

A Page of Interesting Short Stories

What She Really Wanted

By Elsie Endicott

IT so happened that the very spring morning that Tom Harland invented an excuse, to take him into the main office of the concern for which he worked, to see pretty Donna Daley, that Miss Dawson, the private secretary, came in calmly wearing a beautiful diamond solitaire, which she was not the least backward in showing all the other girls. If this had not happened at just exactly the proper moment, Tom would probably never have known Donna's great desire for just such a ring.

For Tom and Donna had been engaged only a week, and the young man had not ceased to marvel at the wonder of the fact sufficiently to consider such secondary things as engagement rings. To be sure, he had long ago picked out a little ring with a modest blue stone (the color of Donna's eyes, he thought), which was still

displayed in the show window of the local jewelry store, and he had fond visions of placing it on Donna's hand. But since that heavenly night a week ago when, to his stammering words of love and longing, Donna had confessed that she loved him, too, nothing like rings had any place yet in his blissful mind.

So that morning when Tom stood outside the office of the lumber company, his blissful heart received a jolt as he heard Donna's beloved voice exclaiming in delighted accents, and he got there just in time to catch the look of utter longing with which she was regarding the diamond ring on Miss Dawson's hand. Also, he was just in time to hear the latter's condescending:

"Hope you'll soon have one like it, dearie."

Tom changed his mind about going

in. Instead, he turned and left the office before the girls noticed his presence. He crossed the yard and sat down on a pile of lumber behind a shed to think over this disturbing question of diamond engagement rings which had been so suddenly forced on his attention. For some time he had seen plainly, in his mind's eye, the pretty little bungalow which he was going to build for Donna. His employer, who wanted to help the young foreman, had promised to give him the lumber to build it, if Tom would secure the building lot.

At his employer's suggestion, Tom had already paid down half the price of the lot, and by careful saving was now ready to make the final payment and secure the land; and it seemed to him that his cherished dream of a home was about to be realized at last. But now came this dismaying fact of Donna's desire for a diamond ring. Of

course, she ought to have one, as well as Miss Dawson, Tom told himself. But it would make a bad hole in the bungalow fund. Still he loved Donna dearly and if she really wanted a diamond he would get her one, and they would have to wait for the bungalow. The little ring with the blue stone didn't seem to appeal to him any longer.

In the office Donna sat down at her desk after Miss Dawson had left, and slowly began to open the morning mail with a troubled look in her blue eyes. She told herself that Miss Dawson's fiancée, who was a broker, could well afford to give her a diamond engagement ring, while it would be foolish extravagance for Tom to buy one. So she resolutely banished the thought of that glittering blue-white stone from her mind and turned her attention to the day's work.

Tom was not so fortunate; and after

debating the thing in his mind all morning, he hurried through his dinner and spent the rest of the noon hour at the jeweler's, inquiring the prices of diamond engagement rings. To his dismay he found that the price of the one he wanted was exactly the amount required before the building lot could be his. But he had made up his mind; and that evening he presented the surprised and delighted girl with a beautiful diamond engagement ring. "Just as big as Belle Dawson's!" So Donna exclaimed proudly.

Bubbling over with happiness, Donna tripped down to work the next morning, proudly conscious of her diamond ring, but stopped in dismay outside the private office, as through the partly-open door she heard these words: "How about your bungalow, Tom? Have you bought that lot from Curtis yet?" And Tom's disappointed voice replied slowly, "No; not yet."

Bungalow! Building lot! Donna tiptoed away and leaned trembling against the wall. Dear Tom! A little home, all their own! She knew now why he had said "No, not yet!" She looked steadily down at her ring a moment, and then, leaving a message that she would be back soon, she left the office and hastened to the jewelry store. She asked the proprietor, whom she knew, if she might see him "on important business," for a few minutes. Soon she came out smiling, with a folded slip of paper held tightly in one hand.

Donna hurried back to the office and immediately telephoned Curtis, the real estate dealer. She managed to evade Tom whenever he came near the office all day. But that evening she met him with outstretched hands and eyes full of love and longing. Tom stared hard at her left hand, on which sparkled no diamond ring, and at the

question in his eyes she put both arms around his neck and whispered, as he drew her fondly to him:

"Oh, Tom, dear! You silly boy! Did you think I'd father have a diamond ring than a bungalow? Why, I wouldn't take it for the world! You spent the money you had saved to buy the building lot. Tom, dear! Think of having a home, all our own!"

Before the surprised young man could say a word, she thrust an official-looking envelope into his hands, containing the deed to his cherished lot. And when he began, "But, Donna, darling," she wouldn't listen to him, but pulled him down beside her in the hammock, where he kissed her and held her close.

The next evening Tom brought her a little ring with a modest blue stone (the color of Donna's eyes, he thought).

Is It Not a Mistake?

By Phil Moore

NOTHING was left to be done now and it seemed to Christy Thain, as she stood back and surveyed her work, that it really already held the bride for whom it was intended. The adjustable form which supported it had something of Delina Ray's slight, young contour. It was quite easy to imagine how the dress was going to look on that wonderful morning now only one day distant.

The dress was her masterpiece. Nothing remained but to fold it in a box and wait for it to be taken away. Outside the open window which let in the June air, there was a step and rustle and a girl leaned in over the sill. She was a pretty girl, in a flimsy, fancy way, like some gay little wayside flower.

"Oh! she exclaimed. "So it's done huh?"

"How do you like it, Doris?" Christy asked, smiling.

"It's just sweet. I wish it were mine."

"Why, do you need a wedding dress?" Christy looked up in surprise.

The girl hid her face on her folded

arms and laughed shyly. "I might. You can never tell. Seems to me if Delina Ray can get a man I ought to be able to. You going to take it home, Christy?"

"No. Delina's going to send after it some time this evening. I'm going to put it in a box and leave it here for whoever comes. Mrs. Peel said she'd see to it. I've got to go out."

Doris turned away. "Well, I've got to go home or Aunt Han will be jaying me. I'm getting just about sick of Aunt Han. She won't let me have a single beau. Just because she's an old maid she seems to think that's the proper lot for all of us. And it isn't. I'm going to be married, if I have to run away. You'll see."

The girl was gone. Christy saw her running across the open yards toward home, a figure, fluttering little shape full of youth's buoyancy and folly.

"I suppose she referred to Harry Crane," Christy thought. "I don't think she'd do so bad if she were to marry him, but she ought not to disobey her aunt. Yet, if I had disobeyed my mother that one time about Rush McKnight I'd have been with him in

Alberta now instead of making beautiful dresses for happy brides to wear. And it wouldn't have made any difference to mother—not for long anyway. Well, I try to think everything's for the best." She sighed as she boxed the dress tenderly and closed the window and went out to supper.

Christy had her dressmaking shop in the two front rooms of Mrs. Peel's house and she boarded with Mrs. Peel. After supper Christy told Mrs. Peel that she would find the dress ready to hand to Delina's messenger when she sent after it; then she made ready and went to Mary Lake's.

"Did you know that Doris is carrying on perfectly awful over Harry Crane?" Mary asked. Being an invalid, she cherished every bit of gossip she heard seriously. "Her Aunt Han was up here today complaining about her. She says she don't know what she will do with the girl."

"I'd let her marry him," said Christy promptly.

"Well, I guess it would be the best thing. But Han Atwell's awful set in her way. I didn't say much to her, for I knew it wouldn't do any good. By

the way, Christy, Carrie Coleman phoned over here yesterday and said she'd had a letter from her cousin, Rush McKnight."

Christy turned pale clear to the edges of her brown hair, where a gray thread or two was beginning to run like silver. But she kept the usual grip upon her emotions that she always did when that name was mentioned.

"He's just cleared up \$25,000 in wheat. It doesn't seem possible, does it? He expects to do as well next year if prices hold up. Then he says he's coming back to civilization. Carrie thinks there's somebody in Minneapolis he's interested in. Probably he'll settle down there."

"Mary"—Christy's voice was sharp as she interrupted—"do you want your dresses made loose or tight around the waist?"

She walked back home in the soft dusk. She smelled lilacs all the way, and she walked on her heart—her poor, starved heart that Rush McKnight had left behind him desolate when he went to the wheat country.

"That's all over," she thought—"all

over forever." As she neared her own door she met a girl hurrying toward her from the opposite direction. She was a housemaid of the Rays whom Christy already knew slightly because of several errands which had brought her to the house.

"Oh, good evening, Miss Thain," she said. "I've come after Miss Delina's dress."

"All right," Christy answered. "It's ready. Come in." She led the way into the sewing room and switched on the electric light. As she cast a quick glance around she saw that the box was gone. "Why, somebody's been here before you and got it," she exclaimed.

"Oh, no," replied the girl quickly. "Miss Delina sent me herself, and I've come straight from there here."

"I'll ask Mrs. Peel," Christy said. Her heart was going fast. She ran to the back of the house and found Mrs. Peel calmly beating up bread sponge in the kitchen. "Who did you give Delina's dress to?" she demanded.

"I didn't give it to anybody. Nobody's been here," Mrs. Peel answered.

"Why, what's the matter?" For Christy was turning a baggard white.

"It's gone."

Mrs. Peel laid a hand on her shoulder. "You go home," she said to the maid, "and tell Delina it wasn't quite ready. That'll give us time to investigate this." When the girl had gone she turned to Christy. "Now, brace up and let's talk this over. Ain't you got an idea, Christy?"

But Christy had none. After they looked the house over without avail they went to bed to sleep if they could, upon the mystery.

It was near dawn before Christy fell asleep. She was awakened by Mrs. Peel standing over her.

"Han Atwell's been here. She says Doris ran away last night with Harry Crane. They were married by the justice before they went. Doris said so in a note she left her aunt. She left one for you, too. Han just gave it to me. Read it quick. I've a suspicion we're going to find out something about that dress."

Christy sat up in bed and opened the note. "Don't tell Aunt Han," she

read aloud slowly, "but I had to have that dress to be married in. So I got in through the window after you went away and took it. I only had it on an hour, but I looked dandy in it. You ought to have seen old Justice Parsons bug his eyes! I put it back in the box just as careful, and tomorrow morning Davy Coates is going to take it to Delina. Maybe you think I'm awful, but I did so want a real wedding dress. Maybe it's the last chance I'll ever have to wear one."

An hour later Delina Ray phoned her thanks to Christy. "I'm sending you a check in the morning's mail," she ended.

The mail brought something else besides the check to Christy—a letter from Rush McKnight. "Could you stand it here in the wheat country with me for a couple of years?" he asked. "You see I'm staking all on the chance that maybe now your mother is gone you'll have me, after all. If you will, I'll come and get you inside of a month."

The next dress Christy made was another wedding gown. And she wore it herself.

Thanks to a Blunderer

By Abner Anthony

AS she quickly slipped into her own room, Mrs. Flower dashed her mask aside, revealing that she really was not a Watteau shepherdess, but the charming hostess of the gay gathering.

"Sybil!" she exclaimed to the figure before the mirror. "I came back to tell you—I thought you ought to know—Bruce Hutton is here."

The girl, who was putting the finishing touches to a quaint medieval costume started violently and then swung slowly around with flushing face.

"Why, Louise! Surely—"

"No, I didn't invite him. Of course not! But Jim met him—just back from California, he said; and you know Jim. He whisked him out here and has him in his room now, arranging a costume. Then, when it was too late, he thought of you."

"Louise, I'm not going down. I'm going home—so, I can't get home. Well, I'll go to bed; and don't you dare mention my name."

"You can't. Everybody knows you are here. Except Hutton. Mrs. Flower laughed childishly. "Oh, forgive me, dear, I know it's serious for you. Why, you two haven't spoken for a year, have you? Imagine you two, of all the people, seeing the Old Year out together!"

Sybil faced her classic image desperately. "I won't go down in this gown. It's not enough of a disguise, and some one may know what I'm wearing. It would leak out. Louise, you must change costumes with me. That wig—those panniers—oh, nobody would ever suspect me of being a Watteau shepherdess. And when time comes to unmask, I'll be suddenly ill or disappear like Cinderella."

Mrs. Flower, always good natured and obliging, was out of her brocade by this time and assisting her young guest to dress. About the same time a tall masked figure in a monk's cloak was reproaching a rotund image of royalty.

"Jim, you blunderer!" Bruce Hutton's smooth voice was vibrant with feeling. "I just heard Miss Ware is here."

"Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Just like me," muttered the remorseful king. "But—"

"No buts! I wouldn't address her for worlds. How would she know it was not all prearranged? How can I avoid her? That's what I want to know."

He cast a puzzled glance over the gay scene, lively with moving figures. King Flower had one of his brilliant inspirations. "I'll fix that. See that pink and silver lady near the door, with her hat on her ear and a stick to keep Mary's little lamb in order? That's my wife. There's your cue—stick to Louise and you'll be all right. She'll understand."

Hutton followed his friend's advice and stuck to Louise. It seemed strange to him to find the vivacious Mrs. Flower in a silent mood; and she

certainly had improved in dancing during the past year. She danced like a fairy now. Then she was shy; but of course that was part of her play. Several times the Watteau shepherdess slipped away and Hutton had to search for her.

During the merry hours Hutton looked for some one figure that might be the girl he had quarreled with long ago—years ago, it seemed. He addressed a few masked guests; but took care that they were of proportions that could not possibly belong to Sybil Ware. There was a chubby Yama-Yama girl and a tall gaunt Joan of Arc. For the rest, he remembered the advice of his host—"stick to Louise." Besides, there was a strange delight in dancing with this wing-footed shepherdess, and in pursuing her when she eluded him.

Bruce Hutton's mood was softening. It was in this house he had passed some pleasant hours with Sybil. He recalled a curtained nook on the first

landing, an embrasure with a window looking on a side balcony. A fascinating idea came to him toward the evening's close. It obsessed him and would not be thrust aside.

"Let's be honest," he whispered to the Watteau masker. "You've kept it up splendidly, Mrs. Flower; but I want a word with you in private. Please—as the pink and silver lady seemed to be poisoning for instant flight. I'm going away again tomorrow or next day, but if you're my friend—and a good little sport, as I know you are—you'll do something for me."

Hutton's smooth voice was rich with an appeal that won his cause. A moment later they were seated in a curtained alcove in the upper hall, with the sound of revelry shut out and a silvery moon shining in through the low window.

"You see Jim told me to stick to you and I'd be safe," explained Hutton. "But I find there are some things I can't forget. You are Sybil Ware's

good friend, and I guess you're mine, too. Will you tell me if there's any truth in the rumors of her engagement to—well, to anybody?"

A brief hesitation and the head with its powdered wig and slanting hair was shaken violently.

"I'm trusting you, Mrs. Flower," went on the man's voice, growing in intensity of feeling. "I'm telling you what I couldn't say to Sybil herself. Tonight in your house has opened all the old wounds. It came to me that perhaps she, too, has not forgotten. Will you—can you find out for me and let me know before I leave? Because—"

A distracting noise suddenly assailed them; the loud reverberations of a great gong, raised voices, hurrying feet, crashing music and laughter. The signal had been given for the midnight unmasking. Hutton had scarcely time to realize that this signal could not have been given without the presence of the hostess when—

"Masks off!" cried the Watteau shepherdess sitting beside him in the curtained alcove, and turned her face to the moonlight. "Happy New Year, Mr. Hutton."

"Sybil!" Hutton caught her hands in uncontrolled fervor. Then he drew back. "But Jim told me you were his wife."

"Louise and I changed costumes," Sybil's tones were demure but encouraging. "I wished to avoid a certain party—"

"Oh, you did. Well, so did I." Then Hutton laughed happily. "Well, you've heard my confession, but not all, Sybil. Good Lord, girl, how I've missed you!"

A moment later Hutton opened the window and tossed a pair of masks into the dusky garden. "Masks off forever with us. And now shall we go down and say Happy New Year to our friends?" Then, as they descended the stairway together, he spoke as if to himself, "Bless dear blundering Jim!"

Her Method of Keeping Him

By Joella Johnson

THERE probably was nothing that annoyed her husband any more than the sound of a sneeze, and for about the tenth time she quickly applied her handkerchief to her nose in time to prevent the outbreak. As it was, he went calmly on strapping his music bag. His back, slim and straight in evening dress, was toward her. He was very handsome and healthy. And she had a cold. No woman can be even passably good looking under such conditions. And if she is very plain to begin with—

The door opened tentatively and Percival turned. His face lit up. No wonder. The thing he saw was enough to brighten any man's face—a girl, young, vivid, gay in the freshest of frocks. She looked like a red rose

or any other glowing, bright-hued flower. Moreover, it was patent that she knew how she looked and how great was the effect she was producing.

"Oh, you poor dear!" she said to Anne. "You feel horribly ill, don't you?"

"Colds are so disagreeable," Anne murmured, unfolding another handkerchief from the pile she had brought downstairs.

"And to have one on this evening of all evenings," Pearl Heath went on. "It must be a great disappointment to you not to be able to hear Mr. Lawrence sing." She glanced at him.

"She hears me practicing," he said, "and, anyway, she doesn't know one note from another." He slipped on his

ulster and took up his hat. "Draw your opera cloak up about your throat more, Pearl. You don't want to take cold," he added.

"Oh, I never do," the girl cried. "Well, I suppose we must go. Mother is waiting outside in the limousine. Good-bye, dear Mrs. Lawrence. I'm awfully sorry. Mother is, too. We'll bring him safe home. And I'll play his accompaniments the best I can."

"Good night, Anne," he said, with scarcely a backward glance at her.

And they went out together, leaving Anne alone upon the divan.

It was a wonderful night—a recurrence to mellow October in the midst of January. She thought of the Heaths' yellow limousine slipping through the calm streets toward the

house where the music was to be given. She thought of Pearl Heath sitting beside her large, placid, stupid mother and opposite Percival. She thought of how the three would enter the house together, and how presently Pearl would be sitting at the piano, playing for him while he sang.

She had had her heart broken during the first six months of her marriage. Another woman had intruded. She had not conceived that she could be so jealous, and yet she fancied she had kept it all away from him. "I will wait," she had hidden herself. After all, she was his wife, and this woman was no better than a score of others he had rejected because of her. She did not understand him, but she wanted to keep him. Some one says

that when the pine tree loved the palm there was more than distance to make one a mystery to the other. He was still very much of a mystery to her, but she was determined to solve him. And that first affair of his with Agatha Richland helped her immeasurably to do this.

For he tired of Agatha Richland in six weeks, and came back to her just as he had gone away.

Now for the first time in years she was not altogether sure that he would come back. Pearl Heath was unlike any one she had ever seen him care for.

Looking to his vanity, which in such men requires a large yard stick.

"I'm not any more sensible than I was when I first married him," she

thought. "All the lessons I've learned do not seem to apply here. It's like having an education in Sanskrit and finding suddenly that you need some everyday French. At least I'll keep on being patient and trust in the Lord."

Being a religious woman she prayed a little and then fell asleep.

It seemed to her that she had barely closed her eyes when she opened them again. Instinctively she knew that Percival was in the room.

"I thought you were asleep," she said, sitting up against the cushions and he came and sat down beside her, dropping his head into his hands.

"How is your cold?" he asked.

"Better. Aren't you home early?" He ran his fingers through his thick

hair. "Yes, I'm home early," he said. "I only sang once."

"Why, Percival?"

"Once only." His tone was apologetic. "Do you know what she did, that dear girl? She played a discord instead of a dissonance, and threw me off the key. So much for letting an amateur accompany you."

"Ah! You were angry?"

"Of course, I was angry. Who wouldn't have been? With that idiot or an Andrews, who fancies he's my rival, grinning at me? She tried to apologize, and her mother—"

To avoid a scene I escaped. I came back to you."

"You always come back to me," Anne thought happily. Aloud she said very softly and tenderly: "Poor boys"