

THE SAME OLD STORY

"The crimson stain that was of Cain
Became Christ's snow-white seal . . ."

I—As It Was In The Beginning . . .

It was the same old story that had been lived and relived ever since men first knew the magic of a woman's kiss. The story of love that masquerades, of smiles that deceive, of life that pays the price of infidelity. That old tale of human tragedy that Sam had only read about in human interest stories, but that now had become a biography of him. This was the enactment of that old ballad about the love of Frankie and Johnny—it had become, in a terrible fashion, their song:

"—Oh, Lordy, how they did love
Swore to be true to each other
As true as the stars above
He was her man but he done
her wrong."

But here the characters were reversed. It was Roxy who had him wrong. It was the beautiful Roxy who, on that November night, in a rain-smitten cross town apartment had precipitated the most artful of deceptive betrayals. Roxy with the quiet laugh and the sky within her eyes; Roxy who in that cold November casually tossed his love aside—the last thing she had done upon this earth.

II—is now . . .

Roxy was Sam's wife and Willie knew it. But then Willie was mar-

ried to Jane and was as faithful as men can be. It was just that Roxy was irresistible and stubborn. When she wanted something she got it. Her obsession was acquisition of everything that attracted her.

Roxy had come a long way since that night Sam had introduced Willie to her. He said hello in an indifferent fashion. She, with her sapphire eyes accepted the challenge, replied, then looked away hiding her wounded pride. But here in Willie's apartment, with November rains beating against the window, Roxy was on the brink of victory. This was the night her conquest of Willie was to be completed. Here, as Willie tediously painted her portrait, with but a scornful reflection for Sam, she was going to win.

Roxy watched him work in silence. Suddenly she said: "Why did you marry Jane, Willie?"

He looked up quickly with a curious glance. "Please don't talk while I'm working". Then he shrugged. "I'll tell you—". Roxy smiled at his obvious confusion. "I've never been sorry I married Jane", he said.

But there was uncertainty in his voice and he knew he was trying to assure himself of a feeling he did not have, trying desperately to hold the tide of his desire from over-running him.

She smiled arrogantly. "You mean you've never been sorry up until now."

Willie looked at her, stopped working and knew she was speaking the truth, the same truth he had not dared to admit to himself.

"You're awfully sure of yourself."

"Sure", she laughed, "why not?" "Suppose Sam finds out? or Jane?" His voice was weak, her's was strong.

"You won't tell them".

Roxy came up to him. Her eyes and lips were warm, her sensuous arm slid gently to his shoulder. The long kiss ended as Roxy listened to the rain and swelled with victory. She heard him speaking.

"I don't fall in love easily. I'm going to be serious about this."

What sloppy sentiment, she thought; what cheap melodrama, what masculine weakness! Only women were really strong—and Roxy was the strongest of them all.

She kissed him and said: "I'm more serious than you know."

III—and ever shall be . . .

Sam was sitting alone. Willie had just left leaving behind with Sam the full confession of the grim betrayal. Willie was taking Jane away. Willie had left Sam

with the recording of "Frankie and Jonny" which was playing tirelessly on the victrola. It had been his way of telling Sam.

"I don't want to cause you no trouble,
Don't want to tell you no lies
But I saw (Roxy) half an hour ago
With a guy named (Willie Bligh)—"

Then Roxy came in. Sam fixed expressionless eyes upon her. Before she was seated, it began. "Willie was just here", he said. His voice was hollow. Roxy steeled herself with all her imperious ability. Sam went on. "He's leaving town—with what's left of his sense of values."

"So you know. Well, we never did see eye to eye. You could never see, darling, how any one could love more than once in a lifetime."

"At the same time?" he asked sarcastically.

"At the same time."

"You prostitute love and don't call it lust. That makes me laugh! You betray and deceive and justify it to yourself. Can't you realize that married or otherwise intimacy is an exclusive affair? Share it, diversify it, and it's a desecration. All its beauty become shameful and a sin."

Roxy was angry. She did not intend to be preached at by some refugee from the Victorian era of puritanical morals.

"I loved Willie just as I loved you, only in a different way. Life is too short to become shallowly engaged in the tedious platitudes of one love. You need other interests in life, other experiences."

"Other conquests, you mean. You home-breaker! Why didn't you leave him alone. Did you have to prove that you could make him crawl too? I know you. You're rotten and sick beneath all that beauty. You wouldn't know the value of anything even if it was labelled."

She got up with her lovely face burning. Never had she been spoken to like this before. "Sam", she said in measured tones, "I'm leaving you. I'm through with you, understand? There's not even an echo left of what we knew. You've killed it, got nothing to offer any more. "I'm walking out."

She made a gesture of disgust and got up to go. The thought of her in Willie's arms infuriated him. He was filled with the cold emptiness of loss, despair and sorrow that engulfed and absorbed him, shattered and destroyed. He looked at her wide, deceptively innocent eyes suddenly realizing that he saw no beauty there anymore. Some women are born to

But No "D" Was Given



be loved, others to inspire, but Roxy was born to be killed. For she herself was a killer. His soul, his heart, his life, lay trampled in the dust of humiliation beneath her feet.

"Will you ever come back again?" he asked reflectively, knowing the despair of the answer.

"Back to what," she scoffed. "To the possession that you called love? To the vacuum that you want to build a new future on? No thanks. There's nothing left for us, I told you. "What you call infidelity I call just a lack of imagination."

All the fury of hate and contempt burst out of him. In a flash he was at the victrola and had smashed that hideous recording. He turned to her as if drunken with some inhuman opiate, a sharp piece of the shattered recording in his hand. It burned its lyrics in his brain—"rubber-tired hearses, Bring them around today They're gonna lock him in a dungeon cell And throw the key away—"

He held the pointed fragment of the record up. "This was our life," he said thickly. "This was our story."

Then he was upon her with the weapon in his hand and the room was filled with her screaming. "Frankie and Johnny" began its terrible flash of death. Again and again his right arm rose and fell in a crimson arc of blood. Plunged into the crimson jelly of her throat with all the fire of bleeding steel—and only yesterday it had burned with lips of love—and now she shuddered once and then was dead. Too dead to feel the salt brine of his tears that fell upon the floor. Fell, but would not mingle with her blood.

IV—world without end, Amen."

He didn't remember how he got

here. He only knew that some where in a dream he had lived and loved, lost and killed, that some where there must be an answer or an end to that hectic maelstrom that was his life. His soul was empty, but he felt strangely elated. They told him that this morning he would die, but he had no desire to escape these iron bars for he knew what the outside was like.

At last and at least he would find peace of soul, surcease for all his pain, a haven for all his passion and unrest. Out of the corridors of his past not a memory, not an incident, only the echo of a song that told how Frankie and Johnny were lovers—oh, lordy, how they did love.

This story has no moral, this story has no end
This story only goes to show, there ain't no
Good in men,
She was his gal, but she done him wrong—"

Just a singing echo of sadness, like midnight streets in the rain. He lay down for a final sleep. Strange to sleep when so soon they would put him in bed forever. But he slept and dreamed of the cold wet winds that blow at night in the cities; of the relentless suns of summer on the plains; of the pitiless march of springtime through the parks. Dreamed of a childhood long perished, of a world he'd never seen and of the summer skies he'd seen in Roxy's eyes. And in the gathering twilight of existence, he knew it would never be again.

At six the wardens came and woke him. A shaft of early morning sunlight pierced the cell and he thought the gods were watching his departure. Without regret he walked the fatal hall, saw the cold door of his destination, knew that there could not be a return. Walked, and it was stranger than a dream.



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