

STORY BY
ALICE GARLAND
STEELE

"AH! MOON OF MY DELIGHT"

AGAY AND SPARKLING TALE OF YOUNG LOVE A-HONEYMOONING

ILLUSTRATION
BY
F. R.
GRUGER

Old Point Comfort.

HAZEL and I are here on our honeymoon. It is great! Of course, I realize more and more that marriage entails many sacrifices on the part of the man, but it is worth them just to have always at your side a congenial spirit who takes your viewpoint about everything.

A girl naturally looks forward to her honeymoon. She has more than half of the pleasure and none of the responsibility, but with a fellow it is different. He knows for weeks ahead that he must provide the cash. The dear old Governor was awfully decent. He asked me right after the wedding how much cash I had on hand, and I told him candidly I had the hundred dollars he had handed me the night before, and \$63.50 I had saved up myself. He said:

"Well, my boy, a little extra won't worry you, I guess," and handed me out another fifty.

It was a relief to get on the train and be alone with my wife!

Just at first the sensation of having a wife is queer. It's great; but it's something you have got to get used to, like voting, or your first long trousers.

Right here I want to set down that taking outside advice is risky and it came near in our case to making our marriage a tragedy. This is how it happened:

I WANTED to try one of the big cigars that Hazel's naval uncle had given me. So I fished out a couple and nudged Hazel. I said, in a low tone, not to attract attention:

"I say, darling, you've got plenty of magazines and things. I'm going into the rear car for a minute."

I must say, I was not prepared for her look of hurt surprise.

She said, "But, dearest, we are perfectly comfortable right here."

I said, as patiently as I could, "I know, darling. I simply want a smoke."

She said, sitting up very straight, "And leave me here—alone?"

I said, "My dear little girl, you are talking nonsense. I tell you I'll be right back; I'll only be a minute."

She said, "I think you might give this one week of your life just to me."

I said, "Heavens and earth, darling, I've practically been in your pocket since we left the altar!"

She said, "Oh, if that's the way you feel about it—," and bit her lip.

The smoker was a cheap, stuffy affair. I sat down beside a bald-headed drummer and lit one of Hazel's uncle's cigars. It was expensive, but it had the wrong flavor. I smoked it, however, stonily.

I felt, in a way, depressed. I got to thinking of Hazel back there in our compartment, wiping her eyes every other minute under her veil; and I realized more and more how unworthy I was.

Well, right here, that fool-chap next to me began to butt in with his questions. He said:

"That's a pretty stiff cigar. Seems a bit strong for you, hey?"

I said, coldly, "Not at all."

He said, "No? Then, it's the smoke. It used to affect my eyes that way, too, before I took to wearing glasses."

I was thankful when he switched off to baseball.

WELL, we got to discussing "team-work" and the Giants pretty thoroughly, and I gave him my views. Meanwhile, that train had stopped at some sort of junction, where they were due to be held up about ten minutes, and we both felt the need of fresh air; so we got off and walked up and down a while, puffing our cigars.

Well, when they called "all aboard" we were still talking, but we got on all right and went back to the smoker (it



"I SAID, 'WHY ON EARTH DIDN'T YOU GIVE MY WIFE THE TELEGRAM I SENT HER YESTERDAY?'"

looked like the smoker), and I told him I had a family; but that I never intended to let it interfere with my career. He seemed surprised. He said:

"You don't say? How many?"

Of course, I told him so far there was only Hazel, and that she was waiting for me in one of the forward cars. He said:

"Say, I don't like to worry you, but that was my junction. I'd ought to have told you that this little combination here heads for Ontario Mills; but, fact is, I took it you were going my way!"

I said, "Good lord, man! You don't mean—that Hazel—?"

He said, "If you want to find anybody on the other train you better look her up, pretty damned quick!"

I put it up to the conductor that he was personally responsible for every passenger he carried over that road. He never flickered an eyelash! He just said he couldn't help the rules of the road!

I said, "Well, the road is an outrage!"

He said, "We come in on that track every day on the same schedule. I can't help it if you made a mistake, young man. This is our regular trip."

He was horribly cool. He said, "You have to apply to the 'Lost and Found'—," and then he smiled.

I saw I was at his mercy. I gripped the arm of the seat and said, as steadily as I could, "I give you two minutes to tell me what to do!"

He said, more mildly, "I can tell you in two seconds. Get off at the next station and telegraph."

In my excitement I had forgotten the Western Union entirely!

Well, I did. I got out at the next station, and I stood over the operator while he clicked off a cool dozen. I sent them to every important stop, and to the hotels in Washington and Richmond and Old Point I had written to, and I described Hazel minutely, so there could be no mistake.

I REACHED the Pennsylvania terminal at 8 p. m. in a state of mind impossible to describe. I pass over those hours as the blackest of my life!

To my surprise, I found I must wait till 10 o'clock that night to get the next Washington express. Meanwhile, where was my darling wife?

I could not telephone our families. I wished to work the thing out alone, and of course there was no use in notifying the police—besides, I did not wish it made public.

Finally, I hit on the idea of Hazel's naval uncle, who was with his ship in the Brooklyn navy yard. He was, of course, unmarried, and could not possibly feel the thing as I did; but he is a bully good sort, and I knew if he couldn't help us, at least he wouldn't jaw.

I got him, after a while, but he did not recognize my voice. I said, "It's Henry."

He said, "Henry who?" I said, "For heaven's sake, don't be frivolous. Henry Montrose, your nephew-in-law! Can you come at once to me here without telling anybody? Something has happened to Hazel!"

He said, sharply, "What's that?"

Hazel's uncle was fearfully concerned. He said he was awfully fond of Hazel. I told him he wasn't one-two-three as fond of her as I was; but he said I'd have to prove it, and that he had dandled her as a baby! Of course he had me there.

I TOLD him about the bald-headed chap and how we had got off for a breath of air, and then I had got on again, but that it was the wrong train.

He said, "H'm. As I understand it, then, Hazel was taking her wedding trip alone?"

I said, "Just for that minute." And then, trusting to his man's nature to understand me, I told him the truth. I said, "I wanted to try out one of your really big cigars."

He said, "Well, Henry, it bids fair to prove a pretty expensive smoke." And then he asked me what steps I had taken. I told him about the telegrams.

Half an hour later we had said goodbye. He cheered me to the end, and the last thing I saw, as the train moved out, was his military salute.

Meanwhile, where was my darling Hazel? I am going to let her tell it as she afterward told it to me!

SHE said that after I left her to go into the smoker she cried. She said it was not so much that I had gone, as that I had wanted to go. (Hazel always gets things down to a fine point.) Besides, she had been hurt at my lack of affection. She said she felt for just a minute as if every illusion she had was shattered! Finally she dried her eyes, got a magazine and read a story in it, and ate some chocolates. Meanwhile, a lot of stations had passed and she began to get really worried; but she was too proud to send the porter after me, and she had no money to tip him, anyway; so she just waited, and after a long time, time enough, she calculated, for me to have smoked ten cigars, the conductor came through.

He asked her for her ticket.

She told him he had punched it once, but he said he must do so again; and then she had to tell him that she hadn't

Hazel was relieved, of course, and thanked him as well as she could, but she was frightfully worried about me!

When she got to Washington she hired a taxi and went straight to the hotel I had written to and had our luggage put in, and when she got there made the hotel people pay the bill!

She went right in and asked for the manager. She said, "My husband, Mr. Montrose, wrote you for rooms two weeks ago. He has been detained, but will follow shortly; meanwhile, I shall occupy them till he comes." And then that darling kid went and signed her name in the register, "Mrs. Henry Montrose, New York City."

She said the rooms were huge and luxurious, and she simply couldn't bear spending hours in them all alone; so as it was still early she went down to the Palm room—and who the dickens should she run into but Stella Richards and Ted Morrison. (Who had been married two days before us and were doing Washington!)

Hazel said she turned perfectly cold.

Stella said, "Why, Hazel, you darling, are you and Henry here, too? We read all about your wedding in the paper this morning, and I think the bridesmaids' dresses were just sweet!"

Hazel said, "Did you?" She said she couldn't think of another word to put to it, and that Stella just stared.

Stella said, "Ted and I were just wondering where you'd spend your honeymoon. Henry was so secret about it, he wouldn't give Ted even a hint; and now isn't it luck that you've run into us? Hazel, we can have perfectly beautiful times, because the boys can go off together and do the kind of things that men like, and we can try all the darling little tea rooms, and in the evening we can go to the theatre or play bridge. Of course you'll have to do the public buildings." Here Stella sighed, but roused herself to say suddenly, "Where is Henry?"

Hazel said she turned numb. But she just sent Stella a nervous little smile and said, "He's gone off to smoke—to smoke a cigar."

MEANWHILE, I was speeding toward Washington, and you can bet I was about all in. Holy Cats, I agree with people who say mental torment is worse than anything the body undergoes! No word, of course, had reached me of Hazel, and the first ray of light I had was a dispatch from Hazel's naval uncle which caught me at Baltimore. It said:

"Have traced H. through conductor of train to Washington. Try all hotels."

This was vague, but better than nothing!

Upon reaching the station I phoned the hotel I had written to but they annoyed me so by asking me to speak plainly I cut them off. They said "Everybody in their hotel was accounted for." So I got into a taxi, regardless of the expense, and went from street to street in the most thorough way, taking in all the

places the taxi driver knew about, and all I had ever heard of. I did not even stop for lunch, for how could I eat in such uncertainty of mind! I phoned Hazel's uncle at the navy yard three times—and you can believe me, "Long Distance" is no joke!—because I felt I must talk to a human being, and the taxi driver of course did not qualify. He was awfully worried by this time, and said if I didn't send satisfactory news by 8 p. m. he'd see the commander, and get leave for 24 hours and come on himself by the Flyer.

I felt, as I turned away from the booth, very miserable, and dismissing the taxi, crossed into one of the little green parks and sat on a wooden bench—and who should pass by but Ted Morrison and Stella Richards!

I jumped up and called out, "Hello, Ted!" And they turned and stared at me. Ted said, "Caesar's Ghost!" But Stella came right over and said, "Why, how do you do, Mr. Montrose? Isn't it great that you and Hazel are here in Washington, too! Do tell us what hotel you are stopping at?"

I said, feeling pretty rotten, "I'm not stopping at any one hotel; I'm trying them all."

Ted looked away, but Stella kept right on talking. She said, "Really? Why don't you try ours? I'm sure you and Hazel would like it." (The little cat!)

I said, "Thanks, maybe we will," and then, while she stood examining the scenery, I took Ted aside and told him the whole beastly business.

He said, "Say, old man, if you'll just come out straight with the truth of this thing, maybe I can clear up a situation that has worried Stella and me awfully."

I did. I told him about the smoker, and how I'd made a mistake and taken the wrong train, while my darling was being carried on into the vast unknown. He was a brick. He just turned around and gave Stella one look and said, "Another time, old girl, don't go looking for trouble when there isn't any"; and then he said, wringing my hand, "I'm glad to know it's all on the level, Montrose; Hazel is at our hotel, and she's the pluckiest and the loveliest little bride in all Washington! Come on, old man, we'll all go back together and have a jolly surprise party for four!"

I PASS over our meeting. The Garden of Eden wasn't in it.

I said, "Come on, dearest, get your things together; I want to get out of this place in ten minutes!"

She said, "But, Henry—and leave Ted and Stella that way, without a word?" (Hazel is a forgiving little thing.)

I said, "Do you think this is a Cook's Tour Honeymoon? Or a private affair for just you and me? We're going straight down to Richmond and Old Point."

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