

Summer Sweethearts

By Mabel McElliot
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CHAPTER XXIX

same sleepy town, glimmered against her finger.

It wasn't real. It couldn't be. Yet there was Michael beside her. And in the back of the car were the drug store packages, the forgotten library book, to remind her of home, of duties.

Katharine turned a scandalized face to his. "Bertine—my stepmother! She'll be expecting me back. She'll be half mad. What time is it?"

Michael consulted his watch. "Half past two."

Half past two. And it has been 10 o'clock when Katharine had stepped out of the drug store into broiling Main street. She was married now. She was this man's wife...

"Michael," she said frantically. "You must wait here. Is there a hotel or something? I'll go back to Innick and get some money—throw some things into a bag."

She had promised to go with him, for better or for worse. In sickness and in health. Something wild and free within herself exulted at the thought. This lean, smiling young man was her husband. No one could take him from her.

He glanced away, avoiding her eyes. "Do you think I'm going to let you go now? We can telephone your stepmother..."

Suddenly it seemed to Katharine that if Bertine knew it would spoil everything. Bertine, prying and questioning, weeping perhaps, and talking of the shame and disgrace of it.

"No," she said gently. "But now we must plan what to do, where to go. Shall we go west again—or is it—would it be uncomfortable for you?"

She asked this haltingly. Now that she was his wife, perhaps Michael Heathcote would tell her why those grim men with badges were looking for him.

"No—not very," said Michael. If she hadn't known the affair was so serious, she would have sworn there was amusement lurking in his eyes.

"Katharine can you realize it?" he asked huskily after a moment. "Yesterday I thought I was done for. Today you belong to me."

"I can't drive when you look at me like that," she murmured. She stopped the car and there was a murmuring interlude.

"Listen, Katharine," said Michael after a space. "You needn't go back to Innick at all. I have some cash in my pockets."

"Idiot," she told him. "I haven't any clothes."

"Well, I'll buy you some."

"With what?" she demanded, laughing.

He frowned. "You've married a poor man, my darling."

"As if that mattered!"

She raised her hand to her lips and, with a spontaneity amazing in one always so cool and repressed, kissed it. His face burned a deep red. He said huskily, "Do you realize, girl, that's the first time you ever—"

"Ever what?" Her dark, burning blue eyes challenged him. Bertine, who complained of her stiffness and coldness, would not have recognized Katharine at the moment.

"The first time you ever gave me any tangible proof of your affection," said the man softly.

(To Be Continued)

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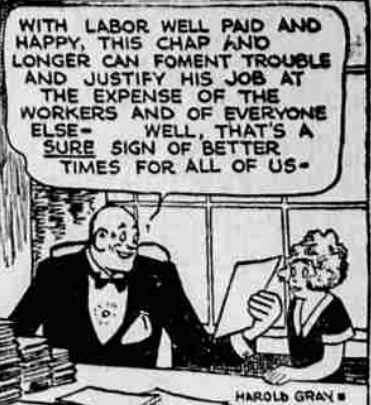
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