

Handmade Rainbows

By Mrs. HARRY PUGH SMITH
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INSTALLMENT ONE—The Book and the Author

Mrs. Harry Pugh Smith's stories of the American family have endeared her to thousands of readers. In "Handmade

Rainbows" she tells of a newspaper editor's family during the depression. Other books by the same author: "Jewels

For His Crown," "So Many Worlds," "Hearts Walking," "Beau," "Peter Pan's Daughter."

CHAPTER I

Slap, bang, bumpety-bump! Kathleen Maguire smothered an eloquent "Damn." A rear tire had gone flat and was smacking the pavement with loose rubber. It was no more than she expected. The family sedan was on its last legs. Nothing could do it any good except to jack it up and run a new one under it.

"And a fat chance there is of that," muttered Kathleen, attempting to steady her wobbling vehicle. But she had been hitting a smart pace and the pike was badly worn, as full of holes as the sedan's dilapidated roof. With a little wheeze and a groan the car slid off into the ditch to the right and coasted gently half up the other bank where it hung, precariously poised on two wheels, in the thick tangled undergrowth of blackberry vines and dog fence.

She had been to the country for flowers. Because they were cheaper than hothouse products. On the front seat, carefully balanced beside her to keep from damaging their tender tips, was a bucket full of purple irises. She had thought it a brilliant idea at the time. Now the bucket proceeded to upset.

"It would," she muttered with a vindictive thought for the perversity of things in general.

Everything lately had come unraveled at the least excuse. Due to the sedan's perilous slant, she was wadded down in the farthest corner under the steering wheel and drenched with the contents of the bucket. There were purple irises in her hair and a spray of fern in her mouth. Even her white sports shoes squished unpleasantly when she tried to wriggle out from under the deluge.

It was no time for the young man lying supine in the meadow beyond the ditch, to snigger. Kathleen glared at him, her red-brown eyes alight with furious sparks. She had never seen him before. She was sure he had no business to be where he was. Nevertheless he had the most maddening air of seeming perfectly at home. A limp leather volume lay near his hand. But she thought he had been asleep. His lazy gray eyes were both drowsy and quizzical in his sunburned face. And Kathleen had never seen a grin which she considered more exasperating.

"I suppose you think it's funny," she said. He laughed, and sat up. He had startlingly broad shoulders.

"You must admit it is rather extraordinary to have a maiden in distress barge in on a feller's dreams, literally cockeyed with water lilies, or whatever those things are you're wearing for a necklace," he drawled.

Kathleen colored and made a rapid effort to retrieve a clump of water-soaked foliage that was bent on sliding down the neck of her red and white sports dress.

"They're irises, and they're cold and wet. And if you believe in being useful as well as ornamental," she said with a curl of her red lips, "you might lend me a hand."

She saw with triumph that he did not like being twitted with the fact he was decidedly decorative. He was in fact provokingly indolent about coming to her rescue. But although he did not seem to exert himself unduly, he proved a surprisingly efficient person in the pinch. Kathleen gathered the impression that he did well anything he cared to do. Certainly with a minimum of effort on his part he extricated her from the undignified position of being jammed under her own steering wheel, by the simple expedient of opening the door and lifting her out bodily.

"All I asked was a hand," spluttered Kathleen.

"Don't worry," he said grimly and set her down on her feet in the shortest practicable space of time. "I've no urge to clasp you to my manly bosom. If you must know, you feel like a cross between a damp garter-snake and a very clammy frog."

"Thanks," said Kathleen, and realized she had not after all succeeded in doing anything to his abominable self-assurance.

"Being one of these southern damsels," he went on, scowling at the sedan, "I suppose you expect any male in sight to fix that tire."

Kathleen surveyed him through long curling black lashes. They were quite her best feature and she could do a number of interesting tricks with them. But the tall rangy young man beside her did not notice.

"You don't need to advertise that you arrive from north of the biscuit line," she told him with what she hoped was a cutting little laugh. "We don't grow them that casual in these parts."

He shrugged his shoulders. "I was warned about small town Dixie flirts. Sorry." He grinned at her again, poking under the sedan's back seat in search of tools. "I don't suppose you have any idea where I'd find a jack to remove that tire, have you?"

Kathleen made a grimace. "The car's six years old. If there was anything on it where it ought to be, I'd drop dead."

"I see," he said briefly.

"You are touring, aren't you?" she asked, eyeing a small roadster

drawn up under a tree some distance away. "I thought at first you must be a hitch-hiker."

"I'm touring. And thank the Lord, I've got wrenches and things in my old tin can."

He left her in search of these, but returned at once with a case of instruments. Whistling under his breath, he set about the delicate task of jacking up the sedan's rear wheel without precipitating it again into the ditch. Kathleen found a small spring of water down the road and refilled the bucket. There were loads of gorgeous purple blooms still intact. She produced her compact and endeavored to repair a little of the damage. But the powder was wet through.

"And I was trying to save a three-dollar florist's bill," she cried, throwing the vanity case as far as she could reach while she morosely surveyed a rent in one of her two best pairs of hose.

He grinned at her over his shoulder. "Don't mind me," he said. "Go on and cry if you feel like it. Only I can't lend you a shoulder to weep on. I'm sort of hard-boiled that way."

"From New York, aren't you?" she hazarded after a silence which did not disturb him in the least. She had identified the license plate on the roadster.

"By way of more recent stops at Cleveland and St. Louis," he vouchsafed.

"You don't take life very seriously, do you?"

He eyed her with sardonic gray eyes. "I've been fired off three newspapers in the past six months for thinking a lot of things are jokes, myself included."

"Newspapers!" Kathleen laughed, a short mirthless sound. "I might have known that you're a tramp newspaper man."

"You don't sound as if you thought much of me and my kind."

She shrugged her shoulders. "I can tell you why you were fired. You couldn't be bothered to do dull stories that pleased the editor or wouldn't offend the big advertising accounts. You preferred to walk out if things got too tame. Or if the fish were biting. Or if the city desk cut down your pet yarn and made you pad one about some pill of a leading citizen who was a pal of the owner."

For the first time she had his acute attention.

"So you know something about newspaper men," he observed.

"My father's one," she flung at him with bitterness. "He owns the Covington Clarion. A daily in a town of eighteen thousand people. He's owned it fifteen years. And he's

never made more than just a living. Recently he and it have been one jump ahead of the bloodhounds. You know there's been a depression. Or do you? Probably you think that's funny too. Dad does. Is he down-hearted because collections have dropped fifty per cent? Is he? I ask you."

The young man who was manipulating the jack lever grinned.

"He's probably having the time of his life trying to pull through by an eyelash."

"He is. He's turned down dozens of brilliant offers in the past fifteen years. Offers that stood for big pay and a name for himself."

"Maybe neither of those things means a lot to him."

"They don't. But—" she broke off abruptly. "He's aces really. He has everything. Only—" she looked away, then back at him defiantly. "He could have gone to the top if he had tried."

"What of it?" His lips curled.

"I suspect you are two of a kind. I suppose you'd rather be your own typesetter on your own news sheet than draw ten thousand a year and take orders?"

"Absolutely."

"I dare say if the biggest store in town underpaid its employees, you'd insist on writing it up no matter what it cost in advertising?"

"Sure."

"You'd love to print the truth about a dirty political deal although it offended subscribers right and left and cut your circulation in half?"

"Positively."

Kathleen nodded. "Yes, you and Mike are two of a kind. Have you finished?"

"Yes." He stood up, brushed his dusty hands on his soiled trousers and grinned at her. "If you'll stand out of the way I'll release the brake and see if I can hoist her back to the road."

The old sedan rocked gently down into the ditch and then under its own momentum and some muscular persuasion from the young man at the rear climbed sedately back onto the highway. Gravely he deposited the irises on the front seat.

"Don't get your values mixed," he said, and his voice was a little gruff as if he was a trifle embarrassed. "I'm not so hot when it comes to moralizing. But a fat salary check doesn't compensate for everything. Not by a hell of a lot. Believe it or not, there is such a thing as selling your soul for thirty pieces of silver. Or thirty thousand. And living to hate them and yourself."

He gazed at her silently. And abruptly his gray eyes were lazy and mocking again. "Your perspective is distorted and I can't say much for your childish tantrums," he remarked with his old exasperating grin. "But you're a cute youngster. And I guess you owe me this."

He stooped suddenly. She could never get accustomed to the swiftness of his apparently languid movements. He cupped her round, dimpled chin in his hand, and kissed her.

CHAPTER II

Laura Maguire carefully set the flaky timbales which she had just taken from the oven on the window ledge to cool. The kitchen was hot and it showed signs of a strenuous engagement. But everything was done except, of course, those things which had to be left to the last minute. Laura fervently hoped that Hulda would not put too much flour in the cream sauce for the asparagus.

Hulda did her best. As well as anyone could who came into someone else's kitchen at six to serve a four-course dinner at seven. Everybody in Covington who could not afford a daily maid had Hulda for special occasions.

Laura, who had urgent reasons to want this particular dinner party to go off beautifully, had been up since six. There had been literally a hundred things to do. She had gone to market herself to select the chicken and the strawberries. The house had been cleaned from front to back, silver polished, the best china and glass washed, the lace and linen tablecloth and napkins dug out and pressed.

The aspic salad had to be made early to leave time for cooling. And Laura had set it in small individual molds which she decorated with tiny rings of red and green peppers. It had been tedious work although she admitted the results were gratifying when she peeped into the big old ice box on the back porch. The Maguires had no electric refrigerator. They hadn't a lot of things which Laura's women friends had.

She was thinking of that as she carefully arranged olives in a slender hand-painted dish so as to conceal the crack in the bottom which she had mended with sealing wax. A party was trouble if one had trained servants and plenty of everything to do with. But it assumed the proportions of a major operation in a house which had to be ransacked to find ten crystal goblets to match, to say nothing of salad plates and forks.

"Poor folks have poor ways," Laura grinned to herself, quoting old Aunt Julia, the black mammy who had presided in the big kitchen on Laura's father's plantation.

Like all Negroes, Aunt Julia had loathed "poor white trash." Laura thought probably the old colored woman turned over in her grave every time "Miss Lolly" patched a three-year-old dress or dyed a season-before-last slip to wear with a \$7.95 model from Blumer's basement.

Laura had been a beauty as a girl. She was still at forty-three almost as pretty as either of her daughters. Although she would have strenuously denied the fact. There were a few silver threads in the smooth black hair above her temples, and laughing wrinkles under her clear topaz eyes. Nevertheless she had on several occasions been mistaken for her older son's sister.

"But not today," she thought with a glance into the wavy mirror above the sink which she was trying to clear of an accumulation of soiled cooking vessels. "Do I look like a hag, or don't I?"

"You don't! You couldn't!" Laura dropped a stew pan. She hadn't heard Kathleen come in. "Darling, you startled me."

Kathleen eyed her mother somberly. Laura did look tired.

"Sorry. I didn't mean to scare you. I came in the back way to leave the irises on the porch. They spilled and are sort of messy, I'm afraid."

Laura surveyed her daughter and giggled. "You haven't been wrestling with them or anything?"

Kathleen grinned ruefully. "The old bucket up and socked me in the eye. Am I a holy sight?"

"You do look a little bedraggled. Better run right up and change."

"Nothing doing. I'm helping you. I should have been here an hour ago. Only I wasn't," Kathleen finished lamely.

She had no intention of confessing to the mishap which had delayed her. In the first place Laura would worry. It really wasn't safe to risk the old sedan far from town in the state of its tires. And there simply wasn't money for new ones. Furthermore, her rescue by the young man in slacks had left Kathleen's pride considerably impaired. She had no desire to expose the painful details. But it hadn't seemed a laughing matter to Kathleen. It still didn't. She tackled the overflow of dirty dishes with a vehemence that made her mother glance at her.

"Don't bother with those things, darling. Let them alone. I'll be all washed up in a jiffy."

Kathleen doggedly wiped a sauce pan. "You don't like kitchen police a bit better than I do," she said in a fierce voice. "You just do it and don't gripe because you're the grandest sport on earth."

Laura's firm, rather wide mouth curved upward. "Thanks for the flattery, darling."

"It isn't flattery. It's the frightful truth. Only you oughtn't to have to drudge like a slave. It isn't fair. Where's Shirley?"

"Upstairs pressing my dress. And melting into her shoes, I daresay." Laura's amber eyes suddenly looked jaded. "Do try to get her to lie down for an hour when you go up, Kathleen. She really mustn't look as if she'd done the family wash when her future in-laws arrive."

Kathleen sniffed. "You know very well that Laird's mother will find something to be catty about no matter how Shirley looks. Honestly, that woman's poison ivy to me. How did as nice a boy as Laird ever draw such a wash-out for a mother?"

"I expect," said Laura with a grin, "if he had had his rathers, he would have chosen differently. But unfortunately, mothers are sort of forced on you, aren't they? And there's not a lot you can do about it."

"None of us ever want to do anything about you."

Laura laughed. "Are you sure you wouldn't prefer a sweet, demure, silver-haired old lady with all the traditional virtues? Isn't it a little trying to have a slightly giddy mother who can beat you swimming?"

"You can't."

"I did Saturday."

"You won't tomorrow."

"We'll see."

Kathleen realized suddenly that she didn't feel depressed or apprehensive any more. And the world, her world, was no longer on edge. She glanced at Laura with narrowed eyes. Had her mother suspected that Kathleen needed to be kidded out of the blues? One could never tell about Laura. She didn't miss anything, though she seldom referred to matters she was not supposed to see. But Kathleen had watched her mother laugh Mike out of the doldrums without his ever dreaming she knew he had them.

"Do come and look at the table," said Laura when they had the kitchen shipshape. "Really it looks very hi-de-ho, if I do say so as shouldn't."

Kathleen agreed but without a great deal of enthusiasm. Privately she thought Laird Newsom's mother wasn't worth all the nerve strain it entailed to give a dinner party in her honor. Even if Shirley was engaged to Laird, and mad about him.

"It looks K. O. to me," she said. "And then some. Only that old snob will find something to patronize. See if she doesn't."

Laura laughed. "I only hope no one decides to move the centerpiece. It's right over the darned place in the cloth."

TO BE CONTINUED

PATTERNS SEWING CIRCLE



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149 New Montgomery Street
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Enclose 15 cents for each pattern.
Pattern No. Size

There's No Doubt but McTavish Asked for It

Sharp received a letter from his friend McTavish which bore no stamp, and he had to pay the postage. The letter concluded:

"You will be delighted to hear I am enjoying the best of health, old chap.—Yours, McTavish."

Sharp pondered over this for a time, then he secured a large stone, wrapped it, addressed it and sent it express collect to his friend McTavish. Attached to it was a note, which read as follows: "Dear McTavish:

"This great weight rolled off my mind when I received the good news of your state of health. Yours sincerely, "Sharp."

Top Clown

Dan Rice (1822-1900), the most famous clown in the history of the American circus, was a friend of most of the celebrated men of his time, made and lost several fortunes, ran for congress and was even considered as a presidential candidate, says Collier's. During the Civil war, he earned \$1,000 a week, or twice as much as Abraham Lincoln.

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In This Newspaper

Handmade Rainbows
The Story of an American Family
By Mrs. Harry Pugh Smith