

The Girls of the Second Floor Back

Number Ten

By Juanita Hamel



CHERRY and Mr. Van Tyle had scarcely settled themselves comfortably at the table at the Cafe le Jardin when Cherry felt that she was the object of a direct and scrutinizing gaze. She turned and glanced over her shoulder. Three pairs of eyes were focused upon her. Miss Rogers and the man whom Cherry had met at the flat, Mr. Wharton, smiled in recognition. The third person in the party was unknown to Cherry, but she instantly concluded he was the "friend" of whom she had heard Miss Rogers speak.

With a troubled brow she again faced Mr. Van Tyle. What turn of fate had directed Miss Rogers and her friends to the Cafe le Jardin?

"Where did you meet that man who just spoke to you, if you don't mind my asking?" Mr. Van Tyle queried.

"Why, I was introduced to him by Miss Rogers. She works in the millinery department at Booth & Barrington's, you know," Cherry answered mechanically. Then, curiously, "You know him?"

"Yes," Mr. Van Tyle spoke quietly. "I know him but I do not know anything good of him. I would advise you not to encourage him."

Then he launched into another subject, giving Cherry no further opportunity to question him. Cherry made an effort to appear interested, but her thoughts were of Miss Rogers and the man against whom she had been warned.

Just what did Mr. Van Tyle mean? What did he know of Mr. Wharton? Suddenly her attention was attracted to the mirror directly back of Mr. Van Tyle. There she saw the reflection of a scene that was being enacted at the other table. Mr. Wharton was carelessly handing a roll of money to Miss Rogers. The latter accepted it unconcernedly and tucked it in the bosom of her gown. She glanced in Cherry's direction, then threw back her head and laughed.

Evidently she was not the only one under obligation to Miss Rogers. But why should this man with plenty of money be indebted to her? Another thing that puzzled Cherry was the fact that this woman always appeared well supplied with money. Cherry had seen her with what seemed to be large sums of

money. But she was always in need of more. Miss Rogers was a working girl, the same as Cherry herself, and yet she never succeeded in getting ahead. In fact, she considered herself fortunate if she was not in arrears.

This was the trend of her thoughts when Mr. Van Tyle again sought her attention.

"I say, Miss Thornton, do you often have these pensive moods? I have been talking to you for fully five minutes, and I'll venture to say you haven't heard a word I have said."

For the remainder of the evening Cherry's thoughts were divided between the dinner, the cabaret and Mr. Van Tyle's charming, if insincere, compliments.

With the intention of adjusting her hat preparatory to leaving, Cherry made her way to a compartment at the rear of the cafe. Here she encountered Miss Rogers, who was being powdered and rouged by the negro maid.

"Oh, hello there, dearie," she exclaimed, puffing at a cigaret. "Come over here; I want a talk with you." She motioned to a chair at her side.

"I only have a moment to spare," Cherry said, as she looked furtively about the room. "I just wanted to tell you that—I know you'll be glad; you know how I need the money; that flat's an awful expense; rent due tomorrow, and I just had to have the money—I told Mr. Wharton that I loaned you some money and that you couldn't pay it back, and that I needed it, so he said he would give it to me and you could pay him any time you got ready. He'll do anything for a person he likes, and, believe me, he certainly has taken a liking to you. He is going to be out to the house again this week and he wants you to be there. I'll let you know what night."

Cherry was dumfounded. She sat rigid in her chair, stupefied.

"Well," she heard Miss Rogers saying, "aren't you glad?"

Cherry made no answer. She rose and groped her way out of the smoke-filled room. Her thoughts were in chaos until she felt the cool night air against her face as the machine sped through the deserted streets. (To be continued)

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