

Blarney

A NEWSPAPER WOMAN'S ORIGINAL EXPERIMENT IN GIVING
PRACTICAL ASSISTANCE TO THE LOVELORN

By Beatrice Ashton Vandegrift

MIRIAM HALE reflectively fingered the handle of her coffee cup, brought her gaze to a focus upon the young man opposite her, and began, seriously:

"Do you know, Larry, that my conscience is beginning to hurt?"

"And do you mean to be insinuating," returned Larry, curbing a twinkle of his Celtic blue eyes, "that a newspaper woman has a conscience?"

"Yes, in this case. Larry, when I stop to think that I have been the arbiter of a thousand souls, have directed hundreds of hesitant feet on a road which may have been the wrong one, it—appalls me!"

"Crushing!" bantered Larry.

"Don't be such an imp, Larry! There are some things in this world that can't be laughed off, you know, and this is one of them. I mean it. I've really been worrying about those poor, perplexed young people who have written to me from the depths of their hearts and asked me for advice. And what have I given them? A superfluous caution, concocted without a moment's serious reflection between sips of hurried coffee in a place like this. Why, Larry"—she laughed, half in shame—"I've been turning out advice like—boiler plate!"

"Efficient little woman!" exclaimed Larry, with admiration.

"Larry, you're a rogue!" scolded Miriam, a fine frown penciling her brows. "Can't you understand how I feel about all this? Why, here's a letter I got this morning, for instance." She explored the depths of her shiny black hand bag. "Oh, here it is!

"DEAR MISS HALE:

"I am a young girl, eighteen, brown-haired, blue-eyed, and considered pretty. Recently I met a man two years my senior, and he proposed to

me. He went away, saying that he would come back, but he has not done so, and has not written. Dear Miss Hale, what shall I do, as I love him very much?"

"Touching!" observed Larry, though his sober blue eyes belied the lightness of the remark.

"It is," agreed Miriam. "And here's the reply I shall probably dash off while waiting for dessert:

"My dear, you must forget this man. His actions show plainly that he is not serious in his attitude toward you. You are young, my dear, and there will come others more worthy of your affection."

"And I," stated Miss Hale, "can toss off a thing like that between omelette and chocolate éclair, while poor little Brokenheart is anxiously waiting for the next edition to bring her a magic word of wisdom that will spirit her man back to her with wedding bells! I tell her to forget him, that he isn't worthy of her. How do I know? I tell her there will come other men. How do I know that? And even though it may be true, what comfort could it possibly be?"

"Aye, what indeed?" grinned Larry. "Can you imagine, now, the comfort it would be to a woman who has known the smile of Larry O'Moore to be told that there are other men?"

"Larry, you're impossible!"

"No, darlin'," he denied gravely. "Nothing is."

"Well, but I do wish you'd take me seriously!"

"Miriam, I wish you'd take me—seriously," he begged, his voice trembling a little beneath its banter.

Miriam studied him coolly through long, sweeping lashes.

"Dear boy," she told him at length, with a curiously maternal smile, "I feel toward you much as I do toward tonic. You're bright, sparkling, and exhilarating; but, dear heart, the label says to 'shake well before taking.'"

She laughed provokingly.

"All right!" consented Larry, squaring his shoulders.

"That's not the kind I mean, Larry. I mean that you need a mental shaking. With your brains and energy, you should be doing something bigger in the world than pawing over secondhand copy in a musty newspaper office."

"But I *am* going to do something big," declared Larry exuberantly. "Don't you call a successful novel anything?"

"When you've finished the first chapter, Larry, I'll admit that you're on the way to accomplishment."

"Ah, Miriam, Miriam!" he coaxed, in his soft, Celtic slur. "If I had *you* to come home to, 'twould make all the difference in the world. I could write twenty novels, and, what is more, I could sell them."

"Do that first, Larry, and you may have me to come home to."

She cut firmly into her chocolate éclair, crushing it as ruthlessly as she had crushed Larry's dreams.

"A fine lot of advice you're handing the lovelorn!" he grumbled.

"I'm sorry," said Miriam, returning to her original topic, "but I intend to institute a reform."

"Eh?" exclaimed Larry hopefully, lifting his rumpled, dark head like a wild pony on the moors.

"My plan," stated Miriam, with quiet zeal, "is to bring my readers—at least, as many as I can—into personal contact with me. That's the only way I can get a real insight into their troubles."

"Good Lord!" exploded Larry. "Do you intend filling the office with a lovesick tribe of females from the Bronx to the Battery, all wailing out their troubles in every key known to the musical ear? St. Peter, it 'll be a wake!"

"You're burlesquing it, Larry. I shall choose one letter only each week, and have the writer come to me. She shall live with me for the following week, so that I can get to know her, and can help her in whatever way she needs."

"Live with you!" repeated Larry, incredulous. "You're taking an awful

chance, Miriam, on getting your throat cut and having the family jewels stolen!"

"And *you* talk to a newspaper woman of taking chances!" scoffed Miriam. "What do you think I've been doing the last three years, ever since old Hardy took me on? Fires, murders—from East Side to West Side—poking my nose into everything under the sun—rubbing elbows with every sort of creature that God has made, from the best to the worst; and you talk to me of taking chances!"

"Hush, Miriam! You know, if I had had my way, you'd be sitting home on a silk cushion!"

"And wondering where the rent was coming from."

"It's better for a woman to be wondering about it," said Larry grimly, "than to be out getting it."

"Not this woman!"

Larry poured the rest of his cream upon his apple pie.

"Well, what do you think of my scheme?" asked Miriam brightly, after an uncertain silence.

"I appreciate the big heart that prompted it, darlin'."

"But the scheme, itself?"

"It's crazy. Hardy will never let you do it."

"Hardy isn't going to know anything about it. It's my own personal undertaking. I'm sorry you think it's crazy, because I was going to ask you to help me."

"And I will," promised Larry resolutely. "If you're going to do something foolish, you'll need my help."

"Thank you!" returned Miriam graciously. "I appoint you judge of this week's prize letter. Come to the house on Saturday, and there'll be a batch to choose from. Now, I've got to run along. I have an appointment to interview the 'most beautiful girl in America.' Don't you wish you could meet her, Larry?"

"Ah, but I have!" whispered Larry, lending Miriam a deft hand with her coat, his eyes bent to the beauty of her upturned face.

For a moment she stood confused, like a young girl in the shyness of her first compliment. Then—

"Blarney!" she flung over her shoulder, and swept from the restaurant with the air of a goddess.

Larry watched her as she went, tall, slender, wrapped close in her long coat of squir-

rel — competent, self-contained, with the poise of the ages in her worldly little walk. And Larry sighed.

II

"ONLY nine letters to choose from!" exclaimed Larry, on the following Saturday, dumping the nine into his awkwardly made lap. "The broken heart market must be slow this week!"

"It's unusually good," contradicted Miriam calmly, from the mauve plush davenport across the room.

She was stitching away at a silk cushion, to add to the gay assortment piled high above her head. Larry watched the winter afternoon sun upon her pale gold hair, and followed its path to the interesting pattern it wove upon the warm blue rug—a pattern molded by the wicker bird cage swinging slowly in the window.

"I usually get about half that many," she added, drawing a long orange thread through her lips, "and have to make up the rest."

Larry chuckled, and the little gray love bird answered him from its cage. It was all very homy and simple and nice. It seemed to Larry like a realization of his dream picture.

"Have you hit upon the prize letter yet?" asked Miriam, with interest.

"I think I have," answered Larry, looking up. "If there ever was a poor devil that wanted help, it's this one. Listen to his tale of woe, darlin', and your two pretty eyes will swim like the Lakes of Killarney. The young fellow starts out by saying:

"DEAR MISS HALE:

"I am a man of twenty-eight, blue-eyed, black-haired, and considered handsome, and I have the bad fortune to be in love with the most beautiful girl in the world. A million times I have asked her to marry me, but she thinks she can do without me. My dear Miss Hale, how can I prove to her that she's wrong?"

Larry ended on a curiously wistful note. He cleared his throat.

"This letter gets the prize," he decided. "All this poor lad needs is a bit of your own personal contact, darlin', and—"

"Larry!"

Miriam dropped her work and sat bolt upright. A gay blue cushion slipped from behind her and slid to the rug with a soft plop.

"You—you—oh, Larry, when will you grow up?"

"When you get young again, Miriam." He eyed her steadily, the mischief fading from his merry blue eyes. She challenged his glance for a moment, and then resumed her sewing, somewhat confusedly.

"I think," she told him, "that you are perfectly horrid! Did you compose the rest of them, too?"

"Ah, now, Miriam," he begged, "don't get mad! Maybe it was only a trick, but that letter came from the bottom of my heart. However, the judge eliminates entry No. 1 and passes on to the next. Hello!"

"Is this one genuine?" asked Miriam suspiciously.

"Cross my heart!" vowed Larry. "It reads:

"DEAR MISS HALE:

"I am nineteen years old, and don't know whether I'm pretty or not; but I want to be, so much, and to make everybody like me, especially *one*. Oh, Miss Hale, if you could only help me!

"VANESSA BIRD."

"This," declared Larry, "in the unanimous opinion of the judges, wins the furlined saxophone. Evidently Miss Bird craves charm, and what better example of it could she wish than that portrayed by the very person to whom she has appealed? I think, Miriam, that a week in your society would do her a world of good."

"You're right, Larry," admitted Miriam soberly. "That's just the sort of girl I could help most. She wants to be popular. She apparently wants a man, and doesn't know how to get him. I think I could show her how."

"You could!" substantiated Larry, with conviction.

And in another five minutes a letter sped on its way to Miss Vanessa Bird, seeker of charm.

III

"Just sit here a moment, Miss Bird," invited Miriam, "while I finish this story."

She smiled cordially, ensconced herself behind a battered oak desk, from which her typewriter presently began to bark like a kennel of young dogs, and left the seeker of charm to glean what she could from her surroundings.

The visitor sat with her hands in her lap, an oasis of repose in a desert of activity. Around her, a battery of typewriters reinforced the clattering of Miss Hale's machine with artillery-like sharpness. From

one corner, during lulls in the heavier firing, came the pattering of a so-called "noiseless," like autumn rain on dead leaves.

In the center of the room, under low-hung lights, a group of green-shaded individuals bent over a semicircular table, marking an assortment of yellow sheets with fat lead pencils. From this table two boys rushed madly to a paper chute against the whitewashed wall, committing long sheaves to the unknown depths of the composing room below. Telephones jangled constantly, impatient hands jerked them from their hooks, more impatient voices barked into them; and in this bedlam of inharmonious sound, the intermittent click of the telegraph maintained a quiet, almost soothing, undertone.

Miss Bird brought her bewildered glance to rest upon the gentleman at the desk directly opposite her—a hurried gentleman who simultaneously answered the telephone, sorted papers, chewed a cigar, marked margins, called "Boy!" and successfully avoided colliding with a half full milk bottle at his elbow. He was busily engaged in pasting together long strips of paper with glue from a huge glue pot, when the telephone burred viciously. He jammed the receiver against one ear, shifted his unlit cigar to the other corner of his mouth, and snapped:

"Hello!"

Miss Bird watched him with wide, curious eyes.

"Hello, hello!" he repeated, without inflection. "Who? Jenkins? What's that? Reporting the Baudermann story? All right, let's have the dope. Wait, I'll put O'Moore on the wire. What, you couldn't get it? The hell you couldn't!" His voice soared alarmingly. "Well, why the devil didn't you stick? Good Lord! What in the—"

His cold green eyes met the round, wide, brown ones of the strange girl. He broke off, a flush of embarrassment warming his cheeks.

"All right, Jenkins," he resumed more calmly. "Let it go. Never mind it. Come back."

He snapped the receiver to its hook and turned to his glue pot.

Miriam was watching him, much amused. Then she stood, collected her manuscript, and covered her machine.

"Here's the story, Mr. Hardy. I'm going now," she informed him pleasantly.

He growled an unintelligible something without looking up. Miriam took Miss Bird's arm, and they descended in a creaking freight elevator to the ground floor. In another moment or two they were traveling uptown in a subway train.

Then it was that Miss Bird drew breath and spoke.

"I don't see how you ever do it!" she marveled.

"Do what?"

"Oh, rushing around like this and—and being in that terrible place with all those men!"

Miriam smiled wisely.

"My dear," she said, "you have just learned your first lesson in the art of being popular—and that is the need of self-effacement. I couldn't work in that terrible place, as you call it, if I preserved the consciousness that I was a woman; but I forgot it. I become merely a part of the *Evening Satellite*. Forgetting my own sex, the others forget it, too, and I am to them merely part of the *Evening Satellite*, as they themselves are." Her mouth curved humorously. "Then in *you* come, my dear, and in a moment you change the atmosphere of the whole place."

"How?" asked Vanessa innocently.

"By cramping Hardy's vocabulary," chuckled Miriam. "Just one look at you, and he deprived us all of a wonderful string of—"

"Why, he doesn't s-swear in front of you, Miss Hale, does he?" exclaimed Vanessa incredulously.

"Why shouldn't he? It's just a habit of his."

"But you're a—lady!"

"Now I am," returned Miriam laconically. "In there I was merely an automaton, like the rest. That's why I get along. A woman in business can't afford to be shocked at anything. Man has never wanted woman butting into his work. He thought he would have to treat her with drawing-room courtesy, and big business, you know, can't be done in pink tea style; so we've had to efface our sex, to become mere cogs in the wheels of industry. Do you suppose my being a good-looking young woman causes any stir in the office? Did you see any one even notice me? Did a heart flutter because I passed?"

"One did, I think," said Vanessa timidly. "I mean that nice man with the black hair and lovely blue eyes. He sat at his

typewriter just looking at you, and looking and looking—”

“Oh, that was Mr. O’Moore,” inferred Miriam. “He wasn’t looking at me intentionally, of course—just gazing off into space for inspiration, perhaps. You see what I mean, don’t you, Vanessa, when I say that self-effacement is the first step toward popularity? Men nowadays don’t like a girl who plays up her sex. It’s the comradely, sportsmanlike woman who eventually wins a man’s heart, not the silly little self-conscious fool who giggles and blushes and drops her glance every time a fellow looks at her. Well, they can say what they want to about the flapper, but she has one thing on her old-fashioned sister—she can meet a man’s eye! Here’s our stop.”

They wriggled from the crowded train and emerged into the street, which was lightly powdered with snow. Facing eastward, they made their way past tall, dark houses with high steps, until Miriam steered her charge up a certain flight, entered a dark hall, and, after three more flights, pushed open the door of the cozy blue and yellow room which had seemed to Larry to be the abode of his dreams, on the day when he chose the very guest who now stood hesitant upon its threshold.

“Come in, dear!” urged Miriam pleasantly. “Put your things there.”

She took off her hat and coat, helped Vanessa with hers, and donned a pretty little blue kitchen apron.

“Run in there,” she ordered, motioning to her bedroom, “and tidy a bit while I see about supper.”

Vanessa did as she was bid, and soon appeared in the kitchen door, her round face shining, her brown curls damp on her high forehead.

“Can’t I help?” she volunteered.

“No, dear. There isn’t a thing to do. Just perch on that little stool and tell me—everything. In the first place, your mother didn’t mind your coming?”

Vanessa said no.

“Well,” Miriam went on, deftly breaking the white of an egg into one blue bowl and the yolk into another, “I’m glad of that. And so you have set your little heart on vamping all the men! A laudable ambition; but couldn’t your mother tell you how?”

Vanessa said she guessed her mother could, except that she was a little old-fash-

ioned, and thought all a girl had to do was to sit home and wait for a suitor.

Miriam agreed that nowadays, of course, such tactics were quite, quite ineffectual.

“A woman must first pick out the man she wants,” she told Vanessa, “and then go about winning him with every art she possesses. Modern love, you know, has been reduced to a science. Now, about this man whom you mentioned in your letter, my dear. You have made up your mind about him? You are—in love with him?”

Vanessa blushed and said no, that she just wanted him to like her, so that she could show the other girls. He was so popular, such a sheik! It would be a feather in her cap if she could parade him in chains before their admiring eyes.

“I—I’ve always wanted every one to like me,” she confessed, with tears in her eyes. “I wanted to have scores of boys ask me to dances and rave about me; but nobody has ever liked me, except John.”

“Who’s John?” inquired Miriam, beating the egg into a stiff, white froth.

“He’s a boy I know.”

“In love with you?”

Vanessa nodded.

“What does he do?”

“Oh, he works in a radio shop, puttering around.”

“He isn’t awfully ambitious, then?”

“No, he doesn’t pay much attention to work, except that he’s always fooling with something he says he’s inventing.”

“My dear,” said Miriam decisively, “then he isn’t the man for you. Make him amount to something before you let him hope.” The picture of Larry flashed across her mind, and she went on with spirit: “If you’ve read history at all, Vanessa, you’ll notice that the men who have done big things were inspired by exacting women who granted kisses only in exchange for kingdoms. Of course, it’s too bad the poor boy is so hopelessly in love with you; and I suppose you flout him and scout him outrageously. Well, Vanessa, when a woman gets a man where she can either take him or leave him, she usually—leaves him.”

Vanessa swallowed hard and looked thoughtful. She did not speak again until supper was served on the pretty little gate-legged table.

“Do you know, Miss Hale,” she began irrelevantly, in her slow drawl, “I’ve been thinking how queer it is that editor stopped

swearing in front of me, when I'm not half as pretty as you. But I'm *glad* he did!" she added with satisfaction.

Miriam frowned. In some unaccountable way the topic irritated her.

"Well, dear," she said, "we won't talk any more about him. This evening we're going to see two young men whom you'll like much better."

"Who are they?" asked Vanessa, with interest.

"One is that Mr. O'Moore who works on the same paper with me, and the other is Mr. Amerman, who draws cartoons for the *Daily Blazon*. Be especially nice to Mr. O'Moore, child. Vamp him to your heart's content. In fact, he's just the man to try out your charms on before going back home to stun your elusive sheik. Practice makes perfect, you know," she concluded lightly.

"I like Mr. O'Moore," stated Vanessa, buttering bread.

"Well, don't tell him so," advised Miriam, a trifle irritably. "You must be subtle—very subtle. Your one fault, dear, is that you are too patent. You do not excite the interest or the imagination. Be reserved, be mysterious. Sophistication makes for charm these days, Vanessa, and you're not the least bit sophisticated."

"I am," contradicted Vanessa stoutly, her brown eyes wide. "I know a lot, but I don't keep thinking about it all the time, so I guess that's why it doesn't show on my face."

Miriam said nothing; but after supper, while Vanessa cleared the table, she took the opportunity to study herself, long and earnestly, in her glass.

IV

"VANESSA, child, you deserve a spanking!" scolded Miriam, vigorously tossing her coat upon the davenport. She and Vanessa had just come home from the theater, escorted by the two gentlemen aforementioned. "You treated poor Mr. Amerman detestably!"

"I didn't like him," returned the incorrigible one.

"You didn't have to. I didn't, either; but you could have been nice to him. I was."

"I didn't like him," reiterated Vanessa maddeningly. "He's an old flirt, and he kept on talking about being sober for two whole days as if he was proud of it. Ugh! I wouldn't even look at him."

"My dear," lectured Miriam firmly, "there's another lesson you must learn if you ever hope to be popular. It's this—be equable. Be pleasant to every one. Never, never let a man know that you disapprove of anything he does. It's fatal."

"I don't care if it is," said Vanessa stubbornly. "Why should I be nice to Mr. Amerman when I hate him, and would never marry him?"

Miriam raised her eyes in exasperation.

"Child," she explained, "it's just this—you can never hope to create that certain aura of charm about your person when you are nice to some and disagreeable to others. Another thing, Vanessa—you acted like a perfect child with Mr. O'Moore. What in the world were you talking about?"

"Oh, nothing," answered Vanessa; "only tobogganing, and hot dogs, and such. And then we found that he knew a friend of mine."

"There!" broke in Miriam. "There's another thing you shouldn't do—drag in the name of a mutual friend to further your own acquaintance. It's as bad as an introduction over the telephone."

"I know," said Vanessa humbly; "but Larry said—"

"Who?"

"Larry. He told me to call him that."

"Vanessa!" reprimanded Miss Hale, a curious heat pervading her. "You have no right to call Mr. O'Moore by his first name on such short acquaintance! It isn't being done, even in this advanced day and age!"

"I'm sorry," apologized Vanessa. "I didn't know you'd be mad about it."

"I'm not," refuted Miriam coldly. "Why should I be?" she added unnecessarily. "Mr. O'Moore is merely a good friend—a likable, irresponsible boy who—"

"He's not irresponsible," defended Vanessa loyally. "I think it's wonderful, the way he gave up everything to take care of his poor mother, ever since he was sixteen—always working and working, and never having any fun."

Vanessa gulped.

"You seem," said Miss Hale icily, "to have learned a good deal more about Mr. O'Moore in one evening than I have been able to in three years' acquaintanceship! It's the one thing I must compliment you upon, Vanessa—you have let a man talk about himself. Now I'm going to get your couch ready. Do you mind sleeping there to-night? It's really not so bad."

Vanessa cheerily said that she did not mind.

Miriam went to her room, continuing conversation through the open door, while Vanessa undressed in the dark, folding her clothes neatly and placing them upon a chair with convent-taught precision.

"Now I'm ready for bed!" she proclaimed, pirouetting to Miriam's door in her flannel nightgown. She paused, aghast. "Oh, Miss Hale, what wonderful, wonderful hair you have! Why, you—you're beautiful! Ugh, how could that horrid man ever swear in front of you? I bet," she concluded admiringly, "that he wouldn't now!"

"Probably not," agreed Miriam, smiling in spite of herself, and drawing the comb through her masses of dull gold hair. "This is one of the few times I allow myself to be myself. At this moment," she added, looking at her image in the glass, "I am *not* merely a part of the *Evening Satellite*."

"You're the evening star!" whispered Vanessa worshipfully.

"Blarney!" laughed Miriam good-naturedly. "Now skip to bed!"

Her light snapped out, and the two rooms swam with soft, pregnant darkness. Came the sound of drawn covers—the turning of Vanessa's restless little body—a sigh. Then her voice, sleepy, but still positive:

"Miss Hale! Miss Hale!"

"Yes, Vanessa."

"Larry told me I did right not to pay any attention to that awful man who had been sober for two days. He said never to do anything that went against my—my grain. He said—what was it? Oh, yes—he said never to compromise my ideals; and I won't, either, because I like Larry!"

Vanessa promptly went to sleep; but Miriam heard the first faint twitter of sparrows that morning, and wearily watched dawn paint in the clock on her dresser.

V

THE week was gone. Miriam returned to her rooms after putting the seeker for charm on a homeward-bound subway train, and sank on the sofa, exhausted. The girl had not been a pliable subject. It had required all of Miriam's patience to impress her pupil with the immutable laws that govern popularity. Vanessa had listened thoughtfully to all that her teacher had to say, and had gone her own way, so that at

the end of the week she left much as she had come.

It was Miriam who had changed; from the first she had been resentful of the girl's undisguised friendliness for Larry. New emotions stirred in her heart at the sight of them together. At times she almost hated the girl, at times Larry, at other times herself. She found herself watching the two closely, suspicious if they laughed, irritated if they talked.

Even when she had put Vanessa on the train, she had the vague presentiment that this might not be the end. Larry would arrange to see her again. There was something between them, she knew—something very comradely.

She had kissed Vanessa good-by, however, with almost sisterly affection, and had smiled at the child's last words. What were they? Oh, yes!

"Thank you so much, Miss Hale," the girl had said gratefully. "I'm sure I could go back now and vamp anybody I wanted to, but I won't. I—I think I'll marry John. I know he doesn't amount to much yet, Miss Hale, but Larry told me that if I had read history I would have noticed that the great nations, like ours, weren't founded by men who jumped into lions' dens after ladies' gloves, but by men who struggled upward with their women at their side. So I think maybe it 'll help John to have me at his side. Don't you think so, too, Miss Hale?"

Miriam had smiled and said yes, indeed, and she waved cheerily as the train slid from the platform.

The experiment was over. She lay back luxuriously against the pile of gay silk cushions and watched the love bird flutter in his cage. The events of the week paraded continually before her. When she tried to think of the morrow's assignment, a pair of wide brown eyes swam into her thoughts. The echo of the girl's silly prattle still rang in her ears.

Compromising one's ideals! Well, she had done just that thing for three years—dallying with cigarettes and cocktails to preserve an appearance of sportsmanship—skillfully dodging unwelcome masculine attentions—overlooking the uncouthness of her associates in the office—putting up with all sorts of things that had "gone against her grain." Now she was sick of it, fed up with it.

Then Larry leaped into her consciousness

—gay, whimsical old Larry, with his soothing voice and mischievous blue eyes. She had missed him dreadfully during the past week. Vanessa had come between them; but she had gone now, thank goodness, and Miriam would soon have him back.

But would he come? Uneasiness pricked her. Larry had been different lately. He had been completely wrapped up in that silly little chit, and seemed to be perfectly happy with her. They hadn't wanted Miriam at all. She had felt like an old woman whenever they laughed, with their heads close together, at something intimately their own.

Well, she wouldn't be an old woman, and she would get Larry back!

She went to her phone. Larry's voice soon answered her.

"Larry, I'm lonely," she began, a pout in her voice. "Do take me out to dinner to-night!"

"Awfully sorry, Miriam! I'd love to, but I have an engagement."

Larry's voice was curiously distant.

"Oh!" Miriam was nonplused. She felt that she ought to ring off with a few well chosen words as formal as his own, but the pricking at her heart subdued whatever pride she had.

"I must see you, Larry," she pleaded. "Couldn't you stop in for a moment after you've fulfilled your—engagement?"

"Certainly, if you want me to," he answered courteously; "but it will be rather late."

She hung up, her throat aching with uneasiness.

Well, she would fight—fight with every weapon she possessed!

She was dressed in blue when he came—a rich blue which deepened her eyes and quickened the sheen of her hair. The gown was clinging, essentially feminine, and made her appear smaller, rounder, softer, so that one could scarcely connect this fair, ethereal creature with the efficient young woman who had banged a typewriter in a roaring newspaper office.

Larry stood, tall, motionless, inscrutable, as she opened the door.

"Come in, Larry," she invited, catching his hand. "There—let's sit on the sofa. It's lots cozier."

She sat beside him, curling one foot beneath her—radiant, palpitating, though he scarcely seemed to notice her nearness.

"Had a hard day," he told her, leaning

forward, his hands clasped between his knees. "Didn't leave the office till six. Saw your suicide story put through O. K. in the last edition."

"Oh, thanks, Larry—but all that seems awfully remote to me to-night!"

She sighed and leaned back against the cushions, lazy, catlike, content, now that Larry was beside her.

"You wanted to see me about something," he reminded her, suddenly alert.

She hesitated. She could have said it more easily without his eyes so steadfastly upon her.

"Yes, it was—quite important." Larry waited for her to go on. "It was in reference to something we—we have been talking about lately."

"Vanessa?"

She flinched at the name.

"No, it's about—us," she went on, a little coldly.

He gave her no help, but his eyes were attentive.

"It's in connection with—something you asked me," Miriam floundered helplessly.

"What did I ask you?" Larry wanted to know.

She leaned toward him.

"You've forgotten? Oh, Larry, don't make it so hard for me!"

He had turned again, studying his clasped hands as if they had suddenly become a problem. Miriam relaxed. Her voice grew soft. She felt warm with anticipation of what she was about to say.

"Do you know, Larry," she told him gently, "I have been thinking that after all the men who have done big things in the world haven't been those who have jumped into lions' dens after their ladies' gloves, but those who have struggled upward with their women at their side!"

Larry faced her. Her words had caused him no surprise. He merely smiled aloofly.

Anger stung Miriam. She felt that she had been decidedly silly.

"That's all I have to say to you, Larry," she concluded coldly. "I merely wanted to remind you that you have asked me to be your wife; but as the subject does not interest you—" She choked, and an unexpected flood of tears pooled to her eyes. "If it's that girl—"

"What girl?"

"Vanessa. Oh, Larry!"

Her poise had gone, her pride had gone. She wept as uncontrollably as a child.

Then Larry's arms swept about her, and she found herself buried in the comfort of his shoulder.

"Hush, darlin', hush!" he soothed, his hands upon her hair. "Hush, dear! I didn't want to make you cry—only to see you bend a little—only to see you a girl again. Oh, darlin', don't! Every sob is cutting the heart of your Larry!"

"I love you!" wept Miriam from the haven of his shirt front. "Oh, Larry O'Moore, I love you, and I thought you cared for—*her!*"

"I do," affirmed Larry. "She's the dearest girl in the world, next to you."

Miriam lifted her head with a jerk, the tears cutting weird channels down her cheeks.

"Larry!"

"Dry your eyes, darlin', and read this letter if it 'll help you," he soothed.

"You *do* care for her! I knew it! Don't you suppose I know what engagement you had this evening?" she went on recklessly. "It was with her!"

Larry held his peace.

"Wasn't it?"

"Yes."

Miriam was white—very white and trembling a little. Then she steadied herself admirably.

"I see, Larry," she said with sad finality.

"I don't think you do," contradicted Larry; "and you won't—until you read this." He thrust the unsealed letter before her. "Read it!"

Through the mist which obscured her vision she made out the words. At first they seemed to have no meaning:

DEAR AUNT JULIA:

I've just got to tell you again what a brick you are for lending me Vanessa. The scheme worked out wonderfully. Miriam has promised to marry me. At first she wanted to keep on with her infernal old newspaper work, but on second thought she decided that she'd have about all she could do writing nursery rimes, God bless her!

I knew all she needed was the companionship

of a sweet, unspoiled kid like Vanessa to bring her down to earth—or, rather, back to the clouds. Vanessa was a wonder. Don't tell her what a perfect little actress she is, or she'll be wanting to try the stage; but tell her Cousin Larry is coming to see her again soon, and will bring her the biggest box of candy there is.

And now I must close, with all the love in the world from your happy, happy—

LARRY.

"Larry!" exploded Miriam. "She's your cousin?"

"The nicest cousin a man ever had."

"And it was just another one of your tricks, bringing her here?"

"Guilty!" he grinned.

"Larry, you're a rogue!" scolded Miriam, with a little laugh of relief. Then she grew frigid. "But I can't understand," she continued, trying to look severe through her tears, "what made you write this. I'm sure I hadn't said anything about marrying you."

"I wrote it in hope that you would make it come true," said Larry. "But I guess," he concluded sadly, "that I've written a fairy tale."

He rose and walked to the center of the room, his hands deep in his pockets, his face lifted to the bit of night sky framed by the window.

"What you said about loving me was just blarney," he said.

There was a silence—an awful silence that poured into the atmosphere like lead. Then Miriam smiled—an uncertain smile, at first, that wavered like the sun behind April clouds, bursting forth at length in such glory that it would dazzle the eyes to behold it.

"Larry!" she breathed. "Oh, Larry, it isn't blarney!"

He faced her.

"Then, if it isn't, come here and prove it," he commanded. He stood with arms outstretched, his two blue eyes dancing with tenderness. "Prove it!" he ordered again.

And Miriam did.

AT REST

My love for you is like a tranquil pool
Set deep among the woodland silences—
Some indistinct, exotic, liquid jewel,
From whose dark heart reflected moonlight glances;
A pallid, placid glow that fills my breast
And gives it, in rich sadness, mellow rest.

William A. Drake