

Love on the Stage

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Elmer Was Cured Of His Romance With Arleen, But His Fall for Gloria Was Something Divine

IT HAD been a delicious dinner. There were lamb chops and buttered potatoes, vegetable salad, and then for dessert, a strawberry shortcake which gave Elmer a distinct and satisfying thrill. What a pity that the whole delightful effect had to be ruined by his father's gruff query:

"Think it would be a good idea if you worked awhile before college opens, don't you, son?" Elmer put out of his mind the memory of the shortcake he had just finished and replied:

"Well—yes, Dad, I think it really would." Elmer's father sighed, squared his shoulders and looked at his mother as much as to say:

"A chip off the old block, my dear. He's quite as ambitious as I was at his age."

Then, to the boy who was permitting his fancy to stray in the direction of the kitchen and the remnants of the strawberry shortcake, he suggested:

"There's an opening right now in my office, if you'd like to try it."

Elmer stared at him.

"Now, not too hastily," his father continued, "you know you'll have to work hard and make good if you take it. No standing on your father's reputation, mind."

Elmer's stare became a look of horror.

"But Dad," he said, trying to make his voice sound natural, "surely you don't expect me to fool around down there with all those dumb file cabinets and things? And as for running errands for all those women"—he laid out his hand in a helpless gesture—"Dad!"

His father explained as gently as he could that those were some of the duties which were expected of the messenger boys in his office.

"And in addition to the money you earn," he added, "you'll get a knowledge of business that'll come in handy later on."

ELMER thought that over, tapping gently with his thumb upon the tablecloth.

"Well—Dad," he said finally, "I suppose you're right, but you know, I really don't think I'm the business type, so I don't believe I'll bother with it. I'll stick to my original plan, if you don't mind."

Of course, Elmer's father didn't object in the least. He was glad that Elmer had an original plan.

"Just what is this original plan?" he asked.

Elmer fidgeted. Parents always managed to get so darned definite, somehow.

"Well—something artistic."

His father looked at him first through his glasses, then without his glasses, then through his glasses again, and realizing just what was about to happen, Elmer hastened to avert the crash:

"Now, Dad, please don't get all excited about this. I'm not going to paint, because I realize I don't have the knack. I'm merely going to write a play. Not a cheap play, you know Dad, but something fine like Shakespeare's."

"Oh-h!" very sympathetically from his father.

"And if you and Mother don't mind, I think I'll go up to my room now and dope out the first act."

them, all right, if anyone can." Titles are dreadfully hard, and after working for an hour on one and then not being able to decide which one of three to use, Elmer decided to go on with the first act and christen the thing later. He chewed the end of his pencil, and gazed out of the window. What a heavenly night! After awhile, Arleen came back up the street, glanced again at Elmer's porch swing.

"My, but I'm glad I'm all over that affair," he said with the relief of one from whom a great sorrow has been removed.

Arleen wandered about the yard.

"DON'T see why she can't stay on the porch," grumbled Elmer, and went over and sat on the foot of his bed to think about Act I. But even there the voice of Arleen as she hummed the melody of "Say That You Love Me" reached his ears. Muttering something about why in the world she had to sing when there were so many things she did better, Elmer went into his closet and sat down on a blanket and some extra pillows. There, with nothing to divert him, he thought out an excellent plot. Beautiful scenes, beautiful girls, a few original jokes, and a lot of love. No one could ask for more than that.

"Now, all I've got to do is write it—which at most won't take more than a day, and then get someone to produce it for me."

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all summer long, I bet." With that he marched boldly into the office of the State Street manager and asked for a position. They gave him one immediately—as an usher.

"Not so good," said Elmer, "but still, I need the atmosphere," and before the end of the first evening that atmosphere, which was a poisonous combination of heat and State street people, would certainly have killed him, had he not fallen head over heels in love with Gloria Gates.

WHEN Gloria hurried onto the stage in the third act, glanced about for the man who was supposed to meet her there and didn't. Elmer's heart pounded so loudly he imagined the other ushers must hear it.

"Oh, boy," he groaned, "isn't she magnificent?"

"Yeah, she's got it," said Bruce, who helped Elmer on the center aisle. "Too bad they wouldn't give her a decent part."

"Yes, or a man who could get there on time, or something," sighed Elmer.

Bruce looked at him thoughtfully.

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"Then you could do it fine, Elmer," said Bruce, "because you really are in love with Gloria."

Elmer sighed heavily.

"Yes, I really am."

"Say, if I was you, Elmer, I'd hang around backstage there and see what I could pick up."

SO ELMER did. The first night he picked up a lot of shoes which Gloria fired out of her dressing room, one at a time, hoping to knock some sense into the man who was never there when he was supposed to be, and a lot of brand new words which he thought he might be able to use later in football yells.

When Gloria finally emerged herself, she threw a very haughty stare at Elmer, which impressed him, not as a haughty stare, but as an appraising glance. As such, he loved and cherished it.

"Next time she sees me, she'll remember me," said Elmer, which was exactly right.

The next time Gloria's eyes rested upon him, they registered contempt, and her voice—but Elmer never could remember just how it had sounded, being so overcome with joy because she had spoken to him at all.

"See here, young man," was what she had said, "who are you?"

"Why—I'm a playwright," Elmer stammered.

Gloria laughed, a harsh, coarse laugh, but to Elmer's ears it was music.

"A playwright? What can I do for you?" Elmer told her she might play the leading role in his latest play when he found someone to produce it for him, and added that in the meantime, she might let him kiss her in the third act instead of the man who never arrived on time.

Gloria laughed again, longer and louder. So loudly that the manager came out to see whether she was having another attack of hysterics.

"Look!" she said to the manager, "that wants to take Jerry's part in my act. Can you beat it?"

The manager said he couldn't at the moment, and since Gloria was so thoroughly disgusted with Jerry, she might try Elmer, at least, so he arrived the next morning at 10:30 for rehearsal. Just as certainly as the first look at Elmer convinced Gloria he wouldn't do, his first kiss convinced her that he would. It had been a long time since a man had kissed her as though he really enjoyed it.

The manager, however, was not so favorably impressed. He said Elmer looked a bit young, and while admitting that he was a handsome kid, thought a mustache might help some.

THE first night everything went fine. Elmer was there the minute Gloria walked on the stage, and kissing her was a glorious sensation, footlights, spotlight, mustache and such adverse circumstances considered. Remembering Edgar's tip that the second night, when you were all in practice and before you became bored with it, was the best time, he insisted that his folks come to see him perform.

"I don't believe I could stand such a place on a warm evening," said Elmer's mother, who really wasn't much for the whole theatrical business, and urged his father to invite the man next door to go with him.

"Is your father at home?" he queried of Arleen, who was sitting gloomily on the front porch.

"No, he's gone to a meeting," she said. Elmer's father looked thoughtful.

"How'd you like to go over to the State Street and see Elmer perform?" he asked.



A roar went up from the audience as Elmer fell headlong at Gloria's feet.

"Oh, I'd love it," cried Arleen and went for her hat.

"Poor kiddo," thought the man, "guess we've been a bit hard on her."

THEIR seats were in a box at the right of the stage. Elmer was to enter from the left.

"We'll be able to see him fine up here, won't we?" whispered Arleen.

"Yes, and if he happens to look, he can see us, too."

Which was exactly what Elmer did. He was waiting in the wings so that he wouldn't be another man in Jerry's class, and being a bit nervous, paced the carpet which extended out from the stage.

Suddenly he caught sight of his father. He stared.

"For cryin' out," he gasped, "the folks in a box!"

Arleen was slightly in the shadow, and it was not until Gloria began her impassioned plea of "Lover Come Back to Me," which was Elmer's cue to rush onto the stage, that he discovered that the woman beside his father was not his mother. That it was none other, in fact, than Arleen.

Then his hands grew cold, his cheeks hot.

"I won't look at her," he thought. "I'll keep my eyes on the floor." Then:

"No, that'll look awful. I'll keep them on the ceiling."

A TERRIBLE dizziness seized him, but he steeled himself against it, cast his eyes upward, extended his arms and prepared to march onto the stage. He imagined what happened was that his foot caught in the frayed edge of the carpet, but he was never certain of anything except that he fell headlong at Gloria's feet. A roar went up from the audience, and Gloria, being a good actress, picked him up, deliberately brushed the dust off his suit, and cried:

"Darling, how you do fall for me! Don't you, now?"

Elmer might have made some appropriate reply, but he hadn't been told to, so he didn't. He took her in his arms, and even though he knew his mustache was up under his left eye some place, and that he looked anything but romantic, kissed her.

"Boob!" she mumbled as he made his exit, and something in the expression on her face made him decide that he had better find his father's car as quickly as possible and sit there until the show was over.

"Elmer!" gushed Arleen when they found him there later, "You were perfectly marvelous! Where in the world did you ever learn to act like that?"

Elmer glared at her. He supposed that this was her idea of gentle sarcasm, but somehow, coming from the girl who had once been in love with him, he didn't think much of it.

"Anyone can have a bad break," he said, and she cried anxiously:

"Did you really break something, Elmer? I told your father I bet you had hurt yourself when you fell, but he said that was your stunt, and that you had been trained to do it gracefully."

ELMER looked at his father, who actually did think the fall was part of the act. He marveled that he had believed so long in parental superiority.

"The only thing that disturbed me," his father said, "was the cheapness of the whole outfit. The costumes, the furniture, everything—And dirty! Why, when you came on and fell down, there was a regular cloud of dust!"

So that was the only thing that disturbed him? Elmer breathed a deep sigh of relief and settled back in the comfortable cushions of the car.

"Say, listen, Dad," he said, "I've discovered that the whole theatrical business is cheap. You were right about it, I guess. Now, in business it's different. You're associating with nice, refined people all the time, and not being thrown with a lot of—well, you know, Dad, the type of persons I mean."

Arleen was listening with profound respect. As for Elmer's father, he wasn't certain, but he imagined he knew the type Elmer was referring to.

"What are you going to do about your own play?" he inquired. "Do you intend to have that cheap bunch of actors put it on for you?"

Elmer sighed, passed a warm hand across his warm brow, and said:

"Well—no, I think I really won't, Dad."



"Now, Dad, please don't get all excited about this. I'm not going to paint, because I realize I haven't the knack. I'm merely going to write a play."



Just as certainly as the first look at Elmer convinced Gloria he wouldn't do, his first kiss convinced her that he would.

He came down to breakfast quite late, the privilege of a playwright, and announced to his mother that he believed he'd "do" the theaters and see if he could find someone who would be willing to put on his play.

"Is it all written?" demanded his mother.

"Well—no," said Elmer, "that is, not entirely—but I've got it completely worked out in my mind, which is the hardest part, after all."

ON HIS way downtown, he decided that the best thing to do was to get himself a job as an actor. That would give him a stage background, and bring him into contact with producers and people. Only one difficulty presented itself. It was summer. And while to Elmer it seemed perfectly silly to think that people didn't care to attend the theater in warm weather, that was the way the managers had doped it out.

He dropped around to the garage where his friend Edgar sold gasoline during the summer months, and it was Edgar who told him about the State Street Theater.

"Course it's nothing swell, you understand," said Edgar, "just a stock company that puts on a different show every week, but the neighborhood folks are crazy about it. I take Margie up every Tuesday evening regular. See, we figure that gives them a chance to correct the mistakes they made on Monday, and still they're not as tired of the show as they are at the end of the week."

"Well—" said Elmer, "all I can say is they'll never get tired of this show of mine. They'll be wanting to play it week after week."

"Say, Elmer, you know she's not one bit wild about this guy she kisses every night in the third act. I should think a smart fellow like you that writes plays might be able to grab up a little part like that."

Elmer weighed the matter carefully.

"Yes, I think I might be able to," he whispered.

"All you've gotta do," continued Bruce, "is walk through that door at the end of the stage, throw your arms around Gloria and give her a good kiss. I should think any guy that could write a play could do that."

"Well—not just any guy who could write a play," advised Elmer, "but some guy who was in love with Gloria, as well, could certainly do it. Even on the stage, in order to give a girl a good kiss, you've got to be in love with her, see?"

"Yeah?" a bit dubiously from Bruce.

"Yes," said Elmer positively.

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