

Nertzzy Rushes in by Florence Ostern

Uh-huh! Nertzzy Interferes in a Budding Romance! But NOT Because There's Anything Amiss—She thinks She'd Be More Suitable as the Bride!

Illustrated by
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ELLIE TOBIN and her house guest, Nan Madison—affectionately known as Nertzzy—lay tanning themselves on the upper balcony of the Tobin domain.

"Here comes your poppa from Princeton," Nertzzy announced lazily. "Potential poppa, I should say."

"If you mean Mr. Nippert Ames is calling on mother," Ellie replied with hauteur, "what of it?"

"You tell me," Nertzzy drawled. "Not that I don't think your mother's a grand gal, Ellie. Terribly attractive, and everybody says she makes Portia look like a shyster. But when she takes on youths of tender age—"

"She isn't taking him on, silly." Ellie's plump good-natured face attempted a scowl. "Naturally, mother being an attorney is interested in somebody who's just passed the bar."

"Naturally," Nertzzy echoed dryly.

"People don't understand," Ellie went on plaintively, "that mother's a permanent widow. Nothing could hold her for long but her practice. Certainly not a kid like Nip."

"Don't I know it," Nertzzy agreed bitterly. "When Nip begins to pall she'll give him the busy signal, like she does all the rest."

"Well, what can I do?" Ellie shrugged chubbily.

"Nip would be perfect for somebody like us," Nertzzy sighed dreamily. "Nineteen's more in his line than thirty-seven."

"Nobody tries to take a man away from her own mother," Ellie answered, speaking for herself. "At least not outside an O'Neill play. It's morbid." She frowned a moment, then struggled to her feet. "Say, maybe we'd better go down and join them. For all we know, Nip's making a fool of himself this very minute."

I'VE never been so darned excited," Nip was saying, when they walked into the room. "Just think, my first case!"

Ellie's mother was smiling in her fascinating shadowy way. "You know, Nip, if there's anything I can do—"

"Sweet Ione! But this case is practically in the bag. A lovely lady is irked by a disgustingly wealthy spouse. I'm charging extreme mental cruelty and a very stiffish fee. The gentleman will not contest. Pretty?"

"As one attorney to another, Nip," Mrs. Tobin asked curiously, "whose house is about to divide itself?"

"The Bellwoods'. Bellwood's Better Baking Powder. A rich aunt steered her to me."

Nertzzy coughed. "No use wasting ourselves on the desert air, Ellie." She grinned impishly at Nip. "S'long, Gladstone—or do I mean Blackstone?"

"Right," Nip called after her. "Gladstone's the bag."

"I guess Nip would be furious if he lost his first case," Nertzzy speculated.

"He won't," Ellie was confident. "You have to be plenty dumb to lose an uncontested case."

"I was just thinking," Nertzzy's voice grew wistful, "what a small world it would be if Mr. Bellwood hired your mother to contest the suit."

The two girls exchanged a long, significant glance.

"Tell me," Nertzzy pressed, "what do you know about Mr. Bellwood's private life?"

"He golfs," Ellie mentioned dubiously. "Every Saturday afternoon."

Nertzzy jumped up. "Come along, Lazy Bones! We've got golfing to do."

THE two girls stationed themselves on the club veranda. "The minute you see him, rush over and sign up," Nertzzy advised. "If we're lucky we'll go on with him."

Two matrons, dressed in spectator sportswear, sauntered down the veranda and settled near the girls. Their talk ran monotonously to babies, braised beef and Bridge.

"Have you heard," one of them whispered, "that the Bellwoods are about to split?"

The other woman made a clicking noise. "Nobody dreams, of course," the first woman went on. "But her maid told mine, Gertie Bellwood only married him for his money. Now she thinks she'd be happier with a property settlement."

"Is Bel' so 'ung to let her get away with that?" the first woman asked indignantly.

Nertzzy had to strain her ears to catch the reply. "Of course. You see he doesn't suspect about Betto. If he did—oh—uh—" the voice broke off in sudden confusion. "Good afternoon, Mr. Bellwood!"

Nertzzy turned and saw a large, rather distinguished looking man. She turned to poke Ellie, but Ellie was already at the book furiously signing up.

Nertzzy was positive the gods were pulling for them that afternoon, for the next four out were themselves, Mr. Bellwood and a bereted male he presented as Robert Varela.

"I'm Miss Madison," Nertzzy introduced herself after the fashion of the links. "And this is my friend, Miss Holstein."

Ellie said afterwards that it was inexcusable

giving her a name which was shared by practically every cow in the country.

With an apologetic giggle, Nertzzy took her position up at the tee. "Bobby Jones is better than I am," she explained. "Half the time I just pick up my ball and carry it on to the next hole."

"So we can make it before sundown," Ellie stuck in cheerfully.

At the thirteenth hole the men decided to quit for dinner. Mr. Bellwood looked worn but resigned; Mr. Varela, on the other hand seemed to be restraining himself with difficulty.

"Gosh," Nertzzy sighed, "I'm thirsty."

Mr. Bellwood courteously suggested that the girls join him in the club cafe.

"Then I'll see you later, Bellwood," said Mr. Varela, grasping this opportunity to break away.

MR. BELLWOOD looked inquiringly at Nertzzy.

"Tea, please," she murmured. "A nice hot cup of tea."

"Tea! In this heat—" Ellie gasped, but a well-aimed kick silenced her.

Nertzzy drained her tea valiantly, then squinted at the few remaining leaves.

"Ever have your fortune read?" she inquired casually of Mr. Bellwood.

"I'm afraid I'm something of a skeptic." His smile was faintly condescending.

Nertzzy nodded. "Lots are. But it's fun just the same. I'd love to tell yours." Nertzzy fixed her big trusting blue eyes upon him.

"Why—er—thank you," Mr. Bellwood surrendered.

"I didn't know you could—" Ellie began, but this time Nertzzy kicked her hard enough to induce paralysis.

Nertzzy instructed Mr. Bellwood to pour some fresh tea, drink it and invert the cup. "Now turn it in the saucer three times and make a wish," she directed. Mr. Bellwood peered fearfully over one shoulder before following instructions.

"You will soon have cause to forget your business troubles," Nertzzy canted rather sinisterly. "You are shrewd, but not shrewd enough."

Mr. Bellwood's moustache twitched with amusement.

"Your home," Nertzzy went on, letting him have it full blast, "is about to totter."

An involuntary exclamation escaped Mr. Bellwood. "Why—why that's extraordinary!" he cried. "Nobody knows of it but my wife's attorney."

Nertzzy continued to twirl the cup.

"You are laboring under the delusion that this—uh—marital discord has been of your making," Nertzzy was really getting into her stride. "The leaves say your wife has been deliberately stolen from you, Mr. Bellwood. I see the initial B. Do you know a B?" she questioned gently. "A Bob? A Bill? No. A—Butt? No, no—Bett—ah . . ." Nertzzy valiantly tried to recall the name.

Mr. Bellwood's fist made the dishes dance. "So Betto's the reason Gertie wants a divorce!" he thundered. "Betto," he explained, "is the name my wife has for that fellow Varela who went around with us this afternoon." Mr. Bellwood was getting red in the face. "Well, just let her try and get the divorce!"

Quick, triumphant glances flashed between the girls.

"What else do you see in that fool cup?" Mr. Bellwood ordered.

Nertzzy obligingly turned it again. "I see another woman entering your life, Mr. Bellwood. A good woman. She comes to you clad in the garb of Portia."

"An attorney?" Ellie interrupted, anxious lest Mr. Bellwood be ignorant of Portia's identity.

"What's her name?" Mr. Bellwood snapped. Nertzzy was not one to overact. "A teacup is not a telephone directory, Mr. Bellwood. I can only say that the woman is near—very, very near . . . And the leaves warn you not to delay."

Mr. Bellwood was breathing hard. "Ione Tobin's the only woman lawyer I know of."

NIP came to dinner Monday evening, with gardenias in a square black box for Mrs. Tobin. For Nertzzy he brought a big pink lollipop wrapped in cellophane. She acted as if he had stabbed her in the back.

"I shouldn't bore the girls with this," Mrs. Tobin said, "but I can't keep B. Nip. Had a new client today."

"That's nothing unusual," Nip's grey eyes danced admiringly.

"But wait till you hear who it is," said Mrs. Tobin lightly. "M. G. Bellwood himself! He's hired me to contest the divorce."

"So, you've taken it!" Nip didn't seem too thrilled.

"Think I'd miss the opportunity?" Mrs. Tobin came back gaily, but a wholly unfeminine light of battle flamed in her luminous eyes.

From then on the dinner became a rather stilted affair.

"If I look in at the Appleton party," Nip

said to Nertzzy when the boys called for her and Ellie, "how's chances of getting a dance?"

Everyone felt positive this was said with no other idea than to pique Mrs. Tobin. That's why Nertzzy was so stunned later to see Nip-pert Ames in the stag line.

"Everything comes to the woman who waits," was her greeting when he cut in.

"I'm supposed to believe you were waiting?"

"Like this." She let her tongue hang out and proceeded to pant like a puppy.

"Crazy!" Nip shook his dark head, amused.

DURING the course of the evening Nip brought up the Bellwood case. "I have to win it," he said. "Can't let Ione Tobin beat me. Things would never be the same again."

"That's what I figured," Nertzzy agreed softly. Then, hypocritically: "Poor Nip!"

"That's all little Nertzzy knows." He lit a cigarette with alarming insouciance. "Ever hear of Exhibit A?"

"Animal or mineral?"

"Exhibit A," Nip enlightened her, "may be almost anything, but the moment it is displayed in court, it invariably becomes 'sufficient evidence.'"

Nertzzy leaned forward anxiously. "And—and you have an Exhibit A?"

"A pip," he assured her. "A note to Mrs. Bellwood scribbled on a telephone pad by her allegedly devoted husband."

"What did he write, Nip?"

"Oh, nothing much—just that it would be the happiest day in his life if the little woman cut her throat, or words to that effect."

"Then how can Mrs. Tobin prove—?"

Nip stooped down and tousled Nertzzy's bright hair. "That's just the point. Mrs. Tobin can't."

THE picture of the judge handing Nip the Bellwood decision was beginning to upset Nertzzy's digestion. That's why she found herself, the afternoon before the trial, hesitating outside a door marked:

NIPPERT AMES
Attorney-at-Law

She hadn't the faintest notion why she had come. Nip seemed surprised, but pleased.

Nertzzy perched herself on the edge of his desk. "Thought I'd drop around and see what a regular law office looks like." She surveyed his modest surroundings. "What, no secretary!"

Nip grinned. "She'll materialize after I win Mrs. Bellwood her freedom. Like to apply for the position?"

Nertzzy burst out laughing. "Me in a law office! I'm greener than spinach. Imagine reaching my time of life without having owned an Exhibit A!"

Nip rose magnificently to the bait. "That's easily rectified." He went over to his yawning file. "Here! Cast an eye on the Bellwood Exhibit."

Another young attorney stuck his head in the door just then. "A cash customer," he hissed to Nip. "Can you come over and witness a will?"

Nip excused himself to Nertzzy. "I'll be right back."

The door closed behind the two men and she found herself alone with Exhibit A. She read it, breathless.

You talk of suicide, Gerie, but I am not frightened. You'd never do anything to make me that happy.

At the third reading, something hit Nertzzy like a thunderbolt. With her heart pounding in her ears, she tried the various pencils on Nip's desk. She didn't call it by the ugly name of forgery, for, as she reminded herself, all she did was add the tiny syllable *an* at the end of the third line. But it seemed to give Mr. Bellwood's note a much kinder tone.

NIP returned just as Nertzzy was folding up the papers guiltily. "All wised up?" he asked. He put an arm about her and gave her a little hug. "I'll ring you the minute I win tomorrow. It's funny, Nertzzy, but I've had a hunch all along you've been rooting for me."

After that Nertzzy felt horrible. In fact she went home feeling like a criminal. She made a mental note to ask Mrs. Tobin how many years a citizen could get for tampering with legal evidence. But Ellie's mother didn't appear at dinner to relieve her mind.

"Mother's with Mr. Bellwood again," Ellie mentioned. "You know his case comes up in the morning."

Sleeping tablets, warm milk and one hundred fence-jumping sheep failed to put Nertzzy to sleep. She hadn't even the excuse of having acted from a purely selfless motive. Wasn't she crazy-mad about Nip? Didn't she, all along, feel this might send him rebounding in her direction? Most likely she wouldn't ever sleep again until she'd confessed the whole thing to him. Of course he never would look at her after that. Just the same she was going to phone him the first thing in the morning.

The night went on and on and on . . .

NERTZZY awoke to find a brilliant sun pouring through the windows. She lay there for a blinking moment before bounding out of bed. Ellie came upon her just as she was beseeching the supervisor to try Mr. Nippert Ames' office just once more.

"She'll be able to raise the dead about as easy," Ellie pointed out. "It's almost eleven. Nip's in court. Why, what's the matter, Nertzzy? Don't you feel well?"

"I'm all right," Nertzzy muttered. Yes she was! As all right as a month old corpse.

She walked slowly back to her room and locked the door. She tried not to think, but her mind was maliciously active, conjuring up pictures of Nip's face, accusing and not a little perplexed. "But why? Why did you do

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it? He'd be sure to ask her that. And what could she tell him?

"Hey, Nertzzy!" Ellie was calling. "Nip's on the phone. Wants to speak to you."

Trembling violently Nertzzy crept to the telephone. "Hi, Blackstone!" she quavered feebly.

"How's my little mascot?" he was demanding. "Just like poppa promised. I won the case."

"Nip!"

"By a default," he was explaining. "Ione didn't appear. Tell you about it when I come over. She home yet?"

Nertzzy put the receiver back with cold, stiff fingers. So Mrs. Tobin cared enough for Nip to deliberately lose the case . . .

It wasn't easy to pack and cry at the same time, so Nertzzy concentrated on the crying. She found a hat and jammed it on, utterly unconscious that her coat had gone over her sleeping pajamas. At the front door she bumped into Nip.

"N—Nip!" Nertzzy gulped. "I mean congratulations. I mean, it was grand—Mrs. Tobin doing all that for you."

"For me?" Nip echoed. "Sa—ay, when a woman decides to marry a man it's impractical to fight his wife's divorce. Ione phoned me the glad tidings early this morning. Not that I was surprised. Knew she fell for Bellwood the day she met him."

Nertzzy sat down weakly on top of her suitcase. "Oh!" she gasped. "Oh!"

"It's just as well she didn't contest that case," Nip was saying ruefully. "I must have been blind or something thinking I had a slick exhibit. When I looked at it again this morning it sounded all sweetness and light to me." From his poker expression Nertzzy couldn't tell whether he suspected anything or not.

"Nip, I—"

"And may I inquire where you are going all dressed up in your sleeping pajamas?" he interrupted dryly.

Nertzzy looked down aghast. "Oh, for goodness sakes!" Then suddenly she giggled. "I'm running home. The folks here been sending threatening letters."

"How about letting me drive you?" he suggested. "It mightn't be such a bad idea if I were to meet your family."

Nertzzy glanced up quickly. "Sounds as if the gentleman has honorable intentions."

At that Nip swooped down, pausing just long enough to remark: "If he hasn't, the lady can start a swell breach of promise suit."