



**Bread and  
Butter**

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By Henry Kitchell Webster

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She did not always kiss Jerry, even when it was a matter of weeks since they had seen each other. But something about the dejected look of him as he came blundering into her sewing-room that morning, where she was finishing up the month's checks, impelled her, as she grasped his outstretched hand, to pull up a little closer and offer him her cheek.

He was engaged, to be sure; had been for more than a year, and Ethel was an altogether lovely girl. But Helen had a hunch that he would like, just now; a kiss that had no emotional connotations whatever, that didn't call for raptures, that meant nothing in the world but affection and good will, only with a slightly higher coefficient than what they used for everyday consumption.

Evidently he did like it, for he held her out at arm's length by the shoulders for a minute and said "Gee!" in a heartfelt sort of way before he let her go.

They were immensely fond of each other, really. He was her husband's younger brother,—younger by two or three years than herself,—and as he had never had a sister until Tom's marriage gave him one, nor she a brother, they had adopted each other from the start. It was just as good, they agreed, as if they had been born that way. Probably it was a little better. Because there weren't any of the gritty, refractory memories of their less agreeable periods, as there often are between a born brother and sister, to get in the way. The thing had a sort of freshness.

"Good trip?" she asked.

He was a consulting gas engineer, and he had been away three or four weeks, making a valuation of a municipal lighting plant.

"Yes," he said; and then: "No—rotten! Oh, the business end was all right. I guess I gave satisfaction."

Before he had finished she had time to realize the extraordinariness of his being here at all—in her house in the middle of a work-day morning.

“Something gone wrong?” she asked. And then, with a sudden tightening of the throat: “Not about Tom?”

“He’s all right, as far as I know. I’ve not seen him. Only got in this morning, and came right out here.”

But, as she still waited rather tensely for the explanation of the phenomenon, he went on:

“I thought I’d like a little talk with you before I saw—anybody.”

When her gaze left his face, it turned out the open door and rested on a closed one across the hall. Then she brought it back for a rather disapproving survey of the room they were standing in.

“This is a fussy, ratty-looking place for a talk, don’t you think?” she suggested. “And I’m such a mess myself. I’ve just had the baby for an hour. Go downstairs—there’s a dear—and find something to smoke and get comfy. I’ll be along in a minute.”

He got the impression, from the way she lowered her voice, that one of the children was probably taking a nap somewhere, so he nodded acquiescence to her suggestion and departed on tiptoe.

She stood there, just as he had left her, until she heard him reach the foot of the stairs. Then, after listening a moment outside the closed door to which her glance had wandered when he was talking, she sped down the hall to her own room, where she repaired the damages wrought by the baby, and, after hesitating a second, changed swiftly into another frock. It took only a couple of minutes, after all. It was much better to let him wait than to run the risk, supposing it were a real crisis, of having her powers of persuasion fail just because she didn’t look nice enough. She was a pretty wise young woman. She’d been married four years, too.

But down in the big drawing-room, or library, or living-room (Helen never could make up her mind what she wanted it called—drawing-room sounded like putting on airs, and the two narrow little bookshelves built in beside the brick fireplace hardly constituted it a library, whereas living-room was simply a confession that there wasn’t any name to call it by)—down in the one important room on the first floor that was neither the kitchen nor the dining-room, Jerry

was neither finding something to smoke nor making himself comfortable, although an admirably stocked humidor and an imposing array of overstuffed furniture offered every opportunity.

He never expected to be comfortable again—didn't know that he wanted to be; and, while that intensely vacuous feeling about his diaphragm persisted, and his muscles rippled and twitched all over him, and his eyelids went on burning, and his lungs felt as if they were full of cotton, and his heart kept racing in that feeble, foolish, fluttering sort of way, the mere thought of tobacco nearly made him sick.

He prowled restlessly about the room, pausing now and again to stare blankly at this familiar object or that until a crazy impulse to kick it over, or smash it, terrified him into moving on again. His mental operations—if one could so describe them—were strictly limited to the assertion that he had got to think; that he'd got to decide what he was going to say to Ethel.

Because memories aren't mental operations at all—not the kind Jerry was suffering from. They came boiling up in him in spite of the most frantic efforts to hold them down.

There was the tactile memory of a hand, the palm against his palm and the slim fingers interlocked with his; the memory of a very velvety rounded white forearm; of silky hair that had bathed his face; of a pair of eyes that had challenged and *then* fled his gaze; of lips—

He clenched his hands and gulped and glared, told himself profanely that he'd got to think. And then the geyser would subside for a moment, only to come boiling up again. There was nothing intrinsically horrible about these memories. But for one damning fact, they might have been in a high degree pleasurable.

But the fact was—you may as well have the secret now, because it must be told—the fact was that the hand and the arm and the eyes and the lips weren't Ethel's.

It is my painful duty as a moralist to exhibit a paradox. If Jerry had been the sort of young man that he with heart-whole conviction thought he was, and abusively that morning called himself,—a worthless, faithless, heartless beast unworthy the affection of any woman better than a harpy, let alone a shining angel like Ethel; had been the loose, rakish, trifling sensualist his atrabilious fancy that morning

painted him, he never would have given two thoughts to the situation. Indeed, it is doubtful if the situation would ever have arisen. It is truly sad, and sadly true, that those who suffer the most excruciating anguish of conscience are seldom those most righteously entitled to it.

It was just because Jerry was such an honest, sound, sweet-minded sort of boy, with the bloom still on him, that a thing like this could happen to him.

It was a sort of instinct that had brought him to Helen's door. Last night, or rather early this morning, in the Pullman, the first blink of light to pierce the blackness of his misery was a resolution, sprung full formed in his brain, not to go to the office at all, nor to let Ethel know that he had come back, until he had told his sister-in-law the whole story. He'd make a clean breast of it to her—call her to the bridge and tell her to take command of the ship. She was awfully fond of Ethel—had had something to do: he suspected, with Ethel's final capitulation to him. So, comforted by the notion of putting the whole horrible business into her capable hands, he had rolled over for the last time and gone to sleep.

Now, however, when she might at any minute come gliding down the stairs, and the actual cold words in which the confession would be stated had got to be thought of, it didn't seem so easy.

How could she understand? How could anybody in the world understand the monstrous, inexplicable thing that had happened to him out there in Dixon City? She'd be astonished, probably, and highly indignant; and that would be pretty bad.

But suppose she weren't? Suppose she made light of it—which was possible, because the actual literal facts, if one missed their spiritual significance, weren't particularly damning—suppose she laughed and patted him on the back and told him not to be a silly. That would be rather worse. Anyhow, it was nobody's business but his and Ethel's!

If his sister-in-law had spent two or three more minutes over changing her frock, she might not have found him. As it was, he greeted her with a sort of abstracted glare, which didn't matter, as she knew it wasn't meant for her. But when she dropped down into the big davenport and patted invitingly the place beside her, he made an involuntary grimace and turned away.

That had been one of Christine's tricks, making him little signals like that across

a roomful of people, so swiftly and so nicely timed that no one else ever noticed.

He went over and stared out of the window, and, though she waited patiently for quite a while, he didn't say a word. Finally:

"I don't suppose anyone's dead," she began, "and you said it was nothing about Tom. But don't keep me guessing at horrors any longer, Jerry. Come along with it!"

"Horrors is right," he said, without looking around. And after another pause, during which she opened her lips once or twice, but forbore to speak, he added:

"I've got to break it off with Ethel. At least, that's what I expect it will come to."

"Has she—?" Helen began to question rather sharply and suddenly, but checked herself and amended the form of it. "What has Ethel done?" she asked.

Jerry turned around and looked at her. "What has she done?" he echoed. "She hasn't done anything, poor child. That's just the horrible part of it."

She waited a little longer, patiently as before.

"Then I suppose it must be something that you've done," she observed perspicaciously; and something about her tone—the words sounding as if they had come from smiling lips—made him whirl around now and glare at her again. But she looked grave enough to satisfy his prolonged and rather suspicious scrutiny.

"Yes," he said out of a very dry throat; "it's something I've done."

But it was evident that his confessional machinery needed a little more cranking up, for he stalled himself at this point and miserably looked out of the window again \_.

"Have you," Helen began—"have you been finding some girl down in Dixon City that you want to marry instead of Ethel?"

That spun him around again.

"No!" he shouted. "I should say not!"

A categorical reply is sometimes ambiguous. This one, be it observed, might mean that he hadn't found a girl at Dixon City, or that, having found her, he didn't want to marry her instead of Ethel.

Helen, it appeared, had no difficulty in deciding which of these presumptions to proceed upon.

"Tell me," she commanded, "exactly what she's like."

Jerry gasped, then took a ruefully admiring look at her. It was part of his job to appear before committees of Aldermen, Boards of Utilities, and similar imposing bodies, and he was generally subjected to a cross-examination by some legal luminary with a brief for the People which the local newspapers invariably described as grilling. But he had never felt, on any of these occasions, quite so much like a trunk that had its lid open and was about to be unpacked as he did now, encountering Helen's friendly, penetrating eye.

"Tell me," she said again, "exactly what this girl, that you don't want to marry instead of Ethel, is like."

And, after he had walked the length of the room and back, she filled the priming-cups and cranked again: "If she's prettier than Ethel, she must be, as Tom would say, some peach."

Jerry exploded: "She's not!"

But he wasn't yet ready to begin firing regularly. He had his back to her now, so Helen indulged in a broad grin.

"Awfully intellectual, perhaps," she ventured, but didn't seem surprised at not getting even a denial.

"How old is she?" she asked suddenly.

There was something a little sheepish about Jerry at this point. "I don't know," he said, as if that detail had escaped him. "It didn't occur to me to ask her."

He turned around quickly enough this time to catch the departing corner of Helen's grin, and flushed up protestingly.



“It seems rather rotten to be talking her over like this,” he said.

“She’d have the same scruples, I suppose.”—Helen didn’t look at him as she said it,—“about discussing you.”

Jerry protested that this wasn’t fair. It was different, somehow. But then he took a long breath and really began:

“Why, she’s the sister of the wife of one of the men who retained me to go down there. She’s visiting them, and they were awfully nice to me, so of course I saw a lot of her. She dresses a lot and dances awfully well, and—I guess she finds Dixon City pretty slow.”

Evidently the hill of confession grew steeper at this point, for his engine stalled again. Something particularly hard to say was coming. But, with an uncanny sort of penetration that brought a stare from him, Helen helped him out:

“I suppose you told her you were engaged to Ethel?”

“Yes,” he said, “I did. And she said that that was all the more reason why she and I should play around together; that with my fiancée in Chicago and her husband in Europe —”

He stopped there—stood aside, as it were, to give Helen’s expression of righteous horror the right of way. “S-so!” she would say, hissing hot with scornful indignation. “That’s what you’ve been doing! Making love to a married woman. I’m amazed; I’m disgusted with you! And I hope, certainly, that Ethel has too much good sense to trust her happiness to a man who could be capable of such a thing.”

But she hadn’t said anything yet. Perhaps she hadn’t understood. To have it over with, he discounted her denunciation.

“That’s what I’ve been doing, you see,” he said. “Making love to a married woman.”

“Yes,” said Helen—rather idiotically, he thought; “they’re always married. Oh, do, Jerry,—there’s a dear,—sit down and take it a little—easier. It has happened before in the world, you know.”

He compromised between the luxurious place beside her which she again indicated, and his caged-animal patrol, by sitting down grudgingly on a hard little ottoman.

“You don’t know what has happened—yet,” he said rather sulkily; for it was beginning to look as if Helen were going to prove as incapable of any real understanding of the state of affairs as—well, Tom himself, for example.

“I guess I know what happened near enough,” she said thoughtfully, “and I can see how hard it is for you to tell me, so I’ll tell you.”

And, after giving him a last chance to undertake the job himself, she began to do it:

“When you first met her, you thought, just because she was older than you and married, that there couldn’t be any danger. A nice, elderly old thing of thirty, with a husband—she’d probably forgotten how to flirt years ago! It struck you as awfully virtuous and self-denying to dance with her and sit around on verandas with her, and all that, instead of with the kids. And she treated you as if you were about forty, and awfully experienced and sophisticated, and you liked that.

“And you sat out dances with her, and she told you all about her husband, and tried to get you to tell her a lot about Ethel. And then she began talking about how glad she was that you were friends, and reached out and squeezed your hand. And a few days afterward, without quite knowing how it happened, you kissed her.

“And after that you felt dreadfully wicked and miserable when you were away from her, and awfully wicked and excited when you were with her, and you made good resolutions, only they wouldn’t work. And every time you thought about Ethel, it made you so sick that you stopped thinking of her as quickly as you could. And—well, there you are.”

Every sentence or two, during the statement of this hypothesis, she had made little pauses, so that Jerry should have plenty of chance to correct it, if he liked. But he hadn’t taken any of them; hadn’t said a word, nor even moved.

After a rather long silence at the end of it, Helen added:

“That’s about how it all happened, isn’t it?”

He nodded; then, with a frown, looked up at her.

“I don’t see how you happen to know such a lot about it,” he said.

And, even in his misery, he noted that the smile this brought to her lips was a little complex.

“An old married woman like me gets to be a pretty good guesser,” she said.

In a detached, speculative mood, had such a thing ever possessed him, he might have found much food for thought in this last rather absently spoken remark of Helen’s. But certainly he had no leisure for it now. She and Tom were married—safe in the harbor of Happily Ever After. It was his own frail bark that, with the harbor lights fairly sighted,—for he and Ethel were to have been married in April,—had run upon the siren’s reef.

It mattered very little how Helen came by her knowledge. The important fact was that she knew. She had told the story almost as well as he could have told it himself.

It had somehow, to be sure, lacked the punch that he would have put into it. That first hand-clasp, for instance. She had told of it as if such things had been everyday occurrences. To Jerry this unsought caress had been an emotional thunder-bolt launched at him out of a tranquil sky. He remembered having assured himself, half incredulously, after he’d got back to his room in the hotel that night, that the thing had actually happened—not in a book or a magazine, but really and literally happened to him.

However, Helen’s résumé of the affair covered the ground. It would do for a working hypothesis to proceed by. Only, how could they proceed? What was there to do, except the horrible task of telling Ethel all about it and accepting the inevitably disastrous results? Evidently that was the way Helen saw it. She hadn’t said anything for ever so long.

At last she stirred. And, looking round at her, he found her leaning forward, her chin in her hand, smiling a little at him.

“Jerry,” she said, “will you cheer up and take my word for something?” Then, though he didn’t look very cheerful, she chanced it. “Will you take my word that this is the luckiest thing that could possibly have happened to you?”

The incredulity in his frown deepened as he thought this over into something nearer anger than he had thought it possible for him to feel toward Helen.

“The only thing that can possibly mean,” he said presently, “is that Ethel and I weren’t meant for each other in the first place and that it’s lucky we’ve found it out before it’s too late. But I hope you aren’t going to try to tell me that. The thing’s a tragedy, that’s what it is; and if you don’t see it, it’s because you don’t understand.”

He got up and began patrolling the room again.

“Oh, I know,” he flashed out at last. “Most people would say that it was nothing, and that I was a fool to take it seriously. It’s happened before, as you say. But, in a way, it hasn’t happened before, because it hasn’t happened to Ethel and me. It might be nothing if it had happened to anybody else.”

She didn’t try to answer him, and he walked away again. But on his next trip he pulled up in front of her once more.

“Don’t you see?” he said. “It isn’t that I’ve done something so wicked that I’m not fit to marry her, nor that I can’t ask her to forgive me. It isn’t that at all. But, when I tell her about it, she’ll ask me why I wanted to do it, if I’m in love with her. And what can I say? I don’t know how it happened—how it could have happened. But it did happen.”

He ran both hands through his hair and thrust them out at her in a kind of furious bewilderment.

“And I wanted it to happen. I didn’t want it to stop. There! Now you know. Nothing like it ever happened to me before. Nobody, not even Ethel, ever made me feel like that.”

Still his confession failed to produce any of the reaction he had expected. She didn’t look startled or horrified or indignant, and the faint, thoughtful smile with which she presently looked up at him had no trace of derision in it—was all sympathy. And, now that the whole tale was told and he knew that he wasn’t getting it under false pretenses, he found it vaguely comforting.

Once more she patted the place beside her, and this time he dropped down into it. When she spoke, it was to ask a question that, for its irrelevance, surprised

him.

“When did you fall in love with Ethel?” was what she wanted to know.

When he had managed to focus his mind on the question—“Why,” he told her, “we have always said it was when I first went to dancing school.”

She smiled at that, and might have seen had she not been too tactful to look around at him, the faint reflection of it upon his own lips.

“I was eight,” he went on, “and she was seven. And Lord! how rotten I felt, all dolled up in pumps and a stiff collar and idiotic white gloves! And the old Frenchman who’d taught everybody in town to dance for the last twenty-five years called me out and made fun of me, and everybody else laughed but Ethel. I knew her then, but I don’t believe I’d ever paid any attention to her before.

“But the first time it was the girls’ turn to choose their partners, she came over and chose me; and she was the prettiest girl there and the best dancer, and—well, I guess that’s when I fell in love with her. At least—”

But he seemed unable to find the words he needed to express whatever qualification was in his mind, and he let it go.

“Do you remember the first time you asked her to marry you?”

This time his smile was unmistakable.

“Sure I do,” he said. “We had been to a high-school dance together. I was taking her home. Imagine, kids like that! I couldn’t have been more than fifteen. I’d just been reading my first love story. I’d always thought they were awful rot before. I started reading this one because, from the title, I thought it was all about fighting and revolutions and so on. It was Richard Harding Davis’ ‘Soldiers of Fortune.’ Do you remember it?”

“But when I got to the spooning part, I liked that, too. The girl—the young one, you know, the real heroine—was a lot like Ethel; a good pal, and up to everything her brother was. Not a bit squashy and sentimental. And then, the pictures of her looked like Ethel.

”Well, I thought it was up to me to do something romantic, so I asked her to

marry me. She laughed at me, and I got quite violent and spouted a lot of stuff out of the book, and at the end I tried to kiss her. But I didn't know how it was done, exactly, and all I managed was to bump her nose. She was furious, and so was I, and we didn't speak to each other for three days."

Helen asked another queer question:

"Didn't you ever take on anybody else—for practice?"

"I should say not! If I couldn't make it go with Ethel—"

He let the sentence fade out unfinished, and his momentary mood of comparative cheerfulness faded out, too. He slumped back morosely among the cushions.

"I suppose that's what it's all about, really," he said after a while. "She's always been—my girl. There never was any one like her in the world as a—pal, you know. There never was anything I was interested in that she couldn't understand, and there never was any trouble I could get into that she couldn't help me out of. It always made me feel good—sort of secure—to be with her. Neither of us cared about anybody else. Only, the other people that paired off all the time were different. Sentimental and jealous and quarreling and making up, and that sort of thing.

"We used to try it, or at least I did, once in a while; but—well, we always felt sort of unhappy and inadequate, and we never began really having a good time again until we stowed our nonsense. And since we got engaged it's been worse. We'd have a lovely time together until we'd read something in a poem or play or novel about raptures and delirium and torment, and then we'd get to wondering what was the matter with us. It didn't seem as if we could be the real thing.

"It never bothered me as much as it did Ethel. I always said that as long as we were perfectly happy together I didn't see that it was anybody's business but ours how we did it."

He thought Helen was about to speak; but some sound she heard upstairs lodged in the domestic layer of her mind, and she got up and went to the hall doorway, where she stood for a minute listening. Then she came back, pushed up the little ottoman with her foot, and sat down facing him.

“Cheer up, Jerry,” she said.

“It’s a cheerful prospect, isn’t it?” he said grimly. “You see what I mean now, though. You can’t help seeing how it will strike Ethel when I tell her what happened to me down there in Dixon City. She’ll say that that just proves what she’s been afraid of all along—that we aren’t really in love with each other at all.

“And the devil of it is, I don’t know myself whether she’s right or not. I know I wouldn’t be married to Christine for a million dollars a year. Why, I don’t even—exactly—like her. And I can’t think of anything better than being married to Ethel. And yet, if people have to feel and carry on the way they do in books in order to be happily married—”

He sprang to his feet and began tramping up and down the room again.

“Look here!” said Helen suddenly. “Did you ever hear about the Golden Rule? Well, try looking at it that way for a minute.”

He paused and frowned over this suggestion. “That’s doing as you’d be done by, isn’t it? Well, what’s the application?”

“Why,” she said slowly, “just suppose for a minute that what happened to you had happened to Ethel.”

He couldn’t seem to get the notion through his head.

“How do you mean—happened to Ethel?” he asked.

“Why, suppose” -she seemed to be reaching out at random for an illustration —“suppose that, while she had been visiting Rose Thorne the first two weeks that you were away, some man had made love to her in an awfully attractive sort of way, and she found she liked it—not liked him especially, but liked it.”

He had drawn breath once or twice to interrupt her, but it wasn’t until now that he fairly got the words out:

“What in the world are you talking about? You don’t mean that while she was visiting the Thornes anything like that did—”

“Jerry!” She’d been riding on the snaffle up to now. This was a sharp pull on the

curb. “I’ve heard it said that a woman couldn’t understand the statement of a hypothetical case. But when a scientifically educated man takes it that way—”

She saw that he was adequately subdued, and reverted—with a certain gusto, one might have thought—to Ethel’s supposititious love affair.

“Suppose he was as different a sort of man from you as—as caviar is from bread and butter. Suppose he had a way of saying things to her, and looking at her, and”—Helen’s smile broadened a little—“kissing her hand, or even the hem of her skirt, that was perfectly and entirely thrilling. Suppose it made her feel sort of—proud and triumphant that a man who had made love to as many girls as he had should find her attractive enough to want to make love to her.

“Suppose she didn’t more than half like him, and didn’t trust him a bit, and would work in a laundry rather than marry him, and yet, because of the wonder of being carried away like that, had forgotten you as well as she could and let him go on and do it. And then suppose she came and told you all about it. Well—what would you do?”

If what he did on being confronted by the hypothesis were any criterion, he wouldn’t do much of anything but stare and knot his hands together. A dispassionate view of his own sad case in reverse seemed, for the moment, beyond him.

“Well, then,” the wielder of the probe went on relentlessly, “what would you want her to do? Would you want her to be very magnanimous and refuse to marry you because she was convinced that you were convinced that she didn’t love you enough? Or would you rather have her say”—Helen got up from her ottoman and walked to the window, pulled him around so that he faced her, and took him by his coat lapels—“have her say, ‘Please, Jerry, marry me as quickly as you can, so that a thing like this won’t—won’t be so likely ever to happen again’?”

His eyes misted up at that, and he pulled in a long breath. Given time, he would have used it, most likely, to stammer out something of his feeling of gratitude to her for lifting, in that wonderful way, the scales from his eyes before he went to Ethel and made a hopeless mess of things. But he wasn’t given time for any of this. Because, just exactly in that little silence, while he was trying to find breath and words, he heard a step coming down the stairs—a step that, except for the



strangeness of it in this house at this hour, he'd have said he knew. The next instant a voice he did know—a voice that this time made his heart jump—called:

“Helen.”

“Go into the dining-room, dear,” Helen called back. “Your breakfast’s there. I’ll be along in a minute.”

Jerry made a move toward the door; but Helen held her grip on his lapels and, with a look of intense significance, kept him from calling out. So they waited until they heard the steps turn off to the right and go to the dining-room. Then—

“Have you had any breakfast yourself?” she whispered.

He shook his head.

She let go of him, but said, still in a whisper: “Wait a minute. Let me think.” And pretty soon she began to smile.

“Ethel wanted to talk to me last night,” she explained, still in a carefully guarded voice, “so she came out to dinner and, after Tom went to bed, we sat up till all hours. That’s why she’s so late. Go in and have breakfast with her, Jerry. But—but promise me one thing. Promise that you’ll wait ten minutes, by the banjo clock, before you say anything—anything at all about—what was her name?—Christine?”

He stared at her. It was a queer thing to ask. He wanted to blurt the whole thing out—get it over with; and it seemed to him—he told her this—that he ought to know best the way to go about it.

“Didn’t you come all the way out here to ask me what you ought to do?” she demanded.

He couldn’t deny that.

“Well, that’s what I tell you,” she said. “Wait ten minutes.”

“Oh, all right, then. After all, I don’t see that ten minutes will make much difference.”

“Perhaps not,” said Helen. “Run along.”

But, as things fell out, he broke that promise. The thick rug that led into the dining-room silenced his footfall, and what he saw, as he halted with held breath in the doorway, was Ethel sitting there over her breakfast in a chair that had its back to him. So, for a moment before she knew he was in the room, he just stood and looked at her.

And, somehow, she was a different Ethel. There was always something finely chiseled about Ethel’s beauty, whether in a swimming suit or in a ball gown, whether she was playing tennis or the piano—a kind of fine taut nervous poise about her that gave one a sense of coolness and confidence and resiliency. Her body, like her mind, came to a fine, clean edge. One was quite prepared, from the look of her, to learn of the immense number of things she could do brilliantly well.

But, as Jerry stood and gazed at her this morning, she didn’t look like that at all. The dress had a little to do with it, perhaps. She was in a soft, fluffy, ruffly negligé that she had borrowed from Helen, and the fact that her absolutely raven-black hair hung down in two great braids (he hadn’t seen it done like that since they were children)—that, or something else, gave her a look of softness, of helplessness. Her head was drooping forward, her fine white hands lying slackly on the table.

The whole effect of it brought a tightness into his throat and set his heart to racing again. There was a sort of intimacy about it, as if something he had always seen her wear—some sort of bright defensive armor—were now laid aside. And between two opposite impulses, one to steal away from an unmeant intrusion upon something sacred, and the other to drop down on his knees beside her there and take that soft, slack, helpless body in a tight, protecting embrace, he stayed breathless there just as he was.

Finally something—it could only, he thought, have been the quivering intensity of the silence itself—made her turn and look round at him. Just a wide-eyed look at first, and then a wave of bright color in her cheeks and the sparkling brightness of unspilled tears in her eyes, and two white arms reached out to him.

He had to blink before he could see any more. And then the hands that had invited him suddenly held him off, and the wave of color receded out of her

cheeks and left them white, and the look that came into her eyes was frightened.

“Wait!” she said. “S-sit down—over there, Jerry, and listen. I’ve—I’ve got to tell you something.”

There was a touch of imagination about Jerry, and it came flaming to his rescue now. He didn’t need to wait. He knew without being told.

He shook his head with an unsteady sort of laugh, and dropped down beside her, and got his arms around her and nestled his head into the silky folds of the borrowed negligee. And, somehow, he didn’t feel foolish or inadequate a bit. It didn’t occur to him even to note the fact that he didn’t.

“I know,” he said. “I know all about it. And the same horrible thing happened to me. And—and, Ethel darling, please let’s be married as soon as we can, so that it can’t happen again to either of us.”

And a few minutes later, ♦ “We’ve each had a taste of caviar,” he said; “but we know now that we like bread and butter better.”

She’d got her smile back—her thoughtful, wonderful, slow smile with just a touch of mockery about it.

“Bread and butter—and sugar, Jerry,” she said.