

LOIS RAYBURN'S WEDDING

A Beautiful Girl Proposes to and Marries a Helpless Man

By LOLA MARTIN BURGoyNE

A GIRL lay face downward on the bed crying as if her heart would break. Great sobs shook her slender form. Jim, an invalid for life! The thought brought fresh tears, and she sobbed until exhausted. Jim, the brightest of them all, the leader of all the sports, so big, so strong, and now, never to walk again! He had saved the child, though, and there was a little warm glow in her heart as she remembered that. The little mite had rushed out without warning, in front of Jim's big car. It was the child or the ditch, and, without a second's hesitation, Jim had turned into the ditch. His car turned turtle and he was pinned beneath it. They had carried him tenderly home to the big house on the hill, and for weeks he had hovered between life and death. Then came the turn for the better, and his splendid strength and clean life turned the scale, and he gradually crept back to life. Then had come this awful thing. Never to dance or skate or even to walk again! With a little moan she covered her face.

If only she had the right to go to him. Down in her heart she knew he cared. Many little half-forgotten things came to her, and that night skating on the pond—what had he been going to say to her, when Ruth came flying over and spoilt it all? If he had only told her and she could go to him now. She had not known herself that she cared so, till the news came of the accident and had shown her the truth, and now—

"Lois, Lois," called Ruth, hammering on her door. "What on earth have you locked your door for? Mother wants you to come down and see the Locketts."

"Oh, Ruth, please, I can't go and talk to them. Tell mother my head aches, and I am going out to try and walk it off. Get me out of it, that's a darling," Lois said.

"All right, I shall do my best. Wish I was old enough to do as I liked," said Ruth.

Lois sighed. "Do as she liked." Much Ruth knew about it!

"Mercy, what a sight I am," she cried, as she walked towards the mirror. "Crying certainly doesn't improve one's beauty."

She washed her aching eyes in cold water and brushed out the masses of brown hair. Jim thought she had nice hair, for he had exclaimed at its length that night of the fancy dress dance at Howes', when she had gone as Marguerite. She slipped into a brown velvet suit and pinned on a little brown fur toque with its single yellow rose. "Nut Brown Mayde," he had called her. She went out the side door, successfully eluding her mother and the tiresome Locketts, and was soon walking rapidly down the street. The air was cold and crisp, and the wind blew the wisps of hair that escaped from under her hat, and her cheeks were soon glowing.

"Oh, Doctor," she called, as she saw a tall man coming out of a house just ahead of her. His face lit up as he turned and saw her.

"Well, Lois, what a picture you are," he said, as he clasped her hand warmly. "It is well for us poor doctors that everyone is not as healthy as you are. Where are you off to this cold day?"

"Just for a walk to try and drive the blues away." Then, hurriedly and with flushing cheeks, "Doctor Merton, how is Jim?"

His kindly face clouded, and he looked at her face keenly.

"He is doing as well as can be expected, but he seems to have lost his grip since he found out that he would not be able to walk again. God bless my soul—when I think of him finding out now, when I did not mean him to know for a long time—perhaps never. Oh, God bless my soul," and the old doctor stamped up and down, blowing his nose violently.

"If we could only make him see there was lots to live for yet," he continued more calmly, "he would be all right, but he has given up hope."

Suddenly she raised her eyes and looked straight at him.

"Doctor, may I see him? Perhaps (her breath came quickly), perhaps I might cheer him up."

"He hasn't seen anyone yet, although he is in the library now. Yes, little girl, go ahead and try. I'll be around later and see how it works." With another shake of her hand he was off, and she turned, trying not to tremble at the thought of her visit. Why should she be afraid—of Jim, too? She had often been to the big rambling house when his mother was living, and she smiled at the remembrance of the good times that they had had in it. It somehow looked very forbidding as she walked

up the drive. Poor Jim, all alone in that big house, and suffering too.

She quickened her pace at the thought, and ran lightly up the steps and rang the bell.

"Well, Sarah, how are you to-day?" she said, as the old woman with her stiffly starched apron opened the door. "Can I see Mr. Jim?"

"I'm very well, thank you, Miss Lois, I am afraid Mr. Jim won't see anyone to-day, Miss."

"Doctor Merton said I might see him. I'll go right in, Sarah, and then he can't refuse."

"Perhaps you can cheer him up a little, Miss Lois. He finds it very hard to be tied to a lounge all day, poor lamb."

"He is in the library, isn't he? Never mind coming up, I know the way," and Lois went up the broad stairs.

She stood for a second at the closed door and then knocked lightly and walked in.

A voice from the lounge near the fire cried impatiently, "Sarah, didn't I tell you I didn't want you again? Can't you women let me alone for ten minutes?"

"Oh, very well," said Lois coolly. "If you are so fond of solitude I won't intrude." But, instead of leaving, she walked into the room and stood smiling at him.

At the sound of her voice he turned his head swiftly. His whole face lit up, and he held out both hands impulsively. "Lois, oh, Lois," he cried, his eyes shining.

She dropped her big muff on a convenient chair and put her hands in his. For a long moment they looked deep into one another's eyes, and Lois gave a sigh of deep content. She had found out what she had come up for.

"Well," she said, with a tremulous little laugh, "must I go or may I stay and talk with you?"

"Indeed, you may stay. Oh, but it's good to see you again, and how—how lovely you look," he said as she stood up to remove her wraps.

A picture she certainly was as she stood in the dim old room with the afternoon sun shining on her wavy brown hair.

She threw her furs and long coat over a chair and raised her hands to her hat.

"May I take my hat off too and be comfy?" she asked. "It's so warm."

He just smiled at her without speaking, almost afraid that she was a figment of fancy that would fade and leave him alone.

She drew up a footstool to his couch and began telling him all sorts of odds and ends that she thought would interest him. Once Sarah, passing in the hall, heard him laugh and hurried to tell Thomas, Mr. Jim's man.

"Bless her heart, she'll cheer him up, little sunbeam that she is."

But "Little Sunbeam" was not having such a good time of it. She had mentioned Ralph Burns several times in her little items of news, and gloom had instantly settled on Jim's face. He answered her shortly, staring moodily into the fire. Her heart ached at the change in him, and conversation lagged in spite of her efforts.

Suddenly she caught her breath and plunged boldly.

"Jim," she said, "will you tell me what you were going to say when we were skating on the pond

that night, when Ruth interrupted us?"

She heard him draw his breath quickly, and for a long moment there was silence.

"No, Lois, I can't tell you," he said at last.

"Why not?" she asked softly, "I—I would like to know."

She was busily tying knots in the fringe of his rug, but saw him clench his hands—oh, how thin and white they are now.

Again there was silence and his voice was very low as he answered.

"Things have changed since then, and I have no right to tell you now what I was going to say that night."

Her head was bent low as she asked in an even voice, "Will you marry me, Jim?"

"Lois, for God's sake!" he cried.

"Will you?" she repeated.

"No!"

A little sob broke from her. "Oh," she whispered, "I—oh, I thought you cared." She covered her burning face with her hands.

"Cared! God, I love you! Lois, Lois, you know I can't marry you. Marry you! You beautiful thing! Don't you know I'll never be able to walk again—never—never. And I may live to be an old man. It's worse than death to give you up."

With a quick movement she bent down beside him. She put her hands in his, but his fingers did not close over hers.

"I love you, Jim; what else matters in all the world? Why can't we live our lives together? I can't live without you. I knew these last weeks"—her head drooped.

"Lois, for heaven's sake, go. You make me forget everything except that—I love you—Oh, my darling."

She deliberately put her arms around his neck and he crushed her to him.

"Well, Jim, old boy—oh, God bless my soul!" and the old doctor stood speechless.

Lois sprang up all flushed and laughing, but with dewy eyes.

"I've cheered him up beautifully, Doctor, but I have had an awful time doing it. I'll never, never propose to a man again. It's dreadfully hard work."

The doctor sank into a chair. "Well, of all things," he gasped. "By George, you're a lucky fellow," he said, turning to Jim. "He certainly does look better, Lois."

"Doctor, try to put some sense into her head," said Jim, but Lois put her fingers gently over his mouth.

"Now, Jim, be quiet," she said, "you know perfectly well you can't live without me, and I wouldn't live without you, so what are you going to do about it? No, Doctor, Jim doesn't know it yet, but we are going to be married to-morrow. Can't you get us a special license or whatever is necessary, and, please, not a word to anyone."

For a long time they talked, Lois finally getting her way. The doctor promised to arrange everything, and took her home in his motor, leaving Jim to his dreams.

Lois needed all her courage to face the family with her news, and there was a stormy scene when she told them, but she finally won them over. Perhaps the fact that Jim Foster was one of the richest men in the town had something to do with it.

It was a strange party that assembled in the Foster library the next afternoon. Lois, in her plain white dress, by Jim's couch; Mr. and Mrs. Rayburn, and Ruth, Stewart Hamilton, Jim's chum; Dr. Guthrie, the clergyman; Doctor Merton, and Sarah in the background.

Lois' voice was as clear as a bell as she went through the service, but Jim's broke utterly as he tried to say the solemn vows. With a beautiful gesture Lois knelt down beside him, and the service continued as she knelt there, with her hand in his.

When it was over Doctor Merton hurried them out, so Jim would not be fatigued.

Lois knelt by Jim's couch with her head on his shoulder. There was a great peace in her heart.

"Lois, my darling," Jim whispered, "God grant that you may never repent it, my Life, my Love"—but here a knock sounded at the door, and in hustled Dr. Merton.

"Excuse me for a moment, children, but I have brought you a wedding present." He held an open letter in his hand. "A wedding isn't half a wedding without a present. I've got one I think you'll like. When Jim was first injured I wrote to a specialist in Vienna and I have just got a reply, which says Jim can be cured."



"Oh but it is good to see you again."