

LOVE FOR TWO

RUTH DEWEY GROVES

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

CHAPTER XXIX

"Hello," Bertie Lou called, in ordinary tones.

Rod's footsteps halted abruptly. Then, after what seemed to Bertie Lou an eternity of waiting, he turned back and came to the arched doorway of the living room.

For a full moment he looked at her without speaking. Then: "So you finally decided to come home," he said coldly.

Bertie Lou's heart dropped to the nadir of hope. Until that moment she had not let herself realize how much her home-coming meant to her—that on this glorious event she had built all her expectations of finding happiness again with Rod.

Deep in her heart the desire to become reconciled to him had persisted despite the mental cold shoulder she had sought to bring to their meeting.

But one glance at his cold, impassive features was enough to convince her that her attitude really mattered very little. It was plain that Rod possessed an attitude of his own.

All of her struggling with her pride had been in vain. It would make no difference whether or not she forgave him. Even the need that she felt for an explanation from him disappeared in the sure knowledge that she had lost him.

She might tell him now that she knew he had lied to her and it wouldn't disturb him in the least. Bertie Lou was aware that her return had men with no response.

She turned cold all over her body, and an icy shiver trailed along her spine. It left her weak as a baby, with a flat, horribly surprised feeling.

In a way it all seemed funny to her. She wanted to laugh. It was such a joke. A joke she had played on herself—hoping against hope that Rod wanted her back, that there'd never been anything wrong with their happiness.

"Why didn't you send a wire?" Rod went on as Bertie Lou had sought vainly for something to say. "I might have been able to meet you."

"I wouldn't have thought of bothering you," Bertie Lou returned, with a fine edge of sarcasm on her voice. "You must be up to your neck in dates."

"That's about right," Rod replied, after a slight pause. "The world is sure good to a bachelor husband."

"Oh, if you're so popular I'll be lucky to have you take me out to dinner, I suppose," Bertie Lou mocked him.

Rod frowned. "I'm dining with Lila and Cy," he said. "I'll telephone them that you're back."

There was a trace of uncertainty in his voice that did not escape Bertie Lou. She noted that he did not take a welcome for her at the Lorees' for granted. Neither did he suggest giving up his dinner engagement with them. He had distinctly said he was dining there.

Bertie Lou could feel the tide of anger rising in her breast. She managed, however, to speak calmly, even lightly. "How perfectly absurd," she said. "I was so sure you would have an engagement that I made one for myself."

She smiled pleasantly at him and Rod stared at her in doubt for a moment. "You don't mind, I hope," she added sweetly. "We can talk about Wayville tomorrow."

"I'll tell Lila you're coming with me," Rod snapped. Bertie Lou's manner annoyed him. And his manner annoyed her. "You may if you like," she replied icily. "But I shall not go with you. I'm going out to dinner with Marco Palmer."

"With whom?" Rod asked in astonishment.

"With Marco Palmer, of the Palmers. You've heard of him, surely. Our dinner engagement is conditional upon your having one. So run along, and get dressed. Lila won't like you to be late, I'm sure. There's always that chance for a moment alone before the other guests arrive, you know. Especially with such an accommodating husband as dear Cy; he's never down in time to interfere."

Rod flushed angrily. Bertie Lou was coming too close to the truth for comfort. Not that he ever had enjoyed a moment alone with Lila in the way his wife's words suggested. But any moment with Lila was precious to him. He had not told her so. . . . never would while Bertie Lou and Cyrus held their respective places in his life and Lila's. But the months that Bertie Lou had been away, her coldness, and Lila's sympathy, had paved the way for a return of his old infatuation.

He believed now that he had stopped loving Lila in the first place because she had revealed herself as heartless and shallow. But every act of hers since her marriage to Cyrus Loree had been a refutation of that impression.

Rod felt that he was in her debt for many things. . . . his first big business boost. . . . her

readiness to shield him at the cost of losing her diamonds and pearls, and her kindness in Bertie Lou's absence.

He came to believe that he had misjudged her. And as his admiration for the way she played the game with Cyrus grew, he was led into a feeling of tenderness for her that was only a step removed from love.

And all this time Lila was making herself seductively beautiful before him.

She used their social contacts to give him ample opportunity to know the soft silkiness of her golden hair, to feel the satin touch of her dainty hands, and the supple roundness of her figure.

She danced with a flavor of abandonment, and when they sat together she had a way of nestling close to him that stopped just short of being openly familiar. But as yet Rod did not know that she was playing up to him, leading him on.

He became aware of her allure without realizing that she was consciously using it to entice him.

mesh him, to win him back to her. He soon reached the stage of wishing he could tell her that he was in love with her again—that their broken engagement had been a mistake, and all that followed it had been a mistake. But Bertie Lou and Cyrus could not be wished out of the way.

Feeling thus about Lila and respecting the sanctity of his marital bonds as well as here, it angered him to have Bertie Lou touch upon his relations with Lila as she might have mentioned a sordid, commonplace flirtation.

Besides, it was poor sportsmanship to scratch the hand that had reached out to pull her up to the lap of luxury, Rod thought. He did not admire Bertie Lou at that moment.

"You seem to have picked up some unsavory ideas while you were away," he said coldly. "Perhaps it would be best for you not to go to the Lorees until you've got rid of them."

Bertie Lou's anger flamed forth at that. "Unsavory ideas" she

cried. "I'd like to know what you think of yourself."

She did not wait for a reply but flew out of the living room and into the bedroom, where she seized the handbag she had carried on the train and dug out the card Marco Palmer had given her.

Holding it tightly in her hand, she went to the telephone and called the number he had pencilled on it. Rod followed her into the bedroom and heard her ask for Mr. Palmer. The lines about his mouth showed plainly in the set expression of his temper. So she really knew Marco Palmer!

He made no effort to interfere with her call. Bertie Lou jumped as he slammed the door of his dressing room behind him.

Then a wave of despair swept

over her, and if the young man she was calling had not answered at that instant she would have hung up the receiver.

In fact she hadn't been at all determined to go out with him. Their casual acquaintance on the train had been very pleasant but Bertie Lou had turned a deaf ear to his persistent pleas for a date with her.

But now that she needed someone to help her achieve a gesture of indifference to Rod and to his engagement to dine with Lila, she didn't care in the least that Marco Palmer was a young man whose escapades frequently made the front pages of the newspapers—generally when he was reported engaged to some Broadway show girl.

Even then she might have found some pretext for calling him without suggesting going to dinner with him if Rod had not come out of his dressing room, a robe over his arm, to ask if she wanted the bath before she went out.

Bertie Lou, fresh and dainty as

a flower, resented his indifference to her immaculate appearance. And he was letting her go out with another man without one word of protest. Bertie Lou was unable to perceive that he was too coldly furious with her to care what she did.

She told Marco, somewhat to his surprise, that she would keep her dinner date. Had he her address? Eight o'clock? Right!

Bertie Lou took her time about hanging up the receiver and turning to Rod, "I've bathed, thank you," she said politely. Rod did not answer.

Bertie Lou went into her own dressing room and remained there until Rod left the apartment, though she had changed into an evening dress and been ready for some time.

When Marco came for her there was an unnatural brightness in her eyes and she was too prone to laugh over nothing. But Marco was not critical. He told her she was a knockout.

"How about a drive up the

Bronx river parkway and dinner at Sherrard's?" he asked. Bertie Lou did not care where they went so long as the place promised to be gay.

"I had some cocktails shaken up before I left the club," Marco said, pulling a hip flask. "All we need is ice."

Bertie Lou regarded the flask with a sudden reckless light in her eyes. Of course, she could be gayer that way! It was going to be different to be gay. . . .

Then she remembered. She had promised Rod not to drink without him. But not the Rod who had gone off to dinner without her.

"I'll get the ice," she said.

(To Be Continued)

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