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The Guide-Advocate

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No Crime to Change Your Mind

BY R. RAY BAKER

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Melvin Colter was dressing for the big event of his life when the telephone downstairs interfered. Just why he thought some one was calling him he couldn't explain. Perhaps it was because he feared it. Sure enough, Mrs. McCluskey shrieked up the stairs and told him he was wanted; so for the present he abandoned the task of making a refractory bow tie look presentable, put on his smoking jacket, adjusting the collar around his bare neck, and went down, gripped by a feeling of foreboding. "Hello, Mel," said the sweet voice of his bride-elect. "Say, Mel, I can't marry you today." The worst had happened. The foreboding was well founded. For two years Melvin had been trying to marry Evelyn Moyer, and up to two months ago he never had succeeded in even proposing. Always something had intervened at the psychological moment. On one occasion, when he was endeavoring to tell her how dismal life would be without her, the house had caught fire and caused a postponement of the attempt. Another time, in the woods during a spring ramble, a snake had rustled in the bushes and caused Evelyn to flee while Melvin was framing sugar-coated sentences. Again, they were paddling a canoe, which began to leak while he was preparing to unfold his heart's secret. But at last he had succeeded in unburdening himself. Evelyn had made him joyful by consenting, and the marriage date was set. All the time Melvin was apprehensive that the fates would interfere. The cause of this apprehension was his knowledge of Evelyn's volatile moods. She was forever changing her mind about things. She had intended going to a conservatory for a finishing course in music, but at the last moment had given it up. She had a trip to the Pacific coast planned, to visit an aunt in Portland, and at the station, with the ticket in her hand, had decided not to go. It was Evelyn's one big fault, this changeableness, and Melvin feared it would intrude on his matrimonial program. But the day of the ceremony dawned with a bright sky and everything looked serene. The wedding, which was to be simple with only close relatives and friends attending, was scheduled for high noon, and the bride and groom were to leave Jefferson City shortly after for Chicago, there to take a steamer for Mackinac Island, Melvin having obtained a summer position as wireless operator at the new station at the famous resort. The boat trip and the honeymoon. Yes, everything seemed serene at last, until the telephone bell rang. "But Evelyn, what's the matter?" Melvin protested. "I'm all dressed." "I've just changed my mind," said Evelyn sweetly. "It's no crime to change your mind, is it? This is Friday, and it's unlucky to start anything on Friday." Melvin actually was on the verge of tears when he returned to his room. He felt sad, exasperated and angry all at the same time, with each emotion striving to outdo the others. He tore the bothersome tie to shreds, stripped off his best clothes and threw them into a suitcase, and put on a business-like checked suit. He was undecided whether to take the train without going to see Evelyn, but decided not to. She was sweetly adamant over her decision against marriage at present. "I've just changed my mind, that's all. You'll have to go to Mackinac alone, and I'll follow after, and we'll get married up there—maybe." Melvin gave up argument and reconciled himself as best he could. He couldn't postpone the trip without losing his job, so he left that afternoon. The weather was perfect for the lake trip, and he would have enjoyed it if only Evelyn had been with him. "I've a good mind to give her up," he told himself more than once. "She's too changeable. I can't get used to it. When I decide to do a thing I do it, come what may." For several days after his arrival on the island Melvin refrained from writing to Evelyn. He did a lot of thinking and came to the conclusion he had been too lenient. "She needs some bossing," he decided, and he sat down and wrote a letter in which, among other things, he said: "The Mohawk leaves Chicago next Friday morning and will arrive here

Saturday. You are to be a passenger on the Mohawk, and there's no argument about it. These are orders, see?"

After the letter had gone he worried considerably for fear he had made it too strong, but two days later he received a telegram reading:

"Am leaving Chicago Friday morning on Mohawk, as ordered—Evelyn."

With a pronounced sensation of triumph and satisfaction Melvin read the message and folded it carefully and placed it in a pocket for future reference.

"She'll know who's going to be boss," he said.

But Melvin's triumph was short lived, and his feeling of satisfaction was superseded by dismay and mental misery. He awoke Saturday morning to find a fierce storm raging, and as far as he could see across the straits whitecaps were leaping.

"A fine day for her trip," Melvin mused dolefully, as he went to his wireless station. Scarcely had he donned his headress when his ears picked this startling message from the air:

"S. O. S. S. O. S. Got off course, struck rock, sinking, fifty miles off Frankfort. S. O. S. S. O. S."

An icy hand seemed to clutch at Melvin's heart and stop its beating. For several minutes he was powerless to act.

"I'll relay the message broadcast," he decided, and was preparing to do so when out of the sky came an answer to the cry of distress:

"Mohawk, picked up your S. O. S. Rushing to rescue. Iowa, 100 miles off Milwaukee."

Then came another: "On way to help Mohawk. Manitoba, twenty miles off Traverse City."

Quickly came this flash in response: "Sinking fast, all pumps working, launching lifeboats. Mohawk, hurry, hurry."

Like an impatient audience watching a film tragedy, except that he was hearing rather than seeing, Melvin stood at his post all day, suffering a nightmare of suspense.

He heard the Mohawk's pleas for assistance repeated again and again, and the encouraging answers from the rescue ships; then finally came hours of silence, which suddenly was broken by word from the Iowa.

"Mohawk went down. Picking up passengers from lifeboats. Sea now calm."

Through a window, as he stood at his instruments, Melvin observed that the whitecaps had vanished and the sun was shining brightly. The ferryboat from Mackinac City was approaching, making its way indolently over the smooth surface of the straits.

A half hour later the Iowa again sent forth a message to the world. "List of survivors picked up from the Mohawk." Then followed a number of names and addresses. But Evelyn Moyer's name was missing from the list.

Melvin felt faint and sank into his chair. To his astonishment, he saw a girl standing in the doorway of the radio office. She was dressed in white, and he wondered if she could be a wreath. It must be, because she looked like Evelyn.

"Hello, Mel," she said cheerfully. "Take off those earflaps and greet me. I got here on time, even if I did change my mind and come by train to Mackinac City instead of sailing on the Mohawk. You'll forgive me, won't you? It's no crime to change your mind, is it?"

Farmer Houston, out of pity, gave a strange boy a job. In the afternoon the farmer was walking across one of his fields, when he thought he would go and see what the boy was doing. He found him lying on the grass under a tree, smoking a cigarette. "Well," he said, "what are you doing—resting?" The youth took the cigarette from his lips, and answered, "No, gov'nor, I'm not resting, 'cause I'm not tired. I'm just lyin' here waitin' for the sun to go down, so I can leave work!"

"God Save the King." The first public performance of "God Save the King" took place in 1740, the occasion being the celebration of the capture of Porto Bello in South America by Admiral Vernon. It was sung by its composer, Henry Carey, who also wrote "Sally in our Alley."

Johnny's mother was tired of having her tablecloths stained. So she instituted a fine of one penny for every spot. During tea, a few days later, Johnny was observed rubbing his rather grimy fingers very hard on the cloth beside his cup and saucer. "Johnny, what on earth are you doing?" asked his mother, in surprise. "You'll soil the tablecloth." "Oh, no, I won't!" replied the youngster. "I'm just trying to rub two spots into one."

The Niagara Gorge. The roadbed of the Niagara Gorge railroad is to be made a public highway for automobiles and other vehicles.

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