

were benumbed and a sniffling cold was rapidly developing. From her travelling bag she took a photograph of Benny, and dreadingly gazed into his pictured face. She had brought it from her dressing table at home, before the premiere of *The Merry Bachelors*. How excited and happy she was that night, when Benny reported every seat filled — why did he have to inform her later that his friends had been in most of those seats, thus explaining the applause which she had supposed was the honest approval of the multitude? No, she could never go home, to fret constantly about her failure.

Others had fled from their sorrows, and she realized now that they had not been able to bear them. She would cost Benny very little more if she hurried to Michigan Avenue, waited until there was no one in sight, and leaped into the Lake. A great sob shook her, as she said tremulously,

"If you only knew!"

Leaning on the stained little table that bore an ice-water pitcher and a soiled menu of a past dinner, she repeated with tragic mein,

"If you only knew!"

Dully she said the words over many times. What an end to a young life that had promised much. He would think she had not loved him, whereas she was departing only on his account, for if Dollie Von Linden could not add luster to their name, at least she would not make it the sport of the whole profession. If he but knew — "but" knew, or "only" knew? The last sounded neater. She reached for a pencil, and on the back of the menu wrote,

"If you but knew."

She pondered, with heavy sighs. Soon the pencil traced beneath the first line,

"That I had grew

"To count you more than life.

"My one regret

"Is that we met

"For I could ne'er be your wife."

"Of course, I'm his wife all right, but it's a stronger number that way," she mused. "And rags have been positively done to death, while weeping ballads are getting the money — and Benny has n't a seller in his catalog except the waltzes. Well, I'll go to the Lake as the clock chimes midnight and leave this set of words for Benny, and with the advertising my death will give it. If he fits a melody to it he'll have a big ballad hit. I'll do some more verses, and use this for the chorus, and he'll see that I did the best I could for him!"

It was eleven o'clock when she completed two verses that were as pathetic as the chorus. Her hands were stiff from the chill air, she was sneezing violently, and the small mirror showed that her face was very pale.

"In one little hour I shall be dead," she said, shivering. "But it's the only path — oh, if he but knew!"

She hurriedly packed her bag, locked it, and put the key, with some others and her ring, into an envelope previously addressed to Benny. On a sheet of paper she wrote,

"Tell the Coroner I am in the Lake, near the Annex. The world is too cruel. Farewell, all. Dollie Von Linden, late star in *The Merry Bachelors*."

Solemnly, with appropriate gestures, she declaimed the words of the ballad. As she concluded the final line of the chorus, there was an insistent rapping on a door connecting her room with the next, and a husky male voice exclaimed, "Say, lady, can you spare a minute to speak to a party on sumpin' important? Open the door into the hall!"

"I've waked him up and he's mad," thought Dollie. "But he can certainly stand it, considering that I won't be here to disturb anyone tomorrow night."

In silence, she listened. Her neighbor was apparently listening too. In a moment he resumed in a lower tone, "I ain't a fresh guy, lady — this is a business matter, an' I ask you, will you open that door an' lemme say a few words? You don't want

to go committin' suicide when the world is bright an' gay. There's hope, on the level there is."

"I can't and won't change my mind, and if you've got a gentleman's instincts, you won't butt in on a private matter!" cried Dollie excitedly. "Can't a person do anything in this town without being harassed, I'd like to know?"

There was the sound of a door cautiously opened, a step in the hall — she ran to lock her door against invasion, but the knob had turned, and a fat, flabby-faced young man confronted her. He wore a grey bathrobe over red striped pajamas, the trousers hanging below the robe. In one hand he held a sheet of music paper, half

covered with inky notes, and in the other was a fountain pen. On his head was a green hat, which he removed with a sneeze that explained his reason for wearing it. Then he said kindly, "I been just as close to the cushion as you are tonight, little girl. Any-one has who's knocked around — yes, an' I was ready to quit, too, when I seen that would n't spite no one but me. Had any eats this evenin'? 'Cause we'll tear out an' grab some ham an' eggs an' coffee; an' while we're grazin' we can talk."

Had Dollie been less imaginative, she might have successfully repulsed him, but the instant she heard his suggestion, she smelled ham and eggs, and thirsted for the vivifying effects of coffee, and it was so pleasant to picture a table spread with food in a warm restaurant, and she was so harrowed by her recent resolve, and the expectation of meeting a curious policeman at the critical moment, and having to trudge on and nerve herself to the guilty deed all over again. With a shudder she said weakly, "Never! You leave this room or I'll scream!"

THE visitor sat down, felt for a match, and lit a cigarette. With the match, he produced two one-dollar bills, observing cheerily, "Here's the two case, an' I'll split with you, kiddo. An' on my half we'll feed tonight, an' you'll be on deck with breakfast money in the morning."

Dollie gave a hysterical sob. He smoked calmly, gazing at the music he held. Dollie wept, her arms sprawled on the table, crushing her hat, careless of her looks. No matter how she looked, when she would n't be here tomorrow! Why did this calm, fat creature have to annoy her with reminders of ham and eggs? Alas, happy thousands would devour her share! Should she eat a last portion, and thus gain strength for the tramp to the lake? With a long, piteous sigh she looked at the young man, who gave her a friendly wave of his free hand, and in a light tenor voice suddenly sang,

"If you but knew — tra-la-la

"That I had grew — la-la-la

"To count you more — than li—if!

"My one regret — tra-la-la

"Is that we met — la-la-la

"When I could not — be — ee your wi — ife!"

"My song!" said Dollie, astonished. "But I only wrote it tonight! And that music is wonderful, it's so haunting. You must have suffered, like me."

"If I had a piano up here I'd have the verse as well as the chorus done," said he. "I did n't ketch all the words, you spoke 'em so fast. The appeal in that would be a knockout, and then there's the chance for a swell lot of parodies later. I'm a mel-

ody writer myself, an' I lost my partner, Jimmy Delmonico, through the both of us drinkin', an' bein' despondent, an' I could n't get an inspiration, 'till I heard you talkin' to yourself. Are you willin' to can this Lake notion, an' we'll work the song out an' sell it?"

"Honest, do you think we could put it over?"

"The market's ripe for a new type! Here's the first of the year due, when every publisher's s'posed to have his new songs ready, an' two-thirds of 'em are goin' to keep on pluggin' their old stuff, because their staff writers are wrote out, an' yet a stranger can't horn in no way — that's all the nut them bone-heads got, you know. An' look at the advertisin' we can get up ourselves — the beautiful despairin' young girl about to throw herself in the drink to escape the worldly old millionaire that's houndin' her. Get it? An' then this scene, only we'll make it that I heard you singin' it as you were leapin' off — I jumped in after you, an' as I looked into your eyes this melody came into bein'."

"My gracious, every paper in the country'd eat up the story!" cried Dollie.

"Sure! I bet that number would sell a million copies."

"WE'VE simply got to find a piano, so the lyric does n't get out of your head, and you'd best stop talking and just keep on going over it. Maybe the clerk at the desk knows one we can find," said Dollie, her cheeks flushed, and her dark eyes glowing. "Oh, is n't Providence grand? I was going to send the words to a party — he's in the music trade — and now instead I'll get the dough with it and show him and every one else they've got another guess as to my ability!"

"Stick here while I gallop in an' fix up. A pal of mine's the piano player in a little drum cut on Cottage Grove Avenue; not a classy place, but we can use the instrument, an' he's so full of cigarettes he won't even notice what I'm playin'."

The musician disappeared, and Dollie, with a gay laugh, tore into bits the letter to the public at large, and retrieved her ring and keys. With renewed zest in life, she carefully powdered over the tear stains, and ran a stick of rouge lightly across her lips. A low whistle summoned her, and she found her escort, splendid in a brown suit striped with black, a light overcoat on his arm, and his green velours hat on the back of his head. His patent leather shoes were cracked, but very shiny, and his red tie was not in its youth, but his stoutness was not as noticeable as when he was in his bathrobe. Dollie put on the sables Benny had given her, and they reached the street as a church clock tolled midnight. In complete accord, they hastily supped in a small lunchroom, both writing busily, and then singing the result.

"Billy Austin made a mint of money out of *Dead Days of Yore*, an' Cavalieri's usin' a heart ballad — that proves what can be done," said the composer,

absently devouring an egg. "Did you ever think about drivin' a zebra? I seen where the Secretary of Agriculture's advertisin' two, broke to harness, for sale. They had 'em for experiments, I s'pose. Now, then, if they could be drove from Chicago to New York, with signs on the carriage pluggin' our song, there'd be letters from Mayors to be got, an' you could drive, an' say you was a suffragette, an' goin' right on to Washin'ton after — pass that sugar, will you — an' I know an animal man that'd tame 'em in a week! I tell you, the possibilities are sumpin' enormous."

"We've got the chance of our lives," said Dollie, awed. "I could wear a mask, though of course, that's been done?"

"Not done like we'd do it," he answered. "I'd trail along in an automobile, an' every so often I could rescue you from some sort of danger, an' those hick papers would fall for it hard."

"Oh, it's glorious, and thank heaven I met you! But there's one thing — I feel I ought to tell you first, and — well, I'm a married woman, you see, and he's the dearest boy, (Continued on Page 13)



She fell upon the piano stool and Benny viewed her with concern



"Oh, you good-looking kid!" cried someone as the pluggers hurled their flowers