"BITTER FRUIT" — Week-End True Story

My name was on the list in the College Employment Department as an applicant for odd jobs. This meant that often I would receive messages to report here or there for work of various kinds. Sometimes people in the nearby small city would make calls for waiters when they contemplated a function a bit more pretentious than usual.

I was always glad to get the waiting jobs as they meant big tips. Also, the College officials felt easier in their minds about my taking such jobs in preference to the less sober and dependable fellows, because such trips meant a return to the campus as late as two o'clock, on account of the train schedule between the college stop and the city.

The day following my unhappy argument with Tom, I found an employment slip under the door of our room when I came in from my last class. It called me to serve a party in the city. I was glad of the chance, especially when I learned that it was to be a stag for a prominent visiting Elk given by Elks. I knew the tips would be generous.

They were. Also—pleased with my perfect service and glowing with a bit of over-geniality, due to the frequent trips into the locker room, added to the quite open indulgence in the less high-powered, and more authentic, beverages served openly on the table—the guest of honor insisted that I join him in a toast to myself.

As a twenty-dollar tip dangled from his fat pudgy fingers for all to see—and "follow-up," as his own hiccoughing challenge admonished — I suddenly saw my puritanic bridges tumbling about my ears, and later, with over two hundred dollars in tips in my pocket, felt the broken boards of my moral bridge wobbling beneath unsteady feet as I crossed the campus to the darkened precincts of our first floor room, abutting on the rear alley-lane just off the street that was the end of the college campus.

As I fumbled for the key-hole I thought I heard something like faint giggles coming from within. But I had been hearing a lot of unusual noises that night, so I didn't pay much attention to these. At length I managed to get the door open.

All was dark within the room. I stumbled to the hanging cord of the light and jerked it with a spasmodic pull. No light came. I jerked again, but still only darkness. Something must be wrong with the light. I fumbled around for a chair, and as I did so my hands caught something yielding. It giggled.

I started back, but the giggling thing had encircled my body with soft bands of perfumed strength. Unsteady as I was, I toppled over and fell sidewise. I felt the yielding softness of a bed beneath me. At the same time the small study light on the table was snapped on and a loud report sounded through the room.

I rolled over, stunned into sudden awareness by the lights and the report. Tom Standish stood laughing by a flashlight camera and, lying in rumpled beauty on my left arm, was Alice North.

They were both laughing. And, when they saw me plainly, the laughter was louder and longer.

It was not until the two had helped me into my own bed that I was completely aware of where I was, and it was not until the next day that the significance of the rest of the happenings of that night dawned on me.

It was during the laughing consultation that took place between them that the closet door opened and two other people appeared. They were both girls, college girls, and the significance of their presence in that room was easily understood — they were guests at the "pep" party.

The opened bottles in their hands with the burnt-out cigarette stubs on the floor told the tale of a successful party that had been about to break up for the climax of my entrance, and what was intended for documentary evidence, to assure my silence on said party.

I was too far gone in a state of half stupefied hilarity to care about anything then, and, to show that there would be no hard feelings about my past attitude, the bunch decided to induct me into the fold there and then. As it was getting late, they would leave Alice to minister to my further initiation with the remaining unopened bottle while Tom took the other two home in the taxi which had been ordered to wait in the alley-lane till two o'clock. He would return for Alice.

Even Tom's return didn't disturb the girl in my arms. She had "passed out" entirely. I was dimly conscious of a dull anger when Tom, laughing uncontrollably, disengaged her warm soft body from my clasping arms. I didn't want to let her go. I insisted that she belonged to me, that we had "got togesher at lasht."

"Yeah, but you won't get 'together' again if I don't get her out of here before daylight." Tom's voice seemed to come to me from a long distance. He went out and came back with the taxi driver. Together they took the girl out. I turned over heavily.

The world went out in a strange glow of warm satisfaction.

* * *

I awoke with a dull, heavy headache, that throbbed all over my body it seemed. For days I could not look Tom Standish in the face, but he, willing to be generous now that I was tied to his secrets and could no longer interfere in his plans for a good time, took his satisfaction out in twitting me and ragging me about Alice.

As for my own feeling about the girl, always my shame was burnt away by the strong flame of my desire for her, again. She, strangely enough, didn't seem to have any regrets for what had occurred. Indeed she took the whole thing as a joke until a month before our graduation. Then

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