

Thrilling Tales of Love and Adventure

That Impossible Town

By Enos Emory



MARIAN HALL, once upon a none too distant time, Penelope Warrington, shattered every time-honored, time-worn tradition as to the beginner in the theatrical world. There are those on the seamy side and on the painted side of the curtain who will not believe this.

Marian came to the region of brownstone fronts and white lights with a determination to shine with the host of other incandescent stars. She did not find it a difficult matter to get her dainty foot on the first round of the ladder.

She did not live in musty hall bedrooms, so dear to the heart of magazine folks; no eagle-eyed landlady opened her mail or asked embarrassing questions or sniffed for stolen gas.

Marian did not fry her breakfast egg over a smoky jet, nor smuggle crackers to her room under her jacket. Neither did she write home for money.

No managers insulted her, no stage-door admirers annoyed her; after-theater suppers were mysteries—something as intangible as highballs.

She never stayed up later than midnight, save on occasions of late rehearsals, and never, never had a member of the male sex, other than the bell-boy, ever stepped into her immaculate little room at the Durrant Hotel.

Penelope—pronounced Pen-el-o-pe, with emphasis on the second syllable—received each Monday night, with some fifty odd orders of the Laughing Princess Company, an envelope containing \$25. Five of that went in a letter each week to an impossible town somewhere in Iowa.

She had \$20 remaining. Statisticians who search frantically through the ages, weigh results by rule of supply and demand, and who come to life in the popular magazines concerning the increased cost of living, might have learned a great deal from Pen-el-o-pe.

once upon a none too distant time Penelope was known as Marian, daughter of the general storekeeper in the self-same impossible Iowa town. She now looked upon her 19 years of existence back there as a butterfly might reflect upon its days in a coffin-like cocoon.

The very moment she put the Hudson behind her and stepped aboard a Forty-second street crostown car she realized the lure of Manhattan. She heard the voices in the roaring "L" trains, in the ceaseless shuffle of numberless feet and in the rattle of ever-constant traffic.

Thus in the gradual process of evolution she became Penelope Warrington. The fact was, Dickie suggested it first, and—

Dickie, O. Richard Blackdaw was a bright, clean-cut, smooth-faced broker who had an office in Wall street. Dickie had a finger in several pies, too, but these were never mentioned below Fourteenth street.

Dickie was everything a gentleman should be, and to Penelope, dazzled by his elegance, he seemed a good fairy dropped from the skies. To other people he was other things.

Anyhow, on the very day that Marian Hall shyly advanced upon the big, bare stage where a chorus rehearsal was in progress and asked a certain flushed, coat and hatless individual for a position, this latter person took in a deep breath, opened his eyes, and then—telephoned Dickie!

It is perhaps well to mention right here that Marian Hall possessed more than ordinary attractiveness. The country sweetness fairly burned in her wide brown eyes and shimmered in the wealth of braided hair.

And when she smiled—well, to repeat that the stage director was amazed is the strongest proof possible to offer.

A position? Why, of course. She was just the type they had been searching for. No experience? Well, that didn't matter. Looks were of more importance. Girls who could sing and

were twice weekly—contained all the news, even to the most minute detail. Here was another time-worn tradition shattered. She told her mother everything!

It scarcely need be mentioned, in this light, that Penelope was a good girl! She was wrapped up in her "art," as all chorus girls should be, but otherwise she was different. Penelope paid \$5 for her room, \$7 for her meals and the balance of the \$20 went for clothes.

She never allowed Dickie to give her a present. In this she was following out the advice given by her mother—and one other.

Her companions in the chorus sometimes teased her, and not infrequently shocked her. She heard many things in the dressing room that were beyond understanding, but fearing to show her ignorance she did not ask questions.

If Dickie took her for an afternoon spin in his big car, which was often, he also took leave of her in the hotel lobby. Never by word or action had Dickie offended her.

Richard Blackdaw was a broker who bought stocks after a careful and mature deliberation, and was content to wait patiently until the market was in a proper shape in order to dispose of them. Dickie's supreme possession was his patience.

With a certain end in view, and all things running in well-oiled grooves, he was satisfied to let matters complete their course. Other men might have been dubious, attempted to unload on an unresponsive market—thereby ruining everything. Again they might have thrown caution to the winds and plunged. With Blackdaw it was a waiting game.

He never plunged, no matter how inviting the water. Every move he made was deliberate and carefully planned in advance. He was nothing if not systematic.

One night when Penelope came out of the stage door, it was only two blocks from her hotel and she always

walked, Dickie met her, his big car chugged patiently at the curb.

"Why not a little bite to eat tonight?" Dickie asked. "I'm lonesome! We can go over to some quiet place. You can be back in the hotel before I o'clock. Just this once, please!"

Penelope hesitated. It is the sort of hesitation that comes to all of us—soon or late. Surely there could be no harm in dining with a man in a brightly lit cafe. Besides, she was hungry.

The machine whirled them through the maze of white lights and cluttered traffic, up a side street, and finally stopped before the door of a little cafe.

Dickie evidently knew the head waiter, for a cozy table was given them in one corner. The room was alive with murmurs and laughter, the music was a fascinating background for all the light and color. Penelope took in a deep, deep breath and felt the warm blood throb in either temple.

The waiter came and tipped away. Afterward, when she looked down beside the lighted candles Penelope saw a fragile, slim-stemmed glass there, filled with an enchanting, greenish-hued liquid. At the bottom lay an olive.

"Don't be afraid," Dickie was saying. "It is the usual thing and . . ."

Penelope's pulses were pounding in her ears like minute drums. Her hands trembled so violently as to spill some of the liquid over them. With a quick laugh she reached into her bag for a handkerchief.

In doing so her fingers touched and fumbled at an oval frame. It came out with the bit of linen. Dickie saw the picture it enclosed.

"Who is that?" he asked sharply.

"It's—it's the man back home," she faltered; and then, suddenly, her voice tremulous: "Please—I don't want to stay here any longer!"

For the first time since their meeting Penelope saw Dickie's mouth tighten. For the first time since their

meeting she felt afraid. A vague, intangible something came between them.

Back in her little room at the hotel Penelope took the picture of Jim Parker and set it before her on the dressing table.

Jim was the dark-eyed fellow who had carried her books in the school days; who had danced with her at the parties; who kissed her that day when she left the little red station for New York. He would always wait on her.

With the approach of warmer weather the audiences who paid real money to witness the "Laughing Princess" dwindled away. The notice followed, and then the closing.

Somehow Penelope had not prepared herself for this ordeal. She had imagined the "Laughing Princess" merrily wending her way forever.

When she left the stage door for the last time she had just \$40 saved. This she tucked reflectively back into her bag and started engagement hunting.

There were several summer reviews opening, and so she promptly made application for a position. Strange as it may appear, these quests were fruitless. There were a dozen girls for every opening.

After a week of this Penelope had \$35 and a bad case of blues.

One day on Broadway she met a former principal of the "Laughing Princess." During the course of their sidewalk conversation Penelope mentioned her lack of position. The principal was plainly surprised.

"But Mr. Blackdaw—you haven't fallen out, have you? You and he are still friends?"

"Yes," Penelope nodded.

"Well, I should think he'd fix you up with some of the summer shows, then," the other resumed.

"Fix me up?" Penelope ventured, curiously. "Why, how could he? Besides, I wouldn't think of asking him such a favor," she added.

"A favor? Why, it's understood, isn't it, that you—"

"Please, Penelope interrupted, cheeks coloring. 'I think you're mistaken about Mr. Blackdaw and that in all. And as for doing for me—why, that is entirely the question!'"

"The other woman laughed frankly. "My dear little girl, I'm born yesterday. You live at the rant, don't you? And that you have on come from Lucie's, I've bought gowns there and I couldn't have cost a cent \$100!"

Somehow and in some manner Penelope left the hotel had walked dazedly up Broadway Forty-eighth street before being control of her senses. Her breath seemed to hurt her throat, a struggle she turned and back to her cross-street, then to the hotel.

At the desk, observing a detour on duty, a sudden nervous gripped her heart. She asked a key.

"What is the best rate you can a friend of mine for a room for the one I have?" She scarcely nized his voice.

"By the week?"

"Yes, by the week!"

"Twenty dollars is the regular clerk answered without hesi- Penelope steeled herself by ing to the marble edge of the desk.

"There—there is no lower rate," "None whatever!"

All the afternoon Penelope ed in her room. Toward evening when she came down into she carried only the little shabby case she had brought from home, anything else she left in the room. She handed the key to the clerk, stepped bravely out into the twilight. Clutched in her cold fingers several banknotes. They totaled \$100.

It was just enough to get her to that impossible town in Iowa. Jim!

OW, I say, lieutenant, there's some style to that reception committee, eh?"

The senior captain in command of the Second Squadron turned in appreciative mood to his adjutant as the four troops of the United States cavalry swept into view of the night's bivouac site just beyond the town limits of Elkton.

For assembled about the point which an advance detail had selected for camp headquarters was a group of young women carrying flags and flowers, so that the nature of their visit was obvious.

The line whipped into squadron front at a gallop and halted with a right merry jingling of accoutrements and that indescribable dash peculiar to the Second Squadron.

It was the fifth bivouac in the summer practice march from Vancouver barracks down the Oregon coast. Everywhere there had been informal entertainments for the officers, and at one point for the men as well, for the average Pacific coast town lets no organized body, great or small, get past without partaking of its hospitality.

And Elkton having no commercial club, it had devolved upon the Young Ladies' Club to act in the present emergency.

As the senior captain swung out of his saddle and passed the rains to an orderly, Miss Winder, an spokesman for the reception committee from the Young Ladies' Club, was upon him at once to assure him of the sincere welcome of his troops to Elkton.

"And we planned to give a big dance for the officers if all of you will come," she added.

As a matter of fact, the club had planned the dance originally for the whole squadron, until some one discovered that such a body was composed of at least 240 men. From the same source it had been gathered that the officers would number about 30.

"I'm sure we'd all be delighted," the senior captain assured Miss Winder, standing hat in hand, in his most engaging manner.

"I'd like to have the list of officers right away, so as to get out the invitations," added Miss Winder.

"A general invitation to the officers will do quite as well, if you prefer," the senior captain informed her.

"But we have the forms all made out and it won't take us long to fill in the names," persisted Miss Winder. "You see, they'll make nice souvenirs, we hope, for you to remember Elkton by."

"Well, now, ladies, really this is mighty good of you to take pity on a lot of dusty cavalrymen," beamed the senior captain.

"No, really," he went on, doing his best to think hard. "I'm not able to call all the officers by their full names. But I'll attend to the matter for you at once. Here, orderly!" he snapped, turning to his trooper-in-waiting, who'd already returned from unsaddling the mounts. "Conduct these ladies to Sergt. Maj. Brainerd's tent and say I wish him to give them any information they may require."

"Yes, sir!" replied the orderly, saluting, and he stepped forward to await the pleasure of the committee.

Miss Winder gave a gasp of surprise as she turned from the acting squadron commander, who, until now, had absorbed her utmost attention. For a field of shelter tents had sprung up silently and quickly as from under some magic wand, and the whole

squadron was quite at home.

"So you are the major," she said, timidly, on being shown into the presence of the veteran cavalry non-com. She wondered, at seeing his bronzed, firm-set face and compact soldierly bearing, if he were not really the officer in command. He was standing beside his field equipment, wrangling with a straggling field reporter.

"I'm the sergeant major, yea, ma'am," he said, politely, with a particular emphasis on the sergeant.

"That's what I meant to say," explained Miss Winder. She wondered if she'd offended him by omitting part of his title.

Sergt. Maj. Brainerd had no need to resort to the muster rolls or squadron roster for the list of names.

"There's exactly eight officers," he said, "beginning with Capt. Blakely—"

"Eight!" exclaimed Miss Winder. "We thought there were 30 or more."

"You see, ma'am," Sergt. Maj. Brainerd hurried to explain, "there'd be 10 ordinarily, but most of the line officers of the army these days are on detached duty. Two of the troops are in command of second lieutenants with no other officers."

"That's not enough for us—I mean for the list," she hastily added, blushing furiously at the slip. "We were told there were 30 and maybe more."

"Not unless you count the non-commissioned officers," he informed her. "There's plenty of them along."

"Of course, I want the list of all the officers," urged Miss Winder, brightening.

"Non-commissioned, too, ma'am?"

"Why, yes, by all means."

"There's 35 of them, and I assure you none of them is on detached duty," said Brainerd with grave humor.

And so Sergt. Maj. Brainerd, without remotely suspecting what the list

might be for, made it out, heading the column with the senior captain and following the line of seniority and grade right down to the newest corporal in M. Troop.

Equipped with this official roster the committee hurried to the home of Miss Winder and filled out the invitations, which were neatly sealed and delivered by Miss Winder's youngest brother, who went from tent to tent at dusk distributing the highly decorated bids to the Elkton hall.

"That's mighty decent of them to give a dance for us," the senior captain suggested to his adjutant as he sat shaving himself by candlelight in his wall tent.

"Just remark upon the fun eight of us'll have dancing with the whole feminine population," put in the bystrial Lieut. Benton, acting troop commander of K.

"The invitations say 9 o'clock, but I suppose it's only decent to allow a half hour's delay," said the senior captain, washing away the lather and applying talcum powder liberally.

Over at Sergt. Maj. Brainerd's tent there was a simultaneous and largely similar conversation going on.

"It's good of them girls to get up a dance for us ordinary bucks," Corp. Haynes was saying. "This is where the officers get left out again. I wonder if they've been invited any place tonight? Say, what time was it we was to be there, Brainerd?"

"Nine o'clock," replied the sergeant major, who was engaged in whisking the dust from his service uniform.

"Dancing is child's play, but I don't mind going just to break the monotony when we're on a hike of this kind," he added.

"We'd better go at 8:30, so as to be there in plenty of time," suggested

the feminine populace of Elkton and contiguous territory was already on hand, looking its very best, when the non-commissioned officers of the Second Squadron put in appearance, half an hour early.

They were a most agreeable lot, too, albeit a little timid. But an hour sufficed to put every one at ease, and by 9:30 o'clock the programs were nearly filled up, and every noncom present as devoted his entire and most earnest attention to some one miss in particular when:

"Attention!"

It was Sergt. Maj. Brainerd's sharp voice, and it filled the ballroom like an exploding shrapnel shell. Brainerd had sprung to his feet.

The others instantly followed him to the position of attention, for into the room, headed by the senior captain, were filing the eight belated commissioned officers of the squadron.

The senior captain, the adjutant, the troop commanders and their lieutenants paused in shocked amazement.

"What the devil!" the adjutant said under his breath. The senior captain looked more than annoyed.

The tenseness of the situation was relieved—to all outward appearance, at least—by the reception committee, which rushed innocently forward to take the newcomers in tow for partners.

"I'm afraid you're a little late to get all your dances taken," smiled Miss Winder, consoling.

"So it would seem," replied the senior captain, with a chilling politeness that was not lost on Miss Winder.

Now, it happened that the senior captain was a man of action and prompt decision, as is becoming of a senior captain, and he saw quickly what must be the plan of action here. Plainly, having been especially invit-

ed, the officers could not withdraw and leave the Elkton function to a set of enlisted intruders.

To remain and permit the warrant officers to stay was altogether prejudicial to discipline, as well as contrary to precedent and common decency.

Such a thing was not to be thought of. The senior captain motioned Sergt. Maj. Brainerd aside brusquely.

"Sergeant," said he, severely, "you will have an opportunity tomorrow of explaining your presence and that of the other men at this place tonight. You will withdraw at once with the others. Pass the order about quietly, but I prefer that you shall all leave in a body so that those assembled here may see the penalty of your imprudence in intruding here."

"Yes, sir," replied Brainerd, saluting. He might have explained in a word that he and the others were there by special invitation; but the captain had asked no immediate explanation, and Brainerd was too much the soldier to volunteer one.

He set about performing his duty immediately and to the very best of his ability, resentment barely occurring to him. But he encountered an unexpected obstacle to the best possible fulfillment of his mission.

"Go!" exclaimed Miss Winder, when he'd told her it was necessary for him to leave at once. She'd been his intended partner for the first and last dances, and had been making herself particularly agreeable to him in the bargain.

"Yes, ma'am," he explained quietly. "There's been a mistake some place. This is an officers' dance and we're only men. There's the real officers just come in."

Miss Winder was an impulsive rales, with a highly-developed sense of justice and no understanding of army eti-

quette. "If you have to go on the count I'll just go alone," she said.

And the same spirit infected the rest of Elkton's feminine population when the young women heard quiet words that their heroes were leaving.

"Well, I'm not surprised by least," growled the adjutant by of relieving his feeling and the tion. "The senior captain appears the verge of a stroke of apoplexy."

For as the non-commissioned officers, hats in hand, filed soberly the hall, each was accompanied by intended partner for the first time. When the procession had become with the darkness without their one solitary female figure remained.

She sat demurely near the "clans" stand. Now, she couldn't be a day over 40, and the adjutant most imaginative youth, vowed to self that she looked for the world the K. Troop cook in disguise and ing a shave. The adjutant, having addition a slight sense of humor, the first to recover.

"There appears to be some confusion left us anyway," said he, plain without enthusiasm as the forfeited ure across the hall. "It's up to reward her for her loyalty in remaining," he added. "We can dance her according to seniority. You, captain."

The senior captain, recovering self, stepped gallantly forward.

"Madam," said he suavely, "I have the ranking officer present. It is the extreme honor of asking the first dance with you." He offered his arm. "O, me," she stammered, directing quick glance of trepidation at the clans' platform. "I don't dance, waiting for my husband—he's the lin gentleman."

A Brand New Neighbor

By Will Seaton



HERE was a flurry of excitement on Pink street that morning. And no wonder! Its dwellers were getting a new neighbor.

For a long time—in fact since old Mrs. Busteed's death—the brown house between Mrs. Lakin's and Mrs. Marlow's had been empty. But now, quite unexpectedly somebody was moving in. A little questioning discovered that the newcomer's name was Rainor; that there were two of them—and a dog; that he was retired from business and seeking the quiet of a small town; that he was elderly, and as much younger, and that they had bought the house outright, and had some nice furniture.

So far, excellent. But before even a call had been made Miss Ash began to find fault with the Rainors. Miss Ash had nothing in the world to do but sit on her veranda and concern herself with the affairs of her neighbors. She told Mrs. Marlow that she did not like the way Mrs. Rainor spoke to her lark female agents; she was too cur-

street, by the way, prides itself upon its courtesy to humanity in general. Then, too, Miss Ash thought that Mrs. Rainor had a hippant flirt to her elier. As for the way she dressed—well, no married woman of any age at all, especially if she has an ailing husband, has any right to wear scarlet in her hat and fuss herself up in pink morning dresses.

"I've my opinion of her," summed up Miss Ash. "It may or may not be yours, but there it is."

Mrs. Marlow and Mrs. Lakin went to call, and came back fairly overcome by what they had learned. Mrs. Rainor was going to have the whole house papered and painted, when it was quite good enough as it was, too. More than that, she was going to have the living room papered in cardinal! Who ever heard of such a thing? Certainly not Pink street.

However, Mrs. Rainor merrily went her way. This paper was applied, and two or three ladies timed their calls carefully so as to get the effect. They came away shocked.

"Red paper! And such outlandish furniture! And a pig to match! It gave me the horrors," said Mrs. Frost.

"You see, Miss Ash," went on Mrs. Rainor, laughing, "poor old Pink street is a misnomer."

"I think you're crazy!" said Miss Ash in a rage.

However, the house shown presently in all its yellow and white glory, and baskets crowded with pink geraniums swung airily between the pillars of the veranda. Also, pink filled porch boxes appeared, and pink and white flowers were set in dainty borders up and down the front walk and about the house. Never before had Pink street become so decorous as to display boxes in its front yards; hitherto it had confined these carefully to its back yards. Green porch screens, a Mexican hammock and some green wicker chairs and tables were added to the outdoor appearance of the Rainor house. And when of a morning Mrs. Rainor, in a lemon colored silk cap, or of an afternoon in white or blue, with some scarlet crochet work in her hands, sat there listening while her husband read, the color scheme was complete. The day that Mr. Rainor drove a long hook into the side of the pillar of the veranda and hung therefrom a glittering brass cage, in which

nearly had a fit. She raged up and down Pink street from house to house.

"It's abominable! It's disgraceful! I'm mortified to death!" Miss Ash could have wept, only it was not her way to weep when she was angry.

Hitherto Pink street had been shunned by all save those who found it absolutely necessary to traverse its length. Mrs. Lakin had often complained that French street got all the travel, and one might as well live in the country for all there was to see. But now, strange to say, on Sunday afternoons automobiles whisked by with veiled ladies leaning out to stare at the Rainor place. Couples strolled by. As Grandma Knowles said, "Pink street is perking up."

The rap sheet of all was that day when Mrs. McAllister, rich and powerful and famed as a traveler and a sojourner in cities, accented Miss Ash and Miss Lakin from her limousine as they were coming out from a bargain sale at Munnford's.

"I want to congratulate you upon your good fortune in having Mrs. Rainor for a neighbor," she said. "I met her at a session of the Monday After-

tremely. She's very bright and up to date. Will you tell her that I am coming to call upon her at the earliest possible moment?"

Miss Ash gulped. "Yes, I'll tell her," she said; "but to be honest, Mrs. McAllister, we—I don't approve of her."

"You don't approve of her? Why not, pray?" Mrs. McAllister stared frankly. Yet in her tone was a lurking amusement. "But, no, I can understand why. It is on account of her pink geraniums and yellow paint. Is not that it? Then she laughed outright. "Oh, my dear! If you only know what people are saying about Pink street—that Agnes Rainor has saved it from utter extinction with those same pink geraniums and that yellow paint."

So authoritative a word could not be gainsaid. Several heads did a great deal of thinking that night. And the next day Mrs. Lakin began to act. She hired painters. It was only white paint that she put on her house. Mrs. Marlow followed her example with French gray. Mrs. Bench made a third with light olive. Pink street caught the spirit, and up and down its extent newly painted houses blossomed as fast as peonies. Miss Ash was the last, but not the least, for she

Nor did improvements stop there. It seemed that for the most of summer people vied with each other to see who could get the most of the shortest time. There always been money enough, but nobody ever thought of using it for beauty's sake.

Mrs. McAllister went to Nova Scotia on a summer tour and did not get until September. Then one day in limousine was seen stopping at various Pink street doors. Mrs. Ash arrived at Miss Ash's dress. Ash, wearing a blue silk dress, had looked twenty years younger almost handsome.

"I wouldn't have known street," said Mrs. McAllister. "It's the same at all. It's lovely. What the prettiest street in town. Every says so. And you know they say property has increased forty per cent in value! The Rainors paid \$40,000 for their place, and they were only \$7,000 the other day."

Miss Ash gave a cry. "They're going away!" she protested. "I couldn't spare him. They're the neighbors."

She pointed Bushy Branch.