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Her Adventurous Night

It Had an Important Result

By AGNES G. BROGAN

Miss Pauline Chester, art student and would be illustrator, stood at the curb of the busy street awaiting a home bound car. Home! She smiled derisively in the semi-darkness at the meaning of the word. Surely the big, bare room, half studio, half housekeeping apartment, was a poor substitute for home. And it was all she now possessed.

She thought as she stood there aside, yet in the very midst of things—alone, yet crushing her way through the throng to the car, how typical it all was of her present life. Even in the brightly lighted apartment, as she passed down the corridor that led to her room, not one of those whom she met each day might speak a welcome because she had not been properly introduced.

Polly was not sure she would care to know them if she had. They were all such silly, chattering women, overdressed and indifferent; such rude, staring men—all but one. Polly thought of "him" gratefully. Something perhaps in the grave kindness of his expression, his deferential yet unobtrusive courtesy, brought back the old days in Brookfield.

Each morning he raised his hat as simultaneously they appeared in the corridor locking their doors for the day's absence. Always Polly smiled and nodded, but the man vouchsafed no word. She was glad, and she was sorry—glad that he was so very much the man she wanted him to be, sorry that one so alone as she might not have the comfort of an understanding friend.

In despair Polly had added to the cheerless furnishings of her studio the companionship of a cat. He had followed her, this big yellow cat, from some darkened area the night she had bought the fish. After his coveted meal had become a thing of the past Patsy, as she called him, still declined to remain her friend.

He had, she discovered, certain embarrassing and stubborn tendencies, one of which was to pry into the affairs of his neighbors, so that twice the nice young man across the way had been obliged to lift Patsy gently and place him outside his door.

Both times Miss Chester apologized; both times the young man bowed silently and pleasantly and withdrew. Polly found herself making little sketches of the grave faced man and the yellow cat during times of intermission at the art school.

"You poor thing," she mocked herself one day as she hastily destroyed her drawings, "filling up your head with a man and a yellow cat just because they've been a little human."

It seemed impossible to make a presentable sketch at home, the boys in the fraternity room overhead were so very noisy, while a player piano banged away below. She wondered as she sat through endless evenings just what it would be like to mingle with the gay throng outside, to be with one who could sympathize and understand.

"He" was lonely too. She was sure of that. Among them all he seemed to live apart. At those times when she had rescued Patsy from before his door she had caught a glimpse within of an open book, a half smoked cigar. So he, too, sat each night alone. His eyes, she fancied, were strangely wistful. Or was it fancy? Polly sighed impatiently.

"Always," she rebuked herself, "your thoughts go back to that man."
It was all very ridiculous, so she fell to drawing in earnest. No better subject at hand, she drew painstakingly the yellow cat lying stretched before the fire.

This accomplished, Polly studied reflectively an opposite vacant chair, then with a sudden dimpling smile she bent again over the drawing board. She was so absorbed she failed to notice the cessation of the player piano and a gradual growing silence settling over the building.

Raising at last a flushed face, she regarded with much satisfaction her work. The figure pictured in the chair opposite her own was remarkably true to life. The "man's" open book lay upon the table beside him, his half smoked cigar in his hand, Patsy comfortably stretched at his feet.

"Twelve," chimed the little clock in sharp, even strokes. "Mercy!" exclaimed the girl, and jumped to her feet. There was something the matter with the lock as she attempted to fasten her door for the night, so she thrust it wide



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open, intending thus to close it securely. A mysterious rustling sound, as of some person or persons stealthily moving farther back among the shadows, caused Polly's heart to flutter uncomfortably.

Not long ago there had been a robbery in this very apartment. She wished that she were not alone. No light showed from beneath the opposite door, no evidence of "his" presence. In trepidation she reached for the door handle to close herself in when, apparently from nowhere, a man's figure confronted her. A rather good looking young man he appeared to be, though fantastically dressed. Polly's apprehension grew at sight of his close buttoned red sweater and the bandanna handkerchief knotted about his throat. The man snatched a yellow checked cap from his head and bowed. In spite of her fear Polly's face flushed angrily at his assurance.

"If you please," he said, "I'd like to talk with you. No"—as she ventured to withdraw into the room—"I won't keep you long, and I'll say it here."

"My first subject is art. I wish to give you a little dissertation on art!"

With rapidly beating heart Polly waited. It was impossible to follow the excited rapidity of the outrageous young man's flowing talk. Of one thing she was sure, he was insane.

Insane, and she alone on the deserted floor of an apartment building, at midnight. What should she do?

To call out or startle a maniac, Polly remembered, might bring on a dangerous climax. What should she do?

Again, very cautiously, she moved toward the shelter of her room.

"Wait!" cried the young man sharply. "I have more to say to you than this, much more."

In the momentary silence that followed she feared he would hear her frightened breathing.

"I love you," burst out the young man at last. "I love you. For long days have I watched you stealthily, adoringly. All my future is built on hope of winning you. Your love can raise me to the highest paradise, your refusal sends me to the lowest depths of despair. Weigh well, then, lovely maid, your answer—lest I destroy myself in your presence; take care."

Faintly the girl leaned against the doorway. Surely she had fallen asleep over her sketching, and this was but part of a troubled dream. From down the hall came a low, confused murmur. "I love you," cried the young man again—"I love you." His voice ended in a wall. "Say yes, or I destroy myself."

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self."
With a sudden flash of light the door opposite was thrown open; for an instant "he" stood there, perplexed, uncertain—he, the one wise, kind soul in all this dreadful city. Polly never hesitated. "Oh, please!" she murmured, and rushed toward him. The man of the opposite room put her aside gently while he caught the wild youth by the collar. "Now," he asked sharply, "what is the meaning of all this?"

Up from the shadows of the long corridor came slowly and silently in their sneaker shoes a dozen men, young men Polly's startled eyes discerned them to be, and for the most part they were laughing or covering their mouths to smother their laughter. Her tormentor of a moment ago was grinning, too, grinning rather sheepishly, as the one man's stern gaze was bent upon him.

"Explain," commanded her protector, "or shall I call the police?"

"Oh, Mr. Lawrence," said a voice, "let us down easy. Maybe we did overdo it a little tonight, but we got pretty gay. It's the fraternity initiation, you know. Bayes, here, was ordered to do a few stunts, had to travel around town all night in that rig and end up with a proposal to the prettiest girl in the building. We picked Miss—"

Chester out as she came in tonight and stipulated the art talk when we'd learned her profession. He had to do it. Don't blame Bayes."

The spokesman's repentant eyes met those of the enlightened Miss Chester. "Awfully sorry," he said remorsefully. "Any way in the world we can apologize, jointly or singly, we'll do it."

His solemn face changed convulsively. "Gee," he laughed, "but it was funny." Polly drew a long breath, and her champion, still holding the victim of initiation by his sweater collar, looked back at her.

"What do you say, Miss Chester?" he asked. "Shall we have these disturbers of the peace jailed, as we could, locked up for the common idiots they are, or—"

It was very comforting to have a protector. Also it was because of these very idiots that "he" was now her protector.

"We will let them go free," she said, humbly objecting. The initiation committee shuffled away. Amused understanding sparkled suddenly in the eyes Polly turned upon her companion. "It must have been funny for them," she said. But Mr. Lawrence was regarding her intently. There seemed to be in his gaze more concern than such short acquaintance warranted.

"You should not be living here alone," he said abruptly. "A girl like you ought to be cared for in her own home by her own people." The sparkle left Polly's eyes.

"That," she motioned to the bare studio, "is my only home"—she smiled tremulously—"and Patsy all my family." Patsy, seeing at that moment a chance for a neighborly call, darted across the hall, clutching the girl's grasp. It was the man who after a hasty chase brought him back to her bedside, and there, forgotten, face upturned, in plain view, lay Polly's clever sketch.

For long vibrant moments they looked from the drawing back again into each other's eyes, the girl's pale, startled, his glowing with some new emotion, deep, unreadable. Then impulsively he caught up her pencil and with swift steady strokes drew opposite the chair which was his own a slender girlish figure. Fascinated, Polly watched him, and if his pencil was not as skilled as her own the likeness to herself was too true to be mistaken.

Again he raised his glowing tender eyes to hers, then wrote beneath the sketch one word—"Home!" And when the door of his apartment closed behind him Polly caught up the yellow cat. "Of course, Patsy," she said, "it is all a part of my unreal adventurous night. Tomorrow it will not be true."

Patsy narrowed his inscrutable golden eyes and purred contentedly, for the "Home" picture was to come true, and Polly would be lonely no more.

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