

Handmade Rainbows

By MRS. HARRY PUGH SMITH
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INSTALLMENT SEVEN—The Story So Far

The depression has hit the Maguire family though Mike Maguire, happy-go-lucky editor and mayor of Covington, is serene. His daughter Kathleen is irritated, however, over several things. Mrs. Newsum would like her son, Jaidr to marry Connie Mays, the banker's

CHAPTER IX

Alec Maguire needed another drink. He needed it badly. Liquor gave him a quick pick-up. But unfortunately liquor had a mean trick of dying on him too soon. And the letdown was terrific.

"Isn't the music gorgeous?" burred Myra. Alec regarded her sourly. He didn't want to, but quite suddenly he saw every line about her loose rouged mouth. Her hair was metallic yellow, but next to the roots it was drab. Her under chin sagged unless she held it well up. But tomorrow would be another day, reflected Alec bitterly. With absolutely nothing to do. While his nerves crawled with boredom. At least Myra provided action.

She had to be doing something every minute. That was why she liked her playmates young. Maturer men occasionally had jobs to go to. Myra herself had no serious occupation except her own amusement. And she was perfectly willing to pay the piper for the privilege of calling the tune.

"I've got to have another shot before I do a rhumba," muttered Alec when the music ended.

He left Myra to rejoin their party as best she could and made his way a little blindly toward the exit. Marigold Gardens had no license to sell intoxicating beverages. So everybody brought his own. It was quite like good old before-repeal days. Myra always parked a quart or two with her car. She thought Alec might have asked her to go along if he wanted a snort. He was a queer youngster. Brilliant but moody, and his temper was as erratic as a trick cigarette lighter. Myra had never quite figured him out. Perhaps that was why he intrigued her.

Alec had not asked Myra to share her own liquor because he wanted to be rid of her. He had to do something which he dreaded. Myra would think it was a scream if she knew. She would tell the world so. Alec's face looked a little haunted. It was a ridiculous jam for him to have got into. It was all Myra's fault anyway. If she hadn't dared him and if he hadn't been three sheets in the wind, it could never have happened. He might be pretty thoroughly no good, but he wasn't at heart that rotten. At least he hoped not.

"Hell!" muttered Alec Maguire to himself and jerked open the door of the telephone booth.

He continued to frown at the blank wall before him as he dialed a number. Kathleen cleared her throat. At least she and Alec always fought fair. He whirled, recognized her, smothered an oath and hung up the receiver before his connection could be completed.

"If it isn't little sister," he sneered. "Out slumming with Hot Shot Mays and the like of that. I thought you had more sense. I had to look twice when you came in. Just couldn't believe the old eyesight."

"That was alcohol, not shock, Buddy." Alec went very red. "One in the family's enough," he muttered.

"Why don't you cut it out then?" "Gene Mays never did a girl's rep any good."

"Maybe you think I like having people refer to my brother as the Boone divorcee's latest gigolo." The moment she spat out the word Kathleen was sorry. Alec went so white she was frightened.

"All right," he said in a thickened voice, "you win. I'm putrid. I'm not fit to open my trap no matter what you do. I admit it. And that's that. Now will you beat it? I've got to telephone and I didn't invite an audience."

Kathleen's lips quivered. "I didn't mean it, Alec. But, gee, Buddy, it breaks my heart when you're like this."

Alec looked away. His handsome boyish face was haggard, his black eyes a little desperate. "I'm not drunk now if that's what you mean," he said gruffly.

"I know. But—don't go back in there, Alec. Cut that bunch and surprise Mother by turning up at a decent hour for once."

"Yeah, and lie awake till daylight, rolling and tossing because I'm too gosh-awful blue to sleep," he said bitterly. "What time is it?"

"Nine-fifteen by my watch and chain though I don't guarantee it," said Kathleen with a rueful grin at the wrist watch which she had won with a prize essay on the beauty of being altruistic in a grossly material world.

Alec groaned. "Blow," he said sharply. Kathleen regarded him with narrowed eyes. "You may as well tell me what it's all about," she said firmly, "because I'm sticking it to you do."

Alec again colored violently. "You won't like it. But if you must have it, you must. We were all pretty well liquored up this afternoon and Myra wanted to do something different, for a thrill. So she dared me to call up somebody and make a date for tonight."

"Who?" "Lou Knight."

daughter, though he is engaged to Shirley, Kathleen's sister. Tom, Kathleen's brother, is hard hit by the slump in real estate, and his wife, Mary Etta, secretary, talks of Reno. A younger brother, Alec, unable to get a job, is taking up with a flashy blonde, much older than he. Ritchie Graham, a stranger, helps Kathleen fix a flat and kisses her. He, too, is a newspaper man—and without a job. So she goes to a dance with Gene Mays though she does not like him.

Kathleen thinks she dislikes Ritchie. Near the railroad shops there was a business street of sorts. It consisted mainly of cheap eating places, squalid second-hand furniture stores, pawnshops, small grimy groceries and beer joints. Upstairs were flats. Dinky dilapidated places with shabby floors and flimsy walls and no modern conveniences. Fire traps Mike was always calling them and attempting to arouse an inert public to demand their destruction. Mike's son, tramping up the steep rickety staircase which mounted from outside, cursed under his breath. How had he ever landed himself in such a mess? Even drunk he should have had more sense, to say nothing of decency.

CHAPTER X

Covington was small enough for everybody to know practically everyone else by sight—and gossip. Alec had vaguely known old Pete Knight's little girl all her life although he didn't remember ever having spoken to her before today. They had gone to the same public school because until recently the town had only the one. But they had never been in the same class or even in the same room. Alec thought Lou was about seventeen, three years younger than himself.

Pete Knight was Covington's bad example. He came originally from good stock, or so it was generally believed. At least when he first blew into town some fourteen years before, he gave evidence of having been at one time a gentleman. Even yet traces of a former gentility showed through his maudlin speech. But somewhere the man had lost hold of himself. Mike had a theory that Pete Knight had taken a knock-out blow in some fairer existence which left him punch-drunk, so that he couldn't pick himself up again.

But if so, he never referred to it. And he resented any attempt at prying into his past—if he had one. Certainly he had no present or future. He must have been about thirty when he dropped off a freight train in Covington and he had been steadily drinking himself to death ever since. Several months after his arrival Lou appeared. She was barely toddling. A queer forlorn little tyke even then, who had made the trip in the care of successive railroad conductors.

He worked, when he wasn't on a spree, at anything he could find to do from washing dishes in a greasy spoon restaurant to hauling garbage for the city. But most of his earnings went for whiskey with which further to befuddle his already foggy brain. And for several years he had been a physical as well as a moral wreck. But when he was in his cups he presented a tragically ludicrous figure. The sort small boys loved to follow and torment with rocks or snowballs just to hear him roar like a baited and bewildered trapped bear.

"Come," said a small husky voice when Alec rapped at one of the battered doors which lined the long dingy upstairs corridor.

The girl, standing a little beyond the scarred kitchen table, reminded him uncomfortably of a small hunted animal. The flat had only two rooms and was depressingly scant of furniture. But at least an effort had been made to retrieve the ugliness of dark cracked walls and narrow broken-paned windows. A straggling geranium grew in a tin coffee can and the rusty cook stove had been polished.

"Hello," said Lou Knight. She was very thin and her blue eyes were enormous in her small wan face. She had thick pale brown hair, a shy nervous mouth and little roughened hands that kept twisting at her side. Her glance begged Alec not to laugh. At the room, or at her, or at her sleazy blue silk dress which pulled in places, revealing raw seams, and which bagged in others. But Alec had never felt less like laughing. She was such a pathetic little scrap. So dreadfully shy. So afraid of sneers and blows because life had handed her little else.

"Ready?" he demanded awkwardly. She nodded. And he went on, trying desperately to sound natural. "Sorry I was late. But if we hurry, I think we can just make the last show."

She said nothing. But he saw the cords working in her thin little neck. She was scared to death. Alec's throat hurt at the look in her eyes. She stumbled on the stair from sheer nervousness and he put out his hand to steady her. But she caught her breath sharply and flinched away. Alec flushed. Had she thought he was going to hit her? He hated himself for being so painfully aware of her shabby little slippers which had scuffed, run-down spike heels. He supposed he was a snob, but the hardest thing he had ever done in his life was to walk through the crowd of hangers-on outside the Covington Airdrome and purchase a couple of tickets for himself and Lou Knight. Even after he was safely inside where there were no lights his handsome young face burned.

(TO BE CONTINUED)



PRIVATE PURKEY ON 'MANOOVERS'

Dear Ma— Well I am just back from another manooover with my outfit and I don't know whether we won or lost on account of there was a dispute between the umpires. One ruled that we was exterminated and the other came up with a decision that we was not even touched. It is all on account of the flag system witch I guess you never heard of so I will explain it to you ma.



Of course we do not shoot each other in these here war games but at the same time nobody can tell how the fight came out if it is all forgot as just a cross country outing. So a lot of flags is used to denote where we are and what happened. All we jeeps do is obey orders and we don't even know what the main idea is. But the observers and umpires who have the whole thing worked out on maps get a idea what wood of happened if it had been a actual battle. Here is where the flags come in.

An umpire waving a blue flag indicates that you are smack in the middle of an area witch is under artillery bombardment and that it is a very unhealthy spot to stay in. If he has a yellow flag it is serposed to show that you are under machine gun fire and that if you go any further into it you wood be shot full of holes in a real war. Another colored flag means that we are advancing thru a heavy smoke screen and so on. I heard that in this last battle somebody got all mixed up on the flags and it still is a question witch got mixed up most the officers or the referees. Anyhow one official said the flags meant my division had walked right through a area witch the enemy was giving the works and that we was mostly all dead or wounded. He said that in a real fight all of us wood have been legible to be buried as the Unknown Soldier. Another referee said nothing of the kind. He said he was a better judge of flags than the other fellow and that from what he saw we had been safe all the time except from more bunions.

Of course for all I know one of 'em is color blind but I do not care as long as the generals do not order the game played over again.

Believe me I am glad the summer is almost over as the weather seems twice as hot in a army as it does anywhere else and it seems to me I have spent the last four weeks in a dust cloud. I never knew there was so much dust in America. It wood almost be a great break for me if I got lent to Iceland, except that I do not think I would like the long days up there.

Sergeant Mooney says the sun does not set at all in the summer in Iceland and that it is day time 24 hours. A 12-hour day is plenty for me, especially in the army. In a place where the sun does not go down I wood be afraid the bugler wood get all mixed up and start blowing me out of bed at midnight.

Well anyhow I am getting so used to tough brakes that nothing bothers me much no more, except when I do not get regular letters from you and Lillian and Doris and all the girls witch reminds me do you know where Lucretia Willeets has moved? All my letters to her come back.

Love, Oscar. Two simple strokes Loosen the yokes Fashioned by tyranny, Marked in the night Yield, in the light, Omens for all to see.

On wall and on door More and yet more Symbols of victory, Pointed and narrow, Sharp as an arrow, This is the letter V. —Richard Armour.

Elmer Twitchell says a lot of people won't really get aroused to the realities of the war crisis until they see the prospect of a return of prohibition and homemade gin.

A PAIR OF CURS I'd like to see him go to prison, Also pay a fine. We both raise dogs and he let his'n Whip that pup of mine. —Merrill Chilcote.

What was once oil for the lamps of China has become oil for the scamps of Japan.

Veils are coming back, we're told. Well, maybe it's an easier way to glamour than just using less make-up.

THINGS for You TO MAKE



make the fetching style at lower left; an applique cactus is on the waistband, and rickrack trims. The softly flared apron at top is appliqued with huge water lilies on skirt edge and band, and another lily forms a handy pocket.

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"She'll probably think she raised her son to be an idiot."

raised her son to be an idiot, but I believe she'd prefer that to a cad.

Alec drew a long breath. "I'll never live it down," he muttered. "But here goes." He dialed his number and this time he waited for his connection.

"This is Alec Maguire," he said doggedly into the receiver. "Will you please send somebody upstairs with a message to Lou Knight? Tell her I've been unavoidably detained and am going to be a little late, but I'll be there."

He did not return to the bathroom. Kathleen watched him going sulkily out the entrance, and didn't know whether to laugh or to cry. He was lucky enough to catch a ride with Len Woods and Sylvia Mason who had decided to move on elsewhere. They set him down on Main Street and, still scowling, Alec crossed the railroad tracks and made for that unlovely part of town against which Mike was always crusading in the Clarion's editorial page, where one row of ugly shotgun houses, all precisely alike, butted against another and the streets were unpaved and dusty, the yards small and cluttered and bare.

Myra would be furious, Alec knew that. But the stimulation of the alcohol which he had consumed earlier in the night had yielded to black depression, and in his present humor he did not much care what Myra elected to do about his cavalier desertion. Nevertheless he was aware that he would feel differently the next day when the hours stretched interminably before him and he had nothing to do but think. The sort of thoughts that had been driving him crazy since he took his degree at midyear and found himself adrift in a world that yawned when he begged for his chance. Just a chance, that was all he asked. A chance to do things. Big constructive things such as he had dreamed of.

