



LOVE FOR TWO

RUTH DEWEY GROVES

AUTHOR OF "WHEN A GIRL LOVES" © 1928 By N.E.A. Service Inc.



moved with her attendants toward the door. When she reached the top of the stairs she knew a wild impulse to rush back to her room, to tear the rosebuds from her hair and cry her heart out.

Mechanically she moved down the stairs. "Here comes the bride, second choice, here comes the bride, second choice," kept time in her head to the music.

But when she entered the big double doors of the living room a low murmur of admiration rose, to be quickly stifled by people who reminded themselves of where they were.

That murmur was like a benediction to Bertie Lou. It gave her courage. She must be very lovely indeed, as the girls had said, to bring it forth. Even the prettiest girl in town, as some people called Lila Marsh, must grant this day to another.

CHAPTER I

Bertie Lou stood on the brink of the great adventure.

She was thrilled to the core of her youth-firm little body. And no one guessed it.

Her own mother had not been permitted to see behind the mask of sophistication she wore to conceal her shy, dreaming soul. And not even Rod had known how happy she was.

For Bertie Lou would not talk about it. She was afraid of being sappy. So she posed behind an armor of hoots and pibes for the weakness of sentiment. It was the code of her day among her friends.

But tonight she could not jeer at her happiness. It made her feel like a traitor to the other girls—this being so old-fashionedly palpitating and concerned. "Wouldn't they razz me?" she thought.

She knew she ought to be asleep. Marriage was a million years old—nothing to get excited about. And she was excited. No use trying to get excited about. And she was excited. No use trying to be blasé for her own benefit. Not on this, her last night as Bertie Lou Ward. Tomorrow she would become Mrs. Rod Bryer.

She let herself dwell upon the event with much the same thoughts that might have filled the mind of any maiden of yore on the eve of her wedding day. The influence of her friends melted away before the wonder in her heart—the thousand questions, the fears and eagerness.

That was only for tonight. The next day she would be modern again—a clear-eyed, know-what-it's-all-about miss. No one would have to know that she had been misty-eyed and hesitantly prayerful the night before—just like any sap who believed in fairy tales.

She thought of the advice one 17-year-old Solon had given her: "Don't let it get you, Bertie Lou. If you don't like it you can chuck it, you know."

"But it does get you—no matter how wise you are," Bertie Lou whispered into the warm darkness of her room. And that was the nearest she ever had come to wisdom.

She lay a little longer, lost in the enchantment of standing on the threshold of a new life, before the heat of the summer night pressed unbearably in upon her. The little breeze that had sprung up at sundown had died down again. Her room had grown sultry since she had gone to bed.

Bertie Lou threw back the sheet that covered her and slipped her sun-banned legs over the edge of the bed. She felt around with her toes for her old mules and thrust her feet into them.

They clattered a little as she crossed the bare floor and groped her way down the hall to the stairs.

Her mother called to her: "Bertie Lou, is that you?" Bertie Lou halted in surprise. Her mother was a sound sleeper. But Bertie Lou did not know what it meant to have a little girl getting married on the morrow.

Perhaps her mother was suffering from the heat. "I'm going down for a drink," she answered. "Want a glass of ice water?"

"Don't drink ice water, honey. There's some lemon juice in a bottle in the refrigerator. Let the water run a while."

"The whole water supply is hot enough to boil an egg," Bertie Lou replied, and went down the stairs on the banister. She didn't do this for sport—it was too old a habit for that—but to save time.

She made a glass of lemonade for her mother after she'd had her own and started back upstairs with it. On the way she passed the hall door leading to the dining room and a sudden wish to take a peek at the wedding present seized her.

She put the lemonade on a stand and opened the door. The light from the hall shone in upon the gift-covered dining table and Bertie Lou stood looking at the array with frank pleasure in the generosity of her friends.

Since the family supper on the screened back porch she had been too busy to view the gifts and she did not know that one had arrived which she had not yet seen.

It was encased in a leather oblong with gold satin lining. Mrs. Ward had put it down on the edge of the table, with the case open. The light struck softly on a dull bronze blade and caught Bertie Lou's eyes.

"Eureka! Another one!" she ejaculated and went in to examine it and the card of the sender. "A funny wedding present," she thought, picking it up. "Sharp as the devil!" Then she looked at the card.

"Miss Lila Marsh."

Bertie Lou dropped the paper cutter quickly into the case. Her face, already flushed with heat and excitement, grew a trifle warmer in color and her eyes darkened. Always the name of Lila Marsh affected her in some way. If others were present she managed somehow to keep a pok-



Rod, who kissed her as if he'd been hungry all his life for her lips

er face but if, as now, she was unobserved, she showed her true feelings toward the girl who had refused to marry Rod.

The rich blood in her cheeks betokened consciousness of Lila's importance and the darkened eyes expressed her will to stand firmly on her own ground.

She was Rod's girl now. Lila belonged to his past. Moderns didn't trouble about a person's past. That is, they didn't acknowledge that they did. But Bertie Lou knew Lila—had known her for years. Lila was a menace. She'd always played the game by her own rules. She never gave another girl a sporting chance.

Bertie Lou wasn't going to be jealous of Rod's past.

But his future belonged to her, at least insofar as Lila was concerned. Lila had had her chance. She'd turned Rod down because he wasn't making enough money. And she couldn't see any chance for a bookkeeper in Wayville to leap into a fortune.

Of course it was all right for Lila to send a present. Bertie Lou conceded that. But why a dagger? From anyone else it would have meant nothing. But coming from Lila it might mean anything.

That was the rub, Bertie Lou didn't know. Lila hadn't gone steadily with any boy since Rod. But she wasn't lonely by any means. She was popular. What if she wanted Rod?

Bertie Lou had openly subscribed to that overworked declaration about keeping no strings on anyone. "If he wants to go, he may. If any other girl can take him, she's welcome."

That was before she fell in love with Rod. Now she knew that a possessive, fighting strain ran side by side with her pride. She would keep Rod if she could. And she couldn't see how any girl could stop loving him. She didn't believe Lila had. Lila had instilled the idea by a pose of sadness and frequent wistful references to a great mistake.

Bertie Lou slammed the door of the dining room with a bang. Lila had spoiled her night.

When she offered the lemonade to her mother, Mrs. Ward said: "Your hand is hot, honey; don't you feel well?"

"It's awfully close, Mums; do you think it will rain tomorrow?" Bertie Lou evaded.

"I'm too excited"—that was a slip—"I mean there are so many darned things to think about when you have a wedding. I wish Rod and I had eloped, what a lot of trouble it will save when people who want to get married just walk up to a mountain top and shout their union to the four winds."

She had raised her voice. Her father, sleeping beside her mother, stirred restlessly. Bertie Lou became quiet.

"Want me to come and talk to you?" her mother whispered anxiously. It had disappointed her vaguely that Bertie Lou had not come to her with confidences and questions.

"You need your sleep, Mums. I'll read," Bertie Lou replied, and slipped out of the room. Back in her own flower-papered bow-er, stripped of rugs and hang-

ings for coolness, she threw her pillows down by the window and knelt upon them, arms crossed on the window sill, curly head upon them.

It was more restful than her bed. And the orchestration of myriad summer insects soothed her. She didn't believe she would sleep that night.

At six her mother woke her, scolding. "You'll be stiff as a ramrod. Go and take a hot bath, real hot. Yes, I know it's a hot day, but you do as I say. Cool off with a shower if you like, but don't stand there rubbing your eyes out."

Mother feelings hiding behind bustling authority.

Bertie Lou had a better idea. She went down and put on a phonograph record and limbered up with the Black Bottom and a stomp. Then she took the hot bath and poured the last quarter bottle of bath salts into the tub. Her mother didn't like them. She might as well luxuriate. Couldn't pack a nearly empty bottle.

She was well seeped in rose perfume by the time she was ready for the cold shower.

Then came breakfast. It was slightly cooler on the shaded porch and Bertie Lou's mother had provided iced honeydew with lemon.

Across town another father felt the same way. Mr. Bryer wanted to have a frank, heart-to-heart talk with Rod, but he couldn't speak his son's language and he dreaded to be laughed at. Besides, he had a suspicion that his offspring knew more than he did anyhow.

Rod's mother would have given anything to tell Bertie Lou how to make Rod happy, but she did not dare. Bertie Lou was little and sweet but she was no clinging vine, and Mrs. Bryer knew she would make a man happy in her own way or not at all.

The wedding was to be at 10 o'clock in the morning. That would permit Rod and his bride to take the best train to the resort in the hills, where they were to spend two weeks of their honeymoon during Rod's vacation.

At eight the florists came and decorated the house. It did not take them half an hour to do it. But it was pretty, even if it wasn't a garden of costly blooms. Rod and Bertie Lou had been busy the evening before with white ribbon and lace paper bells, potted plants and vines.

It was an old house with large rooms and high ceilings. Bertie Lou had been born in it and her mother wanted her to be married under the same roof. Bertie Lou hoped people wouldn't suffocate. She wanted to have the altar built under the great elm tree at the corner of the lot, but Mrs. Ward said it was too public.

Well, Bertie Lou reflected, it would be a short ceremony. Then they could all go out to the long veranda where the buffet breakfast was to be served, while she and Rod drove away to the station.

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Mom'n Pop



Home Sweet Home



By Gowan

Freckles and His Friends



Missing!



By Blosser

(To Be Continued)