I picked him up, dusted him off and handed him over to his chauffeur.—Just a little girl scout. That's me."

"You were amply rewarded?" asked Jim, following the sleek maitre to a choice table.

"What d'ye mean?" she asked bridling.

"No offense, my dear," he said, seating her, himself, taking a keen delight in the perfect symmetry of the back of her neck.

"I only hope Mike showed his appreciation. How did he know where to find you again?"

"He never lost me," she said, an impish twinkle in her eyes. "I had his chauffeur drive him to my house, so I could fix him up. I didn't want his people to see him in that condition. Me, I was used to it. My old man often comes home like that."

"That was very considerate of you. One rarely finds consideration and perfect beauty traveling hand in hand," said Jim, going to work in real earnest.

\* \* \*

SUSPICION LURKED in the velvety depth of her eyes. "Say, Big Boy, what's your game anyway? I wasn't born yesterday."

"Not many yesterdays ago, at that," Jim said, grinning fatuously.

"I'm of age," she snapped, "and I know my way about. I know you did not make this date to pay me compliments. What's the dead weight on your mind?"

"I made this date to meet my future sister-in-law."

"To make sure she'd be a credit to the family? Does Mike have to get your okay to be married?"

"Not exactly, to both questions. I



"I won't apologize," he said forcefully, "because you kissed me too."

had just an older brother's anxiety as to your compatibility. You see, Mike's imagined himself in love before."

"Yeah and you hog-tied him and had him shipped to China.—I guess that's what society calls, 'playing cricket,'" she said scathingly.

"Mike isn't of age yet. That last girl wouldn't have been happy with him or he with her. And frankly, Miss Orcut, I don't think you and he are suited to each other either. You see, his income doesn't run to Chinchilla wraps."

She looked him steadily in the eye. "You are as subtle," she said coolly, "as a ton of bricks."

Jim let that pass. He noted with pleasure the pure gold lights in her long, sweeping lashes. If it were not for her unfortunate voice and diction . . . but that could be remedied. Bernard Shaw once wrote a play about a case worse than hers, who, after she had been coached, passed as a duchess at a royal reception. He rather fancied himself as a Pygmalion to her Galatea. Being an imaginative sort of a chap, he visioned himself with her as he coached her, alone in some mountain retreat. . . .

"Are they worth a penny?" she broke in.

"What?—oh, my thoughts. Well, yes—200,000 to be exact. I was considering how, most tactfully, to offer you that Chinchilla wrap."

"You could," she said calmly, "give it to me for a wedding present."

\* \* \*

SHE'S MORE THAN a match for me, he thought. "I could," he said aloud.

"Now we've ordered our dinner, how about dancing?" Jim did not re-

alize the voracious eagerness with which he folded her slim form into his arms. Hat, and golden head, both, fitted as if made for the spot, into the niche where his chest joined his broad shoulders.

"Mike tells me you're a collector," she said by way of conversation. "It gave me a shock at first. I thought he meant for an installment house or something. He explained you collect antiques and junk."

"Very beautiful junk," he smiled down at her. "I'm a slave to beauty, Miss Orcutt, I warn you."

"Why warn me? You can always kick a slave if he's a nuisance."

"Your kick would be a caress."

Really, Jim thought, when you got used to it, there was a musical timbre to her voice in spite of the nasal twang.

"It must be swell to've had a baron for an ancestor," she sighed. "So you can buy anything your heart desires."

"A baron?" leading her back to the table after the dance, "I'm afraid you've been misinformed."

Her eyes opened in innocent question. "Wasn't the first Baker-Nevins a beer baron?"

Jim surveyed her through suspiciously narrowed eyes. Wouldn't his mother be furious to hear such an observation. He felt amused, but a little annoyed, too.

"Yes, I suppose you could call my grandfather that," he admitted.

"Gee, I wish one of my ancestors had concentrated on beer instead of building roads, and schools and railroads and churches and junk like that."

"Indeed?" He grinned indulgently. The cute little thing was showing off

now. Giving herself a background, so to speak.

"Sure. Didn't Mike tell you?" she asked loftily. "Oh maybe I forgot to mention it to him.—Why, my folks raised this city from a pup. You wouldn't know of course bein' here only since your father was a boy. Me, I came from people been here six maybe seven generations."

\* \* \*

JIM CHUCKLED. The sweet little snob. His lips fairly ached to crush the lovely lying little mouth. She gave him a dazzling smile.

"Tell me about your toys," she urged. "What is it you collect? Pictures, knick-knacks and junk like that?"

"My latest piece of — junk is a Sung flower bowl."

"Sounds Greek to me. Speaking of bowls, I got a swell one at the five and dime store. It's blue with yellow, black and orange flowers. It's gorgeous! You'd never believe I paid only a dime for it."

Jim tried not to shudder. "My Sung is made of lacquered porcelain—fragile as an egg shell and the exact color of your lips."

Now Janet had her share of womanly instinct. She could recognize pure reverence when she heard it. So she led him on to talk of his treasures, and when she grasped his adoration of things beautiful but not necessarily valuable, her velvety eyes shone with a soft, indulgent light.

"I'd love to see them," she said quietly.

"I'd love to show them to you," he said sincerely. "I dare you to come home with me now — soon as we've finished our meal."

She stiffened again, then gave him

a gamin grin. "Why not? — Confidentially, I've been sore at Mike not askin' me to meet his old woman. I better get acquainted with the joint if I'm to live in it."

Jim frowned slightly. There was no doubt about it, he was decidedly not in favor of her marriage to his brother. And this time he was honest enough not to try to analyze the angry strength that lay behind his objections. In the cab she said lightly, "Well, brother Jim. Do I pass the examination? Are you taking me to meet the old lady — I mean your mother, because you approve of yours truly for little Michael?"

"I still don't think you're suited to each other," he answered stiffly. And my mother is dining out. I'm taking you to see my collection."

"You mean we will be alone?"

"Yes, except for the servants. But you needn't be afraid."

"Relax, brother. You sound like someone out of our old family album, way back."

"Seven generations back?" he asked sardonically.

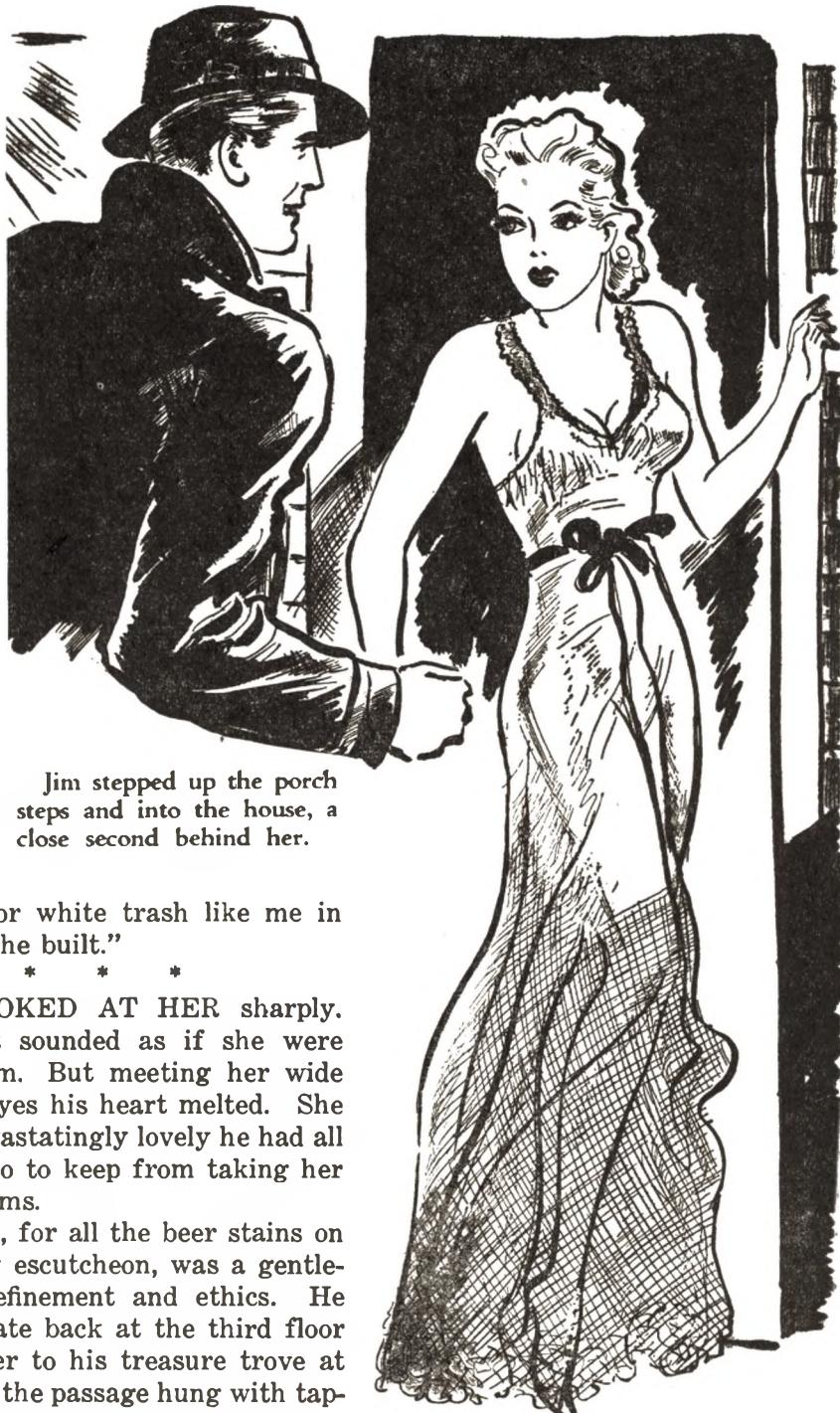
"No. They were a rough bunch. I'd say three," she said gravely. "The Victorian gang."

"Gangsters?" he couldn't resist saying.

"Don't you be funny," she snapped.

"Sorry. Here we are." The cab had driven through the high wrought iron gateway, up the broad drive to the spacious Colonial house situated high up on the huge, tree shaded estate. Inside, he led her to the self-service elevator to the right of the great, red carpeted marble stairway.

"Gee!" she breathed. "I hope the 'baron' doesn't turn in his grave at



Jim stepped up the porch steps and into the house, a close second behind her.

having poor white trash like me in the house he built."

\* \* \*

HE LOOKED AT HER sharply. Almost, it sounded as if she were guying him. But meeting her wide innocent eyes his heart melted. She was so devastatingly lovely he had all he could do to keep from taking her into his arms.

But Jim, for all the beer stains on the family escutcheon, was a gentleman of refinement and ethics. He slid the gate back at the third floor and led her to his treasure trove at the end of the passage hung with tapestries and portraits of the "baron's" family.

Janet grew strangely silent as he

showed her one well filled crystal cabinet after another. Once he saw her remove her glove and close her eyes as she gently stroked his precious lacquered Celadon water jug. The girl had real sensitivity for objects of quality. If he had not already been more than half in love with her, this in itself, would be a powerful magnet.

It was over the near-catastrophe to the green-blue Ming vase that their hands met by accident. Jim's brain commenced to shoot little sparks in his head and the Ming vase stood a very good chance of meeting its maker, as it, and the girl holding it, were seized roughly into his arms. About ten vibrant seconds and as many kisses later, Janet managed to free herself. But she sat down quickly to steady the trembling of her limbs. Jim's rather nice jaw looked really grim.

"I won't apologize," he said forcefully, "because you kissed me too, in spite of yourself — you can see we were meant for each other — I felt it the moment I met you — Mike can't have you—I defy you to look me in the eye and tell me you love him and not me!"

Janet got up cautiously, carefully setting the vase in its nook.

"I've got to go home," she said, her voice breaking. And then she slid past his reaching arms, and running down the passage, slammed the elevator gate and descended.

Jim had not been a football captain at college for nothing. He sprinted down the marble staircase, out of the house, across the grounds to the street, and managed to jump into the cab she had taken, just as it started.

"I'm disappointed in you," he pant-

ed. "I'd never have thought you were the kind of girl to turn yellow in the face of an honest question. I asked you if you loved Mike or me, and you started to run away, you — beautiful coward."

She shrank to the far edge of the seat, refusing to look at him. When the car stopped before the sprawling ivy-covered house badly in need of paint, she sprang out lightly and swiftly slammed the door.

"You mustn't come in, Mr. Nevins. Grandad wouldn't like it. I expect you'll have Mike shanghaied, now you've met me. Well, Okay if you do —Goodbye."

\* \* \*

JIM SIMPLY PAID the fare and stalked up the porch steps and into the house, a close second behind her. Inside the shabby living room he was about to take her masterfully by the shoulders when his expert eye was caught by the exquisite taste of the room's furnishings.

Everything, although worn thin, was of the best. Looking about him appreciatively Jim gave a low whistle and clutched Janet's arm.

"Say! That cabinet over there! That's a real Sheraton or I'll eat sawdust. And Crickie! Those blue plates on the top shelves! May I look? —!" He strode to the cabinet, took one out, held it to the light, read the faded inscription on the back and reverently put it away.

"Do you realize, young woman, you have some genuine antiques worth a small fortune in these pieces?"

"And why shouldn't she?" came a crotchety old voice from the doorway.

"They've been in our family over a hundred years."

The white haired old man furiously propelling himself in on a wheel chair was every inch an aristocrat if ever he saw one. Jim's jaw dropped as he looked from him to the mischievously smiling girl.

"Grandfather, this gentleman is Michael's elder brother." Jim's eyes nearly fell out. Her voice was suddenly sweet, clear, and beautifully modulated. The nasal twang was conspicuous by its complete absence. The telephone bell rang and she went to answer it.

"Listen to me, young man," the old man said irately. "You keep that good for nothing cub of a beer brewer's son away from here. Do you understand?—I hope my daughter made it clear to you I forbid any such alliance —We Orcutts—."

"Oh grandad — grandad!" Janet pleaded. "They've done it, dear. Please be calm — it's too late to do anything about it — they've eloped. Alice wants to talk to you on the phone — Please be sweet about it, grandfather."

"I'll tell her what I—" his voice quavered angrily as he wheeled himself out into the hall.

"Alice?" Jim gasped stupidly. — "Aren't you Alice Orcutt, the girl Mike wanted to—" She shook her head.

"I'm her sister Janet. I got your mother's phone call at the shop. You see I own it, and I thought it would be a good idea if I met you instead of Alice and disgusted you to such an extent, you'd have Mike shanghaied again, so he wouldn't marry Alice. I



"And why shouldn't she?" came a crochety old voice from the doorway.

guess they're very much in love to defy gandad like this."

"I'll teach him and you," Jim said sternly, "to mind your own business in the future."

"The same to you Mr. Nevins. It was not your idea to make a blind date with me tonight. Was it?"

"It wasn't—but it is—now. Isn't it —darling?"

Her answer though muffled by his lips was apparently satisfactorily, judging by the scene that followed.

Old Mr. Orcutt when he caught sight of them, chuckled softly. These two girls, bless them, had sworn to stay single for the remainder of his life. He had had to pretend to be very angry and against the betrothal, to force Alice into one. Being chips off the old block, they were contrary little monkeys with plenty of spirit. Now Janet, too. . . . He glowed with divine old wisdom.

"Great grandchildren about the old house will be nice," he thought. . . .

# ADVENTURE IN LONDON

By SACKVILLE STONE

**M**R. SEPTIMUS RATCLIFF alighted from the bus at Grange Corner, paused just long enough to smirk at his reflection in the plate glass window of a millinery store, and then with a crafty smile, refreshed his memory by looking at a slim bundle of letters that he took from a pocket wallet.

"Number 27, Acacia Road," he muttered. His pale, prominent eyes glinted. "And Mr. Percy Halstead is some lad, I reckon, by these letters. Week-ends in Paris, a house-boat at Maidenhead—he won't miss a couple of hundred pounds for my— hrrmm—for my cooperation."

He grinned to himself at the sly allusion. Mr. Septimus Ratcliff imagined that he had a pretty wit. The only cooperation that he could offer was his silence, and, by the tone of the letters, that needed asbestos wrappings it would be cheap at two hundred pounds.

He reached No. 27 Acacia Road. With approval he noted the quiet luxury of the surroundings. There was a garage by the side, and he could see the glittering rear of an expensive limousine. A man of substance, this Percy Halstead, as well as having a pretty taste in amorous ladies.

A bell trilled somewhere inside the house as he pressed the button. Mr. Ratcliff pushed back his bowler hat and gave an ingra-

tiating smile as a maid in snowy cap and apron opened the door.

"Mr. Halstead? He's expecting me," he said. He put one foot across the threshold in a persuasive manner. "Ratcliff is my name—Mr. Septimus Ratcliff."

"Will you come this way, please."

\* \* \*

MR. RATCLIFF SMIRKED AGAIN. Show'em that you wouldn't stand any nonsense—that was the way.

Mr. Halstead evidently had given orders for him to be admitted immediately. Scared stiff, no doubt, after that discreet message over the phone, and Septimus immediately advanced the figure to two hundred and fifty.

It was a room of quiet luxury into which he was shown. A huge Chinese screen was reared in one corner—Mr. Septimus Ratcliff always had a suspicion of screens. He was tiptoeing cautiously towards it when the door opened again and he swung around.

"Aha so you're the blackmailer, eh?"

Mr. Ratcliff's thin, rat-like face flushed. He didn't like the expression—it was common and vulgar. Besides, this man, this Percy Halstead, Casanova of Acacia Drive, should by rights be cringing and suppliant. He didn't like this hearty, well-fed, pros-

**Blackmail Was in His Heart—He had the Letters and  
He Had a Price for Them Too.**

perous-looking creature. He'd call his bluff, soon enough.

"My name," he said with a certain dignity, "is Ratcliff—Mr. Septimus Ratcliff. I phoned you up about a certain matter—"

"Don't be so devilishly formal, man. It doesn't suit you. You're a horrible little rat and you look like one—"

"If we're calling each other names, perhaps I can start," Mr. Ratcliff snarled, stung out of his smugness.

"Would you like me to start with those that 'your own sweet Kitty' wrote to you. 'My own precious lambkin' and—'"

"So you did get hold of the letters, eh?" Mr. Halstead's full, pinkish face went a little harder. "I thought you were bluffing. You must have picked my pocket, you thieving little skunk."

"It makes no difference to you where I found your wallet," Septimus said, unashamed. The price was still mounting in his mind; Mr. Percy Halstead would find those hard names expensive, he thought.

"I've got'em. Would you like me to read one out to you?"

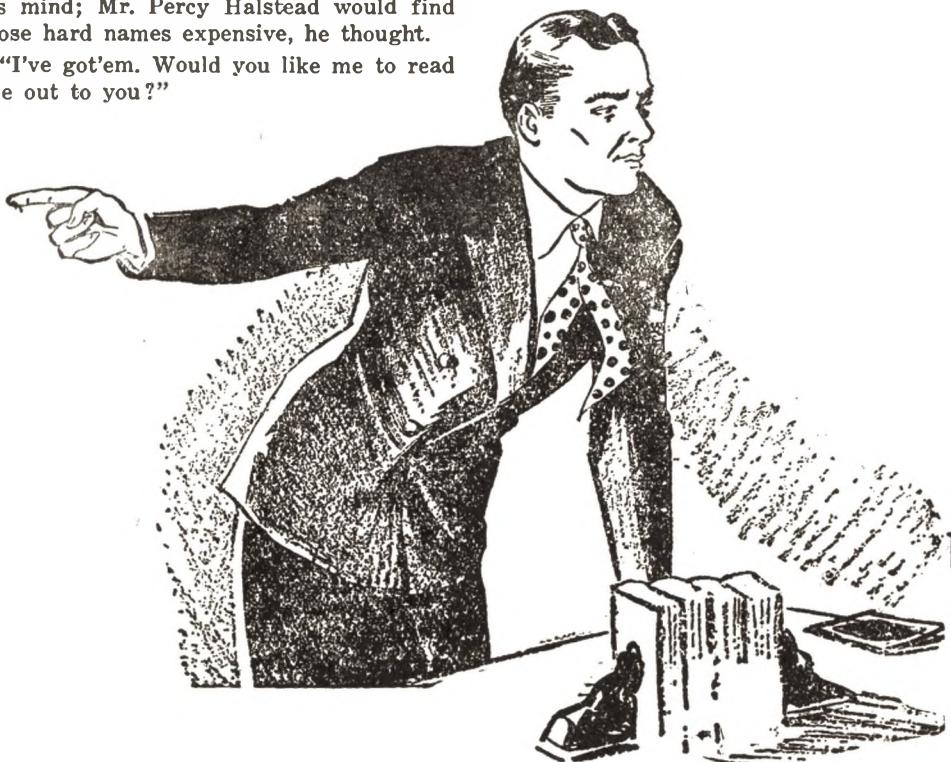
WITHOUT WAITING FOR AN ANSWER, he took one of the letters from his pocket. He kept a healthy distance from the beefy man as he read extracts from the perfumed letter.

" . . . of course, my pet, we must be discreet. But how can I be, when I want to shout the happiness of our love from the housetops. The heavenly weekend in Paris, my darling—"

"Damn you!" Mr. Halstead made a grab, but Septimus was rat-like in his squirming agility.

"It won't pay you to be rough," he said reprovingly. "Would you prefer the home product? That description of another heavenly week-end at Maidenhead, whilst your wife was visiting relations in Scotland? Or that little cottage in Buckinghamshire—?"

"You seem to know everything, my rat-like friend." Mr. Halstead had recovered



"If we're calling each other names, perhaps I can start," Mr. Ratcliff snarled, stung out of his smugness.

himself now. "You have a price of course?"

"Certainly not," Septimus said with dignity. "If you—hrrm—if you care to make me a present of two hundred and sixty pounds, I shall be happy to assist you to burn those letters. A mutual arrangement—"

"But still blackmail. An ugly word, my dear Septimus. You're running a big risk."

But not so big as you are, if you don't cough up," Septimus snapped, with a regrettable lapse into the vernacular. "You'd look a fool if those letters were read in court, Mr. Percy Clark Gable Halstead."

"Hrrm—just so." With quiet deliberation, the large, pink-faced man lit a cigarette. "So you stand by your decision. You want, I think you said, two hundred and sixty pounds for those letters?"

"That's it. And worth it, every penny."

"Thank you." He looked towards the large screen. "You can come out now, Mr. Burton.

\* \* \*

SEPTIMUS RATCLIFF BACKED AWAY towards the door as thin, spare, hard-faced man pushed the Chinese screen aside. There was an air of authority about him, and the blood drained from the little crook's face.

"So you got a 'tec in, did you?" he said throatily. "It won't do you any good, Mr. Bloomin' Halstead—"

"Indeed?" Percy Halstead smiled. "Detective-Sergeant Burton—perhaps you'll be good enough to take those letters from his

pocket. They'll be needed as evidence — ah, thank you. And now, little rat-face . . ."

"I'll shout your blurry name out in dock. I'll show you up—"

"You don't keep up with the times, dear lad," Mr. Halstead smiled. "You really should study the Sunday newspapers. The divorce that you were so anxious for me to avoid has gone through—the charming but descreet Kitty was the co-respondent. Letters similar to those were used as evidence—"

"Oh—hell!"

His cunning little eyes were busy.

The detective was tying the letters into a bundle, and Percy Halstead was walking toward the window. Septimus Ratcliff trembled. The next moment he dragged open the door. He expected every moment to feel a hand on his shoulder, as he pounded down the passage, but he reached the street and scurried along it like the rat he was.

And, from the window of No. 27, Mr. Percy Halstead watched him go. He laughed until his pink cheeks shook, and then he took the letters from the other man's hand pushed them into the glowing fire.

"It's a blessing, Burton," he said, "That apart from being a very good and discreet chauffeur, you look exactly like a Scotland Yard man. It's a pity for Septimus, too, that he didn't notice the letters were dated barely a month ago. Help yourself to a drink, Burton. And then I think it's time for you to fetch Mrs. Halstead from the orgy of shopping I sent her on—don't you agree, Burton?"



# TELLERS DON'T TELL

By ELLA JASON

**T**HE GIRL IN BLUE, just inside the doorway, was exceedingly pretty.

The cornflower blue of her clothing was the exact shade of her deepset eyes. Her hair was a warm sunny gold. Her skin had the lush tinting of peach ice-cream.

But it was all lost upon Henry Barker, seated but a few yards away. He sat behind his bars unseeing and apprehensive. If they had been cell bars in a penitentiary, instead of merely those of his paying teller's cage in the bank, he could not have been feeling more imprisoned or resentful.

Yet no one on either the right or wrong side of the bars would suspect him of these emotions. For Henry, who hid an overwhelming slyness behind an infectious grin and a pair of horn rimmed glasses, was a diligent young man of an even disposition, who was perfectly content at the bank and enjoyed his job.

Townfolk who had known him from the day he had come into the world, considered Henry more or less of a nonentity. Henry, they said, was a steady going, nice boy, but he'd never set a heart or town afire . . .

Henry would have been the first to agree

with them. He had no ambition to set anything afire, emphatically not a girl. His childhood experience with Patricia Paine, a next-door neighbor, had caused him to shy clear of girls. She, in his estimation, had been a fair example of the very unfair sex. A sex who sold you out, double crossed you, kicked you when you were down, squealed when you did wrong. A sex, in short, to be avoided like a germ.

Patricia Paine, the "pain-in-the-neck" of his early teens, had been responsible for his resolution to remain a bachelor. And Patricia Paine who was providing the bane of his life, was the person directly responsible for his present discomfiture.

After ten years of her blessed absence from town, she was returning to Fenimore on a visit. And his own mother, the one woman he had trusted, had proved his betrayer. She it was who had answered a letter from "Pain-in-the-neck" Patricia, with an invitation to visit during the Christmas vacation. And as if this were not bad enough, they were both arriving here at the bank, at the 3 o'clock closing hour today, to cart him off to a tea party being given somewhere, in her honor.

**What Was That Girl Doing Among the Bank Robbers? The Young Bank Teller Was Puzzled.**

To be plunged even for an hour, into a hornet's nest of women, with Patricia as queen hornet, was Henry's idea of punishment incarnate. He would much prefer a year in prison.

\* \* \*

HE CAST A NERVOUS glance down through the bars leading into the other tellers' cages, and shuddered a little, anticipating their derisive smirks when they saw him walking out between his mother and that—creature.

It was ten years since he'd last seen her, but he remembered her as clearly as a nightmare. A freckle-faced red-head, shaped like a butter tub and with a voice like a hen cackle.

It seemed only yesterday she was forever popping up beside him, when he wanted to join the other fellows at baseball or for a swim or a thrilling game of "cops 'n' robbers" "Henereee!" she would screech, so all his playmates would hear, "your Ma said for

you to take me along with or you'll catch it when you get home!"

Just because Patricia was motherless and his mother had taken a maternal interest in the "poor little lamb," Henry had been burdened with her during every waking leisure hour. What a relief it had been when her father had married again and they had left town.

But here she was, popping up again like a bad penny. For a whole month he would have to suffer her under his feet in his own home. His mother would be sweetly forcing the girl on all their friends, and he would be doomed to the role of nightly escort.

He had never had a girl call for him at the bank before. The other fellows did, and often. Smart looking, wise-cracking, pretty girls they were, too. And now to have them see his first caller, a red-headed butter tub, and chaperoned by his mother.



Henry was an ardent movie fan and in the movies there was always a quick-thinking, quick punching hero.

Just as if he were incapable of taking the creature to the party by himself.

\* \* \*

His FELLOW WORKERS teased him enough as it was. He knew they felt a certain contempt for him because he preferred an evening in the gym at the "Y" to joy riding with girls. Often his fist had itched to contact their smug jaws. Someday — he thought belligerently . . .

And then, a minute or two before 3 o'clock closing time, he noticed the girl in blue standing in the doorway. Not the girl so much, as the small band of vicious looking men who had just joined her.

Henry Barker, the hen-pecked martyr, suddenly became immersed in the forceful personality of Henry Barker, a trustee of the bank's wealth. Every nerve in his taut, athletic body clamored in alarm. It had never happened during his two years in the bank, but he knew, just a surely as if they had announced the fact, that the gang in a huddle in the doorway, was about to stage a hold-up.

It was an old bank with antedated fixtures, equipped with only an old fashioned burglar alarm located under the cashier's desk at the other end of the floor. Swiftly as Henry's brain started functioning, the gang was ahead of him in action. He dared not call a warning to his colleagues and thereby run the risk of a hysterical stampede — so, with one eye on the cautiously manoeuvering thugs, he let himself as unostentatiously as possible, out of his cage, and sauntered casually in the direction of the alarm, when one of the men accompanied by the girl in blue, stopped him.

"Get back in there," he muttered, pressing a wicked looking gun into Henry's ribs.

Henry started to obey when his quick

eyes noted that the other members of the gang, were spreading fan-wise through the bank, before the tellers' windows, the executives' private office doorways. One had reached the cashier's desk, too quick for the latter to touch off the alarm. Two other men were herding the clients together.

Now Henry was an ardent movie fan. Never a gangster picture he had not sat through twice. Scenes such as this one, had often graced the silver screen. And always, there had been a quick thinking, quick acting, quick punching hero in the offing. An overwhelming desire to emulate such a hero, took possession of him. An elation he had never experienced, coursed through his veins. It was almost automatically, therefore, as if he was obeying a cue, that Henry went into action.

"Hey!" he loudly whispered to his jailer, "one of your pals over there seems to be in trouble."

Just as some part of his brain had foreseen, the man darted a quick glance over his shoulder, thereby setting his head at the precise angle for one of Henry's "Y"-trained punches. He dropped like a sack of meal. Henry stooped for his gun. But the lady thug in blue, preceded him by a split second.

\* \* \*

AS HAS ALREADY been stated, Henry was no respecter of the "unfair" sex. And this female was a crook besides, a gunman's moll, and with the gun in her hand. The unusual elation was still riding high. His fist shot out again. Henry Barker had struck a woman!

But the moment his hard fist had crashed against that soft cheek, causing her body to sag against his chest, all the elation oozed from him. The peach tints of her complexion had faded to an alarming white.



He knew that a hold-up was about to be staged.

The golden lashes lay like tired butterfly's wings against her rounded cheeks. Something caught in his throat. She was—awfully young, and—awfully little, he thought. And—golly—pretty. And he had knocked her out. Gosh!

He sent a quick look over her head, towards the others in the room. Fortunately all the gangsters were busy with their own charges. One of them was ordering the cashier to open the vault. There wasn't much time to lose. And here he was burdened with an unconscious girl.

Still, he couldn't just drop her and go tackle the gang single-handed. True, she was a crook, but her youth and helplessness made it impossible to leave her. Unceremoniously, he caught her up, football fashion, under one arm. Holding the gun he had taken from her in his free hand, he made a dash to the rear of the bank behind the teller's cages, to the cellar stairs. Down he ran, locking the cellar door behind him.

He laid the girl on a pile of sacking, then let himself out of the cellar window that gave onto an alley-way. Carefully fastening the window on the outside, so she couldn't get out, he raced down the alley to the drugstore at the street corner phoned the police and then stood watching the closed and blinded bank entrance, his hand on the gun now hidden in his pocket, until they arrived, just as the thugs were making their get-away with the loot

\* \* \*

ELATION SOARED once more, Henry took active part in their capture, brandishing his gun ominously as he and the police herded them back in to the building, where his fellow workers and bosses were struggling in most undignified positions, with the binding rope and muting gags.

"Here, you poor mugs, let me help you," he said patronizingly to the other tellers, in much the same tone they frequently used towards him.

"What a bunch of softies you are, letting a few comic-valentine thugs scare you like this."

Everybody gaped, the tellers, the cashier, the executives, the police.

"Are you the guy that phoned us?" the Captain in charge of the latter wanted to know.

"Right," he answered curtly, and before the most loquacious of the executives could find his voice, Henry gave a concise report of the hold-up. In another few minutes the police and their captives had departed.

"Well, gentlemen," Henry said nonchalantly, "it's quitting time." And moved calmly towards the wash-room. At last the others had found their voices.

"Good old Henry!—Stout fella!—Good work, Barker!—You've got nerve, young fellow!—The lad's got his head screwed on right!" came in loud accord, from the bank president, down.

There was much back slapping and hand shaking, followed by a plethora of invitations to "come out and have a drink."

The invitations recalled Henry to his tea party engagement. Visibly he dropped, like a morning glory after sundown. With only a poor attempt of his erstwhile cool manner, he managed to get away. If he hurried out of the building, he might be able to get his women folk out of sight before the fellows had caught a glimpse of Pain-in-the-Neck. She would be enough to puncture any man's distinction.

\* \* \*

AS HE APPROACHED the front entrance cautiously, he noted with relief, his mother and the girl had not as yet arrived. For the first time in his harassed young life, he gave thanks for his mother's habitual unpunctuality. Outside, slowly pacing the street, he remembered suddenly, the girl he had locked in the cellar. He darted down the alley way, unfastened the small window, and let himself in.

She came at him like an infuriated little

terrier, before his feet touched the cellar floor.

"You beast. What do you mean by locking me in this dirty hole?"

Her eyes, the same cornflower blue of her coat and hat, flashed angrily as she came up close. "You—you struck me—you . . . ."

Further words failed her. And so, womanlike, she struck him. She was about to repeat the performance, but he caught both of her hands in one of his, and grinned down at her in spite of himself.

She was like the rest of her sex, ruthless, unreasonable. But she was so darned—little. She was so dashed—pretty in spite of the dirty smudges on her nose and forehead.

Why, he thought, with her cheeks red like that, her eyes shining, her gold hair dishevelled, she was almost beautiful—for a girl.

"Your face is dirty," he told her. He had to say something to try to calm her and it was the first thing that came to his now slightly atrophied brain. To his surprise it worked. She not only calmed down, she began to cry. Softly, heartbrokenly. His heart dissolved like a lump of sugar in water.

"You needn't be afraid," he croaked gently. "Your confederates have been arrested, but I didn't say anything about you. Come on, I'll help you out of the window. Better not go up the stairs. There're a couple of detectives still hanging around."

She quieted down at once. Stood very still for a moment. Then she dried her eyes with the handkerchief he held out to her; held her flower-like face up to him to wipe off the smudges; meekly allowed him to lift her through the window.

\* \* \*

SHE DID NOT WEIGH much he observed, but what there was of her, was beautifully

proportioned. She was a sweet armful. Henry experienced a moment of what he did not admit was regret, when he had to release her. In the alleyway she started to move quickly away after breathlessly thanking him. But he impulsively stopped her.

"Look," he gulped, "maybe you'd better let me see if the coast is clear first." What he really wanted to see, was whether his mother and Patricia were loitering about. He had suddenly decided to stand them up. This poor kid needed his help even if she didn't realize it herself. The hold-up would serve as an alibi when he got home later.

The "coast" being clear, he beckoned to her, took her firmly by the elbow and steered her across the street into a restaurant. She drew back.

"I—I don't want to eat. I'm not hungry—"

"Have something to drink then," he said curtly. "I want to talk to you."

After giving their orders, he removed his glasses, regarding her gravely. She looked a little startled by the change in

him, for Henry without the glasses, was a quite handsome Henry, showing to better advantage a fine brow and attractive pair of slate grey eyes, which at the moment were all but devouring the beautiful contours of her face and figure.

"How on earth did a girl like you ever get in with a gang like that?" he asked wonderingly.

"You're very blunt," she said, sitting stiffly erect. "How do you suppose I got in with them?"

"By force of circumstance. Surely?" he said hopefully. Not of course, that it mattered to him. . . .

"Yes," she admitted. "It was certainly force of circumstance."

"Do you want to tell me about it?" he asked kindly. "I'd like to—help."

"That's very generous of you," she said in a very small voice. "But how can a gen-



"How on earth did a girl like you ever get in with a gang like that?" he asked.

tleman in your position—a banker—help me?

\* \* \*

THERE AND THEN, ambition such as had never existed, entered Henry's being. He may only be a teller now, at the age of 23, earning a mere \$22.50 a week. But he would be a banker, by gum, before he reached 30. Tomorrow, first thing, he would ask for an advance in pay. After this afternoon's experience—

"I said," she was repeating in not quite so small a voice, "How do you propose to help a girl like me?"

"Why, I'll—" he floundered helplessly. Just what did he propose to do for her? What could he do?

"I'll—well, I guess," he ended lamely, "I'd better take you home to my mother. She'll know what to do."

"Just a minute," the moll tinkled, "will your mother approve? How do you know she won't turn me over to the police?"

"She won't and I don't," Henry said, and stopped as if that were the extent of his vocabulary. The gun-girl helped him out. "Who is your mother — a society leader?"

"Well—" Henry wanted to be fair, but the picture of his mother's intention to inflict the Pain-in-the-Neck on him, at the bank, in front of his colleagues, was still large in his mind. "Well — she is a good

soul, but today I look on her with jaundiced eyes. She was about to inflict a childhood pest on me, Pain-in-the-Neck Patricia. She—"

The gunman's moll laughed a low, tinkling laugh, which bubbled in her throat in a way that fired Henry's blood. He wanted to take her in his arms. But he resented her amusement when he felt so serious.

"Stop right there," she chortled, "before you spoil the good impressions you've been making."

Henry's heart leaped. So he was making a good impression!

"I'm Patricia Paine," the vision said. "I was just coming into the bank for you when those thugs followed me in. I'd no intention of using the gun against you, I was going to help you when you clouted me."

She looked beautiful as she explained things to Henry who stood, no longer the conquering hero, sputtering like a fish. He wanted again to take her in his arms.

"You see, your mother went on ahead and I came to pick you up. I certainly didn't expect to be involved in a hold-up, beaten up and locked up."

Henry woke up. "Since you're on this 'up' motif," he said, "I'm going to lift you up." And he gathered the lovely Patricia into his arms, her feet clear of the ground.

"Things are looking up," he murmured as he kissed her.



# GHOST LOVER

By LORENZ AUGUSTINE

**S**HE WAS STANDING at the foot of the bed and smiling and it was the first time I had seen her smile. And it was the first time that I could see all of her, her whole body instead of just the head. For a long time I stared at her, looked at her standing there in the dim light and waiting for me to say something.

This was a dream, of course, like the others, I told myself, only in the other dreams I always saw just her face, white and cold and dead and covered with blood.

Night after night I would see that face, would stare at it for a long time and then it would fade out of my dream.

Once I even saw the accident happen all over again. As if watching a newsreel I saw the car hit the soft shoulder on the road, turn over and over, then that dead silence and somehow Paul and myself were standing by the car, dazed and pale, and we both struggled to pull her out of the wreck and then her face, so pretty and fine, so white and red with blood.

And now I stared at her and felt myself growing cold and panicky as

I noticed that she had on the same green sweater and skirt as when we went on that ride last year. Suddenly she said: "Aren't you going to say hello to an old friend?"

It was her voice, her odd excited little voice, and I could feel my body trembling.

Before, in all the other dreams, I had been cold and told myself that it was only the sub-conscious at work and all that. But now her voice was alive and real and I was afraid. I don't know why I was afraid, I should have been happy to have her back again, to even see her, but I shook with fear and finally managed to stammer: "Hello, Louise," and my voice was lost in the dark bedroom.

"Are you frightened?"

"A little," I said. "I've dreamt about you every night, only then you were . . . well, now you're alive and pretty, and it's almost like old times."

\* \* \*

I SMILED AT HER and I felt all right again. The sound of my own voice seemed to comfort me.

**She had Been Killed in an Auto Crash, But He Awoke to Find Her in His Room, Talking to Him, Kissing Him . . .**

She nodded and came closer. "May I sit down?"

I laughed and motioned to a chair. In a dream you don't have to get up and bring the chair over to your dream lady. She sat down and we stared at each other and I never thought that she looked so beautiful, so slender and youthful. Her long limbs, the soft contours of her figure, her hair, all seemed alive and warm.

She said: "I've been trying to see you for such a long time. You've changed, your face seems older and worried. Did you take it so hard?"

"Yes. We both did, Paul and I. You were his girl and I guess he had a right to take it hard. As for me, well, you were always my girl too, even if you didn't know it."

"I was never sure of it," she said leaning towards me. "You always seemed so cold, full of the big brother stuff."

"That big brother act was damned hard to play. You see I knew I never had a chance and I didn't want to break up our friendship. I couldn't afford to lose even those few moments when you leaned against me, when I could feel your soft hair on my cheek, hold your hand, dance with you. And then when you were gone . . . I don't know what's happened to me this past year. I just couldn't drink it off the way Paul did, I lie here at night and think of you and sometimes I bawl like a kid. And sometimes I think that now you're as much my girl as Paul's and that I'll always have you and things like that. Maybe I'm a little off, I don't know."

"Then it gets me in other ways. I'm walking the streets, or I'm in the

office and I see a girl with a green sweater on, like the one you have on, or I suddenly remember your funny voice and your warm laughter, and then I feel myself growing sick, my insides seem to be turning over. And . . . that's the way I feel about you."

I stopped and just stared at her.

For a long time we just looked at each other, and her eyes were soft and wet and I saw that she was crying and I sat up and said, "Darling, please don't cry. I see so little of you; I want to see you laughing and happy."

\* \* \*

SHE STOOD UP and came over and sat down on the edge of the bed and the bed sagged and then she said: "My poor dear," and stroked my face and her hand was alive and warm. She had been dead for a year and yet she was sitting on my bed and the bed had sagged and her hand was alive and warm and soft.

I wanted to reach out, to hold her, to kiss her, but I was afraid that I would wake up and she would be gone. But I could feel the softness of her hand on my face and finally I shouted, "You're alive, real!"

My voice echoed through the room and she smiled and said slowly: "Yes, I'm real and alive, in a way. You see there are so many things that we don't understand about life and after-life; so little we really know. Remember the discussions we three used to have on after-life? You and Paul were such scoffing materialists and I was the little sentimental sap. Watch."

She took a cigarette out of her pocket and lit it and blew some smoke in

For a long time I stared at her. Night after night I had seen that face. And now I stared at her and felt myself growing cold and panicky.



my face and my eyes smarted and she laughed and offered me a cigarette and I shook my head and she said: "You still don't smoke?"

"No."

"Remember how you used to carry around a package of cigarettes just for me? Remember . . . oh darling, if I had only known!"

Then she was in my arms and I was hugging her and kissing her and I forgot everything, even that it was all a dream, and all I knew was her warm skin and her soft hair and her full lips.

Desire for her seemed to be burning me up, the desire that I had known all those years, and I pushed her away and she sat on the edge of the bed and smiled at me: her hair a gorgeous riot of deep red, her cheeks flushed, her eyes bright. Sud-

denly she laughed and pointed to the floor and said: "Darling, I seem to have dropped some ashes on your floor."

I just looked at her and then she threw the cigarette out of the window and I had her in my arms again.

I never felt so happy and content in my life, the two of us close together and my arms around her. Then I could feel myself drifting into sleep and I tried to fight against it and I said, "Louise, you'll always be with me, won't you?"

\* \* \*

THE SUDDEN HARSH ringing of the alarm awoke me, and I sat up bewildered and sleepy. Of course I was

alone in bed. I shook my head to clear it and looked around the room. Everything seemed the same.

I cursed myself for being a fool. But the dream had been sweet and tender, and she had been so warm and fresh and real, so alive. So really alive that it would make real life seem harder.

"It's over, you fool," I said aloud as I got out of bed. "No matter how real it seemed, it was only . . ."

I stopped and felt myself trembling and sweat running down my sides and my heart beat grew louder as I stared down at the little pile of cigarette ashes at my feet.

—THE END—



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# The COUNTESS CARESSES

By JOHN G. TOWER

THE MEEK LITTLE gardener, in a faded peasant smock, lifted himself from his knees in the flower bed, where he had been planting clusters of pansies, and started to call out a protest as Kip Spearman walked up the flagstone path to the entrance of the vine-covered chalet.

The gardener felt a need to call out a protest, for one did not so lightly approach the entrance of the chalet of Mademoiselle Nadyne Nicollet. But one also hesitated about shouting at Kip Spearman. His tall body and broad shoulders contained more than just a suggestion of strength—they radiated crushing, dominant power. And his stride had an authoritative air that brushed aside all restraint.

For a moment the gardener stared after him with indecision, then shrugged his shoulders and turned back to the flower bed. He could see that Mademoiselle Nadyne was standing in the entrance of the chalet, and knew that she was much more

capable of handling intruders than he.

Kip had also noticed Nadyne, and a light of interest flickered in his blue eyes. He had seen a lot of beautiful women while hiking through France, but he knew he had never seen one more ravishing than Nadyne. She was regally tall, with jet black hair brushed smoothly back from an ivory white, patrician forehead and braided at the nape of the neck. The pale whiteness of her face made her lips more vividly red and her sloe eyes more dangerously black. She was dressed in a form-fitting black gown of rich satin. The shimmering satin gave her an added appeal.

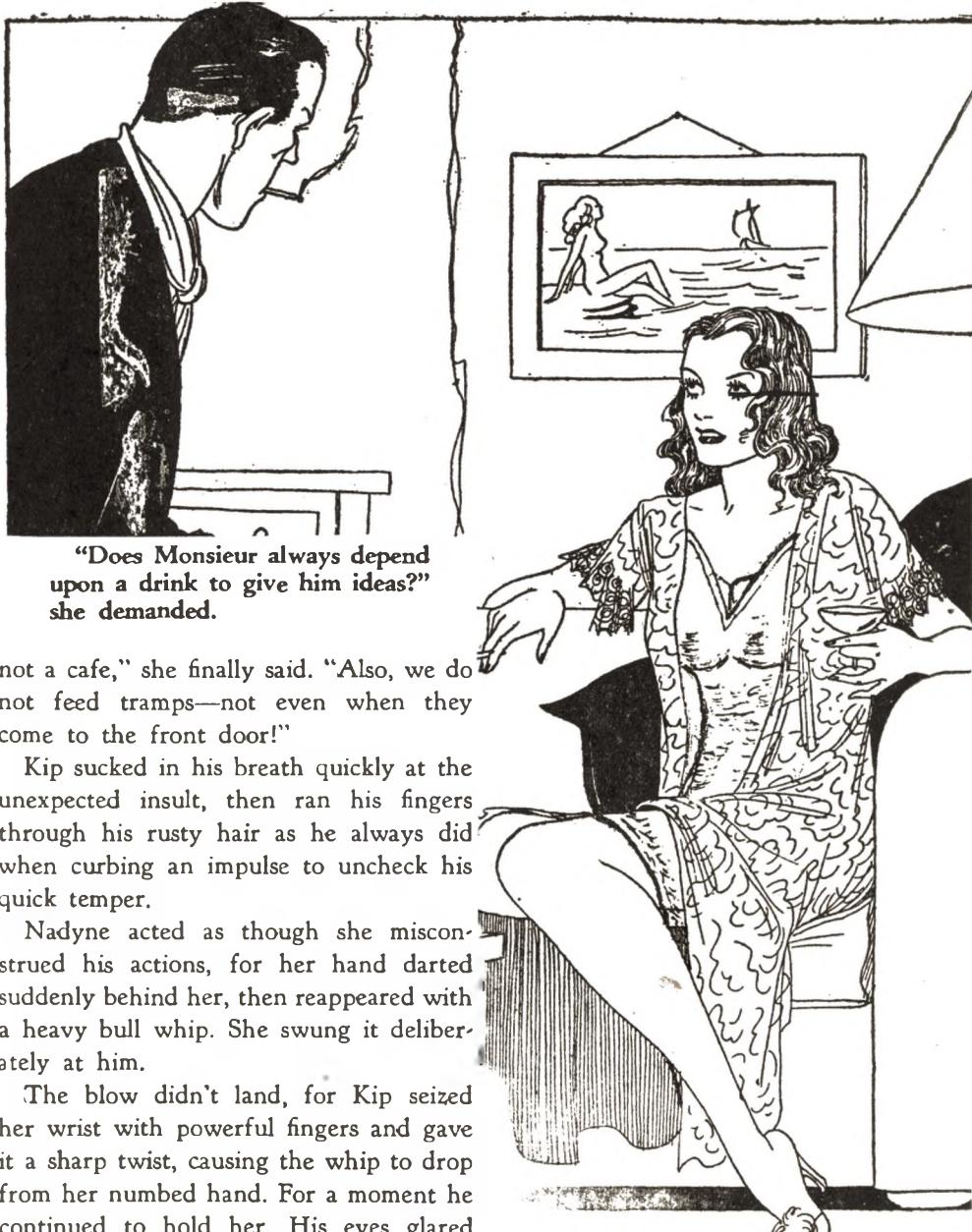
\* \* \* \*

"BON JOUR, mademoiselle," said Kip, removing a battered Dobbs from an unruly crop of rusty curls. "May I have a drink of water, please?"

Nadyne merely stood in the entrance of the chalet and glared imperially at him for a few moments.

"Monsieur has made a mistake—this is

**Kip Didn't Like People Who Threatened Him with a Bull-Whip—Especially When They Were So Good-Looking.**



"Does Monsieur always depend upon a drink to give him ideas?" she demanded.

not a cafe," she finally said. "Also, we do not feed tramps—not even when they come to the front door!"

Kip sucked in his breath quickly at the unexpected insult, then ran his fingers through his rusty hair as he always did when curbing an impulse to uncheck his quick temper.

Nadyne acted as though she misconstrued his actions, for her hand darted suddenly behind her, then reappeared with a heavy bull whip. She swung it deliberately at him.

The blow didn't land, for Kip seized her wrist with powerful fingers and gave it a sharp twist, causing the whip to drop from her numbed hand. For a moment he continued to hold her. His eyes glared with the same angry light as hers.

"I ought to take that whip and give you a generous taste of it," he remarked grimly. "Maybe then you wouldn't be so quick to reach for it the next time someone calls."

He hesitated for a moment, while he

continued to hold her in his crushing grip, leaving her in doubt as to whether or not he would carry out his threat. His blood continued to remain glowingly warm, but not from anger.

Kip allowed his eyes to boldly appraise

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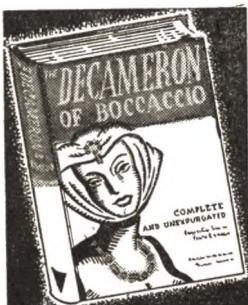
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Nadyne's face. The anger was gone from her eyes, and she was watching him with a calculating expression. He was convinced again that she was the most beautiful woman he had seen in France.

"If you weren't so damned beautiful, I'd slap you around a bit to teach you some manners," he declared. "Maybe this is something you'll understand better—"

His left arm swept suddenly about her slim waist, while his right hand flattened on the back of her head and held it firm and his lips crushed abruptly to hers. All the savagery of his strength was put into that kiss, together with all the quick ardor of his rusty red hair.

Nadyne struggled just a bit, which made him hold her even more helpless. At first she tried to remain indifferent to his caress. The power of the kiss, however, melted the ice in her veins and started a torrent of fervid blood racing through her. Kip was aware of a response coming from her lips. She was a bit breathless and stared incredulously at him when he released her.

Kip stared calculatingly at her for a moment, then twisted his lips into a satisfied smile. Turning about, he kicked the bull whip from the flagstone path, then started back through the garden toward the gate. He had almost reached it before Nadyne, who has been staring after him, called out suddenly.

"Monsieur!"

Kip turned slowly and stared indifferently back at her.

"Well?" he demanded.

"Perhaps monsieur would rather have a glass of wine than a drink of water," she suggested.

\* \* \* \*

INSTANTLY Kip was striding back toward the entrance of the chalet, where



Once more he found a challenge gleaming in her brilliant eyes.

Nadyne still stood. He could see that her dark eyes were sparkling more brightly than before, and that she was standing in a manner that more clearly revealed the sweeping, exotic lines of her symmetrical body.

She led the way into the building and gestured for Kip to be seated upon a lounge chair before an empty fire place. Her eyes were still appraising him, and evincing a silent admiration for the heavily-muscled shoulders and deep chest as she poured out two generous tumblersful of golden French vermouth.

"Mademoiselle is an unusual woman," he commented as he accepted the glass and sipped the mellow brandy. "She greets me with a whip, then offers a glass of excellent vermouth."

"Monsieur could not be considered an ordinary man," replied Nadyne with a slow smile. "He kisses a woman for daring to protect her own home. Is monsieur always so ruthless in taking whatever he wants?"

For a tense moment he stared into the gleaming depths of her eyes, trying to read them. Abruptly he leapt to his feet.



"If I want it badly enough," admitted Kip.

"Oui—monsieur looks strong enough to do that," Nadyne agreed. "Now that monsieur has the drink he wished, is there anything else he desires?"

"The drink may give me ideas," Kip in-

formed her, his eyes once more reverting to their bold appraisal of her provocative, alluring lines.

Nadyne, who was conscious of his gaze, smiled enticingly.

"Does monsieur always depend upon a drink to give him ideas?" she demanded.

She had seated herself upon a chair beside him.

"In Paris, yes," answered Kip. "Here, the vermouth is secondary by comparison with mademoiselle."

"Monsieur means that I give him ideas?" asked Nadyne curiously, but her sloe eyes were sparkling with a knowing light. She leaned still closer to him, avidly against Kip's arm.

\* \* \* \*

THE BLOOD was racing madly through Kip's veins. That rusty hair of his made him no object for a woman to play with. For a tense moment he stared into the gleaming depths of her eyes, trying to read them. But he couldn't be sure about the answer he thought he found.

Abruptly he leaped to his feet, then seized her by the arms with a bruising grip and lifted her from the chair. He held her off the floor, with her face close to his own.

"Honey," he said hoarsely, "if you're only playing a game, I'm going to knock you from under your dandruff!"

Nadyne merely smiled at him, but her sloe eyes were flashing with a greater brilliance than before.

"I do not feel like playing games on anyone this afternoon," she said softly. "And I would not like to be bruised...."

Instantly, Kip had his crushing arms about her, as his lips crushed with bruising fierceness down upon hers. His free hand frantically sought the nape of her neck and held her firmly. He could feel a tremor run over Nadyne's body as he did it . . . and a greater warmth crept into her kiss.

She was a woman of ice who turned to flame once the chilled veneer was melted. Kip was aware that her slim arms crept slowly up and encircled his neck.

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The door of his room was flung violently open. He looked up in startled surprise to see Nadyne.

Both were breathing deeply when Kip's lips finally left hers. When he looked at her, he found a challenge in her brilliant eyes. He answered the challenge by kissing her again with savage, searing force, and continued to keep his lips pressed hungrily over hers as he lifted her from the floor and walked across the room. . . .

BACK AT HIS ROOM in the village inn, after dinner that evening, Kip opened up a portable typewriter and pounded off a cablegram to the news editor of the New York newspaper by which he was employed.

The message read:

"Your foreign correspondent scores

# THE POWER TO LOVE

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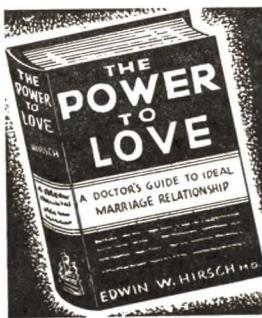
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again! Have located Nadyne Nicollet, the missing Countess de Cambria, daughter of the Pretender to the throne of Thurguria. May have to make six or seven visits to get an interview, but can guarantee it will be exclusive. Wire six hundred bucks at once for expenses. Spearman."

He had just read the message over and was about to pull the sheet from the typewriter when the door of his room was flung violently open. He looked up in startled surprise to see Nadyne stalking wrathfully into the room. In her right hand she was grimly clutching the bull whip he had taken away from her during the morning. Her dark eyes had narrowed to mere slits of angry jet.

"Canaille!" she exclaimed, advancing menacingly toward the surprised Kip. "Vile deceiver of helpless women! Always I have warned all the servants that newspaper people and dogs are not to enter my property. But are my wishes respected? Non! Tonight the kitchen maid tells me the butcher's boy told her you are an American scribbler for a New York newspaper! Voila! That I, Nadyne Nicollet, should be so grossly deceived! It is an insult I can not ignore."

She lifted the bull whip quickly and started it on a furious journey toward Kip. But Kip had leaped hastily from his chair, and again his hand clamped crushingly over her wrist before the blow could land. He gave it a sharp twist that made her drop the whip, then twisted it still more, bringing her to her knees before him.

When the bull whip fell from Nadyne's useless hand, Kip kicked it across the room. He lifted his hand menacingly but checked himself. She was so damned beautiful he couldn't carry out the threat.

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Remembering how he had quieted her during the morning, he released her wrist, then swept his arms about her and lifted her from the floor. Nadyne struggled furiously to get free, her small fists beating rapidly upon his shoulders.

Kip laughed as he held her a helpless prisoner in his arms. His hand closed over the back of her head and crushed her lips to his own. He held them there for a long time, although they had hardly met before her efforts to break free became less and a responsive fire came to the kiss. Nadyne's anger appeared to be melting under the kiss and her arms began to fondly encircle his neck. There was a brilliant gleam in her eyes when Kip finally released her.

\* \* \*

"COME HERE, I want to show you something," he ordered, taking her wrist and dragging her to his typewriter. He pointed to his statement that six or seven visits might have to be made to her chalet before an interview could be obtained. Nadyne smiled dreamily as she looked at it, then picked up a pencil and scratched out the words. In their place she substituted the statement that sixteen or seventeen visits might be necessary.

"But only for a newspaper interview, cheri," she murmured softly.

"Some day," he warned her, "I'm going to slap you all over the room if you don't lose that bull whip."

"That might be beautiful, mon brave," Nadyne said with a smile.

"But right now I think this would be better," declared Kip.

He seized her in his powerful arms again and lifted her from the floor. Once more he found a challenge gleaming in her brilliant eyes as he stared down at her. And again he answered it by bruising her lips with a savage, forceful kiss as

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