LOVE FOR TWO

By RUTH DEWEY GROVES ©1928 by NEA Service.

THIS HAS HAPPENED

Bertie Lou Ward marries Rod Bryer, who had previously been engaged to Lila Marsh. The only shadow on the bride's happiness is Lila's habit of telling friends that she was Rod's first love.

A position in New York is offered Rod by Tom Fraser and he accepts. Anxious to make a good impression, they live beyond their income and Bertie Lou finds it hard to resist when Molly Fraser urges her to buy more than she can afford. She and Rod have their first quarrel over money, and to make matters worse Lila arrives to visit Molly and make life miserable for Bertie Lou. But they introduce her to a rich Mr. Loree and she surprises them by marrying him.

Lila asks Bertie Lou to forgive the past and be friends and she consents. Trying to keep up with their wealthy friends plunges them in debt. Rod becomes depressed and Lila seizes her chance to persuade him to accept a higher salary from Loree. She also induces Bertie Lou to indulge in an orgy of spending.

During Loree's absence Lila asks Rod to put her jewels in the office vault. Later she requests him to return them and when they open the case the jewels are gone. Rod wants to notify the police but she will not let him. He finally promises to keep the loss secret if she will let him pay their value in installments as he is able to save from his salary.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

CHAPTER XXV

When she begged Rod not to tell Bertie Lou of the theft Lila did not take into account his ineptitude for lying.

A few minutes after he left her apartment she had occasion to telephone Bertie Lou in regard to an engagement they had for the following afternoon.

In the course of the conversation she mentioned that Rod had just returned her jewels.

Before he reached home Rod decided not to say anything about the matter to Bertie Lou because he knew he could not tell half the truth without revealing that there was a half he wished to conceal.

Bertie Lou knew he had lunched with Lila on the day he took the necklace and bracelets to the office, so naturally she expected him to speak of having returned them.

As the evening wore on and Rod offered no explanation for his lateness in coming home Bertie Lou began to wonder. Oh, well, perhaps it had slipped his mind. He seemed to be deeply troubled about something.

"What's the matter with you, Rod?" she asked him finally. He had declined to go out to a motion picture show or to call up anyone for a table of bridge.

"Nothing," he answered shortly and a trifle bruskly. He did not want to be questioned. Bertie Lou was too keen.

He almost regretted that he had started out to keep her in ignorance of his trouble. But of course Lila was right. His desire for understanding and sympathy was a weakness—the same emotion that prompts a grown-up man to run to his wife with his troubles precisely as a little boy takes his troubles to his mother.

Rod stiffened his resistence. "I'm tired," he said; "worked late tonight."

He hardly knew he had lied. Had he been clever about it he'd have been very careful to tell Bertie Lou that he was at Lila's house.

Good liars learn to leave few loopholes. Rod was a novice. He said the first thing that popped into his head. Thought out logically it would have amounted to a desire to account for his state of mind. All right—tired. And a ready excuse for being tired was overwork. It was less a prevarication to him than an alibi.

* * *

But to Bertie Lou it was a shock. She shrank back in her chair—they were sitting before the fire—as though he had struck her. Her face went white. Rod was staring at the dancing flames; he did not see the effect of his words.

In a moment or two she got up quietly and said she thought she would retire. Somehow, willing it with all the proud strength of mind she possessed, she walked steadily out of the room.

The instant the door closed behind her in the bedroom Bertie Lou let go. Her world had turned suddenly topsy turvy with a ghastly unreality that left her giddy and gasping. She rushed over to the bed and flung herself upon it just as a great, wrenching sob tore itself loose from her throat. The pillow smothered it and received the flood of tears that followed.

All that Bertie Lou ever had suffered of Lila and all her torments of fear came back to her now as a crushing load of proof of Rod's perfidity.

It came to her, too, her recent slight pique over Lila's influence with him—the ease with which she had persuaded him to change his mind about accepting a position with Cyrus.

Bertie Lou raised her head and surveyed her charming bedroom with bitter loathing. This was the price of Lila's victory. The sop thrown to allay a credulous wife's suspicions.

Bertie Lou twisted her lips sneeringly over the memory of Lila's humble plea for friendship. "And I fell for it," she scathed herself. "Opened the door and let her walk right in. Well, she left the piano, but she's got Rod lying to me."

* * *

It was a brave attempt to get back on the familiar ground of youth's sarcasm for life; but life, or love, was too strong for her. Again she stifled her sobs with the pillow, a very damp pillow now.

But she'a got to stop it, she told herself. Rod wouldn't sit out there all night. And she didn't know what she was going to do. So got up, turned the pillow over and went into her dressing room. Rod had one of his own; he would not come in here.

While she tore off her pretty dinner dress—Rod liked her in soft, dainty things and she dressed to please him—she was beginning to think more calmly.

It was plain to her now that Lila had wormed her way back into their good will with but one object in view—to reach Rod. That was why she had induced Cyrus to employ him, to pay him a handsome salary.

"So we'd think her an angel," Bertie Lou concluded with a feeling of contempt for both her own and Rod's blindness.

But beyond realizing that chance had exposed Lila's hand at this point Bertie Lou had no idea what had gone before. Tonight was the first time she had caught Rod in a lie, but that did not mean that it was his first lie to her.

Her impulse was to go and ask him. She threw a velvet negligee around her shoulders and started back to the living room. But another thought stopped her. Hadn't she been second choice when she married Rod? What would happen if she went to him now and taxed him with being still in love with his first choice? Could he help that?

Bertie Lou sank down upon the bench at her dressing table and buried her head on her crossed arms. What could she do? Rod was miserable. So miserable that he couldn't hide his true feeling any longer. He had come from Lila, perhaps so embittered at having to part from her that he was unable to pretend what he did not feel for the girl he had married.

* * *

A wounded soul, struggling in the dark, can conjure up many torments. Bertie Lou's mental anguish was as real and intense as though all the painful conclusions she reached were true ones.

Rod had lied to her. He had come from Lila and lied about it.

She began to feel sorry for him. Infinitely and hopelessly sorry. Lila might have found a way to shake herself back into his heart, but Lila was Lila. She always would be Lila. Let her pose. Let her fool Rod.

Cyrus and she might step aside, but Rod could not find happiness with Lila. And then Bertie Lou knew that Cyrus never would step aside. He wasn't that kind. Rod could not have Lila.

But what should she do? She who knew how things stood between them . . . no . . . how they MIGHT stand. But she couldn't give Rod to Lila because Lila was not free to take him.

And Bertie Lou hadn't said to herself that she was willing to give Rod up.

Oh, it was a hideous mess. Her head was aching furiously now, and little darts of white light flashed before her eyes. She opened them for relief and the dressing room swam about her like a rocking house at a fair.

She was so long recovering from the nervous shock she had suffered that Rod had gone to bed when finally she crept, heartsick and weakened, to her pillow.

She knew Rod was not asleep but she did not want to talk to him—not yet. The moment of challenge had passed. To face him with his lie and make him admit that Lila meant as much to him as ever, would precipitate a crisis. And Bertie Lou could see no solution for it.

She would have left him if she had proof that Rod had been unfaithful to her. But she did not believe that he had. It would do him no good if she freed him unless Cyrus would free Lila.

Bertie Lou admitted to herself that she loved Rod too much to leave him unless it would benefit him or unless he made her action unavoidable. And surely there would be too many persons to suffer over their separation to think lightly of it. Her parents, and his. And the talk in Wayville. That would hurt them. And perhaps, if she did nothing at all, Lila herself would end it some day by showing Rod how she was playing with him as a cat plays with a mouse.

Of course, life would never be the same for her again, Bertie Lou told herself, but she was not ready to cut herself adrift from all hope, all chance to have even the crumbs of happiness.

* * *

In the morning, after an hour or two of fitful slumber, she was no nearer a decision in regard to her future than she had been the night before.

She did not get up and breakfast with Rod as was her habit. He left the apartment without the slightest idea that she was troubled with anything more than a headache, to which she confessed.

It required considerable steeling of her will to face her engagement with Lila. They were lunching together and then going to a matinee.

Bertie Lou telephoned that she would meet Lila at the theatre. Lila seemed relieved to omit the luncheon. And as soon as Bertie Lou hung up the receiver Lila called the office and asked for Rod. Would he come up to luncheon? She wanted him to meet the man they were talking about. Rod understood that she meant the detective. He promised to be there promptly at one as Lila requested.

That morning he had searched the office and the safe carefully, inch by inch, to see if he could discover any clues to the theft. He explained to Cyrus' secretary that he had lost a valuable cuff link the day before.

He had not been out of the office more than five minutes when Bertie Lou called in to tell him about a telegram she had received from Wayville. The girl at the switchboard told her he had gone up to Mr. Loree's apartment.

Rod found the detective waiting for him when he arrived. The man's eyes bored uncomfortably into his when he asked about the lock on the case. Had he, Rod, for any reason sought to open it?

"Certainly not," Rod replied emphatically.

The detective turned to Lila. "But you say it was in good order when you gave it to Mr. Bryer?"

"I didn't say anything of the kind," Lila snapped. "I said I assumed it to be in good order."

"You had no trouble locking it?"

Lila hesitated a second. "N . . o," she admitted reluctantly. "But see here, Mr. Weeks," she added suddenly, "you're entirely on the wrong track if you think Mr. Bryer put that lock out of order."

Mr. Weeks stared hard at her.

"How do you know?" he shot at her sharply.

But Lila had her answer ready. "Because he is paying for the jewels. And he could never dispose of them for their full value so what would he have to gain by stealing them?"

Weeks scowled. "Did you discover any clues at the office?" he asked Rod. Rod said no.

"Why are you paying for the jewels?" the detective questioned, his words coming like machine gun bullets.

His manner angered Rod and he took his time about replying.

"Because they were in my care and I was responsible for them," he said. "Your first thought was that I had stolen them. Wouldn't everyone else think so, too? Well, I didn't do it, and when Mrs. Loree consented to let me pay the insurance on them I considered that a wiser course than trying to convince the world of my innocence."

"And if you don't care to believe the truth and stop wasting time asking foolish questions you can drop the case," Lila spoke up.

* * *

The detective decided to do what was asked of him, regardless of his private opinions. There was something fishy here, but as no one seemed to be crying for redress he was willing to go on with his investigations along the lines laid down for him by his employer.

Before he left they arranged a way for him to search the office. Rod would remain after the other employes were gone and admit him.

Lila made up her mind to be there too, but she said nothing of her intention at the time.

When Rod got back to the office after lunching with Lila he found a memorandum of Bertie Lou's call on his desk. He tried to get her on the telephone but there was no answer.

Lila, too, tried to reach her, after standing 10 minutes in the lobby of the theatre and losing her patience. She thought, when Bertie Lou did not answer, that she was on the way. It was nearly curtain time, so she left Bertie Lou's ticket at the box office and went into the theatre.

Bertie Lou did not arrive during the first act. Lila was getting a little worried. She called the apartment again. Still no answer.

Well, if she didn't come by the end of the second act it might be a good idea to telephone Rod, but if he couldn't get the apartment either he would go tearing off home and forget about the detective. And Bertie Lou might arrive after all, and make the upsetting of their plans a needless sacrifice.

The play ended and Bertie Lou did not come to the theatre. Lila got into her car, the cabriolet that had thrilled her so the first time she rode in it, and which now she would have exchanged, on occasions only, for the old rattletybang car that Rod and she had climbed poles and jumped fences in once upon a time.

She glanced at the clock on the panel above the rear rod and saw that it was about office closing time. With ordinary luck in traffic she would arrive shortly after the office force had left her husband's place of business for the day.

* * *

The detective was there ahead of her. Through the open door of Cyrus' private office she could see him moving about the safe when Rod admitted her to the anteroom.

"Any clues?" she asked. They told her there was nothing at all.

For a moment she stood leaning against Cyrus' desk and watched the search. A queer smile played around the corners of her mouth.

Half an hour later the detective left them. Lila turned to Rod. "Cy keeps some good stuff in his safe, doesn't he? Let's have a drink?"

"I'd rather not open it again," Rod demurred. "In fact I think I'd better be getting along, Lila. Bertie Lou was trying to get me by telephone and I haven't been able to reach her. I have a feeling that something is wrong."

(To Be Continued)

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FREAK YACHT SINKS IN TEST; CREW IS SAVED

(Associated Press Leased Wire)

BINGEN, Germany, Aug. 6.—Fritz Van Open's new motor racing yacht, Open IV, exploded and sank within a few minutes near Bingen lock today when the manufacturer of rocket propelled machines was giving the boat its first test.

Van Open and his companions jumped overboard in their clothes and swam ashore.

Saturday one of his rocket cars exploded when being tried for speed on the rails.

Ripe Dillard watermelons and muskmelons. D. Coon stand, Dillard.

AMERICA GIVES HEENEY BRIDE AND $100,000

(Associated Press Leased Wire)

SPRING VALLEY, N. Y., Aug. 5.—Tom Heeney, the solid man from down under, will take a bride instead of the heavyweight crown back home to New Zealand.

Heeney, who recently was defeated by Gene Tunney in a match for the heavyweight title, was married last Thursday night to Miss Marion Estelle Dunn, of Spring Valley. Miss Dunn gave her age as 24.

Heeney received $100,000 for his fight with Tunney and since coming to this county a year ago, penniless, has shared in several other large purses.

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IN BANKRUPTCY

In the District Court of the United States for the District of Oregon. In the matter of Zigler-Craven Hardware Company, a corporation, Bankrupt.

To the creditors of Zigler-Craven Hardware Company, of Roseburg in the County of Douglas, and district aforesaid, a bankrupt:

Notice is hereby given that on the 3rd day of August, 1928, the said Zigler-Craven Hardware Company was duly adjudicated bankrupt; and that the first meeting of its creditors will be held at the office of the undersigned referee in bankruptcy in Roseburg, Ore., on the 17th day of August, 1928, at 10 o'clock in the forenoon, at which time the said creditors may attend, prove their claims, appoint a trustee, examine the bankrupt and transact such business as may properly come before said meeting.

Dated August 4th, 1928.

C. L. HAMILTON,
Referee in Bankruptcy.

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2000.00	10.00	13.34	23.34
2500.00	13.00	16.67	29.67
3000.00	15.00	20.01	35.01
3500.00	18.00	23.34	41.34
4000.00	20.00	26.67	46.67
4500.00	23.00	30.00	53.00
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