

# Married Flirts

by MABEL McLELLOTT  
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## CHAPTER XXXII

Lila said patiently, "I've told you over and over again. I want to be sure."

Derek, tall and handsome in tweeds, looked at her dark eyes puzzled, asked, "What's gone wrong? I don't know, dear. Oh, sweets, there must be something we can do..."

Lila rose from her place by the fire and stared out of the window at the city below which sparkled in the night. The big clock tower came in noisily and carried away the coffee tray. The big furniture was very quiet.

"It was a mistake from the start," she said evenly. "It was better than she had expected and the harder she tried to get away from the appearance of her husband, the more she was beating thickly. She should find out that, after all, she meant to marry Marko, and his boy attitude of puzzled hurt would be changed. But he must not get out."

"To not your sort," she continued, "to get out of the long, supple ringed hands to the blue. 'We don't think the same way. Confess your idea of the same way.'"

"No, Frankly, it isn't," Derek said. "But after all, marriage means compromise. I've made some. I suppose you have, although in the main it has been as you wanted it. But it was forever. You and I both said that...we pledged it, not two years ago."

"I know, I know." She stirred impatiently. How could she make him see?

"It's just that—well, I don't feel the same any more. I don't—don't you any more."

The man in the deep chair moved as though to ward off a blow. His face paled suddenly.

"I'm sorry," Lila said quickly. "I didn't mean to hurt you. But you just won't see..."

Derek rose. How tall he was, she thought idly. How good-looking, too, as an unconventional way. But although he was a dear he could never get her, besides, Marko was so terribly attractive.

"I didn't understand." His tone was vaguely formal. No casual onlooker would have known he had just received a mortal blow.

"I'll go to Reno, of course," Lila said quickly. "It will be easy. There need be any publicity until it's all over."

"Oh, you have planned it all out," Derek said with dreadful politeness. He threw out her hands in a gesture of despair. "You're being so difficult," she told him.

"Terry," he had his hands plunged deep into the pockets of his coat. His hair was a white mask. The worst had happened. He had been expecting this, dressing it, for weeks. If you take a failure of marriage, thought Derek bleakly, it meant you were a failure in everything else. He did not stare the light sentiments of most of Lila's crowd, who changed life partners as casually as they changed their faces.

There was another man he did not know. But who? He looked at her, and he saw the young gallants who seemed to Lila's cocktail parties. He treated them all very much alike. But had something escaped him in her attitude toward any special one?

He groaned. This was all so ugly—unspeakably sordid!

"I'm sorry, Derek," Lila said prettily, gracefully. Whatever this slim, hair-raised, clear-skinned young woman did would always be pretty and graceful. Even when she was a small girl her mother had said, "Why aren't you like Lila? You're so beautiful."

"Now that she had said that, she could afford to be nervous with Derek. And, after all, they were civilized people. Why wouldn't they be friends? There wasn't the least reason in the world."

clenching and unclenching themselves as they had the night before. "He'll get over it," Marko prophesied. "He'll marry again."

"Do you think so?" Lila was not entirely sure she liked this. "Certain to," Marko nodded. "He's attractive."

"Do you ever see Gypsy Morell any more?" Marko started her by asking, breaking in on her reverie. Lila was glad to be distracted. "No, she's gone completely domestic," she told the man opposite. "Gypsy's turned maternal and middle class and all that."

She didn't want to sound spiteful; after all, Marko had admired Gypsy. So she amended hastily. "Such a pity she married that young nobody. Of course, he's all right—well born and so forth, but he'll never get anywhere."

She sipped her tea with the superior air she reserved for people who hadn't much of the world's good. "Funny—I always thought Gypsy would do something wonderful," she went on, wanting to seem gracious in her lover's eyes. "Become a singer or an actress or something. She had talent and looks but marriage simply squelched her."

"Pretty little thing," Marko commented idly. "Lovely eyes. And the most graceful hands in the world."

Lila didn't like this. Marko would have to be taught (later, of course) that you didn't say things like that to one woman about an absent member of the sex.

"Really?" Her languor was distinctly forbidding.

She glanced about her cautiously. "I'll go on without you," she whispered. "Won't do to be seen together just before news of the break leaks out. You never know when one of those awful column writers is lurking about. They seem to be everywhere."

Lila went through the marble and gilt foyer alone, very slim and elegant in her pale costume, the fur making a dark background for her lovely face. Eyes were turned as she passed and admiring glances followed her. She enjoyed every bit of it. When she was Mrs. Marko Broughton she would have more of it. Admiration, adulation from all sides.

She went back to the apartment in a taxi. Although the long greyhound car just beyond the awning entrance was hers for a beckoning finger. Some day soon that car would be hers and the square-jawed Finn at the wheel would take her orders.

"To Tiffany's," she could imagine herself, speaking through the silver tube, commandingly.

She could even see the rings that would be laid out for her choice—emeralds, rubies, star sapphires. There would be narrow bracelets fashioned of stones clearer than clear water...

Meanwhile she fumbled in the pale leather bag for change. The taxi man swifly her for the tip and she went shakily into the foyer. It would be lonely tonight. Marko dared not call and she had made no arrangements to dine with anyone. She shivered at the prospect of a solitary dinner.

She rang up several people she knew, feverishly and in haste. Freddy, Chloë and Dick Van Ness. One was engaged and the others were out of town.

Of a sudden impulse she dialed Gypsy's number. It would be a lark, she reflected, to take pot luck with the Weavers this night—see how the other half lived.

But the bell rang dimly, rang and rang and rang. Gypsy's little nest was plainly deserted. There was trouble, real trouble that late April afternoon in the house of Weaver.

(To Be Continued)

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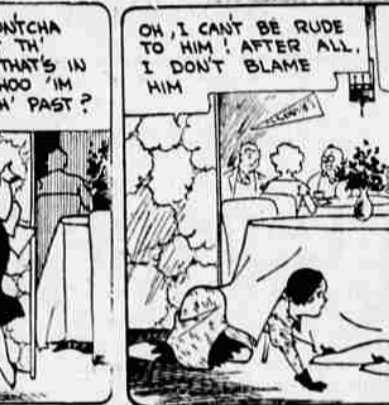
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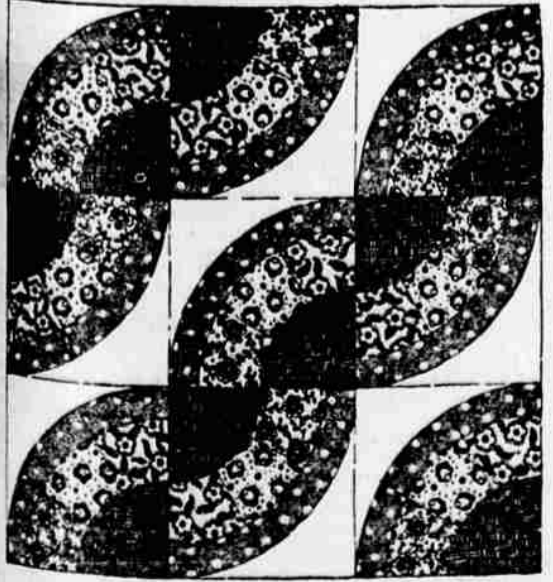
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