

Lightly WE

by MARGARET F. SANGSTER

SIXTH INSTALMENT

"But now," said Ellen, "you'd better take me home. And then you'd better go home yourself, and go to bed and get some sleep. And when you wake up, have black coffee—lots of it. I'm not saying have coffee," she endeavored to laugh, "because I think you need it, because I think you've been drinking, or anything. You said you hadn't, and I believe you. And—" It was such a long speech, Ellen wished that she might give up the effort, that she might just stop talking and let her head lie back on the broad shoulder beneath the Pierrot suit. "And, after you've had your coffee, sit back and go over the facts in the case. And if you still feel the same way about marrying me, by noon tomorrow, come around and we'll get down to cases. My name? It's Ellen Church, I've been forgetting that you didn't know who I was, either. You'll find that name below a bell at this—" she gave him a street number, "address. And if, after the sleep and the coffee and the thinking, you still want to go on . . . Well, a marriage license can be had, they tell me, up to four! If we should happen to get together tomorrow, perhaps I'll let you buy me one. But if you," she was able, by gritting her teeth, to make her voice seem casual, "if you don't show up, I'll know you're completely normal again; I'll probably be that way, myself. No," all at once she was sniffling violently, "don't kiss me—not now. Don't you dare to kiss me! If you come tomorrow, there may be years of kissing ahead of us . . . If you don't come, we'll have one less moment to forget."

Her heart said, "Oh, God, don't let him stay away." It said, also, in swift panic, "Don't let him come. I can't pretend with him much longer. And if he comes, I'll never be able to do anything else but pretend!" The taxi turned sharply through the dawn, and made for the nearest park exit.

Tony came the next day, slightly before noon, looking a trifle older than he had in his touselled Pierrot costume. Seeming less sun-browned, less sure of himself, but somehow more dear than ever—indefinitely more dear! Ellen, starting forward to meet him, could hardly hold back her arms. They seemed to be on springs—on springs that dragged them forward, toward him.

Ellen—she wasn't looking quite so vivid herself, as she had

in the brief costume of a page boy. Her hair was parted demurely in the middle, and she wasn't made up. She wore a plain little dress of navy blue crepe, with white linen collar and cuffs, and small, strapped black slippers. She was like a school girl in appearance.

"Well?" she asked.

The red rushed up under the brown of the boy's cheeks, but he managed to speak just as nonchalantly as she had.

"Very well, indeed!" he answered. "Oh, very—"

And then, without quite knowing how they got there, they were in each other's arms, and he was kissing her oddly shaped winglike eyebrows. And she was quivering, close to sobs, against his shoulder.

For a moment they stood together, so. And then Tony spoke. "I guess," he said, "that settles it! We will be married as soon as possible. How," his voice was close to breaking, "how could you send me home, as you did, last night?"

"This morning!" corrected Ellen.

Tony's face had a high, uplifted look. He paid no attention to the correction.

"You had me worried," he said, "stalling that way. Pretending that you hadn't fallen for me, and that my bank account was all that mattered."

Ellen raised a slender hand—half in protest, half in a gesture of withdrawal.

"Listen," said Ellen. "Stop and look and listen! You're going too fast, Tony—you're assuming too much. I didn't mean to worry you last night, and I wasn't stalling, either. I wasn't pretending not to like you, for I do like you far better than any of the other men I know. But I suppose it was, really, your bank account that finally sold me—on marriage, I mean. For," her heart thudded sickly at the falsehood, "I don't love you, not as loves goes in novels. I won't ever love anyone that way. I've always said that marriage would have to be sort of lukewarm to interest me, and I haven't changed my mind! What I mean is, I don't love you madly. I don't believe in love, not for girls. It's all right for men—with a man, love's only a gesture any way!"

"Most women," said Tony, and he spoke with the conviction that every rich young man possesses, "would be afraid to talk as frankly as you do, Ellen, if they really didn't care! They'd be afraid of losing me—and my bank account—"

Ellen tossed her head until the curls of it were all a-dance. "I'm not afraid!" she boasted. How could a boy guess that the boast was so hollow?

"I suppose," Tony went on, "that I'm sort of old-fashioned, in some ways. But my mother and my father were married for thirty years. My father died just two months before my mother went away, and when she followed him (and say what you will, it was heartbreak, for she hadn't been ill), she was calling—" the boy's voice shook, "calling his name. I believe in that kind of marriage, myself."

Ellen's eyes were staring far away.

"My mother loved my father until they both died," said Ellen. "And that," her imitation of Claire's shrug was piteous, "and that's why I don't believe in that kind of marriage. I want to get what I can out of life—I want to squeeze life dry, like a sponge. If you marry me, it will have to be on those terms—you're not to expect too much from me. Not too much love, . . . too much gentleness, or too much loyalty. I'll try not to do anything to put any sort of a blot on your name—you can pretty well count on me, there, because I'm not the type! But I shall continue to have my own friends, and to go out with them. And I'll keep on with my work, if I find I'm not busy enough running my marriage. I'll—"

One of the first things she had noticed about Tony was the strength of his jaw line. It widened out now, in an odd manner. It became blunt.

"What," said Tony, "if I make a few remarks and stipulations? As long as this seems to be a mutual contract we're drawing up! What if I say that I'll have as many women friends in my life, as you have men? What if I say that I'll find my excitement elsewhere, if you don't keep my home peppy enough? What if I say I don't care about the blots that I put on the family name, as long as wearing the family name can be held so cheaply by my wife? What if I say I thor-

oughly agree with your theories? That what you've said can go—double!"

Ellen's hands were folded in her lap. They looked like calm little fingers, but in reality the nails of them were biting into her pink palms. Tony—oh, he mustn't go about with other women! Not when he was her husband. She—reversing a single standard to fit her own quaint measure—could be less fastidious. Because she knew that other men wouldn't ever matter to her. But how could she be sure that some other girl wouldn't matter to Tony? She started to speak, changed her mind, and said something entirely different from the thing that she had intended to say.

"At that, our marriage should work out better," she said, "than most marriages. It's being built on a perfectly honest, fifty-fifty, cards-on-the-table basis."

Some of the buoyancy seemed

to have gone out of the heir to the Brander millions. Only his doggedness, the strong line of his chin, was left.

"It'll work out all right!" he told Ellen. "Say when!"

Oh, the throbbing of the heart in Ellen's breast! Oh, the persistent beat in her temples. . . .

"Why," she said, and her voice sounded like a stranger's voice, even in her own ears, "why, the sooner the better! It's just after twelve, now. Maybe, if we took a taxi, we could catch us a license right off, and be married, and have a bite of luncheon together, before three. At three o'clock I have a date to pose for Dick Alven, in his studio. He's doing a mural . . ." She broke off before the torrent of Tony's words.

"Do you mean to tell me," he was shouting, "that you'd go off, right after the ceremony, and pose for some artist? Do you mean to tell me you'd leave your

husband to go to another man, so that he can paint you into a dirty little Indian picture?"

Ellen was interrupting. "Long after our marriage is over, Tony," she said hotly, "long after we've stopped being, Dick's mural will go on, giving beauty and fineness to people. It's not a dirty little Indian picture, Tony—Dick is a great artist."

"Great artist be hanged," grated Tony. "I bet he's in love with you, the—"

Ellen's face was burning. "If it's going to be like this," she said, "when we've known each other less than a day—well, then, I guess we'd better call off the whole business."

But, suddenly, she was in Tony's arms again, and his mouth was against her mouth. And the whole earth whirled dizzily about them.

And then with her hand tight in Tony's, and a blue, small hat clamped down over her ears, and

Coleman Again in "Drummond Strikes Back," Thriller



Ronald Colman is doing his best to protect Loretta Young in this scene from "Bulldog Drummond Strikes Back" the sequel to the earlier mystery thriller, which comes to the Liberty The-

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a white, strained smile on her lips, Ellen was being whirled away—toward lower New York and the marriage license bureau. Only they weren't going in a taxi. Tony was driving a scarlet Rolls-Royce roadster with a special body and a mean way of nosing through traffic.

(Continued next week)

Take A Chance Judge: "How dared you at your wife?" Husband: "Well, she had back to me and the front was open, so I took a chance!"

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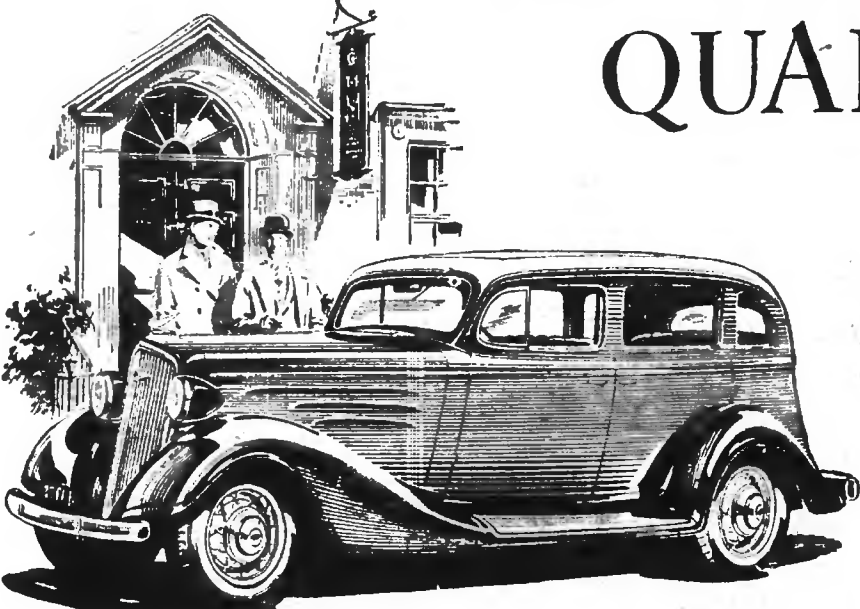
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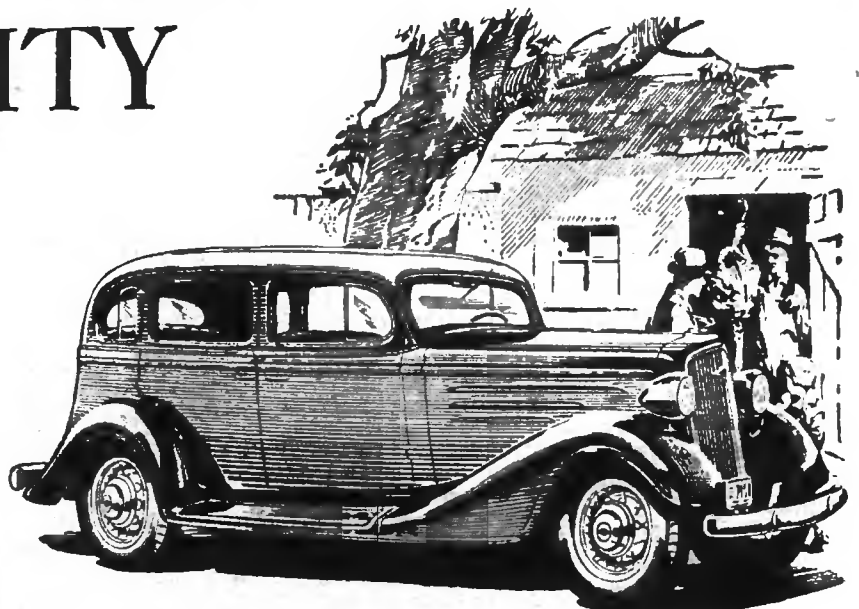


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