

# THE FICTION CORNER

## CARNIVAL NIGHT

By MARY KEMPE CHEATHAM

ALL along Elm street to the old park grounds, the carnival was drawing people like a magnet. From where Ellie sat, on the top step in front of Mrs. Blodgett's boarding house, she could see them hurrying along in groups and couples, laughing and chatting, their merry laughter floating back to her on the early summer air. Cars whizzed by, carrying others, till it seemed the entire population of the little town was rushing in one direction. All, that is, except Ellie—and possibly Mrs. Blodgett, who, now that the supper work was over, sat contentedly in the kitchen, resting her feet.

There was nothing in the world like carnival music, reflected Ellie, leaning her head wistfully against the porch rail. The nostalgic ripple of tunes, half sad, came to her on sudden bursts of breeze, cutting into her heart with the sharpness of pain. She closed her eyes to shut out the sight of the couples—always the couples, passing through the early dusk, smiling into each other's eyes, murmuring words of which only the tone need be heard.

Carnivals are for couples, she thought. No, for children, too; for families, even for old people, visiting their neighbors and winning lamps and blankets. But not for someone alone. Never for someone alone. You could walk through the crowded grounds under the blaze of lights, caught in the glare of melody, and become the loneliest person in all the world. She had been doing fine till the carnival came to Greyville. Why, she thought, oh, why, did the carnival have to come?

She opened her eyes, at a soft touch on her knee, and saw Patty Brown, a little neighbor girl, sitting on the step below her.

"Gee," sighed Patty, on a long, mournful breath. "Isn't it LONESOME?"

Ellie smiled. "For you, too?" she asked.

Patty nodded, hard. "Yes," she said soberly. "Everybody's gone to the carnival but us. I guess you and me, and Miz Blodgett and my Grandma, we're about the only ones in town that didn't go. Miz Blodgett, she never goes anywhere, anyway, and neither does Grandma since my Grandpa died. My Grandpa was swell! He always took me to carnivals." She shook her head in rapid recollection.

"You live with your grandmother?" Ellie asked. She felt suddenly ashamed of how little she knew the neighbors. She had been boarding at Mrs. Blodgett's several months, since first she came to Greyville to work in its dress factory and to work even harder at the serious business of forgetting Bruce.

"Ever since I remember," answered Patty. "My Grandpa loved carnivals like I do. Grandma was always scolding him about it, but he'd take me every night and we'd go on the rides and buy cotton candy. My," she breathed, "I sure miss Grandpa."

Ellie studied the serious small face, framed by the smooth brown pigtail. Here too was someone adjusting to a loss, and she had not even taken the trouble to find it out. She had seen Patty often enough, running errands for Mrs. Blodgett and playing hopscotch or jacks on the wide front sidewalk, but she had been too absorbed in her own affairs to ask about the child. How selfish people are, thought Ellie.

"Patty," she asked humbly,

"would you like to go to the carnival with me?"

"Yipes!" uttered the little girl, almost toppling off the step backward. "Would I!"

"Be careful!" cried Ellie, thrusting an arm about the little shoulders. She laughed in spite of herself to see the change in the young face. There was nothing serious about it now. It was afire with the dazzle of carnival lights themselves.

"I'll go ask Grandma," shouted Patty, bounding across the lawn. "I'll be right back."

"Bring a wrap," called Ellie after the swinging pigtail. "It may be cool on the rides." She went inside for her own light coat and to go over her makeup at the dresser. Her face in the mirror was smooth and quiet, showing only in pallor the turmoil of the empty months. It was still quite a good face, the eyes a



"Mr. Kenyon already knows you haven't got a boy friend," soothed Patty. "I told him when he asked this afternoon."

wide, deep blue, the hair a dusky cloud, brushed back from a widow's peak at the forehead. With lipstick and rouge and a deliberate turning up of the lips at the corners, it was even an animated face. By concentrating on Patty, Ellie found she could keep the lips curved upward. She would forget all other carnivals.

"Oh, my goodness," complimented Patty. "You look beautiful!"

Ellie laughed. She tucked the child's hand under her arm and they started for the park grounds. The groups were dwindling now. As Patty had said, most everybody was already there.

"It's funny you haven't got a boy friend," Patty mused. "Pretty as you are."

"I used to have one," Ellie obliged, out of a long silence. "His name was Bruce."

Patty considered gravely, but asked no more questions.

"Oh, look!" thrilled Patty. "There it is. Please, please, let's go on everything!"

"Most everything," Ellie amended, "not the really rough rides. But the others."

She held tight the warm, squirming hand in her own, to fortify herself for the first glimpse of the sprawling tents. "You have to get over this, Ellie, my girl," she told herself, gulping down the lump in her throat. "Tonight's as good a time as any."

It was like all carnivals before, without the magic. No, she decided,

looking at Patty's nappy face, it is I who am without the magic. The barker called from their concessions, drawing the crowds with imperative cries. Girls passed, carrying feathered kewpies, spangled whips, bright birds and monkeys on sticks. There was a blend of hotdog and hamburger odors, coffee aroma, the roasting fragrance of peanuts and popcorn. Everywhere were people, eating ice-cream sandwiches, drinking pink lemonade from sweaty glasses.

Patty, high on the merry-go-round, clung lovingly to her horse's bridle and waved to Ellie every time she passed.

"That was fun," she beamed, finished at last, running to Ellie for new adventure. They joined hands and started over the grounds.

"Who's your girl friend, Sis?" asked a man's voice. Instantly guarded and alert, Ellie turned to look. She gazed warily, straight into two gray eyes. So gray, she thought, I'll always be a push-over for gray eyes. He was not a dressed up young man, but he looked nice with his soft shirt open at the neck, showing his tanned

skin.

CARP, OSCAR W.—On numerous occasions you were observed standing in the doorway of a bus in the rush hour. Asked to step forward, you did so. A degree is not enough, Oscar. Name your wish and you shall have it.

WIGGLESWORTH, PRENTICE K.—The university crowns you a man among men and a citizen extraordinary. Although in a position by a little skulduggery and a mild twisting of conscience to get money from the government, you bothered to realize that Uncle Sam is being gyped right and left, that he is in a hole up to his neck and that he is too good a guy to swindle. You also openly expressed concern about the government's financial future, even dropping the fannies to analyze the situation. You get not only an honorary degree but strawberry ice cream with cherries.

CRUMMETT, THADDEUS R.—You are an American workingman and union member. We have the positive proof that, instead of blindly following a wild-eyed leader when you were convinced he was wrong, you voted the other way at the special meeting. You were heard to make the statement on your feet and in a loud voice, "I could be right, too." Take a box of cigars as you go out and help yourself to the chicken sandwiches—all white meat.

TUPPER, HALLOWAY G.—We want you to take a degree printed on special glossy paper and also \$1,000 in cash. Called before a committee of the United States congress in a time of national crisis to answer the simple question, "Are you a member of the Communist party?" you did so. You did not demand to read a long statement. Furthermore, you showed up without your lawyer. Get up there nearer the head of the line where you belong!

COOKSEY, GERALD K. H.—What are you doing away down here? We meant to honor you first. You shot a composer of radio jingles on sight. See us in the dean's office later. We're throwing a special party.

A TIP TO COLUMBIA  
Mind your books  
And students be  
Or Ike will put  
You on K. P.

Zeke Clay Says:  
Tex Willoughby and the wife are on speaking terms again but there's still a cold war going on between them.

The Chet Eppergills who have been social outcasts for years bought a television set last week and now are the most popular folks in town.

Even Gadsby's boy, who has graduated from two universities, has returned home but has to phone the garage for help in fixing the lawn mower.

Doodie Kimbell fell into enough money the other day to have his gas tank filled and is thinking of having his auto washed at a public garage.

Will Kippely will open bids on a shave and haircut next week.

The stock market has had its biggest rise in eight years and nobody is more frightened than the fellow who finds his stock is up a dozen points.

"Ashen faced and close to collapse he trembled as his counsel pleaded for clemency, saying he lacked the strength to resist temptation."—News item on a rent gouger's prison sentence.

That was no tremble; it was just the usual "shake."

We just heard a fellow explaining his despondency by saying that he had just popped the question and his girl "Gromykoed me."



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## A PRAYER FOR INNER STRENGTH



I KNOW somehow that time will heal this sorrow.  
This bitter grief, and that the years will bring  
Forgiveness and peace, that some tomorrow  
Will hold no memory of my suffering.  
And I believe that there will be a blessing  
Of the jagged edges of the wounds I bear,  
And in my heart again will be the ringing  
Of laughter that has long been absent there.

I know all this, yet still cannot remember...  
I cannot see beyond this wall of tears...  
Yet as the falling ashes cool an ember,  
So will my heart find comfort through the years.  
I know—but God, dear God, my need is great!  
Give me the inner strength this day to wait.

Grace Aill O'Connell

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