

Peppertree Inn

By JEAN RANDALL

SYNOPSIS

The loss of their family fortune is accepted stoically by the Bristol family, including Professor Bristol, invalid archeologist; his daughter, Rosemary, and Simmons, a family "fixtured." The only property salvaged is Peppertree Inn, a Southern California hotel, now being managed temporarily by Bob Elliot, an avocado grower. To settle their dilemma, the Bristols move to California to operate the inn, with Kent Standish, Rosemary's childhood sweetheart, planning to follow later and thus prove his business ability by managing the enterprise. They are elated at first sight of the inn but disturbed by the appalling lack of service.

CHAPTER V

"Bob? I don't even know where Hal is!" Rosemary said bewilderedly.

The girl laughed. "He's usually in the kitchen, isn't he? At least that's where Bob finds him. You're new, aren't you? Come on the afternoon train, or by motor?"

"Train. And we were to have been met. I wired ahead for a wheel chair but no one came."

"Oh, that's too bad! Bringing an invalid out here? Why didn't Bob—"

Rosemary said with a touch of temper: "I don't know who Bob is. Is he supposed to be here? Isn't someone supposed to stay in the office? I telephoned from the station but nobody answered."

"That's right. I'd forgotten. Bob had to drive out to one of his groves this afternoon."

"Groves?"

"Avocados. He grows 'em."

"I've no possible objection," Rosemary told her, "but what's it got to do with answering the telephone?"

"Poor dear, you're tired, aren't you, and worried about somebody. Sit down and I'll find Hal. Would you like a cup of tea?"

"No, thank you; and I didn't mean to sound cross. It's only that my father's waiting at the station and he's been ill. He's worn out from the trip and—"

"Say no more!" Miss Darkeyes adjoined her, and vanished through a door at the back. In an incredibly short time a little procession made its way through that same door.

First came a lanky youth who galloped straight to the telephone without a glance at her. He dialed a number, spoke hastily into the instrument, listened and vanished again. Then came a fat, red-faced woman carrying a tray. Behind her was a small boy in a bell-hop's uniform.

"Now, dearie, drink this," begged the red-faced woman. "Don't bother your mind about anything. Hal's gone for a taxi—it's just down the street away—and Tim here'll get the chair ready, and everything will be fine. Miss Ellen, you see I brought two cups."

Ellen Relates History of Inn

"I see you did, bless you! This is Hetty Bunce," explained the girl, sitting down by the little table Tim had drawn up. "She's supposed to be the cook here—and a mighty good one she is, too!"

Mrs. Bunce nodded and smiled and disappeared in her turn, leaving the two girls alone together.

"I'm Rosemary Bristol of Philadelphia. As I told you, my father's at the station with Simmons who takes care of him."

"I'm Ellen Carter, but everyone calls me Len, for some reason. I live here—at the inn, I mean."

"By yourself? I mean—"

The other girl smiled. "By myself. That's really why I'm living at the inn. My aunt died a month ago and I closed up the house and came here. I haven't any family."

"Shall you stay here permanently?"

"That depends on Bob Elliot's resistance." Ellen took another sandwich and bit into it. "You haven't met Bob? No, of course not. He's a darling and a dear and he can't be bothered with girls. I'm trying to broaden his point of view. I do hope you won't fall in love with him."

"I hope so, too. It would sort of mess up things for quite a few of us, seeing I'm engaged to a man back home."

Ellen held out a slender hand. "Shake! You take a load off my mind, I do assure you. I've been worrying for fear Bob might like your hair."

"What about your hair? I think it's beautiful. Doesn't Bob?"

"If he does, he keeps it to himself," Ellen remarked sadly. "I might as well be bald-headed for all Bob Elliot notices. About all he ever says to me is: 'Len, for the love of Mike, can't you find anywhere to park except in front of my desk?'"

"His desk? Where?"

"Over there; behind the railing. He's the manager of this inn, you know."

"Manager? There isn't any manager to this inn—at least not till Kent gets here."

"Who's Kent?"

"The new manager of Peppertree Inn," she said firmly.

Ellen looked confused. "I knew Bob had sent for a new manager but I don't see how that ties up with anyone you know by the name of Kent. Bob is the manager here, truly. He doesn't like it, he calls up his father every evening and says he doesn't see how he can possibly stand the place another day but he keeps staying on. I suppose it's his sense of duty," she sighed.

The slim girl opposite her stiffened. "Why should he feel any duty toward this inn? He doesn't own it."

"No," laughed Ellen. "He wouldn't have it as a gift, he says."

"Oh! I loathe your Bob."

"He's not my Bob, but go right on."



"I wired ahead for a wheel chair, but no one came."

loathing him. I'll feel ever so much safer. Why are you so interested in the inn, by the way—if you don't mind telling me?"

"I own it," said Rosemary calmly. "That is, my father does, which is the same thing."

"Good gracious! Are you the girl who's been writing those letters to the Judge?"

"What letters?"

"Oh—just letters. Business letters, I expect. Bob just happened to mention them."

"Why should this Bob know about my letters, business or otherwise? Who is this Bob, anyway—besides being a self-appointed manager of the inn?"

"Self-appointed! My word! Don't ever let him hear you call him that if you want to live out your fair young life! He's Bob Elliot. The Judge's son, you know. But you don't know, of course. Relax, my dear, and I'll tell you though even yet I don't see why you're interested. In who manages the inn, I mean."

She hurried on as Rosemary stirred restlessly. "Judge Elliot helped poor Richards sell the inn—you know about Richards?"

"Yes, and I know about the Judge, too. What I don't know is where this Bob comes in."

"The manager ran away with some money—"

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"I'll have a hot bath and slip into something loose and warm," she meditated. "After dinner, I'll write Kent—a long letter."

She carried out this program as far as the bath and dinner were concerned; but hardly had she unscrewed her fountain pen when there was a knock at the door.

"Come in!" she called, then looked up in surprise as a tall young man entered.

"Good evening! I'm Bob Elliot, and I can't begin to tell you how sorry I am the mistake was made in your wire."

"Mistake? What mistake?"

"You said Thursday in your wire," he told her kindly. "This is only Tuesday. That's why I wasn't there to meet your train."

"I did not say Thursday! I distinctly said Tuesday. If it said Thursday, it was a mistake at the telegraph office."

He spoke in soothing tones. "Undoubtedly, undoubtedly. They do sometimes make mistakes, though not often. I hope your father is comfortable now—resting, and everything?"

"Thank you."

"Is there anything I can do for him tonight? Or for you?"

"Nothing, thank you."

"Then I'll say good night and let you get some rest. If your father feels equal to a business talk tomorrow, I can come in at any time."

"If it's business that concerns the inn, I'm the one to talk to. Dad doesn't know a thing about running it."

"And you do?" he asked, surprised.

"Nothing. But then I don't really need to, do I? I mean, you didn't know about managing it either when you took on this job."

He grinned. "Ellen Carter said you'd gone to inspect some avocado groves; your groves. That wasn't business for the inn."

"Ellen was mistaken. I went to get some avocados from my grove for use in the inn. At wholesale prices, too," he added. "If there's nothing more tonight—"

"Nothing, thank you. I'm really greatly obliged to you, Mr. Elliot, for helping out as much as you did. I'll look after the inn myself tomorrow."

"Very well," he replied huffily, and laid his hand on the doorknob. Then he relented. "Better keep me on till you've got the hang of things. This inn's a little difficult to run."

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