

Love Me, Love My Wife

By GEORGE B. RUSS

Chad whistled while he worked and the other employees exchanged glances with one another behind his back.

The telephone call from Mrs. Effie Frazier had changed Chad's complete outlook on his work day. Between taking the October inventory and bringing up Christmas merchandise, Chad had been in a tailspin until he had talked with Effie. The excitement of hearing from an old friend was the basis for his exuberance. All the things they had meant to each other in the past had not yet dawned upon him. Making appointments had become a way of life with him; so, telling Effie that he would see her on Saturday was just another appointment he had made. Every day someone here in the store wanted him on hand after the 5:30 closing hour. Being stockroom man here at Woodard and Beamon Clothiers for Men kept his overtime pay at a peak. Puncturing in again at 7:00 and working several hours was money in the bank toward making his life's dream a reality. Working here at the store wasn't the worst kind of job for him or anyone for that matter but he wanted something a little better, something of his own. His dreams of self-employment and granny Lizzie's candy making recipe was kept under lock and key in his brain and inside a small leather box in the bottom of the dresser draw where his shirts were neatly packed.

Yes, siree, Effie Freeland was an old flame -- Effie Frazier was the name of a woman whom he had promised to meet at her home on Samhain Boulevard. Chad wondered where Samhain Boulevard was located here in Hayestown as he made ready to leave the Store. Gladys had gone to Friendly City to visit her aunt Charity and wouldn't be home until tomorrow. She would take care of aunt Charity's needs: write letters, collect the monthly rents from the farm out on Glenhaven and the three room shot-gun houses up and down Maplewood Avenue. Gladys never mentioned the fact that was overly nice to her old aunt because someday she would inherit a goodly portion of her aged, ailing aunt Charity's worldly goods. And he never made any objections to Gladys' trips to Friendly City; he loved and trusted his sweet, little wife. However, his own mother had intimated that he was a fool to allow his young, pretty wife to spend overnight time out of town. Until he had just cause to mistrust her, these overnight stays would continue. If Gladys had her fingers in his eyes, he would string along like a "lappy dog" until he made the discovery of her unfaithfulness.

Janet had left a note saying she had taken Ronald with her to a movie: Deanna Durbin in Mad About Music -- with Herbert Marshall. His children

were his pride and joy. Janet was twenty two and a junior at State College -- a Sociology major; Ronald was 17 and a senior at Hayestown High.

Spending a great deal of time alone was nothing new to Chad, therefore, he was not disappointed that his family had left the nest. He would get out the blueprint of his dream and let the rest of the world go by. Strangely enough, he did not sit for hours working with his dream plans. Instead, he went down stairs and searched among a pile of scrap books until he found the one with a photograph pasted to its faded, crumbling, pink page. The picture was taken on a summer's evening in front of Hayestown First Baptist Church. Effie was wearing a blue dress with white polka dots the size of a guinea hen's egg, she was laughing and her brown eyes were closed against the sunlight. Effie was beautiful -- not pretty. Hers was soul-beauty, however, she had lovely, shapely legs, and tiny feet. Effie was a native of Salisbury, a middle sized, western town below Asheville. There was something about the girls in this locale that attracted him more than girls in other sections of North Carolina. Perhaps it was their independence, their self assurance. Whatever the quality, he was more at ease with them. Gladys was a native of western Carolina. However, hers and Effie's paths had never crossed. Gladys belonged to the social club set. Work was Effie's religion. She loved making money. How he became acquainted had always struck him as being uniquely corny. He was out of a job and had given up knocking on any more doors for this particular day. As he walked down the street patting his pockets for a crushed cigarette pack, an attractive young woman crossed the street carrying a basket of snowy linens. Readily he saw that she had an overload and ran to her rescue; "you're trying to carry too much." He said reaching for the wicker laundry basket.

"A lazy man's load. I didn't want to make two trips. Thanks a lot. Maybe, I can do something for you sometime in the future."

"Maybe so. Right now, I need a job. Do you know anyone who needs --"

"Jobs for men are hard to come by. In case I hear about something how can I get in touch with you?"

"I live with the Hogans on Jones Street."

"You're joking!"

"Do you live near the Hogans?"

"Across the street."

"I've never seen you there."

"I spend a lot of time with my sister-in-law. My brother is serving time. I stop by every evening when I come from work 'n spend right much time with her. I have seen you going back 'n forth. I thought you were stuck up."

"Me!"

"No joke. You're always by yourself."

"But I am a stranger here. I don't know the folk around here."

"Where you're from?"

"Capitol City -- I finished high school in '30. Came over here to make some dough to get back in school."

"You're smart."

"I'm not sure about that."

Then suddenly he asked, "Do you smoke?"

"No. But I'll give you a nickel. You can get some loose cigarettes at Green's Grocery Store across from Hayestown Drug Store." Effie pushed her hand into her apron pocket and came up with a coin.

Chad found the grocery store about five blocks from where he had obtained the nickel from Effie. And when Effie came home later in the evening. He was seated on her doorsteps waiting for the very nice lady.

Effie admitted that she was glad to see him, "but I had no dreams I'd ever see you again."

Effie's blunt frankness often shocked Chad but he eventually learned to appreciate this characteristic. And as the weeks passed he became more and more dependent upon Effie, and as time passed they became more romantically enamored. Finally, out of necessity, he took up residence with Effie. He did what he could to share the expenses but times were hard and paying jobs were luxuries that only few men could boast of.

Effie was a sweet, lovable girl friend and generous with her cash. His very need was supplied and he was grateful to his benefactress.

During the summer of 1933, he found a job as vegetable cook assistant. Preparing vegetables for a cafeteria like P and H. was no small chore. Bushels of turnip greens, Kale, Collards; potatoes, rutabagas, bushels of fresh string beans, egg plants, crates of cabbage for cole-slaw. The hours were long and the pay exigious. Chad worked hard and within a single year, his wages were increased from \$8.00 to twelve. At least, he was in the money. He moved out from Effie and took up residence with an aged couple; Mr. and Mrs. Frank Brewington. His moving out from Effie was not the result of any moral scruples. Her brother was coming home and Effie hadn't wanted her brother to discover that his sister and boy friend were sharing the single bedroom apartment with his wife.

Bishop Freeland was a "Chicken House thief" but he abhorred unmarrieds shacking up. So, he put his sister out

for sinful carrying on in the room with "Missey gale," his pet name for his wife, Beulah.

Chad avoided the family embroilment the way one avoids the plague. However his admiration for Effie became more entrenched.

Chad was leaving church one Sunday afternoon when his former landlady called to him, "Mr. Hodges, I'd like to speak with you if you have the time." The honied voice of the fat lady announced him but he turned around and met the good sister half way.

"I guess you'll be getting married soon."

"Mam!"

"You don't fool me with your sneaky innocence."

"I plan to go back to school in the Fall, Mrs. Hogan."

"Well! You're going to run out on Miss Effie now that she has gone to the trouble to get a divorce."

"Divorce!"

"She hasn't told you about her husband? I always thought she was the sly one. Of all the under handed schemes. I have told Mr. Hogan more times than a dozen that Effie Freeland is no good for you. But she has you by your nose. It's no business of mine but why do you hang around that woman. God is my secret judge, I can't see why some of the nice church girls don't attract you. I was telling Mr. Hogan no longer than this morning that you and Gladys Briscoe would make an ideal couple."

Chad wanted this sharp tongued, old biddy to be on her way. "Gladys Briscoe," Chad stammered.

"Take my advice and find yourself a girl friend."

Chad Hodges resented Corn Hogan and her advice. He had no intention of courting any giggling church girls. However, the name, Gladys Briscoe did appeal to him. There was a classy sound to it.

Effie left for the beach in August with the Bradleys, the white people whom she worked for. Her admonishment for him to behave himself was unnecessary. He wanted only Effie's love and kisses. So he spent his after work hours writing letters to friends and relations -- at Hayestown Movie Theater -- and, the Wednesday night prayer meetings. Gladys Briscoe was among those in attendance and on several occasions he walked with her home.

When Effie returned, the words was out that he was engaged to marry Gladys Briscoe.

Too many of us waste too much time on petty matters.



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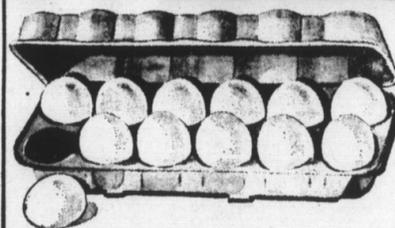


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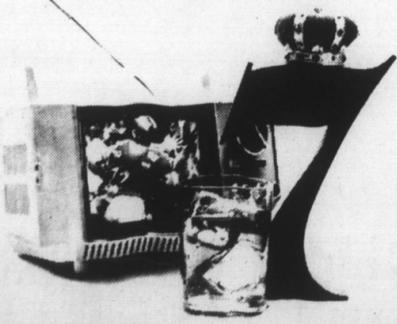
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