

STORIETTES

Purple and Fine Linen

THE big, white automobile was out for its trial spin—as the men with Dick Gibson knew. As they also knew, and as he half confessed amid their chaff, if it made good on this breakneck, nerve-wrecking journey it was to be a votive offering to Her.

They shot past maples and spreading chestnuts, and skimmed lightly the deep shadowy stains thrown by a low sun on the shell-like whiteness of the road. The drive was almost deserted, and Gibson opened the throttle and raced through the air at a pace which made his companions pull their hats more firmly over set brows. As they swerved suddenly around a curve, they saw just ahead of them a smart runabout, and in it a young couple oblivious of the world. The man's arm, in its dark sleeve, made a sharp contrasting line about the girl's waist, and as he held her close their lips met in a clinging kiss. The idyllic tableau was rudely interrupted by a hoarse *honk, honk*; and at the warning sound the man clutched his lines, steadying the chestnut mare with a word of command. The girl, as they disentangled themselves, buried her face in her hands with swift instinct for self-preservation, thereby hiding her identity completely.

"Kirke's a cad!" said Harris. "A man ought to protect a woman, and not kiss her in daylight on a public road!"

The addendum was received with a shout of derision which relieved the tension, and the subject was dropped, only to be renewed that night at the club.

"Have any of you fellows seen a dress——" began Frank Harris.

"Loads of 'em," interrupted Ames cheerfully; "but they were all occupied. What kind do you want?"

"Shut up, you blithering old owl," retorted Harris with amiable directness. "Has any one seen a purple dress——"

"It wasn't purple," said Stewart scornfully. Having sisters, he was en-

titled to speak with wisdom. "It was mauve, or something like that; and the hat was covered with violets," he finished triumphantly.

But no one had seen the frock or the violet chapeau, and so the quivering purple shoulders, and their owner's identity, remained a mystery.

Gibson promptly forgot her, for his dreams were all of the girl to whom the white car was to go as a lover's gift—who had promised to ride beside him next day to the tea at the country club—whose blue eyes had answered his mating—his wife that should be. He anticipated her delight in the new car, and was rejoiced that he could give her costly things; for she was poor—a distant connection of the rich young woman whose guest she was.

Next day, therefore, when she came down the broad stairway in Miss Channing's home, the violets that Gibson had sent her pinned against her breast, the rush of happiness obliterated for the moment, all things save her eyes and her voice. But with returning consciousness came a clearer view, and her image was suddenly seared into his soul. She wore a close-fitting suit of purplish hue, and, swathed in a filmy veil, a violet-covered hat! It must be some hideous mistake—it could not be Grace Martin that Kirke had kissed—not the girl he loved! But the picture which rose before his dull eyes was too clear.

By this time they were, he knew not how, at the curb, where the car coughed and spluttered. He jerked up the bonnet and fumbled needlessly over the engine, hiding his burning face from her. He could not take her, he dared not! Take her past the club, to that tea! Impossible! Dazed and stunned, miserable, his ideal destroyed, his happiness blasted, he replied at last to her questions with some inarticulate remarks, and under pretense of showing her a new building, avoided the club windows by devious ways.

He had time to get his breath before they reached the long, white road which led straight to the grounds of the country club, and to the golf tea.

"Would you—would you mind just taking a little spin through East Park and going home?" he asked.

The girl caught her breath, and said in what tried to be a cheerful tone:

"Not if you feel ill—is your head aching again?"

The wistful note cut him to the quick; but he set his teeth grimly.

"No, my head doesn't ache," some perverse devil prompted him to say.

Miss Martin stiffened.

"You promised to bring Cousin Kate and Mr. McGruder home," she reminded him coldly.

"I don't think they are going," he hazarded.

"Why, they are already there," she replied, amazed. "They are playing a foursome with Mary McGruder and Mr. Kirke."

Kirke! He clenched the steering-wheel and threw in the high speed clutch, whereat they bounded viciously forward. So she wanted to see Kirke! Well, she should see him. But why had she worn that dress?

As for the girl, her beautiful edifice of trust and love was crumbling. Yet, with a woman's pride, she continued to talk, and Gibson knew that he would have been charmed at any other time. Finally, puzzled and disconcerted by his strange mood, she leaned back in her seat with flushed cheeks and dangerously bright eyes. Thus they rode in silence.

At the clubhouse the men were perched for the most part on the wide railing, with their heels tucked comfortably in the grillwork below, while the chairs on the shady veranda were left for the prettily gowned women. Kate Channing, playing with her favorite brassie, her forearms bare and burned to a delicious brown, her fair hair tucked under a natty golf cap, was a radiant picture.

"Bring some tea for Grace, Mr. Ames," she commanded, as she saw the white car coming.

Ames obeyed—every one obeyed Miss Channing unquestioningly—and as he came back with the brimming cup Miss Martin was accepting a proffered seat.

"Here's your cup that cheers," he began; then, catching sight of the betraying raiment, he floundered, and though he did not entirely lose his self-possession, he did lose the tea.

"But it must be taken internally to be efficacious," Grace exclaimed, just escaping the deluge by a quick yet graceful movement.

Ames only stared stupidly at his friend, seeking some explanation for that purple-clad and violet-crowned figure; but he met a steel-cold look, and when at last Gibson spoke there was a strange, weary note in the man's voice.

The dull red that had swept into Kirke's face at their coming grew deeper. Miss McGruder and her brother, who had lost the foursome, were explaining their defeat to the circle around them. Miss Channing's brown fingers were beating an impatient tattoo on her golf club. Grace Martin's glance, oddly troubled and puzzled, sought Gibson's, not Kirke's, as the former noted with a thrill of miserable satisfaction, and he wondered why.

When Harris and Stewart drove up with a couple of girls in their brake, Gibson knew that the men had told the joke; it was too good to keep. Commiseratingly he looked again at Grace, so sweet, so fair; her coat, partly open, showing the white blouse of linen and lace within, and the great bunch of violets at her breast. How he loved her! His passionate anger burned out suddenly, and he determined to save her from the consequences of her own folly. She loved Kirke—the kiss had disclosed that. She should be free; and then, if the engagement was announced immediately, the tang and flavor in this gossipy story would vanish. Fortunately no one knew as yet of their own betrothal.

Gibson's face cleared, and for the first time that afternoon his eyes met hers reassuringly. She responded quickly with a forgiving ghost of a smile.

Just then the four newcomers joined the veranda group. Mischievous merriment leaped into their eyes as they greeted Miss Channing and her visitor, while Gibson nerved himself for the fight, deciding that Miss Martin should somehow leave the field with colors flying.

"What an odd, beautiful shade of

purple Miss Martin's suit is," murmured one of the girls presently.

"Is it purple?" Harris quizzed. "Stewart called it mauve, but I said it was purple."

Kirke's face had turned to crimson, and he seemed incapable of speech; but Grace Martin, strange to say, appeared perfectly cool and self-contained.

"It is an odd shade," she said, "and beautiful, too. Don't you think so?" Her frank and innocent reply provoked a laugh, and almost disarmed her malicious tormentors.

"Yes; it is beautiful." Stewart was mercilessly outspoken. "We could not see it so well yesterday. But it is lovely—and so is the wearer," he concluded.

"Yesterday?" she questioned. "Yesterday? You did not see it then?"

Gibson groaned, with a morbid desire to kick Stewart.

"Oh, yes, indeed we did! Don't you remember when we passed you?"

"No," she answered, with a pleasant, positive shake of her head.

So this was why she wore the dress, merely for the opportunity to disclaim participation in the osculatory episode. He had not suspected his sweetheart of such duplicity or such shrewdness. She would make them think it was some other girl, some other purple gown! He admired her courage and wit; but the voice was going on meanwhile, softly, gently.

"No, you could not have seen me in this dress, because I did not have it." She smiled fondly across the circle. Kate Channing's fingers ceased to play nervously with her golf club, and she half rose, as if to interrupt; but she was too late. "My cousin, who is so good to me always, gave me the dress this morning," Grace went on. "She was generous enough to say that it was more becoming to me than to herself; but I know she only wanted a pretext for giving me a frock of my favorite color."

Only Miss McGruder and her brother were unmoved as Grace Martin finished. Kirke's eyes were fastened on Kate Channing's scarlet face. Ames, Stewart, and Harris were ready to explode, if their countenances spoke their true condition. The two girls talked volubly, not daring to glance at each other nor at the generous Miss Channing.

To Dick Gibson it was given to know sudden, delirious, mad bliss. The world had never seemed so lovely, the sky so blue and pure—blue as his sweetheart's eyes—pure as her heart; and to that purity he would pay everlasting homage.

Robert Armstrong

"All the Latest Magazines"

THEY had parted forever at two o'clock—forever, mind you—and now here they both were at half-past three, in the same Pullman, Janette bound for New York, Bill for New Haven. Bill was sitting only three seats behind Janette, too, which was most vexatious; she could feel his angry eyes boring coldly through the back of her head like twin augers of blue steel. No, she hadn't turned around to see, but she felt them bore, just the same. And how could they be anything but angry after what she had said to Bill that morning at the Malcolms'? Bill hadn't said anything in answer, she remembered, but his face had been terrible. Dear me, to think that big, kind, brotherly Bill—but then, what did it matter, now that they had parted forever?

Heavens! That wretched, impertinent mirror at the end of the car! It showed Janette with perfect distinctness the scattering half dozen passengers reading or dozing; Bill's shoulder was reflected, too, though his face was hidden. How big the shoulder looked! Shaking? My goodness, it couldn't be as serious as that! Eh—what? A comic weekly in Bill's hands? Bill choking with laughter? Well, that settled it! Perhaps Janette might have relented after ten years—or a week—but *now!* No, it was all over, all, every bit, forever and ever. Her healthy young cheek reddened hotly as she thought of Bill's unreasonable insistence that he must get back to his lectures just when she wanted him to stay for an automobile tour.

She stared resentfully—no, no, indifferently—out of the window at the whirling landscape, which wheeled past in Titanic minutes. Her fingers drummed the pane, just loud enough to let Bill hear how care-free she really was. What right had he to take the same car? He might at least have had