

KITTY FREW

by JANE ABBOTT

SYNOPSIS: Soberly hidden, Kitty Frew has thought herself a runaway from her husband, Gar, who is working in a store until he is willing to forget the money he will inherit and settle down to supporting her without his mother's aid. But suddenly she sees Gar's sister, Carol, and fears discovery.

Chapter 21 FIRM GROUND

MISS LEE had not noticed Kitty's agitation.

She was enjoying herself immensely; to talk with even a pretense of intimacy of such people as Margery Crosby and the Idyllers had for her as pleasant a taste as the Chef's salad. "I don't care much for amateur things, but I'm going to the first show. I like to see who's in the audience, and it'll be a smart one. That's the way I fix these people in my mind, you see. This Somerses' coaching them. He may be a good actor, but I can't say I like his looks, do you?"

Kitty looked at Paul Somerses. He was lean, dark-skinned, heavy-browed, with black hair, which he wore plastered sleekly back from a prominent forehead. He was leisurely finishing his meal, apparently undisturbed by Carol's desertion. "No, I don't like his looks." And Kitty was thinking of Carol, of Carol's face as it had looked when she left the table. Carol had said she had nothing she wanted. Did she want Paul Somerses? And if she did there was Marge to reckon with; Gar had laughed over the way Marge was giving this fellow a rush. The old alien feeling swept over Kitty, for Marge and Carol, all of them, and then almost at once it left her. Why now she had escaped them—she'd found firm ground for her feet to tread.

"I think I'll let you take charge of the displays after this," Miss Lee was saying.

The next Sunday, Kitty, leaving the house for breakfast, paused on the top step to draw in a long breath of the sun-warmed air.

Usually on Sunday she met David at the corner restaurant to eat breakfast with him; to dally over the meal, talking to him, to drink a second and often a third cup of coffee stood off the emptiness of the long day. Now she found him waiting at the table which they called theirs by right of usage.

He rose quickly to greet her. The concern with which he always met her took note of her lighter step, a little glow on her face, a softening of the too-set lines about her mouth. "Did you ever know such a day?" she asked gaily as she eased herself in the chair he drew out for her. "I wish I had wings—I'd fly to a hill-top I know back home!" Her whole heart was, childishly, in her voice.

David smiled at her as if she were a child. "We can go, without wings. Not to your particular hilltop, but to one that's particularly mine, if it'll do."

"David! You mean to your little house?"

"Yes. There's a bus that goes within a half mile. Will you mind walking?"

"Oh, I'll love it. What a darling you are to think of it, to know how much I'm longing to see real country again. Can we take a picnic lunch? Can we start at once?"

"And you say you're grown up!" "I feel young today. It's—but I'm not going to tell you, now. I'm going to save it. Oh, David—I'm happy again. Did you guess when you saw me?" He nodded. He'd seen that she was happy; perhaps she'd heard from Gar. But he didn't want to know, just now.

"You'd better eat some breakfast. Then we'll go around to your room and get an extra wrap. It may turn cold before night; this warmth is only one of the weather-man's jokes."

"Might not Dorcas like to go?" she asked after a moment, but with such lack of enthusiasm that she had to explain, laughing: "I'm selfish this morning. I want this fun just for the two of us. If Dorcas went I couldn't tell you things—"

She was so wholly intent on having David to herself that she did not see the sudden swift kindling in his eyes. She went on, smiling fondly at him. "David, you can't half guess what it means to me to have you. You're so—so listening! You're even better than a brother. I think my heart would have broken with everything shut up in it." She put out her hand impulsively and clasped it over David's, where his lay on the table, thumb light over his fingers. "David, you're dear!"

He moved his hand out from hers. "Don't give me too much of the brother role—I've never learned that part. I might fall down on the lines, Kitty. Have you finished? We won't bother with a lunch—we'll find something out there. And we

won't take Dorcas along." He had gotten up and was standing behind her chair, her coat in his hands. He smiled down at the top of her head. "This will be our day, if you want it so."

They boarded an interurban bus at the end of Ketchum Street. It took them through the city, on past the suburban bungalows hanging like a heavy fringe to the city-limits, to open fields and farm houses and barns. Kitty's excitement was like a child's.

"Look, David! Those willows. Couldn't you think it was spring?—David, see those ridiculous geese!—David, why haven't we done this every Sunday?"

They left the bus at a cross-road and followed it where it wound through brown orchards up over a hill. Kitty matched her stride to David's freer swing. She took off her hat and carried it, and the softly stirring air roughened her hair and brought a higher color to her cheeks. Her chin was lifted, her eyes were going hungrily ahead to the edge of the hilltop.

They paused before they started down into the further valley. David pointed to house-tops, a white church spire, visible among the tree-tops in the distance.

"That's White's Corners. It's a mile beyond my place. It's named for my mother's people. Most of them are buried there. At one time my great-grandfather owned a good part of the valley. There's a mill the other side of those woods—it's gone to pieces now." A new quality in his voice brought Kitty's eyes to his face. It was alight with a strong pride.

They walked down the hill and at its bottom turned into a narrow road that ran off at a sharp angle. And almost at once David said: "Here we are."

It was a low-bull, gray clapboarded house, old, but with no dreariness or neglect in its age. It had no look of desertion, rather one of waiting. Kitty remembered what David had said of it—a place that put arms around you.

David unlocked the door and stood aside for her to enter, an odd smile on his face. Kitty found herself in a low-ceiled living-room, clean, fresh, curtained, furnished so much like her mother's living-room in Bridgewater that she gave a little cry of delight.

"Why, David, I could believe I was home! That old sofa—I know it's ours. Is one leg wobbly? And George and Martha Washington! And the clock!" She began to laugh, and then her laugh broke off sharply. "O, David, it's so good just to see things that look like—home. I didn't know—"

He left her and went on to the kitchen beyond, opened doors and windows. When she followed him her gay mood had come back but her blue eyes were misty, as if they had shed tears.

David was taking cans down from a cupboard.

"Soup. I've a tin of crackers somewhere. Corned-beef, apple sauce, coffee—"

"But, David, we can't eat now! I must see every corner of the house and the brook and the hill. David, how beautifully clean you keep everything!"

"Not me—Mrs. Dundy does that. She's my neighbor. Wait a minute." He went to the open door and whistled. At once there was a shrill barking, and presently through the woods came bounding a collie dog. The animal leaped on David, whimpering in his joy, licking David's hands and face.

"Jan, this is Kitty."

The dog greeted Kitty with more dignity, simply nuzzling her outstretched hand and returning at once to the adoring of his master.

"I've had him since he was a puppy," David explained. "The Dundys keep him for me." He was holding the dog's head close to his shoulder. "Jan, old fellow, have you missed me as much as that?"

Jan went with them while they explored the house. Narrow steps led to the sleeping chambers above, small rooms, with sloping ceilings and narrow, small-paned windows. "This was my mother's room—when she was a girl," David said or the threshold of one. Kitty made no move to enter. She saw the books, the pictures, the little blue glass lamp on the table at the window, the low rocking-chair beside it, the gay, piece-work quilt folded at the foot of the narrow wooden bed.

She slipped her hand through David's arm. "David, I wish you'd tell me about her, sometime," she said softly.

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David tries to break Kitty's illusions about Gar, tomorrow. "Haven't you learned the truth?" he asks.

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NELSON, B. C., May 3. — (AP) British Columbia police used itch powder and short lengths of garden hose as weapons yesterday when they encountered 200 Doukhobors in parade at Thrums, 16 miles from Nelson. Authorities arrested 117 men and women, many of whom were nude.

The police sprayed the powder on the exposed bodies of the men and women, finally herding them into an orchard where they were held until trucks arrived to bring them here.

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