

You Can't Marry

by Julia Cleft-Addams

SYNOPSIS: "Choose between me and your job," Eddie Townsend tells his wife, Georgie. To keep her from leaving him, he had threatened, should she marry—she has promised her cousin, Jenny, married Eddie. Now that Eddie is nervous-shocked from an accident, she feels she must keep up the deception.

Chapter 29

THE MOST SUBTLE ENEMY

SHE made a grimace at herself in her mirror and then, casually, her attention was caught by the beauty of the room reflected behind her. For a moment she was absorbed in it, delighted, completely satisfied. Everything else was swept from her mind.

That ash-gray furniture, with its touches of ebony, was perfect of its kind. The peacock silk on the low bed gleamed, the lace fell creamily, the door of the huge wardrobe slipped suddenly ajar as though it invited her to see the frocks that Jenny had hung, each on its scented hanger, upon the long, polished rail. With a gasp of pleasure, Georgie rose, flung the cupboard door wide, and ran the clothes up and down the rail, steeping her senses in the color and the touch of them. Finally she chose a taupe gown of her favorite apricot. In the dressing-chest she found the lingerie that matched it; and somewhere, she remembered, she had dull gold, brocaded shoes...

While she bathed and powdered and scented herself, while she brushed her hair until it shone and tended her nails, she looked back at her life and smiled. People said that she had showed courage and initiative and endurance in her job; but the truth was that these things came naturally to her and so she succeeded where others failed. No merit about that. But now she was fighting the most subtle enemy in the world—her love for Eddie—her own deep desire to follow him even to the world's end.

She would win. She was determined to win. She knew what was best for Eddie, she thought; and what would keep their love alive and what would starve it slowly to death.

She gave a final touch to her lips and swung out of her room; at the other end of the little hall, the kitchen door stood open and she saw the remains of a meal. A homely brown teapot, a loaf and a big currant cake stood on a checked tablecloth.

Georgie glanced in as she passed by and frowned. That expensive servant, engaged by Jenny, ought to be in charge. She had no business to go out at this time, with her work unfinished and a dinner to cook! Georgie's color was rising as she went into the sitting-room.

"You've been every one of the seven ages of man," was Eddie's greeting. He leaned against the window and she noticed that he was gripping the curtain in an odd way, and that he was pale; but she was full of her grievance.

"Evidently that woman Jenny discovered isn't competent!" she exclaimed. "The only sign of her in the kitchen is the relics of her dinner."

"Woman? Oh, that cook-person!" Eddie abandoned the curtains and slowly seated himself. "She was competent all right, but she got on my nerves. Too darn competent, like those nurses at the hospital—so bright and cheerful the whole time, I nearly screamed."

"Well, I hope that whoever took her place—"

"Jenny and I have been taking it. We thought it would save you money and she's a good cook, Jen is. She teaches me a bit every day. Had some of my cake?"

"Your cake? That—that stuff in the kitchen?" Georgie's astonishment seemed to amuse him, for he laughed until his chair creaked in sympathy. "What is that old wicker thing doing in here?" she demanded, grimacing at it. "That's the kitchen chair!"

"Suits me. I keep slipping out of the new leather one."

A difficult pause. Georgie's eyes were hurt and angry. Eddie's were half-closed.

"Does Jenny's cooking extend to any kind of evening meal?" she asked curtly. "Or do we manage with bread and cheese while she has eight courses at Rochester Gate?"

"Good lord," Eddie pulled himself erect in the old chair. "I clean forgot! We've been having a midday dinner and a supper like they do in the country, but we've collected an emergency store in case you came home unexpectedly. There's a whole shelf of tinned things—"

"Thanks, I'd rather not!" shrugged Georgie. "Not, at any rate, until I've been strengthened by a cocktail!" She pulled open the cupboard door and stooped, peering. "We don't seem to have anything but

empty bottles—frightfully awkward if anyone dropped in for a chat! Really, if Jenny is going to play housekeeper, she must do it elsewhere. I need someone reliable."

"She had not meant to go so far, her own words had carried her away; but she was prepared to stand by them. Jenny took too much on herself, anyway..."

"Eddie?" Was it possible that he had not heard her? He was so motionless.

"What's the matter?" she whispered.

Eddie took his head in his hands. "Nothing's the matter." He sounded drowsy. "I get sleepy, suddenly, like this. When I get—when I hear a crash. Thought I heard a crash in the street just now."

"How odd!" At a loss, she giggled—and saw the blood mount to his face. Then, feeling that she could bite out her blundering tongue, she ran across to him and took his head in her arms, cradling it gently. "You have forty winks, old darling, while I open all the emergency tins at once!"

His lips touched her hair as she released him but when she looked back at the door, he was asleep. She went quietly back to the kitchen and pulled Jenny's overall over her apricot gown.

If Jenny had been here now, Georgie would have been particularly sweet to her, given her a present or something; for she was bitterly ashamed of the jealousy that had flared out in her against her little cousin. Bustling the remains of the supper off the table, she began to hum softly. Wasn't this exactly what she had dreamed of doing—showing Eddie how easily the modern girl can run a home and job at the same time? Come home at the end of a long day and toss a hot meal together might be out of the question for most; but she was strong and young and clever; she could do it. Eddie should see!

She inspected the emergency stores and the cupboard. Generously, she admitted that if her dinner was a success she would owe it to Jenny, for the body and substance of the meal were provided already. She decided that she would try an omelette.

Half an hour later, flushed and anxious, she took off the overall—and found Eddie in the doorway. "Woke to find the place dim with smoke," he grinned, unsympathetically. "Thought it was a fire until I remembered you were cook tonight. Can I do anything? Jenny showed me a first-class way of making eggs."

"Fortunately, she showed me once, too," laughed Georgie. "That's all we shall get, I'm afraid—the omelette begs to be excused. And there are some cheese-straws I've warmed up in the oven. And there will be some coffee—I really can make that."

"Did Jenny show you?"

"I believe she did." Actually, it was Georgie who had taught Jenny, but she was glad to make amends when she recollected her attitude of superiority. "Sit down, Ed. Our first meal together."

He drew a jug of drinking-water, which she had forgotten, and she tried hard to banish the picture of Jenny and him facing each other over this little checked tablecloth in just this informal way. No doubt he had laid the covers and drawn the water and placed the chairs and Jenny had whipped the dishes out of the oven, and urged him to help himself...

She forced her mind back to realities. She was Eddie's wife, she was Georgie Townsend and Jenny—well, if she really would take a salary as their housekeeper and put her back into the work, it would certainly solve a good many problems.

"D'you mind if I take my coat off?" Eddie was asking. "It's hot in here. And I've got into the way of it ever since Mrs. Bigger told me that it flustered her to see a man sitting with his coat on in the evening."

"Who on earth is Mrs. Bigger?"

"My landlady. She has a shop," Georgie pulled herself together. Oh, opposite that hotel where Jenny is staying?"

"She's back here, now. She has the room you got ready for my dressing-room." He met her gaze suddenly. "If I hurt your feelings just now when I spoke about your job will old Matching, I'm truly sorry, a-d. I know, by what Jenny has told me, how you stayed to make this place ready for me. But you wouldn't think me anything of a fellow if I were to take up my quarters in that pretty little room and just live on your bounty; you wouldn't, honestly."

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"Georgie must give up her job, Eddie, tomorrow. She refuses—who will break the deadlock?"

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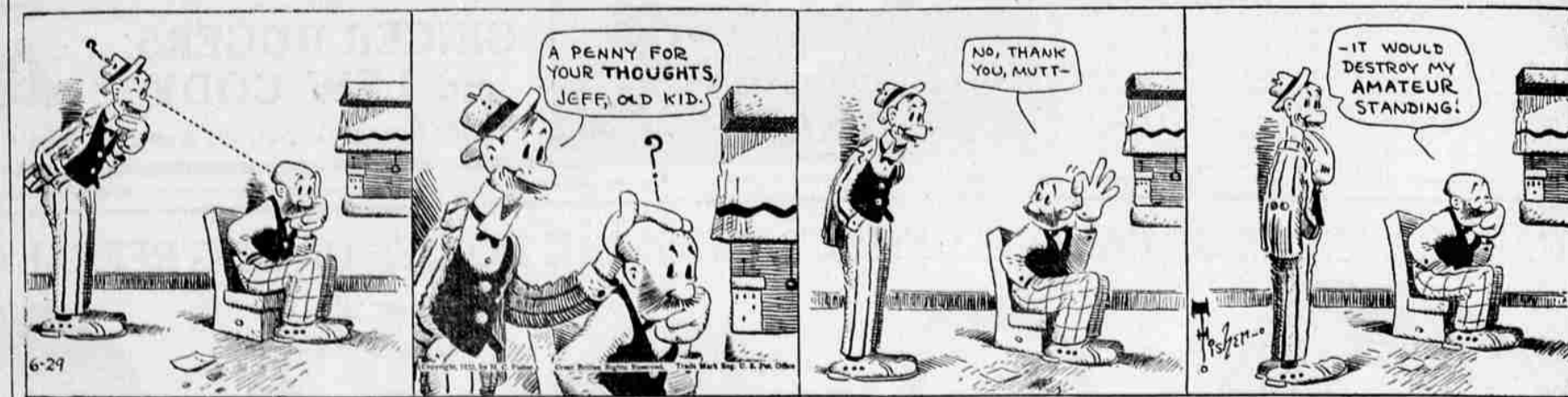
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ROME (AP)—Italy is seeking a new outlet in northern Africa for surplus population by colonizing land seized from rebel tribes in Cirenaica, Libya, during the 10 years insurrection just ended.

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BRINGING UP FATHER



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