

# FIRST LOVIES

by FELIX RIESENBERG

**ELEVENTH INSTALLMENT**

"Dammit, Breen, it's all hell to get these rodmen to use their heads." The experienced engineer was speaking with authority. "We engineers got to hold 'em down," he added with conviction. John was leaving. "See you later," Malling called, and John left the exciting scene. "We engineers!" He felt a foot taller, and Monday morning seemed a year away. John was very young.

He went to his new room, unpacked the photograph of Josephine, and looked at her image long and thoughtfully. He called up Van Horn and had also talked with Josephine for a moment over the telephone. She seemed glad to hear from him. Her laugh was familiar. John remembered nothing but the laugh. Her very reticence conveyed things that seemed bound to bring them close together again. The warmth of young summer was in the air; lovers were walking in the park across the way.

Van Horn remained in the city. He just refused to leave, and Josephine, in the dark cool house in the middle Fifties, agreed with those millions who have said, "New York is a splendid summer resort."

As many people were always in or about town, and as Josephine had several insistent problems confronting her, the city, in the summer, took on the proportions of an adventure. Josephine was frankly in the business of living successfully. She had no intention of being anything but a success, and not merely a social success, but to achieve freedom, and expression, and, well, lots of other things besides. In fact she was not above the plane of experiment. The artless dropping of a fold of her crepe, kimono, the closeness of her firm breasts, for an instant pink reflected light of a table lamp, beneath John's eyes, as she had bent over him, placing a tray of toast and tea upon his bed, on the morning of his convalescent luxury, happened as she planned. She recalled his quickly mounting color, her bustling of the pillow under his head, bending close above him, breathing the freshness of her morning bath. It was all so intimate, and innocent.

And John had never asked anything. It puzzled her. Boys proposed to her, almost as a matter of course. Gerrit Rantoul had proposed, and was waiting her reply.

Josephine still felt Rantoul standing over her, tall and firm and charming, his white hair a mark of distinction rather than of age. He once told her, half laughing, "I guess I was born that way."

Rantoul was wealthy, belonged to good clubs, had offices in the financial district, and had leisure and just enough contact with great affairs to make him an entrancing companion. He was constantly meeting important men. A word or two, a mere hint, gave Josephine the feeling of mingling in a consequential world. It was so different from Gilbert Van Horn's world, a place utterly divorced from business and occupied with stupid sports, or gossip, or mooning.

Women were attracted by Rantoul, women always had been attracted to him. Charming women, Josephine knew, would take him in an instant, and he loved her. She was certain of that, loved her intensely, with passion held in masterly reserve. He was a compelling figure. She often thought of him as a Richard Harding Davis hero, an engineer of great renown, decorated by foreign potentates. Josephine laughingly told this to Rantoul. When they dined that night at the West-Hambleton's, Rantoul wore a yellow and red sash across his breast with a brilliant ten-pointed star. A sparkling order hung about his neck by a purple ribbon. On the breast of his evening coat, over his heart, was a row of overlapping medals. It was the night he proposed.

John had never proposed to her, probably never would, or perhaps had

never had the chance.

Van Horn was dining at the club, it was Friday night, a beastly night by the way, with so many people always eating fish, and Aunt Wen was in the midst of a book.

John had called up only an hour before. It was six o'clock. Perhaps he was still at his new quarters. She would call, and would leave word for Rantoul, at his rooms, that she could not see him. After all, Josephine could see Rantoul often, but that night she wanted to see John Breen.

They met, an hour later, at the Savoy, and walked east, through Fifty-ninth Street to the Third Avenue L. It was a familiar station to John, in a reminiscent way, as indeed the entire city was reminiscent and crowded with surprises. The same old platforms and rails, but an electrified train carried them down through the close revelation of the East Side. Jacob Riis had written about slums, disturbingly, and Theodore Roosevelt had endorsed his words; this gave the steaming tenements a sentimental and a literary value.

"John, I'm glad to see you, alone." Josephine was starting things early. "There's a lovely place, the Cafe Boulevard, so Bohemian, John, and with you, I'm not afraid." A few weeks before Rantoul had protected her there.

John Breen might have no medals, she mused, moving closer to him, but he did have an uncanny fascination on that shimmering night.

John secured a table on the balcony, ten feet or so above the crowded street, where they could dine, under the awnings, in the open air, and still in sight of the entrancing things within.

Josephine sank into her seat with a sigh, they were very fortunate indeed in getting that delightful table.

On their ride downtown, they had talked the common-places of their separation. But once at table, and alone, as if by magic, John and Josephine were again on the fatal plane of delicious intimacy.

Josephine smiled. John noted the merest suggestion of a dimple. A mood of perfect understanding seemed to permeate the air. The dinner was superb. She had asked for a cocktail and John joined her, and a bottle of St. Julien added flavor to the dishes. Cafe Boulevard, always famous for its coffee, outdid itself on that Arabian night. They ate their ices and lingered, while John smoked a cigar grandly, blowing fragrant clouds through the hedge as they leaned across the table tete-a-tete. Blue wreaths drifted slowly back across her hair.

"Do you mind the smoke, Jo?" He used the diminutive easily.

"No, John, I love it." Her face was close to his, her hair gave back the faintest perfume. She was even lovelier than he had imagined her in his fondest dreams; she was an angel.

As John talked Josephine was glad, so glad, to be with him. He was finer, more manly, more handsome than ever. John talked as he had never talked before. His life at the University, in the atmosphere of recognized ideas, had broadened him. He unburdened great ambitions ripe for expression in that understanding night. His surer outlook and his burning belief in the great dignity of the career ahead, glorified him. He would be a builder, "like Rantoul. Yes, like Rantoul," a builder in the greatest city of the world!

Something from within smote Josephine; it came, a cold breath of doubt. She was losing ground, slipping in a mental panic as she compared her lovers. She missed the tight, high-colored skin of the older man, youthfully flushed at times, perhaps by wine. The crisp white hair of Rantoul was less silky, and less thick, than the youthful crop of Breen, and she missed that careful guarded manner, the habit of an older man, but which she then set down to cunning. John swept her along on a flood of emotion. His hunger demanded her; it was a terrible emotion. She dared not try to fascinate or charm. Love stabbed her with delirious pain. Doubt dropped away and, in her instant of surrender, her hold on John was of transcendent power.

Rantoul vanished from her mind,

and John Breen, so close across the table, clasping her hand, her pulse, her soul, was the finer man, wealthier by twenty years, rich full years she was to share with him, love with him. His grip tightened; he whispered, "Darling, will you marry me?" The question had been in his eyes. She heard the words, the fervent words carrying her beyond all thought of time or calculation.

"Will you wait for me?" his eager tones were tender. "Will you—sweet-heart?"

Their eyes met, swimmingly. She whispered, "Yes." Rantoul was forgotten; her plans and structures tumbled and re-formed.

They drove home in a taxi gliding quickly through dark enveloping streets. John helped her to the door, and Van Horn, who had entered a minute earlier, called to him.

"Come in, John, glad to see you. Josephine!" he called, but his ward had already disappeared in the upper hall. "What's up, John? Nothing wrong, I hope. He looked at the young man quizzically.

Josephine has promised to marry me." The words sounded unreal, almost as if he were uttering something sacrilegious.

"Marry you?" Gilbert Van Horn steadied himself at a newel post. "The devil you say. Come here, John." He gripped him by the hand. His eyes glistened, he turned away.

"Here, Jules," to the butler hovering in the hall; "some Cluquot, Jules! We'll have to drink to this. By gad! By gad! Kelly will like this, he will. I was afraid Rantoul had the inner track—too old, John—too old," he added, smiling and shaking his head. Gilbert Van Horn looked old, tired, as he led the way to the library. It had been a long pull. "You'll need a ring. Ring her, boy, ring her," he advised. Jules filled the glasses. "Here's good luck; Josephine and you." They stood and drank the wine in solemn silence.

"Thank you, Gil," John said simply.

"How are you fixed? Money, I mean," the older man spoke with the ease of long friendship.

"I've enough," John answered; "I'll make more."

The talk of money seemed hateful to John. He was feeling let down from his period of exaltation; he wanted to get away, wanted to think.

"Good night, John, I won't come down." Van Horn held out his hand. He too wanted to be alone, to think. "Don't worry about money," he called. Josephine will have enough. It's a partnership, you know."

He waved his hand as John left, to walk uptown under the stars, up through the southern part of the park where he and Becca had tarried, and on, up to the flat opposite the shaft site. The more John walked the less certain he was of what might happen next.

CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



SEPTEMBER 1932  
 SUN MON TUE WED THU FRI SAT  
 1 2 3  
 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
 11 12 13 14 15 16 17  
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**I RESOLVE**

To keep my health;  
 To do my work;  
 To live;  
 To see to it I grow and gain and give;  
 Never to look behind me for an hour;  
 To wait in weakness, and to walk in power;  
 But always fronting onward to the light;  
 Always and always facing toward the right;  
 Robbed, starved, defeated, fallen, wide astray—  
 On, with what strength I have;  
 Back to the way.

—Charlotte Perkins Stetson.

**VENTILATION**

You take a whiff of air  
 And find it stale  
 And thoughts of suffocation  
 Make you quail;  
 You think of deadly germs  
 That lurk about  
 In air that's dead and stagnant;  
 Yes, no doubt  
 You'll die right where you are—  
 E'en now you're sick—  
 Unless you raise a window  
 Pretty quick.

You feel a breath of air  
 Against your back  
 And right away your thinking  
 Takes a tack;  
 Your memory recalls  
 Friend now gone  
 Whom dreadful pneumococci  
 Feasted on  
 While sitting in a draft  
 And then you frown  
 And rushing to the window,  
 Slam it down.

**POSTMAN AIDS DIVORCE SUIT**

Chicago.—Mailmen who see Carl Shropshire coming down the street had better leap in their mail pouches and hide until he goes by.

In fact, the mailman who tried to be so helpful to Mr. Shropshire a couple of months ago had better see if he can not get a leave of absence and go for a long trip.

This mailman, plodding down Sixty-Second Street, looked at a letter addressed to "Carl C. Shropshire, 1360 East Sixty-Second Street."

"Tsk, tsk," said the mailman to himself, "this is a great error. Mr. Shropshire lives at 6251 Blackstone Avenue. I'll take it there."

The mailman, however, did not know that Mr. Shropshire's sister lived at the address indicated or that the letter was from one "Dorothy" in Cleveland. Nor, said Shropshire's wife, Helen, did he know that Mr. Shropshire always got mail from

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Dorothy at his sister's address.

Consequently, "Dorothy's" letter came into the hands of Mrs. Shropshire who confronted him with it and got slapped, she told Judge Joseph Sabath. She won a divorce.

Al: You know, I don't like these modern dances worth a tinker's damn. They're nothing in the world except necking set to music.

Vi: I don't like music either.—V. M. I. Sniper.

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