

IF A PARTY MEET A PARTY By Jack Lait

Suppose, If You Were a Married Man, That a Dainty Miss of Nineteen Sought to Hold Your Hand at Three o'Clock in the Morning, Would You Tell Her You Had Given Yourself to Another? Patrolman Rourke Didn't Until He Was Given the Surprise of His Life



Millie gave him her hand—the first time—that night when they parted at the gate.

IT seems to be written in the book that when a man does an act of gallantry toward a female in distress he must and shall fall in love with her. Any man brave enough to be brave deserves to fare well with the fair, and it is up to him to wrap his strong arms about her there and then or as soon thereafter as circumstances allow. As to the lady, of course she falls in love on the spot. Let's see.

Ed Rourke, patrolman, was traveling nights out in the tall grass. He had transgressed and had been transferred. He had arrested a rowdy with the wrong uncle, or a drunk with a drag, or an alderman's private secretary, and for the good of the service, he had been assigned to a station where it took him two days every day to go to work from where he lived.

Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year came pretty close together—and that was all. Millie had told him what she did for a living and that she was the only daughter of a widow—and that was all. Ed had told her that he came to pound the suburban flagstones because he was in Dutch at headquarters—and that was all.

And then one night Ed hurried, as he did every night, to make the car after his 2:30 pull at a box six blocks away. Millie got off. He was just about to join her, but she, quietly and without turning her face toward him at all, said out of the corner of her pretty little mouth, "Nix." Ed stepped back a pace to get a better focus, for he was puzzled. Then he noted that a man had gotten off the car at the same corner, a pace behind the girl. That was unusual in the wilderness.

"Well, good-night. I guess he won't worry you no more after this." "Anybody what thinks he will a dime'll get him rich," said Millie, who had her set phrase for each emotion.

Ed watched her down the black passageway to the rear door where she always slipped into the house, then he turned and strolled back toward the main avenue to meet the next car, from which the conductor always tossed him an early morning paper.

He was feeling pretty good. It had been an adventure and he had been a knight. The monotony had been broken and so had the ice.

He wondered—yes, he smiled, then smiled, then frowned, then whistled once, then smiled again and wondered. What would she say if she knew he was married? He hadn't told her that he wasn't. Maybe she suspected. It wasn't hard to suspect it. But, no. Girls never suspect it. Say—they don't even believe it when a fellow tells them so.

And to some, again, it doesn't make any difference. That love thing is a funny sketch. A woman will let herself go, get herself all in love and wrapped up in a man she knows she can't have, follow him around like a devoted little slave when all the time she knows another woman has him—but that's how they are, those girls. So thought Ed as he strolled—and as he smiled.

The next night was Sunday, so he wasn't to meet Millie. But he strolled past her house three times, telling himself that he had to patrol that block the same as any other block, didn't he? As late as midnight he saw a light in the house. But he couldn't see in. He wondered what they were doing up so late. But what mattered? He would ask her next day.

All next evening Ed found himself looking at his watch. He wasn't impatient for 2:42—nothing like that. But he just didn't want to miss that pull at the box, and the girl would be scary and timid now that she had been molested, so he mustn't fail in his duty to her. No, by all means he mustn't fail. So he was there and waiting when the headlight of the car swung into view and standing at the crossing walk, as the platform stopped there.

Ed lifted his hat and beamed up at the step where stood Millie, with a smile on her face, looking radiant.

Ed reached up to help her off when—Suffering Disorderly Conduct—the masher stepped out from behind Millie, put his two feet on the ground, reached up and offered his uplifted hand to Millie. Ed pulled his cap firmly on his head and with one quick motion drew back his right arm. Millie jumped down, threw up both her hands before Officer Rourke, between him and the masher.

"Cut it out," said Millie sharply. Ed stopped, his swing halting in midair. The conductor rang his two bells and the car pulled away.

"What the—?" gasped Ed. "You lay off that party," said Millie. "Why, that's—"

"Never you mind who he is. You'll find out mighty quick who he is," and she turned to the well-dressed little man. "Arthur," she said to him, "tip this fresh harness bull off to what you think he oughta get wise to before they make kindlin' wood outta his hickory."

"Why," started the little man, clearing his throat nervously, "I am Senator Carberry, member of the state legislature from this district, and—"

"Not 'Franchise Carberry?" exclaimed Rourke. "They sometimes call me that," said the little man.

"Why, then—then you're the boss o' this district—an' you—"

"You have nothing to fear, officer," said Carberry. "I have no desire to punish you, though you do take a great deal for granted for just a common patrolman, and you are

Ed was married. His wife was a girl from his own parish, and he had known her a long time. They had married without much flurry or furlough. Their home life was honest (some part of a policeman's life must be honest) and tranquil and unexciting.

Rourke had entered the police service through a longing for adventure. He preferred it to becoming a plumber's helper or a motorman. He wanted to hunt thieves and raid opium dens and shoot burglars caught in the act. And here he was, out where he got burrs on the tails of his blue coat, pacing for hours up and down cold, dark residential streets where nothing ever happened.

Everything out in that neighborhood closed for the night before he got there for duty. No thieves were ever crazy enough to go so far out. It wasn't a fashionable suburb—one never even saw a taxi there.

Only one incident lighted up the nightly travel. On the 2:42 car each night came Millie Pringle, a little waitress who worked down town in a lunchroom until 2 o'clock. Ed had met her one night when he saw her get off the car and start up a dark street, alone. He addressed her and offered uniformed escort. She readily accepted. So Ed found out that she made that car nightly except Sunday, and he suggested that he had better be there each night and see that she got safely home over the two and a half blocks of desolate sidewalk. Millie said, gee, it would be fine if he would.

The only good look that Ed ever got of her was as she alighted, when in the flare of the street car platform lights, he noted that she was prettily put together, chubby, smiling, with nice white teeth and nice pink lips and that she could not be more than about 19. He liked her walk, too, which was brisk and cute, and her talk, which was the what's what in the latest refined slang. She chewed her gum gracefully, she wore blue boots with white heels and, generally speaking, she was the kind of a girl who would do anybody proud, anywhere.

Not a word had Ed spoken that would not have passed muster had Millie's mother been along. But there was something in her smile as she caught his face each night, looking ahead while the car ground and grounded at the crossing, that led Ed to suspect that Millie had noticed his broad shoulders, his curly brown hair that showed beneath the white military police cap and his smooth, young face which could be looked at without annoyance.

When she smiled he smiled right back, giving tooth for tooth and eye for eye. And Millie knew, likewise, that each dimple registered, that the cocky little tail set off her round face tellingly and that any man might be proud to take her to the movies.

But no diplomatic messages had been exchanged. Rourke was entirely within his duties, lending to a lone girl police convoy at that hour, and Millie could accept it in turn without compromise. They talked of the weather and suffrage and President Wilson's engagement and the fact that

"What's the matter?" demanded Ed, addressing the girl. "This goof," said Millie, hotly, "made a play for me in the restaurant. I never gave him a tumble. But he waits around till I get off and tails me on that car and takes a seat across from me and gives me the all-over like he was gonna buy me or something. I wasn't gonna make no riot on that car, so I let him step right into this. Now, where do we go from here? Or do I have to let a lop-eared chicken chaser like this run me all over town and get away with it?"

Ed tightened his grip on the fellow's collar.

"It isn't so, officer," said the prisoner. "I thought I knew the young lady. That is—I saw her in the restaurant and as I was going up the same way I was about to suggest that as it is dark—"

"Dark, is it?" said Policeman Rourke, and with his free hand he slapped the masher across the mouth, drawing blood. "Live up here, do you?" and he smacked him again. Then with the hand that gripped the coat Rourke gave the unwelcome stranger a shove that landed him in the middle of the dusty roadway in a heap.

Rourke followed to the edge of the sidewalk.

"If I ever ketch you annoyin' this here young lady again or mashin' on my beat I'll bust your nut and I'll run you in," said Rourke, and he turned and took Millie's arm and led her along toward her home.

Millie looked up at Ed's strong shoulders in his well-fitting blue uniform. Her little hand stole up on his arm and the spot it squeezed was as hard as Bessemer.

"You're a bear," she said with feeling. "It's that kind o' roaches makes me wanna do murder," said Rourke. "I didn't wanna take him in becuz you would o' had to go to court an' so would I, an' the only way I could get to court at 9 in the mornin' out here would be to sleep in the station four hours an' then I'd get home just in time to be too late to start back this here way again. But I guess he won't worry you no more after this."

"Anybody what thinks he will a dime'll get him rich," said Millie with more feeling.

Millie gave him her hand—the first time—that night when they parted at the gate. And Ed took it. And he noticed that she had a soft little hand, though a working girl, and that when he closed his big paw over it it felt so warm and snugly that he just kept it there until he suddenly remembered that such things mean something, and he let go of it with suddenness and vigor, raised his cap and said:

Current Events As the Cartoonists Interpret Them With Their Facile Pens

THE SONG OF PEACE



STILL AT IT



SMALL POTATOES

