

FIRST LOVIES

by FELIX RIESENBERG

THIRTEENTH INSTALLMENT

As they sailed Josephine, too, suddenly glimpsed the essential quality of John. In fact, if she was not engaged, and piqued, and what not, John might very easily have been a hero in her eyes. That horrible night at the tunnel shaft, and the frightful garlic smell of the acetylene, and the confusion, began to look less crude. John certainly did carry himself with an air of confidence, and—how easily he had assumed character of a gentleman! Josephine noted this especially. Of late Gerrit Rantoul had told her a great deal about John's early life on the Bowery and in the Ghetto, and things he had picked up in conversation with Malone. It seems John Breen had lifted himself far above his normal station in life. Fortunately, for Rantoul, Van Horn had no idea of this phase of his conversations with Josephine.

"Rantoul's going over on business," Van Horn remarked to John. "Fine, that'll keep Josephine occupied. He's handy." John had no special reason to accept Rantoul as anything but a very agreeable old man.

"When you are married, next spring, I'll have a very important thing to say, John," Van Horn held John's hand, looked steadily into his eyes. Their glances dimmed momentarily.

"Gilbert dear, John's mine, not yours. Give me a chance, please." A sudden mood seized her, there on the deck she hugged John, his arm was over her shoulder, their lips met.

Gilbert Van Horn, a smile on his face, stood near them. Suddenly his ashen look seemed to wash away. He became genial, agreeable. He looked at Rantoul, but that distinguished cosmopolitan was busy waving at friends on the wharf. A whistle was blowing. Visitors were hastily leaving the deck of the steamer.

"Good-by, John, good-by."

The business of drilling, exploding and mucking out rock, of punching a long tunnel, miles and miles of it, two and some places four city blocks, straight down in the rock crust of the earth, of lining it with concrete, mixed by machinery, spaded and tamped behind steel forms, of fitting monster bronze gates and valves, of carrying out the magnificent details of conception, all unthought of, unsung, unknown, except in its lists of deaths, occupied John Breen, C. E., through the winter and into the spring of 1912.

A month later, John was visiting Harbord at the University. "I've had a taste of the city work, I'm going to stick. This place," nodding out of the high window, "is so full of big things it's a challenge to a fellow with a grain of kick in him. That bridge off there," pointing to the huge new span of massive steel rising above Hell Gate, "is enough to make a man stick. I've had a taste of this for some time, it's full of chances. Dammit, Harbord, this city is a challenge to a man. You've heard of Hammond, the mining engineer? Well, he said something the other day. This is a big man's town."

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was his advice. "Go west, or go anywhere, if you feel yourself to be about the average, but if you have the punch, stick in New York—and win!"

Gilbert and Josephine were in Paris in early April. Josephine completed her trousseau. Rantoul had gone on ahead to London. Then they were at the Cecil for a few days. Rantoul had preceded them. A letter from John reached Van Horn as they were about to embark for New York. Pug Malone was waiting for his return. He had planned a walking trip through the Berkshires. "A regular Malone hike," John had written. "Pug wants to get away from his work. He's had a rotten winter, Greenbough filled with bad livers. I am full of tunnel air and need a change. American dust will do you good. And, Gil, I'm crazy for Josephine, crazy for her again. I never knew what love meant, until now." Poor John! It was spring. Gilbert Van Horn carefully folded the letter and gave a sigh of satisfaction. Thank God they were homeward bound. He cabled Marvin Kelly. "Sailing tomorrow. All well."

Halfway across, on her maiden voyage the Titanic raced through a smooth sea, a flat flexible sea enameled in the deepest indigo reflecting stars, great facts, glinting in the sky. But stars have long been ignored by men, or they have been conjured with, it matters very little to the stars, and few attended them that night. Dinner was over and Gilbert Van Horn busied himself in the smoking room, playing solitaire, a demi-tasse and his pipe keeping him occupied. Aunt Wen had retired to her state room, the night was slightly chill, a breath of the outer voids, a touch of the ethereal cold.

Few were out, but Josephine, on the arm of Rantoul, both in ample steamer coats, walked the deck, broad and white, like a lighted avenue in a deserted city. In a spirit of adventure Josephine, nodding at a ladder, pulled her escort. "Let's go up, Monsieur Gerry." How quickly he responded to her mischievous spirit. They were on the deserted boat deck and walked aft, far abaft the funnels. The peculiar spiral of black smoke twisting rapidly over the rims of the huge stack and curling astern, was the only indication of their speed. They looked down over the steep side, from the rail. A singing white streak of water rushed by the black hull, a seething phosphorescent band of light.

Rantoul knew that time was getting short. He instinctively felt the moment had come. If the heart of Josephine was to be captured he had at last arrived at the final movement of assault. He walked with her in silence, holding her close to him. The rustle of her loose dinned gown, under the folds of her loose warm cloak, the intimate detachment of the sea, her laugh, her evident enjoyment of the night, gave him resolution. He too was being somewhat carried away.

They had walked back and forth for almost a half hour and were leaning on the after thwartship rail again, sheltered by the bulk of a large life-boat, looking down into sea. A sigh from Josephine, a slight shudder, caused Rantoul to place his arm about her, a thing he had never done except when dancing. She rather yielded to the embrace. She was thinking of the end of such things. John, grubby, hard, unsympathetic, practical John, always dirty and smelly, in the tunnel, would be so different.

Much of this was in the sigh; an implicit answer to the martyr days of their circumspect intimacy. Rantoul caught her bare hand, with his free arm partly muffled in the warm wide sleeve of her cloak. Words were so inadequate, so unnecessary. He suddenly drew her to him, fiercely nor did she resist. Their eyes flashed a message to each other in the dark above the rushing night, above the blue-black water scarred with lre. She dropped her lids; his eyes, burning, eager, were on her own. They seemed to be buoyant, her cloak fell apart and he crushed her to him. Rantoul, utterly out of control, kissed her with the pent-up yearning of

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months and years of waiting. Passionately their lips met in their warm embrace.

And the stars winked down on them. The floodgates were dive open; they, unburdened themselves. A lounge seat, used by shuffle-board players, held them as they gave themselves up to the common things. She clung to him as women cling when they are moved by strong passion. She lifted him beyond all caution, shattering his elaborate defenses; both Rantoul and Josephine paid whatever price their dallying entailed. For an hour they sat quiet, huddled, barely doing more than murmuring. The night was velvet black; a secret night.

A screaming rocket rose a thousand feet, curving, slow, an increasing toppling bend. It burst with a loud detonation. Showers of stars dropped from the black sky, suddenly shutting out the firmament with their closer fire. The boat deck was lit by the falling glare. The speed of the great steamer altered perceptibly. Josephine held to Rantoul, her eyes dilated. What beastly business was this? Already he had begun to wish himself quietly in his bunk. Josephine was a trifle heavy, for one so young and willowy, and all that. Also, it was decidedly cool; cold.

Another disturbing rocket rose above them. Those officious fools on the bridge were signaling, they were always signaling, or something. Rantoul was irritable. Then another and another rocket lifted into the blackening sky. It was late. Josephine was unnerved. A loud shuddering screech of escaping steam thundered above them on the funnels, the shaking white clouds bulging like cotton overhead. Josephine clung desperately to Rantoul. What a terrific strength the girl had. The engines were stopped and safety valves were lifting on the tortured boilers.

The sea had changed, the great ship was sluggish. Peering off into the dark, Rantoul saw a ghostlike wall, a towering apparition looming above them, above the funnels, close aboard and drawing slowly astern. Ice, of course. How lucky they had missed it. Ugh! it was cold. His limbs ached, he shivered. He wished Josephine in hell. Perhaps, he had been a bit hasty. She stirred uneasily she also saw the ice. A feeling of guilty terror seized them. His arms were tired; he was no longer as vigorous as he had been in years past.

Then the boat deck was stirring with men. Far forward on the bridge lights flashed. It had been in darkness before. The radio was sending. The steamer seemed to shake. Seamon with axes and knives were running aft. An officer, his trousers hastily tucked into short boots, brushed past them. He played his flash lamp on them, momentarily. Josephine thought she saw him smile. But why the rushing about, . . . the excitement . . . what had happened?

CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

GOLD HILL ITEMS

The Prosperity grange met Monday night with good attendance. Two new members were received into the grange making four that have joined this month.

An ice cream supper was held at Mr. J. F. Fry's home last Saturday night. A large crowd were present and several gallons of ice cream was sold. The proceeds of the supper will go for buying a bell for Piney Woods church.

Mrs. R. B. Glover has been very sick for the last few days. We hope she will soon be well again.

Mr. and Mrs. Will Rodgers and daughter of Albemarle visited with Mrs. Roger's parents, Mr. and Mrs. D. A. Moss Sunday.

Mr. Leonard Treece spent a few days last week with his grandfather, Mr. A. R. Treece, near Albemarle.

There will be a baptismal service at Mr. C. L. Wiles' fish pond Sunday evening, September 25, at 3 o'clock.

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according to the pastor of St. Paul church, Rev. T. R. York.

Mr. and Mrs. R. V. Walker of China Grove visited his parents, Mr. and Mrs. W. T. Walker, Sunday.

Gleason Treece is attending court in Salisbury this week. He is serving his first time on jury.

A very good rain fell in this community Wednesday morning. It has been dry so long that it will do a lot of good.

Mr. John Honeycutt is able to be up again after another operation on his leg a few weeks ago.

Rev. J. N. Wise filled his regular appointment at Zion church, Sunday. Two new members, Mr. and Mrs. Grady Treece, were received into the church.

-PATTERSON ITEMS-

Mrs. R. F. Albright has had as her guest, her sister, Jenny Wilhelm, of near Salisbury.

The Patterson grange had as their special guests, Saturday night, the Juvenile and Subordinate degree team of Barber grange. Both put on their degree in fine style, and it was much enjoyed by all present. Delicious refreshments were served at the conclusion of the meeting.

Mr. and Mrs. J. L. Suther and family were guests of Mr. and Mrs. J. R. Caudle of Kannapolis, Sunday.

Miss Vivian Freeze has just returned from a two-weeks visit with her sister, Mrs. Paul Cook, of Fort Mills, S. C.

Mr. and Mrs. B. C. Cauble and Mr. and Mrs. H. E. Isenhour and family, of Salisbury, were visitors at the home of Mr. and Mrs. J. A. Patterson Sunday.

Mr. H. C. Deaton attended the conference held at St. Lukes, in Bear Poplar, Monday and Tuesday of last week. Mrs. J. F. Litaker also attended this conference.

The Patterson degree team put on the third degree at Woodleaf Monday night. The team was in excellent shape and put the degree on nicely. Delicious refreshments were served at the close of the meeting by the Woodleaf grange.

Mrs. A. W. Albright and Miss

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Mary Albright visited Mrs. Marks McKnight Monday afternoon.

Mrs. H. E. Shue and Mrs. C. R. Bost visited Mrs. J. L. Suther Saturday night.

CARD OF THANKS

We wish to thank the kind neighbors and friends for the service rendered us during the death of our wife and sister, Mrs. Oma Goodman Currie and also wish to thank them one and all for their sympathetic consideration of us. We are also deeply appreciative of the lovely floral offerings. May God's richest blessings rest on each and every one.

—C. Carl Currie, and the Goodman family.

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TIMELY WARNING

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