

Make-Believe Bride

BY RUTH HARLEY

FINAL INSTALLMENT

"Well, that's free, and now I reckon I'd better get out to the fields or we'll never get any work done with all this excitement, for even if it's Sunday the beasts must be fed."

But as the man left the table, Maris turned to the farmer's wife. "I wonder if you'd let me call up Patsy now?" she asked.

"Of course you may. The phone's right there," and she pointed to the hall.

But as Maris rose from the table a sudden blackness seemed to envelope her. With a cry, the farmer's wife rose and rushed to her side just in time to see her from striking her head against the table.

"The poor little girl! Quick, Tille, bring some cold water, and then turn down the bed in the spare room. I guess all this terrible excitement's been too much for her."

When Maris opened her eyes again she found herself in a cool, dormer-windowed room with snowy white curtains at the windows and a big bowl of flowers on the window ledge. She looked slowly around her. Where was she, she wondered. It was pretty room, but how had she ever got there?

Then the generous-bosomed woman in the quaint flowered-sprigged cotton gown who was sitting by her side said, "Feeling some better now, my dear?"

"Oh, yes," she whispered. "I'm afraid I've been an awful nuisance to you. I must get home."

"No, no, not yet. You couldn't rise just yet, but if you can tell me where your friends are, I'll call them up."

"Oh, but that would scare Patsy. I'd better talk to her myself." She tried to rise, but slumped back on the pillows again.

"There, my dear, you mustn't try just yet. Won't you let me talk to your folks? I'll be mighty careful what I say—tell them just what you want me to."

"All right. I guess you'd better," Maris said, and told her Patsy's number. Then she fell asleep again.

It was late afternoon when she woke, and through the open window drifted in the lazy hum of a jaggard bee, and the fragrance of fall flowers. She closed her eyes again as once more she thought of the fate she had escaped. What a fool she had been! She'd lost Rod, for of course he wouldn't be interested in her any more.

She'd lost Stan. That was different. She was only too glad that she had found out in time what a contemptible cad he was. Maybe, after all, Rowena had found out his real character. She might well be congratulating herself on her escape.

Patsy had been right. Men like Stan didn't have much sense of honor where girls like her were concerned. She clenched her fists, as she thought of her escape.

Then she thought of what her crazy infatuation had cost. Her job would be gone, for of course she could never go to Fayson's again. She'd spent nearly every penny in her savings account so she could be all dressed up. Now the very thought of the clothes she had bought was hateful to her.

Once more she drifted off to sleep. Then just as dusk was falling she woke again and suddenly she sat up in bed.

The door of her bedroom was softly opened, and Patsy tiptoed lightly to the bedside. "Maris, honey," she whispered as she bent over her.

"Oh, Pat, you darling, will you ever forgive me? I've been an awful fool, and now when I'm stranded you are the only one I could call on." Her eyes filled with tears.

"There, Maris, there's nothing to forgive. I'm just so glad you were lucky enough to strike folks like the Dawsons. They're the kindest people. They're insisting that Jimmy and I will stay overnight too, so we won't strike all the Sunday night traffic."

"And you'll take me home with you, Patsy, even if I'm broke and?"

"Of course we will, and we're not going to say another thing about it. I knew you never really loved Stan Fayson. You were just carried away by the glamour that surrounded him. But when you know all that we know about him, you'll thank your lucky stars that you never went through any marriage ceremony with him."

Maris was silent. She could not yet understand why she had fallen for Stan's love-making, why she never realized till their last ride what the expression of scorn on those lips of his signified, nor what it might mean to her to marry a man who couldn't get along without his whiskey.

She shut her eyes tightly, as she turned to Patsy. "Oh, Patsy, if only I could ever forget all this; if only

could stay here and look after things."

"That would be lovely, but it doesn't seem fair that I should be lying on you."

"Lying off me? Nonsense. There are a lot of things I want done and if you'd do them for me, that will more than pay back anything it will cost for your keep. And then who knows, something may turn up for you by that time. Anyway, you don't need to worry, for Jimmy will be perfectly happy to have you here."

And so, on Saturday evening Patsy and Jimmy were quietly married, and started for their wedding trip in Jimmy's car. The house seemed strangely desolate to Maris, as she fixed up the things Patsy had asked her to—making curtains and things for Patsy's home.

She hadn't tried to get a job. The best she could do was help Patsy out after all she had done for her. Once she'd thought of calling up Milly, but then, Milly was not a girl she really cared to have for an intimate friend, and now that she had cut herself off from Fayson's she decided it would be better to let things stay as they were.

As she sat alone in the evenings her thoughts turned often to Rod. Had he a steady nowdays, she wondered. Was she that stunning looking girl she had seen him meet? Her eyes filled with tears. She realized that she had deliberately cut herself off from happiness.

Patsy had never mentioned Rod since Maris had come back. Somehow she'd been expecting her to say something about him, maybe to suggest that she should call him up or ask him to come to see her. Her tears fell fast. Maybe Patsy realized she had had about enough to stand; that the knowledge—if it really were so—that he had transferred his affections elsewhere would hurt her so much. Pat probably thought that it would be kinder never to mention his name.

And yet as she laid her sewing down and wiped her tear-filled eyes, she felt a desperate longing to know about Rod, even if he were going to marry some other girl. At least her heart would be at rest, and she would try to build up her broken life, to fill it with other interests. She knew now that she would never really love anyone as she had loved Rod, and felt there could be no one else.

The bell rang. It was only the mail man with a card from Jimmy to Patsy. "We are having a lovely time," they wrote. "Wish you were with us." She laughed as she read the message written in Jimmy's careless handwriting. That would be a nice idea to be their chaperon on their honeymoon.

But somehow when she found she could laugh, her fit of the blues seemed suddenly to dissolve. Even if she might never again know the sweetness of Rod's love, she must try to keep from getting sour.

Then she thought of the Dawsons in their comfortable home in the Connecticut valley. She'd promised Tille she'd send her some candy.

So, slipping on an apron, she went into the kitchen and started to make her preparations.

Setting her scales on the table, measuring out the sugar, and taking down her box of flavorings, Maris started her candy making. It was a nice cool afternoon and her caramels turned out beautifully. She was just debating whether to make another batch when suddenly the door bell rang.

Pulling off her apron and smoothing her hair, she hurried to the door. But when she opened it, her heart almost turned over. Rod O'Rourke was standing on the threshold!

"Well, Maris, aren't you going to ask me in?" he questioned as he held out his hand.

"Of course," she whispered, while her cheeks grew rosy, and a sudden sparkle leaped into her eyes. "But Jimmy and Patsy are still away."

"That's fine. I guess they're hav-



America's Healthiest

CHICAGO . . . Here are the healthiest farm boys and girls in the U. S. and declared the winners in the National 4-H Club finals, held here. Left to right, front, Charles Abbott, Jr., Blairs, Va., and Margaret Topovski of Wooster, O. Second row, Jerry Cowan, Rogersville, Mo., and Mary Sellers of Letchatchee, Ala. Rear row, Roy Graves, Porter, Okla., and Martha Ekberg of Wisconsin Dells, Wis.

Don't you think you could love me just a little? I've missed you so, my dear."

Her arms tightened about his neck and she nestled against his heart, she murmured. "No, Rod, I can't love you just a little for all this time I've been loving you with my whole heart—just you."

"Darling," he whispered, "you really mean that?" and again she raised her face to his. But when he saw her glowing eyes he knew she spoke the truth and as their lips met, Maris knew that this indeed the man for her.

And she knew that her most thrilling day was still to come, when she went to the altar as Rod's bride—a real bride this time, with a real man, who would love and cherish her, for her bridegroom.

(THE END)

SAYS AMERICA NOW IN NEW ERA OF LAND USE

Addressing the annual session of the North Carolina State Grange at Raleigh recently, H. H. Bennett, chief of the soil conservation service, Washington, D. C., told members that in the last few years the country has made a far greater advance toward the conservation of soil resources than in all preceding years since the United States became a nation.

"The national program of soil and water conservation now in progress has carried us into a new era of land use," he said. "Land defense is replacing the old system of land waste and exploitation."

In North Carolina alone farmers representing more than 400,000 acres are co-operating with the soil con-

servation service and the State College extension service to conserve the soil, Bennett declared. Accomplishments in North Carolina are typical, he said, "not only of work here but also in Virginia and South Carolina and on the Pacific and Canadian border."

Describing his observation on a 3,900-mile inspection tour of seven southern states, Bennett stated that "the condition of our agricultural land in southeastern farming states is grim evidence that people of this youthful nation have squandered their rich heritage of productive land more rapidly than any other nation, civilized or barbaric, of which we have any record."

Bennett pointed out, however, that a tremendous area of good soil throughout the region is still fertile and productive. Any areas that have been damaged only moderately can be safeguarded from further decline through the use of proven measures for conserving rainfall and controlling erosion, he said.

Continuation of the present policy of working agreeably and co-operatively with farmers and state and federal agencies will "forthwith" bring a solution to the national problem of unnecessary and costly land destruction and decline, Bennett concluded.

STRANGE CREATURES

Second of a series of beautiful pictures, in full colors, depicting strange creatures of the sea. One of many features in the December 27 issue of the American Weekly, the big magazine which comes regularly with the BALTIMORE SUNDAY AMERICAN. Get your copy from your local news dealer.



The holiday season affords an opportunity to express again the pleasure we derive from our business relations with you, and on behalf of our entire organization we wish for you and yours a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

FARMERS HARDWARE & SUPPLY COMPANY

This Season brings renewed appreciation of old and new friends. We hope that your Christmas will be merry and the New Year prosperous.

Northwest Carolina Utilities Inc.