

A score of Miss Birdie Clares smiled their set smile at the nochalant Delaney.

He lighted a cigarette and unfolded the newspaper. Perhaps he was a little bored. He was taking Miss Clare to dinner because it was quite the thing to take Miss Clare, or some other Miss Birdie or Miss Fifi Somebody, to dinner. It was part of the routine of a dozen years of his history. Meantime he read the paper.

Miss Clare appeared at last. Her hair was a masterpiece of well-arranged disarrangement—thanks to Lucille. For the rest, she was tailor-made, with emphasis on the slender waist. Her eyes were tantalizingly cool and saucy; her mouth a bit hard.

Delaney eyed her with a degree of satisfaction. Of course, it was her business to look that way, but he felt obliged to admit to himself that she did it very well. It occurred to him that he might kiss her; and then it occurred to him that, if he kissed her, he would disturb a relationship that was already satisfactory—a relationship which was free from entanglement. Wherefore he grinned at her casually, and, observing that she still had something to do to her hat, dipped again into the paper.

"Here's a queer one," he remarked presently. "What do you think of this?"

He pointed to an item in the personal column. Miss Clare paused in the operation of adjusting a veil. She stepped to the side of his chair and glanced down at the fine print, bending till the plume on her hat brushed Delaney's cheek. She read. Slowly she straightened up and in silence moved across the room to the window.

"How's the che-ild going to know?" inquired Delaney. "Mother ought to have signed her name—what?"

Miss Clare did not answer at once. She was looking out into the darkness; but at last she spoke measurably.

"Harry, haven't you any home?"

"Sure thing!" he answered. "New York, U. S. A."

"New York? Does he live there?"

"I'm the fellow that was born here," he added. "Why?"

She was silent. He looked at her curiously.

"If you've got anything on your mind, little one," he said, "you might as well unload it."

"I?" She turned and showed him a preoccupied face. "I've just remembered something, Harry. I can't go out with you, after all."

Delaney grinned.

"Who is it, Birdie?"

"Nobody. Don't ask questions. Be a good fellow and run along."

He got up.

"What are you trying to hand me?" he inquired.

"Nothing that's likely to worry you," she answered with a hint of weariness.

"Oh, well!" He surrendered easily and took up his hat. "I'll phone you in a few days, Birdie. Hope you have a good Thanksgiving."

As soon as the door had closed behind him, Miss Clare summoned her maid.

"Lucille," she commanded, "take my purse and go and get tickets and a stateroom for Portland, on the midnight."

Delaney, strolling down the street, began to be angry.

"The nerve of her!" he muttered. "Throwing me down like that—me!"

He flung the folded newspaper from him. It sailed off in an eccentric curve and dropped lightly into the tonneau of a big, shiny motor-car that stood by the curb.

IV.

As she went out to the motor-car with her husband, Mrs. Edgerton's taut nerves were tingling with this latest annoyance. Why did he inflict his wishes on her with such irritating placidity? Why was he always proposing the impossible?

Her sharp chin was held disdainfully high as she stepped into the car and seated herself as far away as she could on the farther side. She was