



LOVE FOR TWO

RUTH DEWEY GROVES

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



CHAPTER XLVII
"HERE's a letter from your caretaker," Bertie Lou told Bertie Lou when the latter came into her room. "It was downstairs. I guess you'd better open it."

A moment later Bertie Lou announced that Mr. Brown was quitting. "Well, I think it's a good thing," Bertie Lou declared.

"Yes, it is," Bertie Lou admitted. "It makes it easier for me. I won't have to tell him to go."

Bertie Lou brightened. "So you were getting on to yourself, were you?" she said.

Bertie Lou smiled. "I haven't been kidding myself, Bertie," she answered. "But before Mr. Brown leaves Moonfields you've got to help me prepare a surprise for him."

"I'd like to know who's going to help prepare a surprise for me," Bertie Lou demurred. "Because someone will have to use influence or I'll never have the surprise of getting past Saint Peter at the gate. I'm as full of lies as a porcupine is of quills."

"Just a few more little ones," Bertie Lou pleaded, "a good cause."

"What cause?"

"Mine . . . and Mr. Brown's."

"H'm. Say, don't you ever give Mr. Palmer a chance to bat? That guy could hit a home run with me any day."

Bertie Lou had no time to talk about Marco. "I want you to send Mr. Brown a telegram," she said excitedly. "No, wait a minute, we can telephone to one of the neighbors. Do you know the name of the people next door?"

"Sure, it's Neighbor," Bertie Lou grinned. "No foolin'."

Bertie Lou jumped up and hurried out of the room. "I'll get the telephone book," she called back. "And we'll see if they have a 'phone'."

Soon she was back with the directory and they looked for the name Neighbor under the listings for Moonfields. It was not there. Then they went down to the telephone—it was in the lower hall—and asked for the information operator. She gave them the number.

Bertie Lou transmitted Bertie Lou's message to Rod, though she pretended to be distressed over doing it.

"Never mind," Bertie Lou consoled her. "This will be the last time, Bertie. And you've been a darling. I won't forget it."

"Not even when you're Mrs. Marco Palmer?" Bertie Lou teased. "You and Marco seem to have that all settled," Bertie Lou smiled.

"Persistence wins, they tell us at the store," Bertie Lou retorted. Bertie Lou looked at her like one who has suddenly come face to face with an undeniable fact of terrifying import. Would Marco finally break down her resistance? She had thought he never would bother with her again after the sudden leave she had taken of his party on Long Island. But, though he complained of it, it had made no difference in his determination to marry her.

However, why worry about that now, she asked herself. Before anything of the kind could happen she would have her hour with Rod. She wouldn't think of anything else!

"You won't fall down on this?" she asked Bertie Lou doubtfully.

Bertie Lou bridled. "I'm a perfect liar," she boasted.

"Yes, you've gone beautifully," Bertie Lou assured her. "But you aren't in sympathy with Mr. Brown. You might make him suspicious if you aren't careful."

"Don't worry, I'll tell him just what you said."

And she did.

The next day Rod came, in answer to the telephone summons. He understood that the owner of the cottage had read his letter and wanted to see him in regard to his resignation from his job.

But the owner was away, and though he looked searchingly at Bertie Lou as she told him this, he found nothing in her expression to arouse his suspicions about the business.

"That's odd," he said. "I always seem to just miss him. He's kind of an elusive bird, this Mr. Baker."

Bertie Lou, too, had assumed a name. For his benefit. She feared he would hear her own from her neighbors. She did not know them, but she surmised that they would inquire about the ownership of her cottage. Fortunately, the houses next to hers had been started later. She prevailed upon the development company to keep her name a secret and call her Mr. Baker. She took a chance on Rod hearing it from those who had learned it before she had any reason for concealing it.

Another circumstance in her favor was Rod's desire for solitude. He did not care to mingle with the fast growing population of Moonfields, so he missed hearing people say that, "It's Baker who owns that place with the lovely flower beds; I thought it was Dryer, or something like that."

"He's a busy person," Bertie Lou apologized, "and he's awfully sorry to inconvenience you. He left your railroad fare both ways."

Rod took it. He couldn't afford to be called out on a wild goose chase—not with just a few dollars left of the money he had borrowed from Tom Fraser.

"And he'll see you sure before you leave," she promised earnestly.

"But I'd like to go tomorrow," Rod replied. "I've found a position that requires overtime so I can't stay with Mr. Baker. And of course if I'm not there evenings there's no use my being there at all."

"The owner will fix everything up all right," Bertie Lou proclaimed. "Go ahead and make your plans."

"But I don't like to leave the place unprotected," Rod insisted. "Are you sure Mr. Baker understands that I want to leave immediately?"

"Sure I'm sure. But we'd like to know that we can get in touch with you tonight. You will go right back to Moonfields, won't you?"

"Yes, I'll be on the job until tomorrow evening," Rod told her. "Maybe," Bertie Lou said to herself. Then, to Rod: "Mr. Baker may call up and I'll tell him you went out again, on the first train."

"Mr. Baker" did call up, from the neighborly Neighbor's house, and what she heard sent her flying back to her own cottage to plunge into the preparations that had engaged her before she put in the call to Bertie Lou.

She stopped in the kitchen door and sniffed. Spice cake! Rod's cake! If he came before it was out of the oven he ought to be reminded of happier days. But he couldn't, of course. He had just left Bertie Lou. She smiled over Bertie Lou's grumbling for having to spend her Saturday afternoon waiting for Rod, while Bertie Lou went out to Moonfields.

But Bertie Lou had done some waiting herself. It had been necessary to spend a long hour in the stores that fronted the station, taking her time over her purchases, before she saw Rod come swinging down the street in a hurry to catch his train for New York.

After that she moved in a whirlwind of activity—except for the moment when she had stood

in a clothes closet and pressed her face to the old suit that hung there. One suit! And Rod liked good clothes. Oh how she hated Lila!

She opened the oven door to look at her cake. It was flat as a pancake! There was only one explanation. In her excitement she had forgotten to put in the baking powder. Well, it had filled the house with a delicious odor anyhow. Maybe, if she hurried faster she could bake another one. But first she must finish in the living room.

It was too warm for the fire that Rod had pictured himself dining before, but they would have the refectory table. And on it she laid a great sheet of roses. Other flowers, from Rod's gardens, filled the fireplace and every other possible space. It was too bad she couldn't have a merry blaze crackling away, but the smoke would have warned Rod that some queer things were happening. She did not want him to know anything about it un-

til he opened the door. Which door did he generally use? She wondered. It was likely that he did not confine himself to the rear entrance . . . he was not a regular caretaker.

He had been told to use the entire house. And Bertie Lou could see that he had done so, although everything was neat and clean as a pin. A few old books, from a second-hand store, she supposed, were strewn about the living room. And Rod's pipe was there, on a brass smoking tray. The sight of that tray had given Bertie Lou a happy moment, until she remembered that it was of little intrinsic value. She had given it to him before they were married.

Rod had, apparently, sold or pawned most of his belongings. He might have left them some place, of course, but Bertie Lou doubted it. At least he had brought nothing of any particular value here with him.

Going through the house had been a keen delight. She had not

been in it since Rod's occupancy, though she had been at Moonfields several times and had seen him, from hidden vantage points. It thrilled her now more than ever, because it had actually sheltered the man whose dream had inspired her to buy it. It seemed to have brought them closer together—to make their parting sweeter, though infinitely sadder.

Bertie Lou shook a tear out of her eyes. She would not spoil it, she told herself impatiently, by crying. That could come later, when there was nothing else to do. Just now she must think only of doing everything she would do if nothing had happened to her happiness. She must be the busy, contented young wife, preparing a special dinner for her lover husband. To celebrate a wedding anniversary, perhaps.

And why not? They'd never had one. And in just a few more weeks it would be their second wedding day. Bertie Lou wished she had time to make

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a bride's cake. No that would be too suggestive. It was a secret celebration, the anniversary part, anyhow. Rod wasn't to know anything about it. To him she would make it appear—well, just a dinner.

She went on with her work, her pleasant tasks, growing more and more excited and trying harder and harder to be calm, until she heard a key in the front door lock.

She felt her heart flutter and turn over.

(To Be Continued)

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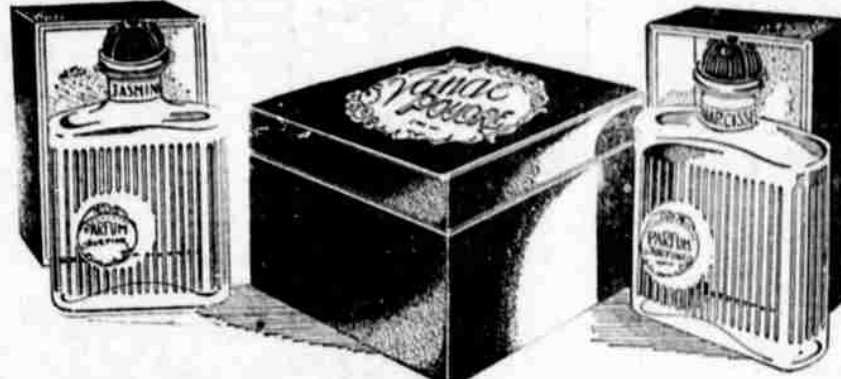
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